



A COMPANION TO
OLD
NORSE-ICELANDIC
LITERATURE

EDITED BY **RORY McTURK**

A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture

Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture

This series offers comprehensive, newly written surveys of key periods and movements and certain major authors, in English literary culture and history. Extensive volumes provide new perspectives and positions on contexts and on canonical and post-canonical texts, orientating the beginning student in new fields of study and providing the experienced undergraduate and new graduate with current and new directions, as pioneered and developed by leading scholars in the field.

Published

- | | | |
|-------|---|--|
| 1 | A Companion to Romanticism | <i>Edited by Duncan Wu</i> |
| 2 | A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture | <i>Edited by Herbert F. Tucker</i> |
| 3 | A Companion to Shakespeare | <i>Edited by David Scott Kastan</i> |
| 4 | A Companion to the Gothic | <i>Edited by David Punter</i> |
| 5 | A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare | <i>Edited by Dymphna Callaghan</i> |
| 6 | A Companion to Chaucer | <i>Edited by Peter Brown</i> |
| 7 | A Companion to Literature from Milton to Blake | <i>Edited by David Womersley</i> |
| 8 | A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture | <i>Edited by Michael Hattaway</i> |
| 9 | A Companion to Milton | <i>Edited by Thomas N. Corns</i> |
| 10 | A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry | <i>Edited by Neil Roberts</i> |
| 11 | A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature and Culture | <i>Edited by Phillip Pulsiano and Elaine Trebarne</i> |
| 12 | A Companion to Restoration Drama | <i>Edited by Susan J. Owen</i> |
| 13 | A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing | <i>Edited by Anita Pacheco</i> |
| 14 | A Companion to Renaissance Drama | <i>Edited by Arthur F. Kinney</i> |
| 15 | A Companion to Victorian Poetry | <i>Edited by Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman and Antony H. Harrison</i> |
| 16 | A Companion to the Victorian Novel | <i>Edited by Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing</i> |
| 17–20 | A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volumes I–IV | <i>Edited by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard</i> |
| 21 | A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America | <i>Edited by Charles L. Crow</i> |
| 22 | A Companion to Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism | <i>Edited by Walter Jost and Wendy Olmsted</i> |
| 23 | A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South | <i>Edited by Richard Gray and Owen Robinson</i> |
| 24 | A Companion to American Fiction 1780–1865 | <i>Edited by Shirley Samuels</i> |
| 25 | A Companion to American Fiction 1865–1914 | <i>Edited by G. R. Thompson and Robert Paul Lamb</i> |
| 26 | A Companion to Digital Humanities | <i>Edited by Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens and John Unsworth</i> |
| 27 | A Companion to Romance | <i>Edited by Corinne Saunders</i> |
| 28 | A Companion to the British and Irish Novel 1945–2000 | <i>Edited by Brian W. Shaffer</i> |
| 29 | A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama | <i>Edited by David Krasner</i> |
| 30 | A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel | <i>Edited by Paula R. Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia</i> |
| 31 | A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture | <i>Edited by Rory McTurk</i> |

A COMPANION TO
OLD
NORSE-ICELANDIC
LITERATURE
AND CULTURE

EDITED BY RORY McTURK

 **Blackwell**
Publishing

© 2005 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd
except for editorial material and organization © 2005 by Rory McTurk

BLACKWELL PUBLISHING
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA
108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JF, UK
550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

The right of Rory McTurk to be identified as the Author of the Editorial Material in this Work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

First published 2005 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A companion to Old Norse-Icelandic literature and culture / edited by Rory McTurk.

p. cm.—(Blackwell companions to literature and culture ; 31)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-631-23502-7 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Old Norse literature—History and criticism. 2. Iceland—Civilization.

I. McTurk, Rory. II. Series.

PT7113.C66 2005

839.6'09—dc22

2004018064

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Set in 11/13 pt Garamond 3
by Kolam Information Services Pvt. Ltd, Pondicherry, India
Printed and bound in the United Kingdom
by TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

The publisher's policy is to use permanent paper from mills that operate a sustainable forestry policy, and which has been manufactured from pulp processed using acid-free and elementary chlorine-free practices. Furthermore, the publisher ensures that the text paper and cover board used have met acceptable environmental accreditation standards.

For further information on
Blackwell Publishing, visit our website:
www.blackwellpublishing.com

Contents

<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	viii
<i>Maps</i>	xii
Introduction <i>Rory McTurk</i>	1
1 Archaeology of Economy and Society <i>Orri Vésteinsson</i>	7
2 Christian Biography <i>Margaret Cormack</i>	27
3 Christian Poetry <i>Katrina Attwood</i>	43
4 Continuity? The Icelandic Sagas in Post-Medieval Times <i>Jón Karl Helgason</i>	64
5 Eddic Poetry <i>Terry Gunnell</i>	82
6 Family Sagas <i>Vésteinn Ólason</i>	101
7 Geography and Travel <i>Judith Jesch</i>	119
8 Historical Background: Iceland 870–1400 <i>Helgi Þorláksson</i>	136

9	Historiography and Pseudo-History <i>Stefanie Würth</i>	155
10	Language <i>Michael Barnes</i>	173
11	Late Prose Fiction (<i>lygisögur</i>) <i>Matthew Driscoll</i>	190
12	Late Secular Poetry <i>Sbaun Hugbes</i>	205
13	Laws <i>Gudmund Sandvik and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson</i>	223
14	Manuscripts and Palaeography <i>Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson</i>	245
15	Metre and Metrics <i>Russell Poole</i>	265
16	Orality and Literacy in the Sagas of Icelanders <i>Gísli Sigurðsson</i>	285
17	Pagan Myth and Religion <i>Peter Orton</i>	302
18	The Post-Medieval Reception of Old Norse and Old Icelandic Literature <i>Andrew Wawn</i>	320
19	Prose of Christian Instruction <i>Svanbildur Óskarsdóttir</i>	338
20	Rhetoric and Style <i>Þórir Óskarsson</i>	354
21	Romance (Translated <i>riddarasögur</i>) <i>Jürg Glauser</i>	372
22	Royal Biography <i>Ármann Jakobsson</i>	388
23	Runes <i>Patrick Larsson</i>	403

24	Sagas of Contemporary History (<i>Sturlunga saga</i>): Texts and Research <i>Úlfar Bragason</i>	427
25	Sagas of Icelandic Prehistory (<i>forndarsögur</i>) <i>Torfi H. Tulinius</i>	447
26	Short Prose Narrative (<i>þáttir</i>) <i>Elizabeth Ashman Rowe and Joseph Harris</i>	462
27	Skaldic Poetry <i>Diana Whaley</i>	479
28	Social Institutions <i>Gunnar Karlsson</i>	503
29	Women in Old Norse Poetry and Sagas <i>Judy Quinn</i>	518
	<i>Index</i>	536

Notes on Contributors

Katrina Attwood works in the High-Integrity Systems Engineering Group in the Department of Computer Science at the University of York, researching improvements in development and safety processes for civil aircraft engine controllers. She is currently editing a range of Norse-Icelandic Christian poems for the international project to re-edit the corpus of skaldic poetry.

Michael Barnes is professor of Scandinavian studies in the Department of Scandinavian Studies, University College London. His recent publications include *The Runic Inscriptions of Maesbowe, Orkney* (1994), *The Norn Language of Orkney and Shetland* (1998), *A New Introduction to Old Norse I: Grammar* (1999) and *Faroese Language Studies* (2001). He is currently compiling, together with R. I. Page, a scholarly edition of the Scandinavian runic inscriptions of Britain.

Úlfar Bragason is director of the Sigurður Nordal Institute of the University of Iceland. He has published extensively on *Sturlunga saga*, among other topics, and is the editor of *Rit Stofnunar Sigurðar Nordals*, the series published by the Sigurður Nordal Institute. His research focuses on medieval Icelandic literature, the Icelandic emigration to America, and modern Icelandic culture.

Margaret Cormack is associate professor of religious studies at the College of Charleston. She has published *The Saints in Iceland: Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400* (1994) and a collection of essays entitled *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion* (2002). She is currently extending her study of the cult of saints in Iceland through the Reformation and creating an on-line database which will make the basic data accessible. She is also working on translations of a number of Icelandic saints' lives.

Matthew Driscoll is lecturer in Old Norse philology at the Arnamagnæan Institute, University of Copenhagen. His major publications include editions and translations of a number of early Icelandic works as well as the monograph *The Unwashed Children of Eve: The Production, Dissemination and Reception of Popular Literature in Post-Reformation Iceland* (1997). His research interests include manuscript and textual studies, particularly in the area of Old Norse and Early Modern Icelandic.

Jürg Glauser is professor of Scandinavian philology at the Universities of Basel and Zurich. He is the author of *Isländische Märchensagas* (1983) and the co-editor of, among other publications, *Verhandlungen mit dem New Historicism* (1999) and *Skandinavische Literaturen der frühen Neuzeit* (2002). He is currently editing a history of Scandinavian literature and is working on the transmission of Scandinavian literature in the early modern period.

Terry Gunnell is senior lecturer in folkloristics at the University of Iceland. He is the author of *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia* (1995), and has published a variety of articles on Old Norse religion, Icelandic folk legends, folk drama and modern folk traditions.

Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson is associate professor at the Árni Magnússon Institute in Reykjavík. He has edited (with others) *Reykjabóltsmáldagi* (2000) and *Konungsbók Eddu-kvæða: Codex Regius* (2001), and is currently preparing an illustrated textbook on Icelandic script from 1100 to 1900. His research focuses on the history of the Icelandic language and of Icelandic script.

Joseph Harris is a professor in the Department of English and American Literature and Language at Harvard University. Recent publications include articles on *Beowulf*, Swedish runic inscriptions, eddic poetry and the ballad, and a collective volume (edited with K. Reichl), *Prosimetrum: Crosscultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse* (1997). His research ranges over medieval Scandinavian literature and myth.

Jón Karl Helgason is an editor at the Bjartur publishing house in Reykjavík. His books include *Heijan og höfundurinn* (1998), *The Rewriting of Njáls Saga* (1999), *Höfundar Njálu* (2001) and *Ferðalok* (2003).

Shaun Hughes is associate professor of English and comparative literature at Purdue University. His recent publications include a translation of *Áns saga bogsveigis* in Thomas H. Ohlgren, *Medieval Outlaws: Ten Tales* (1998), and an essay on women's voices in Icelandic literature, 1500–1800, in Sarah M. Anderson with Karen Swenson (eds.), *Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology* (2002). Forthcoming publications include an essay on the eighteenth-century Anglo-Saxonist Elizabeth Elstob. His research interests are early modern Icelandic literature and culture, with a special emphasis on the *rímur*.

Ármann Jakobsson is an external lecturer at the University of Iceland. He is the author of *Í leit að konungi* (1997), *Staður í nýjum heimi* (2002) and *Tolkien og Hringurinn* (2003). He is currently working on an edition of *Morkinskinna* for the Íslenzk fornrit series.

Judith Jesch is professor of Viking studies at the University of Nottingham. She is the author of *Women in the Viking Age* (1991) and *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age* (2001), as well as of articles on sagas, skaldic verse and runic inscriptions.

Gunnar Karlsson is professor of history at the University of Iceland. He is the author of *Iceland's 1100 Years* (2000) and of a number of textbooks in Icelandic on the history of Iceland. His work has covered a wide variety of subjects, from the medieval plague (on which he has written in the *Journal of Medieval History*, 1996) to relativism in history (on which he has written in *Rethinking History*, 1997).

Patrik Larsson is currently working at the department of Scandinavian languages at Uppsala University and at the Institute for Dialectology, Onomastics and Folklore

Research in Uppsala. He has published papers on names in Old Scandinavian sources, above all in runic inscriptions, including the survey 'Recent Research on Personal Names and Place-Names in Runic Inscriptions' in *Onoma* (2002).

Rory McTurk is reader in Icelandic studies at the University of Leeds. He is the author of *Studies in Ragnars saga loðbrókar and its Major Scandinavian Analogues* (1991) and of *Chaucer and the Norse and Celtic Worlds* (forthcoming), and has published translations of *Droplaugarsona saga* and *Kormáks saga* as well as articles on early Scandinavian kingship, medieval and modern Icelandic literature, and Hiberno-Norse literary relations.

Vésteinn Ólason is a professor at the University of Iceland and director of the Árni Magnússon Institute in Reykjavík. Author of *The Traditional Ballads of Iceland* (1982) and of *Dialogues with the Viking Age* (transl. Andrew Wawn) (1998), he is a co-editor and co-author of *Íslensk bókmenntasaga I–II* (1992–3). His numerous publications in the fields of Icelandic literature and folklore include editions of sagas and ballads.

Peter Orton is senior lecturer in the School of English and Drama at Queen Mary, University of London. Among his recent publications are *The Transmission of Old English Poetry* (2000) and 'Sticks or Stones? The Story of Imma in CCC, MS 41 of the *Old English Bede*, and Old English *tān*, "twig"' (*Medium Aevum*, 2003). His main research field is Old English, and much of his recent work has been on the impact of literacy on Anglo-Saxon culture.

Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir is associate professor at the Árni Magnússon Institute in Reykjavík. She has published articles on Old Norse Bible translations and other subjects, and is one of the editors of the collected works of the seventeenth-century Icelandic hymn-writer Hallgrímur Pétursson, published by the Árni Magnússon Institute.

Þórir Óskarsson is currently employed by the Icelandic National Audit Office. His publications include *Undarleg tákni á tímans bárum: Ljóð og fagurfræði Benedikts Gröndals* (1987) and (with Þorleifur Hauksson) *Íslensk stílfraði* (1994).

Russell Poole is professor of English at the University of Western Ontario. He is the author of *Viking Poems on War and Peace* (1991) and of numerous other publications on Old Icelandic and Old English poetry, the editor of *Skaldsagas* (2000), and a contributor to the new international project to re-edit the corpus of skaldic poetry. He also has research and teaching interests in New Zealand literature.

Judy Quinn teaches Old Norse literature in the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic at Cambridge University. She has published on eddic poetry, on prophecy in Old Norse poetry and prose, and on orality and literacy in medieval Iceland. She is currently editing the verses of *Eyrbyggja saga* as part of the international project to re-edit the corpus of skaldic poetry.

Elizabeth Ashman Rowe is an independent scholar. She is the author of *The Development of Flateyjarbók: Iceland and the Norwegian Dynastic Crisis of 1387* (forthcoming) and of articles in *Alvíssmál*, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, *Gripla*, *Saga-Book*, *Scandinavian Journal of History* and *Scandinavian Studies*. She is currently working on a book about historical writing in late medieval Iceland.

Gudmund Sandvik was professor of legal history at the University of Oslo until his retirement. His publications include *Hovding og konge i Heimskringla* (1955) and *Prestegard og prestelønn: Studiar kring problemet eigedomretten til dei norske prestegardane* (1965).

Gísli Sigurðsson is a professor at the Árni Magnússon Institute in Reykjavík. His books are *Gaelic Influence in Iceland: Historical and Literary Contacts. A Survey of Research* (1988, reissued 2000), a full annotated edition of the ancient Edda poems, *Eddukvæði* (1998), and *Túlkun Íslendingasagna í ljósi munnlegrar hefðar: Tilgáta um aðferð* (2002; in English as *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method*, 2004). His publications have focused on oral tradition and orally derived texts, particularly in the areas of medieval literature and folktales and folklore of more recent times.

Jón Viðar Sigurðsson is associate professor in the Department of History at the University of Oslo, and director of the Centre for Viking and Medieval Studies there. His publications include *Frá goðordum til ríkja: Þróun goðavalds á 12. og 13. öld* (1989), *Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth* (transl. Jean Lundskær-Nielsen, 1999), *Frá hövdingmakt til konge- og kyrkjemakt: Norsk historie 800–1300* (1999) and *Kristninga í Norden 750–1200* (2003).

Torfi H. Tulinius is professor of French and medieval literature at the University of Iceland. He has written on French and Icelandic literature, both medieval and modern. His major publication to date is *The Matter of the North: The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-century Iceland* (2002), and he has published numerous articles in academic journals as well as contributing to collective works within the field of Old Norse-Icelandic studies. His main field of research is medieval Icelandic narrative.

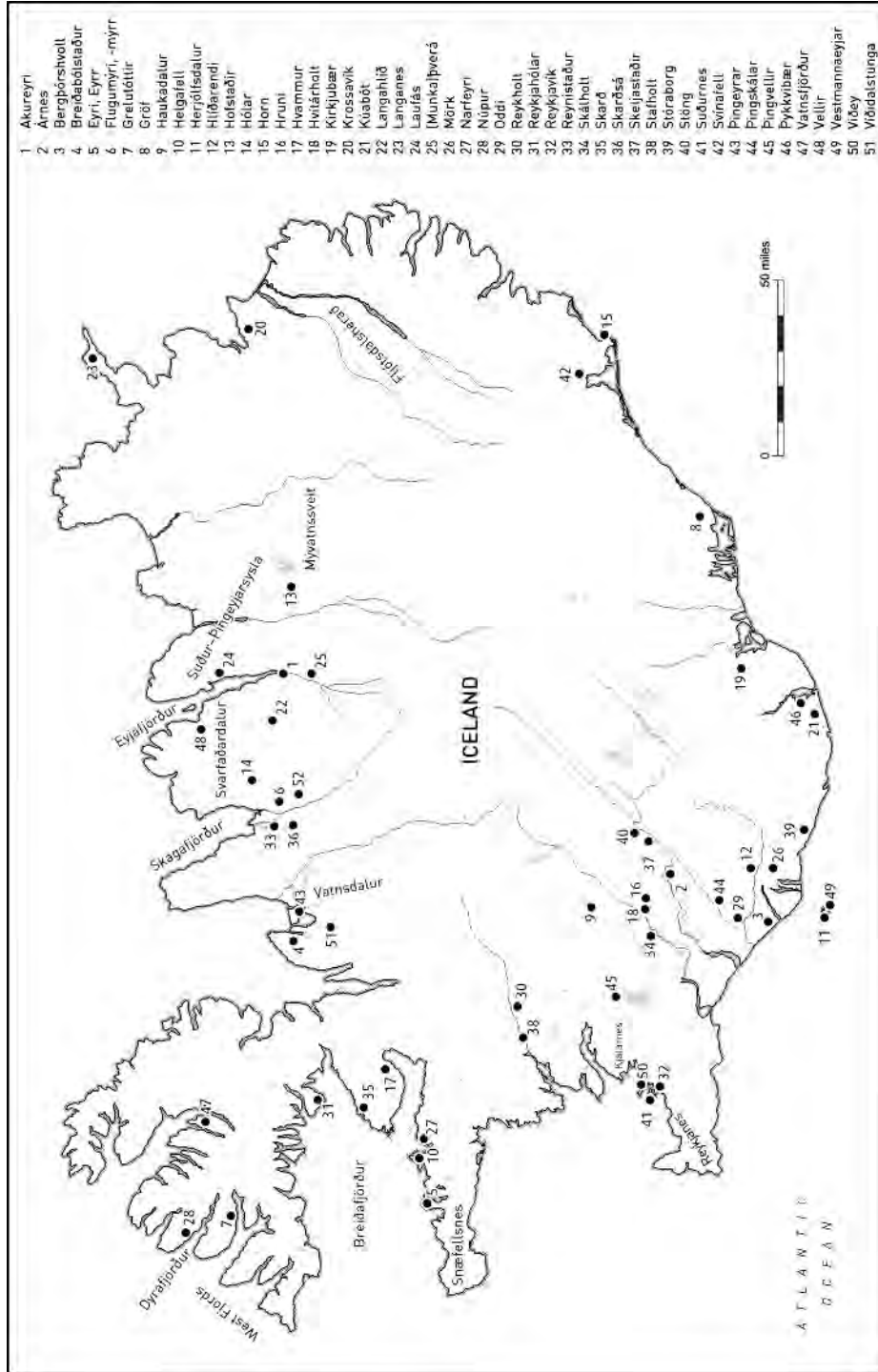
Helgi Þorláksson is professor of history at the University of Iceland. His major publications include *Gamlar götur og goðavald: Um fornar leiðir og völd Oddaverja í Rangárbíngi* (1989), *Vaðmál og verðlag: Vaðmál í utanlandsviðskiptum og búskap Íslendinga á 13. og 14. öld* (1991), *Sjóran og siglingar: Ensk-íslensk samskipti 1580–1630* (1999) and *Frá kirkjuvaldi til ríkisvalds: Saga Íslands VI (1520–1640)* (2003).

Orri Vésteinsson is lecturer in archaeology at the University of Iceland. He is the author of *The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power and Social Change 1000–1300* (2000). His current projects include the excavation of a small settlement-period farm site in northeast Iceland (Sveigakot) and excavations of the medieval trading place at Gásir.

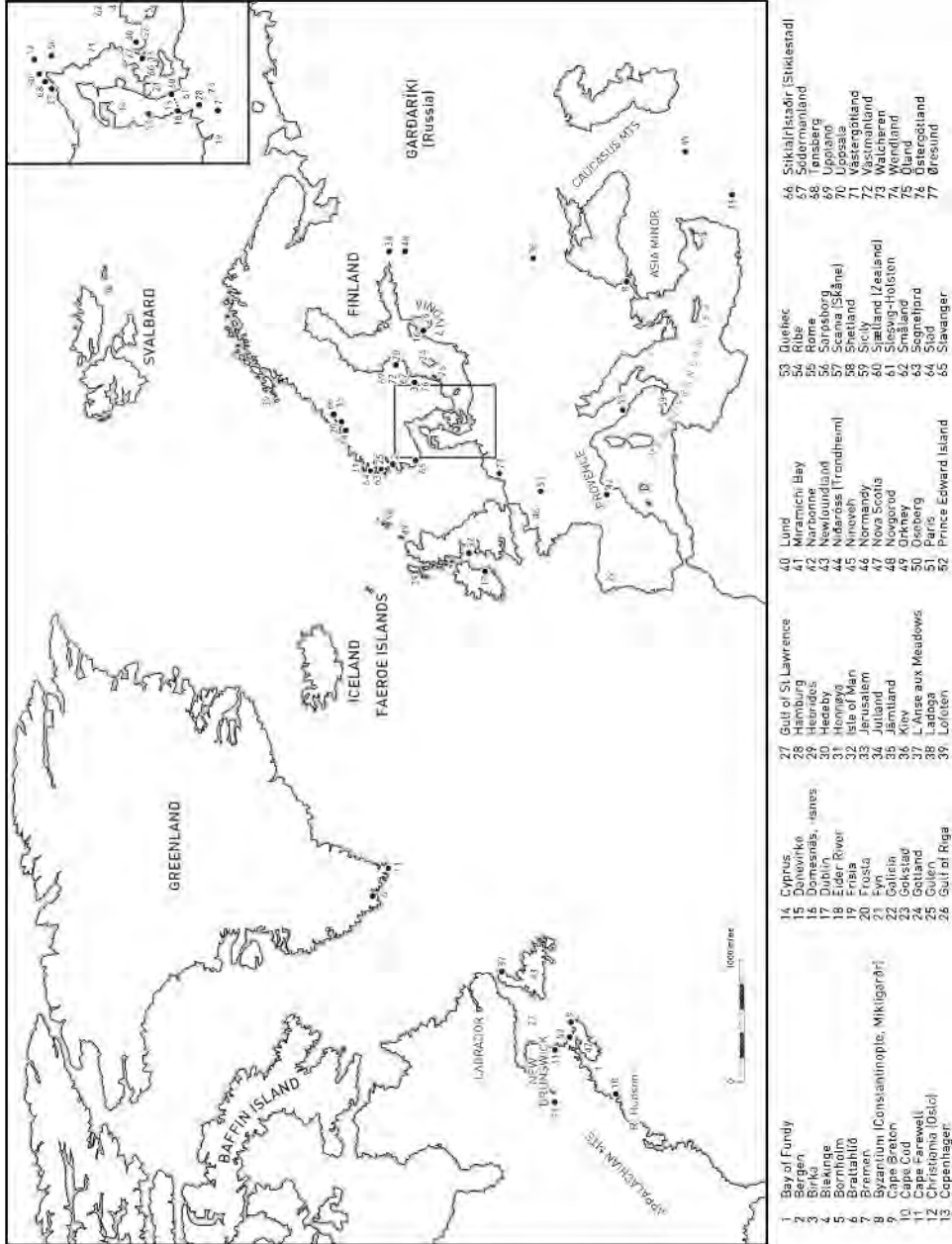
Andrew Wawn is professor of Anglo-Icelandic studies at the University of Leeds. He is the editor of *The Iceland Journal of Henry Holland 1810* (1987), and the author of *The Anglo Man: Þorleifur Ræpp, Britain and Enlightenment Philology* (1991) and *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2000).

Diana Whaley is professor of early medieval studies at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. Her publications include *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (1991), *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld* (1998) and the collaborative *Sagas of Warrior Poets* (2002). Her research is in the fields of Old Icelandic saga and poetry and English place names.

Stefanie Würth is professor of Scandinavian studies at the University of Tübingen. She is the author of *Elemente des Erzählens: Die þættir der Flateyjarbók* (1991) and *Der 'Antikenroman' in der isländischen Literatur des Mittelalters: Eine Untersuchung zur Übersetzung und Rezeption lateinischer Literatur im Norden* (1998). Her main field of research is Old Norse-Icelandic literature.



Map 1 Iceland, indicating places of major importance mentioned in the text.



Map 2 The Viking World, indicating a selection of places mentioned in the text.

Introduction

Rory McTurk

In his introduction to the Chaucer *Companion* in this series, the editor, Peter Brown, gives examples of companions, human and otherwise, that appear in Chaucer's own works and works used by Chaucer as sources, and ingeniously compares and contrasts their functions in those works with that of the volume he is introducing. There are, of course, many companions, of one kind or another, in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, but the ones most relevant to the present volume are perhaps those with whom the Swedish king Gylfi finds himself involved in the part of Snorri's *Edda* known as *Gylfaginning* ('The Tricking of Gylfi'): Hár, Jafnhár and Þriði ('High', 'Just-as-high' and 'Third'), who tell him what are today regarded as the major stories of Old Norse mythology. As explained in chapter 17 of this volume, these three are members of a tribe called the Æsir who have arrived in Scandinavia from Troy.¹ Gylfi visits them in their Scandinavian stronghold, Ásgarðr, built on the model of their former home, Old Ásgarðr or Troy, to find out whether their apparent ability to make everything go according to their will is due to their own nature, or to the gods they worship. They are aware in advance of his coming, and subject him to various optical illusions, the purpose of which is apparently to trick him into believing that they, the human Æsir, are identical with the divine Æsir, their gods. When he arrives, the three make him welcome, but tell him that in order to leave unharmed he must prove himself wiser than they. He then proceeds to ask them questions about their gods, as much with a view to exhausting their store of knowledge as to satisfying his curiosity, and their replies, as already indicated, include what are now considered some of the best-known stories of Old Norse mythology, not least the one in which the god Þórr, when visiting a giant's castle, fails to drain a drinking-horn or to wrestle successfully with an old woman, only to be told, when he has just left the castle, that what he had been drinking from the horn was the sea, and that the woman he had failed to defeat was old age. When Þórr, furious at being so deceived, raises his hammer to smash the giant and his castle, both vanish; and when Gylfi finally brings his three companions to the point where they can answer no more of his questions, they too vanish, like the

giant in the story they had been telling, thus cheating him of any acclaim that he might have won for exhausting their store of knowledge.

There is, however, a case for saying that Gylfi has the last laugh, since he now returns to his kingdom and tells people what he has seen and heard, including presumably the fact that the gods in the stories he has been told, the divine Æsir, were not identical with the human Æsir telling them; whereas the human Æsir, it emerges after Gylfi has left, had wished it to be thought that they were identical. After his departure the human Æsir hold what we may assume is a rather hurried, panicky conference, assigning the names of personages and places in their stories to people of their own company and to places in their new homeland, Scandinavia, in the hope that, in spite of what Gylfi is telling people, they may still be able to put it around there that they and their gods are identical. Their position at the end of *Gylfaginning* is comparable to that of Alice's elder sister, who, at the end of *Alice in Wonderland*, equates Alice's dream world with reality; whereas Gylfi's position is comparable to that of Alice, who is convinced of the dream world's otherness. It is indeed possible that the title *Gylfaginning* is ambiguous; it means 'the tricking of Gylfi', certainly, but does this mean that a trick has been played *on* Gylfi, or *by* him, or both? The Æsir had indeed tricked Gylfi with their optical illusions and by their sudden disappearance, but he could be said to have tricked them in confounding and leaving them before they could convince him, and through him his people, that they were divine.

I must not push too far any comparison of Gylfi's three companions with the present *Companion*. In such a comparison, the slot occupied by Gylfi would presumably be filled by the reader, and the one occupied by his companions would be filled by the contributors; the editor would come somewhere between the two. The comparison thus proposed holds good to the extent that few readers are likely to have all their questions answered by this volume, any more than Gylfi does. The comparison shades into a contrast, however, when the obvious point is made that none of the contributors has set out deliberately to deceive, as Gylfi's companions evidently have. At the same time, none of the contributors would claim that his or her contribution offers the last word on its subject, and to this extent their chapters may be compared with the stories told by Gylfi's companions, which, for all their interest and variety, do not (at least in my view) achieve their ultimate purpose of convincing him of their narrators' divinity. The possible ambiguity in the title *Gylfaginning*, noted above, suggests that, in the history of Scandinavia as Snorri conceives it, what has emerged from Gylfi's relationship with his companions is a healthy balance of information and points of view, not least as a result of the 'tricking' played by each of the two parties on the other: the Æsir have told Gylfi a fund of wonderful stories, but with their vanishing trick have not given themselves time to carry out their full deception of convincing him that they are the gods in the stories, and Gylfi has passed these stories on to his people, without himself perpetuating the idea that the newcomers to Scandinavia, who had told him the stories, were the gods who had figured in them; he has 'tricked' them in the sense that he has left them to do this for themselves.

If the present *Companion* also provides readers with a balance of information and points of view, albeit not precisely by the means just described, I, as the editor, will be more than satisfied. The title of the volume is indeed meant to convey an impression of balance, in using the expressions ‘Norse-Icelandic’ and ‘Literature and Culture’. There is no doubt that Old Norse-Icelandic literature and culture are most impressively represented by Iceland, and this is reflected not only in the subject matter of most of this volume’s chapters, but also in the fact that over a third of its contributing authors are Icelanders. The idea of having the ‘Norse-’ element in the title, however, is to retain in readers’ minds a sense of the mainland Scandinavian (indeed largely Norwegian) origins of the Icelandic people, and of the ongoing contact of various kinds between Iceland and other countries and cultures, in mainland Scandinavia and elsewhere, from the Viking Age onwards. As for the ‘literature and culture’ pairing, the emphasis of this volume is, for good reasons, primarily literary – partly because of the nature of the series in which it appears, and partly because it is in medieval Icelandic literature that Old Norse-Icelandic culture is seen at its most impressive. To be understood adequately, however, the literature needs to be studied in the context of other manifestations of Old Norse-Icelandic culture, and it is for this reason, as well as with the ‘Norse-’ element in mind, that chapters on archaeology, geography and travel, historical background, laws, and social institutions are included. A chapter on language in a book whose main emphasis is on Old Icelandic literature needs no special explanation, but it should be noted that the ‘Language’ chapter in the present volume is of particular value in discussing the Icelandic language largely in terms of its North Germanic, that is, Scandinavian, family connections. The chapters on manuscripts and palaeography, orality and literacy, and runes illustrate in different ways the interrelationship of literature and other forms of cultural expression, most especially in a ‘Norse-Icelandic’ context, while those on Christian biography, Christian poetry, historiography and pseudo-history, metre and metrics, pagan myth and religion, prose of Christian instruction, rhetoric and style, romance, and royal biography, while all illustrating the ‘Norse’ element in Old Icelandic literature, also show the openness of that literature to influences of various kinds from beyond the bounds of Scandinavia.² Even those chapters whose titles reveal that they deal with distinctively Norse-Icelandic subjects, those on eddic poetry, family sagas, sagas of contemporary history (*Sturlunga saga*), sagas of Icelandic prehistory, short prose narrative (*þáttir*), skaldic poetry, and women in Old Norse poetry and sagas effortlessly succeed in placing their topics, to a greater or lesser extent, in a context beyond the purely local. The chapters on continuity, late prose fiction and late secular poetry help to locate Old Icelandic literature temporally as well as spatially by giving an idea of the remarkable continuity of Icelandic literature since the medieval period, while the chapter on post-medieval reception illustrates the no less remarkable continuing influence of that literature in the world outside Iceland.

I have followed the example of the Chaucer *Companion* in arranging the chapters in alphabetical order of title, partly because, in reading the Chaucer volume, as I did from beginning to end shortly after its first appearance in 2000, I found that

arrangement thoroughly congenial, but also because – and this is no doubt a version of the same reason – it does not commit the reader in advance to any particular grouping among the topics treated. Readers may either read the present book from cover to cover, or pick and choose among the chapters as they wish, with or without the guidance of the cross-references at the end of each chapter, which point to other chapters treating the most immediately related topics. Those who wish to begin at the beginning may like to know that, by a happy coincidence, the opening paragraphs of the archaeology chapter, which is alphabetically the first in the sequence, provide an admirable introduction to the volume as a whole; others, however, should not be inhibited by this information from starting with the chapter on women in Old Norse poetry and sagas, which comes alphabetically, and for no other reason, at the end of the sequence.

The topics signalled by the chapter headings are of my own choosing, though the actual headings of one or two chapters have been modified at the request of their contributors. I am also responsible (I am proud to say) for identifying the authors of chapters (very occasionally on the advice of others, in areas where I was not sure of whom to approach), and for inviting them to contribute. Once I had established a full list of contributors, by the end of February 2002, I circulated it to all of them, together with their addresses and agreed chapter headings, encouraging those who were writing on closely interrelated topics to consult among themselves with a view to ensuring that excessive overlap among chapters was avoided, though not discouraging overlap altogether, on the grounds that it would be interesting to see the same or nearly the same topic treated from different angles. The results of this exhortation were indeed interesting, to me at least; while each one of the contributors, it seemed to me, stuck admirably to his or her given topic, some welcome if not altogether expected examples of near-overlap nevertheless arose, whether because of consultation among contributors I cannot say. To give just one example, readers who are disappointed to find no chapter in the present volume on the Norse discovery of America will find much to interest them not only, as might be expected, in the chapter on geography and travel, but also in the chapters dealing with orality and literacy and with women in Old Norse poetry and sagas. Not a few of the contributors refer explicitly in their chapters to other chapters in the volume, and/or to work published by their fellow contributors, thus fulfilling part of the book's aim in giving an impression of current interactivity and debate among Old Norse-Icelandic scholars specializing in different aspects of the subject. The overall aim of the book is the ambitious one of going some way towards meeting the needs of university students at undergraduate and graduate level, and also those of the general reader, while at the same time having something new to offer specialists in its own subject as well as in neighbouring disciplines.

Some brief notes on the treatment of names in this volume, and on Icelandic pronunciation, may be helpful. My general aim has been to use medieval spellings for the personal names of medieval people (whether historical or fictional), and modern spellings for names of modern persons; with place names I have aimed to use modern

spellings except in cases where it is clear from the context that the reference is to a place as specified in a medieval text. Somewhat arbitrarily, I have taken c.1450 as a very flexible dividing line between the medieval and modern periods. I cannot claim to have achieved complete consistency in the policy just outlined, however. In cases of direct quotation I have, of course, followed the spelling of the passage quoted.

As for Icelandic pronunciation, no more than general rules of thumb can be given here. The letters *þ* and *ð* should be pronounced like *tb* in English *thin* and *this* respectively; *o* like the *o* in English *hot*; *æ* like the *eu* in French *feu*; and *ö* like the *eu* in French *peur*. In Old Icelandic *æ* was pronounced like the *a* in *bat*; in Modern Icelandic it is pronounced like the *y* in English *my*.³

My gratitude to all the contributors is clear, I trust, from my foregoing remarks. The contributions of those who were later than they might have been in sending them in were, in all cases, well worth waiting for, which is not to play down in any way the work of those who produced their chapters on time. Some have exceeded the publishers' stated word limit of 'approximately 8,000 words' per chapter; others have gone well beyond the recommended maximum of 25 items for each list of references. The one contributor who was, in the event, unable to submit his chapter should be thanked here for making space available for these excesses to be accommodated.

My debt to Peter Brown, the editor of the Chaucer *Companion*, will already be apparent from what I have written above. I had the pleasure of meeting him in the summer of 2002 and benefited greatly from his advice and encouragement. I also owe a special debt of gratitude to Peter Foote, who at my request (and with the authors' knowledge and consent) assisted me in the editing of the chapter (13) on laws, a topic which I found to be beyond my competence (and who also, though I may not be supposed to know it, did the preliminary editing of at least two of the other chapters, at the request of their authors). Thanks are also due to Jeffrey Cosser for translating chapters 14 and 20, and large parts of chapter 6; and to Andrew Wawn for undertaking, at the author's request, the preliminary editing of chapter 16. For help and advice of various kinds, and also for encouragement, I am grateful to Margaret Clunies Ross, Richard Perkins, Tom Shippey and Paul Beekman Taylor. My heartfelt thanks also go to Guðni Elísson, for his unfailing promptness, patience and conscientiousness in responding to my frequent cries for help; and to my wife and family for their love, tolerance and support.

Finally, I should like to thank Andrew McNeillie, now of Oxford University Press but of Blackwell Publishing in 2001, when he invited me to edit this *Companion*, for his encouragement at that early stage and later; Emma Bennett, Jennifer Hunt and Karen Wilson, all of Blackwell Publishing, for encouragement, advice and help at all stages; David Appleby, of the Geography Department, University of Leeds, for preparing the maps on pp. xii–xiii; and Fiona Sewell, the copy-editor, for her close and careful reading of the typescript (on which many of the contributors have commented gratefully), as well as for her sustained good humour. What errors remain are, of course, my own responsibility.

NOTES

- 1 What follows here is very much my own view of *Gylfaginning*, and one with which Peter Orton, the author of chapter 17, would not necessarily agree. A fuller version of it appears in McTurk (1994).
- 2 It is only fair to point out that at least one Icelander, Jónas Kristjánsson (1994), objects to the application of the term 'Norse' to works of Old Icelandic literature, but is prepared to tolerate the term 'Norse-Icelandic' when this is used of Old Icelandic *and* Old Norwegian literature. My impression is that he interprets the term 'Norse' too narrowly, understanding it to mean exclusively 'Norwegian'.
- 3 For further guidance on the pronunciation of Old and Modern Icelandic, see Barnes (1999: 8–21).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Barnes, Michael (1999) *A New Introduction to Old Norse*, part I: *Grammar*. Rpt with corrections and additions 2001. London.
- Kristjánsson, Jónas (1994) 'Er Egilssaga "Norse"?' *Skáldskaparmál: Tímarit um íslenskar bókmenntir fyrri alda* 3, 216–31.
- McTurk, Rory (1994) 'Fooling Gylfi: Who Tricks Who?' *Alvíssmál* 3, 3–18.

Archaeology of Economy and Society

Orri Vésteinsson

‘Old Norse’ defines the culture of Norway and Iceland during the Middle Ages. It is a somewhat illogical concept as it is largely synonymous with ‘Norse’ – there are no such things as ‘Middle Norse’ or ‘Recent Norse’ – and its temporal and geographical scope is far from clear. It definitely does not apply to anything post-medieval – after 1500 or so things that used to be ‘Norse’ become ‘Nordic’ or ‘Scandinavian’. Linguists use the term ‘Norse’ or ‘Old Norse’ to describe the common language of Scandinavian peoples (apart from the Sami) until the emergence of the separate languages of Swedish, Danish and Norwegian in the late Middle Ages. This common language – *dǫnsk tunga* it was called by its speakers – is the manifestation of a common ethnicity – the speakers of ‘dǫnsk tunga’ considered themselves to be ‘norðœnir menn’ – and the term ‘Norse’ is often used as a translation of *norðœnn*. As such it applies to all the Germanic peoples of Scandinavia and their colonies in the British Isles and the North Atlantic. In the context of the Viking Age we often find ‘Norse’ used as a description of anyone of Scandinavian origin, synonymous with ‘Vikings’, ‘Scandinavians’ and ‘Northmen’, whereas after the end of the Viking Age it is as a rule not used to describe Danes or Swedes, except in the most technical discussion of language or ethnicity. Literacy reached Scandinavia towards the end of the Viking Age in the eleventh century, and in the twelfth there emerged in Norway and to a greater extent in Iceland a tradition of writing in the vernacular, the language known in English as ‘Norse’. Texts in the vernacular were also written in Denmark and Sweden and the consideration of these clearly falls within the scope of Old Norse studies. But compared to the Icelandic-Norwegian output these texts are small in volume and minimal in their appeal to modern readers – law codes being the largest category of twelfth- and thirteenth-century vernacular texts from Denmark and Sweden. The vernacular literature of Norway and Iceland – the eddas, the skaldic poetry, all the different types of sagas, as well as laws, chronicles, annals and works of science and theology – is what most people think of when they hear talk of things Old Norse, and it is with this vernacular literary production of Norway and Iceland that this *Companion* mainly deals.

The term 'Norse' is not in regular use among archaeologists and it does not have a clearly defined meaning in archaeological discussion. On the other hand, archaeologists happily use the no less ill-defined term 'Viking' of anything Scandinavian during the Viking Age, but after its close things archaeological become 'medieval' all over Scandinavia and no archaeological distinctions have been made that match either the temporal or the geographical scope of 'Norse'. 'Norse' also tends to be used to refer to the less material aspects of culture, to language and phonetics, poetry and prose, memory and composition, ideas and beliefs, individuals and their exploits – in short, things that archaeology has traditionally not had much to say about. Most modern archaeologists believe they have little to contribute to Old Norse studies as they are practised by philologists, historians and linguists, and feel much more at home discussing such aspects of culture as economic strategies, diet and nutrition, trade and settlement patterns, technology and environmental impact.

While there are a number of contact points between archaeology and Old Norse studies it is fair to say that in the last half-century or so they have not aroused much interest or led to fruitful debates. This has not always been the case, and until the first half of the twentieth century archaeological, historical, linguistic and literary inquiry into the medieval past of the Nordic peoples was to all intents and purposes a single discipline practised by individuals who were equally at home discussing artefacts, runes and eddic verse. It is to this period of scholarly syncretism that we owe most of the major discoveries of ancient texts relating to the Norse world, the basic sorting of manuscripts, the decipherment of runic inscriptions, the elucidation of the language and metrics of the poetry, as well as the basic outlines of a popular conception of what 'Norse' means and what the 'Norse' world was like. In this respect we still owe much to the legacy of great nineteenth-century scholars like Carl Christian Rafn, Kristian Kaalund and Olav Rygh, men who easily straddled what are now two or more separate disciplines. Their legacy is a syncretic view of the 'Norse' world, a view which persists, especially in the popular mind, even though many – if not most – of its premises have been questioned, refuted or trivialized by subsequent generations of scholars.

We can take as an example the importance accorded to assemblies – the regular meetings of free men to settle disputes, make laws and discuss policies – in the Norse world. This institution is an essential component of the idea of freedom as a characteristic of Norse society. While this idea has come under strong criticism in its individual manifestations – nobody believes any more in a class of totally independent farmers in the Norse world (though see Byock 2001: 8–9, 75–6) – it keeps cropping up in new guises, such as sexual freedom, to name but one (for example, Jochens 1980: 388). Freedom of spirit is probably the basic notion, a notion that scholars no longer discuss or argue for, but which is nevertheless completely ingrained in the common conception of 'Norse', affecting scholars and the public alike. It was chiefly the work of Konrad Maurer in the mid-nineteenth century (Maurer 1852, 1874, 1907–38) on Old Norse laws and constitutional arrangements which defined the assemblies as a fundamental element in Norse

governmental order, and it was through the work of late nineteenth-century antiquarians like Kristian Kaalund, Sigurður Vigfússon, Daniel Bruun and Brynjúlfur Jónsson that the actual remains of Icelandic assemblies were located and categorized (Friðriksson 1994a: 105–45). This work was seen as amounting to an important verification of Maurer's interpretation of the medieval texts and it is fair to say that it was accomplished to such general satisfaction that no aspect of the assembly system as described by Maurer has been seriously questioned since (for example, Byock 2001: 171–83).

If, however, we look at the methods used by the antiquarians to identify assembly sites, reasons for concern begin immediately to emerge. Not only did they rely on questionable criteria, like the presence of 'court-circles' – a phenomenon of doubtful authenticity (Friðriksson and Vésteinsson 1992) – but their findings, considered independently, turn out to suggest a much messier arrangement than Maurer postulated, a system not described in the surviving texts. Quite apart from problems of assembly site identification (Friðriksson 1994b: 364–71), it is clear that the distribution of such sites is very uneven, in contrast to Maurer's model which would have the assembly sites evenly distributed among Iceland's districts. Not only are there clusters of such sites in a few regions (Dýrafjörður, Suður-Þingeyjarsýsla, Fljótsdals-hérað), but in many of the central regions the assembly sites are in marginal locations, not at all central to the area they are supposed to have served (in particular the assembly sites of the southern plains, Árnes and Þingskálar). A recent hypothesis sees these assembly sites as the symptom of a particular type of chieftaincy (Vésteinsson, Einarsson and Sigurgeirsson 2003). According to this view, chieftains in regions of fragmented power, who on a national scale could only be considered of small significance, used regular assemblies at neutral locations as a means of consolidating their own powers and gaining regional supremacy. It follows from this that Maurer's model cannot be accepted as a realistic depiction of an actual system. The constitutional arrangements described in *Grágás* – the laws of Commonwealth Iceland – must rather be seen as a thirteenth-century rationalization, a lawyer's attempt to make sense where there had been little or none before.

This is just one example to illustrate the complex relationship between archaeology and the study of Norse texts. The latter has – especially in the past – relied heavily on archaeological verification, but for most of the twentieth century the two disciplines had little serious exchange, with the result that the students of each now tend to view the past in rather different ways and even tend to be unaware of the implications for the other discipline of the findings in their own. This gap has been widened on the one hand by the book-prose school, which holds that the sagas of Icelanders are medieval creations rather than Viking-Age traditions, and on the other by a growing sense among archaeologists that the Nordic countries underwent major economic and social changes at the end of the Viking Age. Both lines of thought have aggravated the perceived lack of association between actual life in the Viking Age as evidenced by archaeology and medieval ideas about that age expressed in the sagas, laws and other lore committed to vellum in the twelfth century and later.

This lack of association is not a problem for those influenced by anthropological theory who consider the legends and myths of the Norsemen as a world with its own integrity, which can be studied without any reference to the real world which created them (for example, Meulengracht Sørensen 1993; Miller 1990). This view is, however, unlikely to satisfy many readers of sagas, who are interested to know more about the society which created them and the times in which the stories are set – was Norse society really like that? And what sort of society creates literature like the sagas? These are questions that archaeologists should not shirk from trying to answer, and in the following an attempt will be made to discuss some basic notions about Norse society from the point of view of archaeology. Importance is also attached to shedding light on the profound changes undergone by Norse society at the end of the Viking Age and how these may have obscured the past in the eyes of the historically minded scholars and authors who wrote in the high Middle Ages. The focus is on Icelandic archaeology but where necessary the archaeology of other Norse regions will be mentioned.

Archaeology of Saga Times

Nobility

A pervasive notion in saga literature is that many of the settlers of Iceland were Norwegian noblemen, who for either practical or ideological reasons could not live under the tyranny of Haraldr hárfagri ('Finehair'), the king who was credited by tradition with unifying Norway under his sole rule in the late ninth century. This idea should in no way be dismissed as wishful thinking on the part of medieval Icelanders trying to create a respectable past for themselves (for example, Meulengracht Sørensen 1993: 173–6). It stands to reason that people with wealth and connections are more likely than those with neither to be able to invest in and organize such a complex and risky undertaking as settling a completely new country more than 10 days' sail away from anywhere. This is clearly what happened in Virginia in the seventeenth century, for example, so why not in Iceland?

It is of course nobility as an abstract quality that is emphasized in the sagas, rather than the idea that the individuals involved were functioning noblemen. The flight to Iceland implies that their role as such was played out; and that sort of nobility – a quality of character associated with family origin – is virtually impossible to test archaeologically. If, however, the settlement of Iceland was led by noblemen who still had wealth and authority in Norway – either personally or through their families – one would expect to see signs of this in the archaeological record. Such signs could take the form of imposing architecture, artwork and expensive consumables, rich burials, and evidence of large-scale planning.

There is now considerable archaeological evidence available from Viking-Age Iceland which allows us to assess such issues: more than 300 pagan burials, at least

three early Christian chapels with cemeteries, at least 18 long-houses with associated pit-houses, ancillary structures, middens and artefact collections as well as an increasing number of animal bone collections and a substantial environmental record. From the Faeroes there are few unambiguous pagan burials but several Viking-Age long-houses and substantial artefact collections. If this material is compared with the Norwegian evidence it becomes immediately apparent that the range is much narrower in Iceland and the Faeroes than in Norway. Considering the difference in size – and hence in the economic base – of these societies, one would not perhaps expect to find in the North Atlantic colonies monuments like the royal mounds at Borre or the Oseberg ship burial – which in any case belong to the late Iron Age and early Viking Age rather than the somewhat later period of the Atlantic settlements. It is maybe more surprising that there is nothing comparable in the colonies to aristocratic graves like the ones found in Gjermundbu (Grieg 1947), Mykleboestad, Tinghaugen or Tussehaugen (Shetelig 1912: 179–220). One has in fact to go pretty far down the social scale of Norwegian burials to find graves that compare with the richest Icelandic ones. The richest graves from Iceland would in Norway have been regarded not as aristocratic, but possibly as graves of local landowners or free-holders. An important difference is that in Norway swords are the weapons most commonly found in men's graves, whereas in Iceland swords are relatively rare. If they can be regarded as symbols of authority this difference may suggest that representatives of the Norwegian gentry did not find their way in any great numbers to Iceland. Another important difference is that in Norway tools are frequently found in graves, while in Iceland they are as good as unknown. This suggests that specialized craftsmen could not make a living in Iceland in significant numbers, which in turn suggests that their patrons, the aristocrats, were absent as well.¹

Much the same picture emerges when we look at buildings, although we must keep in mind that in this category there is relatively little evidence from Norway. If we take Borg in Lofoten as a typical regional chieftain's dwelling in Norway (Munch et al. 1987), even the largest hall in Iceland, Hofstaðir in Mývatnssveit, is less than half the size of Borg. And Hofstaðir is an exceptional building in Iceland (255 m²), with the rest of the long-houses in Iceland and the Faeroes falling broadly into two categories, small and large, the majority (40–90 m²) in the former category and three (90–130 m²) in the latter (figures from Roberts 2002: 65–6). It is important to note in this context that the Hofstaðir hall is built after 950, more than a century after the start of settlement in Iceland, and thus reflects political developments in the third to fourth generation of Icelanders and not social status among the original settler population.

In short, there are no material signs of a nobility in the North Atlantic colonies, and in so far as the social status of the settlers can be ascertained from archaeological remains it seems that, while there clearly was social differentiation in the colonies, the top of their social scale was near the middle of the social scale in mainland Scandinavia. This then suggests that the North Atlantic colonists were materially poor and that theirs was a subsistence economy only. This conclusion still, however, gives us

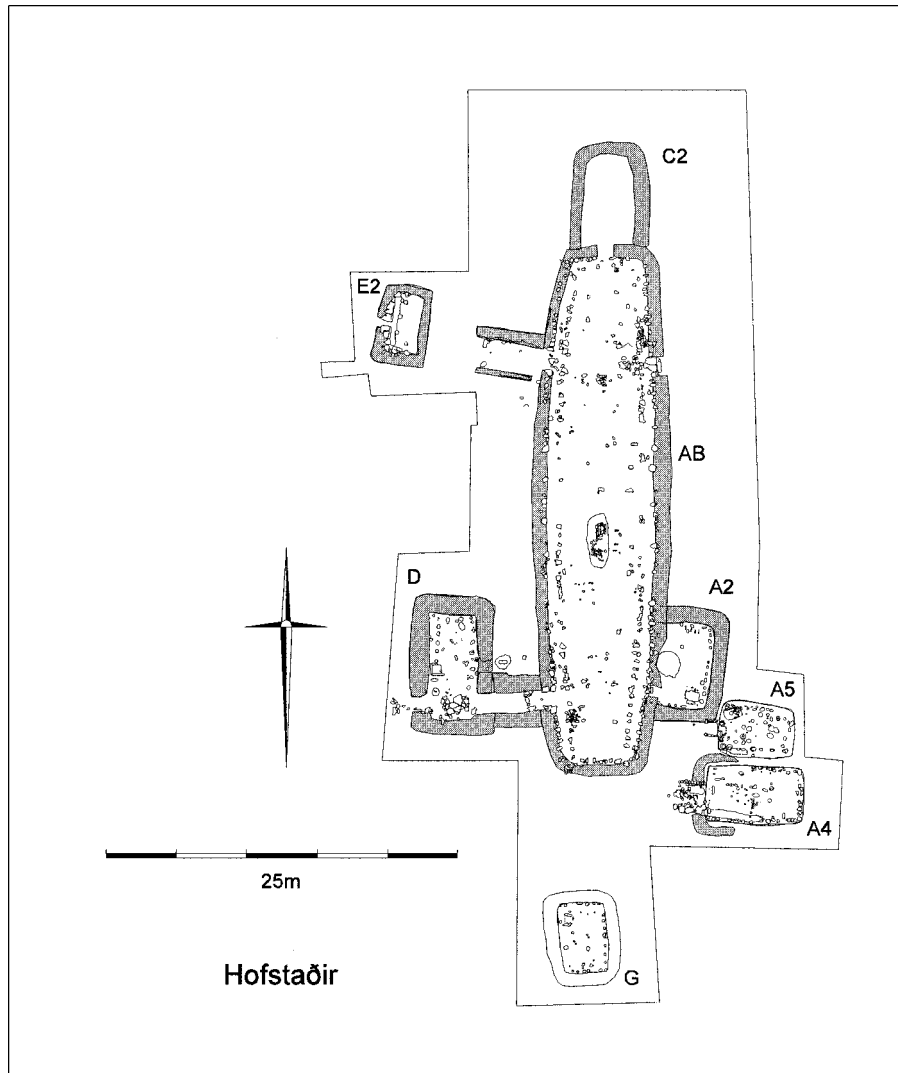


Figure 1.1 The great hall at Hofstaðir, northeast Iceland. © Gavin Lucas, Fornleifastofnun Íslands.

room to debate whether they were Scandinavian gentry fallen on hard times or peasants prepared to face hardships in order to improve their lot – or some blend of these stereotypes.

The picture of material poverty is to some extent contradicted by the settlement patterns, which suggest a considerable degree of planning and the existence of centralized authorities who must have done the planning (Vésteinsson 1998b; Vésteinsson, McGovern and Keller 2002). In those parts of the Icelandic lowlands where forests needed to be cleared in order to allow settlement, farmlands tended to be evenly spaced, with equal access to resources, which suggests that in those areas there

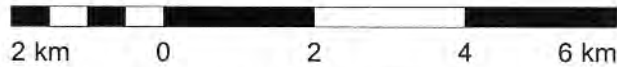
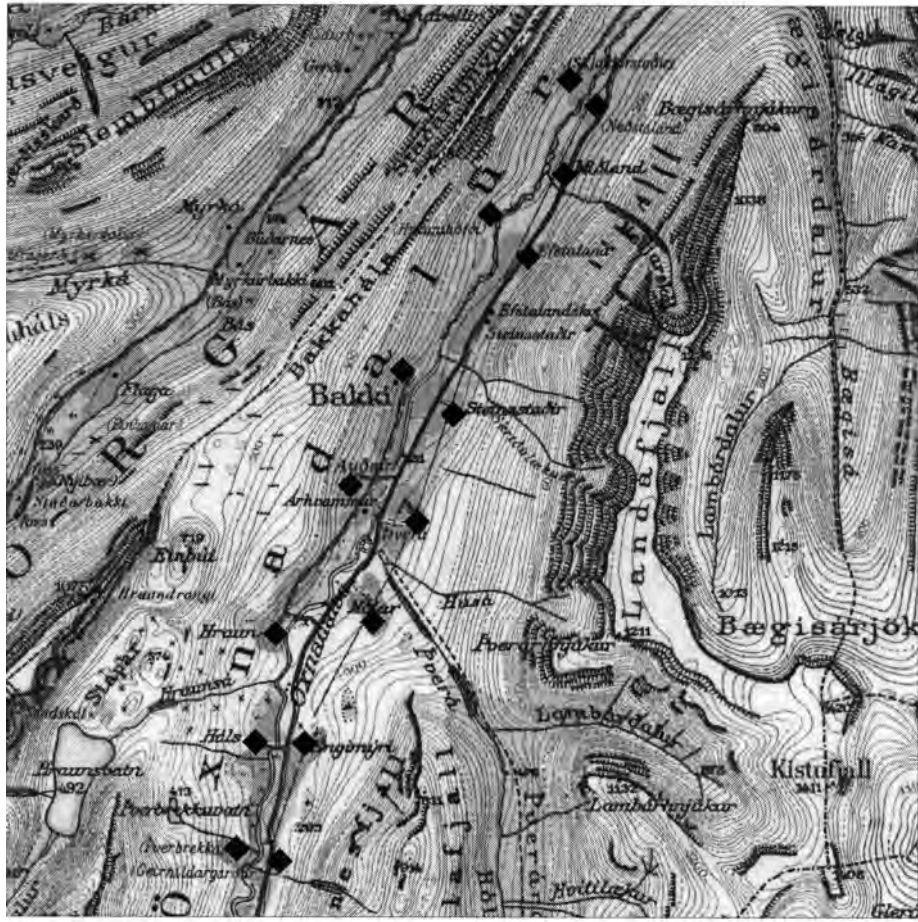
was a control over the settlement process which must have come from a person or persons who could wield authority over a large group of people. The extent of this planning and the number of people who must have been subject to the planners makes it difficult to imagine that they were vastly inferior in terms of status to, say, the Gjermundbu chieftain. It is possible that archaeologists have not yet located the seats of power or the burials of these great organizers, but it is equally likely that the source of this authority never left the Scandinavian homeland: that, much like the North American colonies of the seventeenth century, the North Atlantic colonies of the ninth were organized and financed by entrepreneurs in the 'Old World' who never had to brave the North Atlantic to profit from the enterprise. Once news of a large, empty, but inhabitable new country had made its way to Scandinavia and people started to get interested in becoming colonists, there must have been others who saw ways to profit from the situation. Owners of ships would have been in a position to diversify, to add passenger transport to their established trading and raiding routines, and the more enterprising businessmen would have seen that they could also profit from the colonization itself. Why stop at selling fares if you can also claim the land and sell it to the passengers for a consideration? As with any venture of this kind, some will have specialized in this latter aspect of the undertaking, rather than in the basic transport arrangements, and while many no doubt acted through agents, some may well have made their own way to the new countries to oversee things. Their futures must in most cases have lain back home, however, and that is where the initial profits will have gone as well.

This is of course an idea that will be difficult to substantiate, but as a model it has the virtue of an analogue in the North American colonization by Europeans in the seventeenth century, and it certainly explains both how the transport of people to the colonies was financed and why the people left on the shores of the colonies were so materially impoverished. And while noblemen may have played a part in this process, they are more likely to have done so as adventurous financiers than as idealistic leaders of clans seeking to build a society unsullied by novel ideas of kingship and taxation.

Affluence

Another notion which has been around for a long time is the idea that because the environments of the Faeroes, Iceland and Greenland were as good as untouched by humans when the Norse colonizers arrived, there was an initial period of plenty when unspoilt nature provided bountifully for the newcomers (see, for instance, ch. 29 of *Egils saga*). A follow-up notion is that this allowed the free farmers of Iceland to create a vibrant economy capable of sustaining a much larger population than the country has seen in later times. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars imagined that for the first two to three centuries Icelanders engaged in substantial and extensive trade on their own ocean-going vessels, and that the decline of this trade – blamed on a lack of timber for maintaining the fleet, along with a decline in climate and political

Atlaskort 1:100.000



Scale: 1:100.398

Figure 1.2 A planned settlement in Öxnadalur, north Iceland. The rectangles represent farm units in 1686. Map base © Landmælingar Íslands.

fortunes in the thirteenth century – led to a reduction of the population and to the loss of political and economic independence.

It is easy to believe that the idea of an unspoiled land appealed to prospective settlers in the ninth century, and according to twelfth-century sources (*Íslendingabók*, ch. 6), this was the essence of Eiríkr rauði's ('the Red's') sales pitch when he started to recruit settlers for his Greenland colony in the late tenth century. And to some extent it must be true that unspoiled nature made life easier for the new settlers. In particular, unwary

game (walrus, seal, birds) must have been a ready source of nutrition in the early stages, but this will have alleviated only to a small extent the immense problems facing the initial settlers. The story in *Landnámabók* (ch. 5) of Hrafna-Flóki's abortive attempt at settlement in Iceland reflects the pros and cons of being the first settler: Hrafna-Flóki's party spent the first summer hunting and fishing in the bountiful Breiðafjörður but forgot to collect fodder for their livestock, with the result that the animals died, forcing them to abandon their settlement the following year. Establishing a completely new, self-sustaining settlement hundreds of miles of rough sea away from the next inhabited place is no easy task, and if the earliest English settlements in Virginia and New England are anything to go by, it will have involved tremendous hardships and major loss of life – and in Iceland there were no Indians to take pity on the initial settlers.

Life must have been very hard during the initial phases of reconnaissance and landscape learning, and as in the case of seventeenth-century North America we must allow for at least two or three decades before a semblance of stable and self-sustaining communities can have been created. There are no archaeological sites which can with certainty be associated with an initial settlement phase – all the sites excavated so far seem to be farms, the occupants of which based their livelihood on stock-rearing. Many of the oldest sites excavated in Iceland and the Faeroes were, however, abandoned very early, some it seems within a generation of their establishment. In some cases (for example, Grelutóttir in north-west Iceland and Tóftanes on Eysturoy in the Faeroes) the relocation seems to have been over a short distance, possibly within the same home-field, but in others (for example, Hvítárholt in southern Iceland and Herjólfsdalur in Vestmannaeyjar) the abandonment of the farms seems to have been part of a larger-scale reorganization of the settlements. These relocations attest to the length of the learning curve involved in colonizing a new country. Some things, like the lie of the land, the presence and absence of flora and fauna, and distances and routes, can be learned relatively quickly, whereas the knowledge necessary for successful farming, an understanding of soils and drainage, and an awareness of the interrelationship of climate, location and vegetation will have taken much longer to establish. The problems of the first generations of settlers must have been compounded by chains of events which their own colonization had set in train, and which led to changes to which they had to adapt. The decimation of the walrus colonies is one obvious case, the destruction of the woodlands another.

At those sites where significant artefactual and faunal collections have been retrieved, identifiable signs of stress have not been found. While research into the health of early livestock is only now under way it seems that, by the time the North Atlantic settlers had established a farming routine, they had achieved at least bare survival. From the artefact assemblages it is, however, clear that these people were materially poor. Although a systematic comparison of artefact collections from the North Atlantic colonies and Norway has not been attempted, a cursory glance over the evidence seems to suggest that the differences within this overall area are most striking. North Atlantic farm sites are characterized by small numbers of artefacts,

a very limited variety of types, very limited imports (mostly soapstone for vessels, schist for whetstones, and beads, mainly of glass but some of amber) and hardly any imported prestige items. In the Viking Age the colonists made much more extensive use of local stone (in Iceland using obsidian for cutting, and sandstone for gaming pieces and spindle whorls) than they did in later times, which possibly suggests a limited availability of raw materials that was later alleviated by increased local iron production and imports. In Norway artefact quantities from farm sites are greater overall, but there is, more importantly, a greater variety of find categories there, and a greater frequency of prestige imports.

The archaeological record in Iceland and the Faeroes becomes much thinner after the Viking Age, but it seems that this relative material poverty began to diminish in the thirteenth century with increasing imports, more substantial architecture and greater stability of settlement. Thirteenth- and fourteenth-century farm sites like Stöng, Gröf, Kúabót and Stóraborg in Iceland and Sandnes, Gården under Sandet (GUS) and Brattahlíð in Greenland evince not only a more substantial architecture but also much larger and more diverse artefact collections than their Viking-Age predecessors. The stone churches of thirteenth- to fourteenth-century Greenland and Faeroe demonstrate the existence of a substantial surplus of wealth, and the political organization to channel that surplus into monumental architecture. In Iceland comparable churches have not yet been excavated, but the unusual buildings at Reykholt, associated with the use of geothermal water and steam (a spa?), may represent comparable economic growth. The fact that this growth took place hardly needs explanation – it is most easily understood as the result of a slow accumulation of wealth over two to three centuries, driven by a desire to attain standards similar to those current in the old homelands. It is indeed surprising that this growth seems to have been so slow.

In Iceland a stage in this development may be represented by a complex system of earthworks, mainly found in the northeast of the country and dated to the tenth to twelfth centuries (Einarsson, Hansson and Vésteinsson 2002). The building of the system will have involved something like three weeks' work every year for 10 years for each of the c.200 farms in the region (36,500 labour days). While that no doubt represents a significant investment in a subsistence economy, the form of this investment suggests a degree of social organization which has not yet attained the central focus attested to later by the monumental architecture.

For our present purpose we can see in this system a confirmation that by the eleventh century at least (the exact time of the building of the system is not certain), the Icelanders had mastered their new environment and developed their subsistence strategies to such a degree that they could start investing in large-scale projects like the earthwork system.

Confirmation that the Icelanders had their basic subsistence worked out by the eleventh century comes from the cemetery in Skeljastaðir (eleventh to twelfth centuries). Analysis of the skeletons suggests that this population was relatively healthy, with no signs of malnutrition or endemic disease. The explanation for this is good



Figure 1.3 A part of the system of earthworks in northeast Iceland. © Árni Einarsson, Fornleifastofnun Íslands.

nutrition on the one hand and, on the other, isolation and clean water, which will have impeded the spread of infectious diseases (Gestsdóttir 1998).

It seems then that by the eleventh century the Icelanders were on the whole well fed and that they had begun to be able to invest in large-scale building projects. They were, however, still materially poor in comparison with the societies of mainland Scandinavia, and it is not until the thirteenth century that we begin to see signs of concentrated surplus wealth in the North Atlantic colonies. Rather than supporting the view of original bounty followed by decline and crisis in the thirteenth century, archaeology suggests an initial period of relative material poverty followed by slow growth up to the thirteenth century, when the North Atlantic colonies can be said to have attained economic standards similar to those of the old homelands.

Freedom

The idea that Norse society, in particular the new societies established in the North Atlantic, were characterized by economic and political freedom has already been alluded to. It is a very old idea which seems to originate on the one hand in ideas about barbarism – no doubt ultimately derived from classical descriptions of Germanic and Celtic warrior societies – and on the other in nineteenth-century perceptions by Nordic societies of themselves as democratic and enlightened. Scholars have long conceived of Norse society as made up of a large group of property-owning farmers ruled over by not very interfering chieftains or petty kings, government being characterized more by collective institutions like assemblies and the military organization of the *leidang* ('levy'). The property-owning farmers are seen not as great landowners but as owners of the land they tilled themselves. In the Icelandic context these property-owning farmers are then seen to have made up the constituency of the chieftains, who have traditionally been regarded as *primi inter pares* rather than despotic rulers.

There is much in the saga literature and the medieval law codes that can be made to fit this scenario and it is certainly true that Norse society was simpler in terms of political hierarchies than societies further south in Europe. The polities were smaller and the organization of the top layer in each region was weaker. The development of complex political hierarchies and feudal modes of proprietorship seems to have begun in southern Scandinavia during the Viking Age, but in the northern part and in the new colonies this development was much less pronounced, even in the high Middle Ages. The fact that the concept of serfdom does not occur in the Norse law codes suggests on the one hand that Norse farmers in general had more freedom than, say, their French or Italian counterparts. On the other hand, it may simply reflect the relative lack of organization on the part of the Norse ruling elite.

The limited size of Norse polities also has an effect on our appreciation of the conditions of life of Norse farmers. The smaller the political group to which an individual belongs, and the more distant and the more poorly organized any ultimate power is, the more political weight that individual will have, irrespective even of

wealth or pedigree. Both observations point to a relative difference between the conditions of life of Norse farmers and their counterparts in more southerly latitudes. This is not the same thing as saying that they were all free or politically active, however, or that their portrayal by nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars is necessarily accurate.

The concept of freedom, as it has been used to describe Norse farmers, is a legal and philosophical definition which is difficult to test archaeologically. From the archaeologist's point of view such terms are of limited value for describing prehistoric societies, and should be used only with the utmost caution in describing proto-historic societies such as the Norse ones of the Viking Age. When archaeologists contemplate questions as to what extent people are likely to have been able to make their own decisions about their own lives (for example where to live, whom to marry, which crop to sow, how many sheep to slaughter, which chieftain to support), they are confined to a limited range of evidence. Settlement patterns fall within this range. As already discussed, Icelandic settlement patterns are characterized by relatively few large units occupying the very best land and often centrally located vis-à-vis a larger number of much smaller but evenly sized and regularly spaced units. With the help of other evidence, such as place names and the distribution of churches and chapels, it has been suggested that in the eleventh to twelfth centuries Iceland's roughly 4,000 farm units were divided between about 600 estates, some 1,000 reasonably large and seemingly independent units and up to about 2,500 planned settlements (Vésteinsson 1998a: 165–6). The farmers of the planned settlements were clearly in a dependent relationship to the estate owners and it is easiest to view this relationship as one of lords and peasants. If we accept this picture of differential access to resources as the basis of social analysis, it then follows that the portrayal of farmers in the sagas must be limited to the society of the roughly 600 estate owners and possibly the 1,000 independent farmers (a theme developed in Vésteinsson forthcoming). The majority of the Icelandic householders were, according to this picture, not politically free in anything but the most technical sense.

The Great Change

The greater part of Norse literature is set in the Viking Age or even earlier periods, but was composed after the close of the Viking Age – in some cases long after. Many scholars have pointed to the long time-lapse between the events described and the writing of the accounts as a reason to be suspicious of the authenticity of the sagas as historical documents. There is undoubtedly some truth in this – as time passes, memories fade and take on a life of their own – but this is not necessarily a mechanical process (that is, a memory does not lose its content at a steady rate through time) and it is affected by a number of more subjective factors. One of them is the rate of change in the society in question. In a society which is relatively stable, where institutions and attitudes change slowly or not at all, memories presumably lose their significance

and meaning more slowly than in a society which is transforming rapidly. In such a society memories will not only lose their meaning and significance relatively soon, but a need may arise for new 'memories', that is, explanations for a past that has become incomprehensible through change.

The transition from the Viking Age to the medieval period in the lands of the Norsemen is no arbitrary chronological demarcation created by scholars for want of other things to do. It is a division between genuinely different periods, different in nearly all the most important aspects of society: economic, social, political and ideological.

One of the most striking features of the Viking Age is the remarkable homogeneity of Norse culture in that period. While there are distinct regional differences, there are also certain traits which were shared by all the peoples of the Norse world. A common language is apparent from runic inscriptions and the earliest vernacular texts, but the Norse also shared ideas about what their houses should look like, how jewellery should be decorated and what fashion accessories it was fitting for women to wear. Among the more distinctive types of artefacts are the oval brooches worn by women, the distribution of which (see figure 1.4) maps out quite convincingly the geographical extent of Norse culture during the Viking Age. The Norse of the Viking Age clearly had a strong cultural identity which set them apart from other Europeans, whether Christians to the south or other pagan peoples to the north and east. The introduction of Christianity gradually reduced this distinctiveness, replacing indigenous art styles and tastes with more universal decorative fashions in the course of the twelfth century. These changes signify the incorporation of Norse society into the larger sphere of European Catholic culture. The Norse ceased to maintain a divergent identity and instead adopted new building styles, new decorative styles and new learning. In the twelfth century Norse artists – wood-carvers, stone-cutters and jewellers – forswore the traditional decorative styles based on animal motifs and took up Romanesque styles based on floral motifs. From an art-historical point of view this is a major transformation, implying a fundamental shift in tastes and attitudes. To the archaeologist it makes sense to view the inception of vernacular writing in the twelfth century as a corollary to developments in other spheres of fine art, as a new concept which is more correctly understood as the reception of a completely new type of cultural expression than as an adaptation of old traditions to a new medium.

The end of the Viking Age marks the end of a barbaric expansion and the integration of the Norse lands into 'civilized' European society. They became integrated in terms of political structure, with kings levying taxes, minting coins, promulgating laws and making alliances with other European kings as equals. With the introduction of Christianity and the establishment of the church they became civilized in the eyes of other Europeans. In becoming Christians they adopted a whole new ideological suite, ranging from matters spiritual and intellectual to ideas on social order. The establishment of permanent kingdoms and the church (a gradual and complex affair, to be sure) involved changes in the social structure which are most

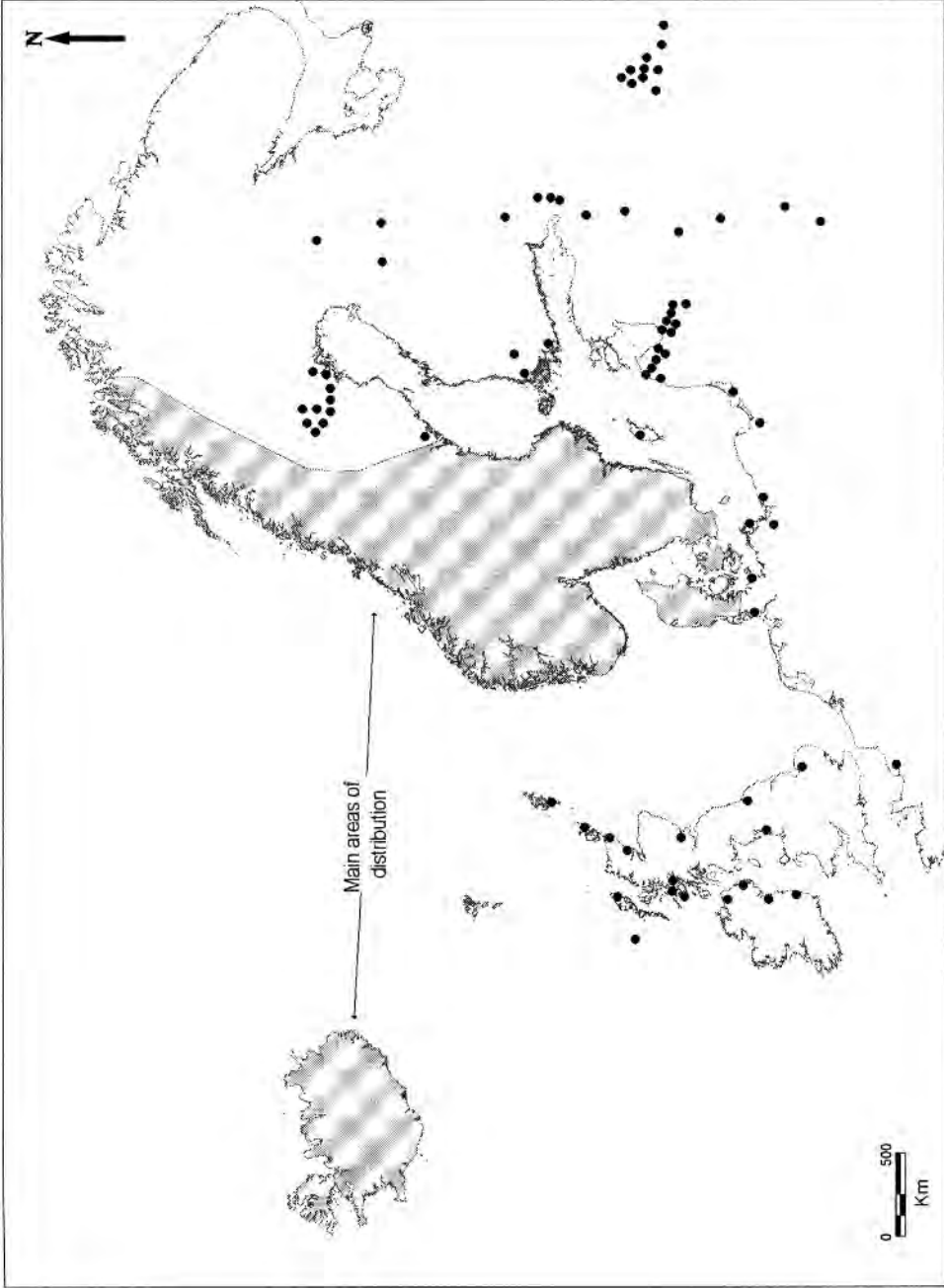


Figure 1.4 Distribution of oval brooches in Northern Europe in the Viking age. After S. H. H. Kaland, 'Dress'. *From Viking to Crusader: The Scandinavians and Europe 800–1200* (New York: In Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson (eds.) 1992), fig. 1, p. 192.

notable in the effects these new institutions had on patterns of landownership, on the organization of the aristocracy and on the judicial system.

At a more fundamental level important economic changes were taking place in the last part of the Viking Age. In southern Scandinavia this is seen most clearly in the increased emphasis on cereal cultivation as against cattle-breeding and the sudden halt in the relocation of villages. Villages which had shifted their site every century or so since their foundation in the Iron Age became stationary from the eleventh century onwards. These changes were on the one hand the result of the introduction of new technologies – the heavy plough with the mould-board, for instance, and intensive fertilizing – but on the other they reflect increased social complexity, which meant that the needs of national or supra-national institutions like the state and the church had a direct impact on decisions as to production and land use at the household level.

In Iceland a variety of changes in the late Viking Age can be detected in the archaeological record. Most obvious and well known are the changes in burial customs resulting from the introduction of Christianity around 1000 and the introduction of a new type of structure, namely churches, permanently changing the layout of a large number of farmsteads. Other changes are often associated with the process of adaptation to a new environment, such as the disappearance of goats and pigs from archaeological faunal collections in the eleventh century. These woodland-dependent animals became rare as a result of overexploitation (whether intentional or otherwise) of the birch forests, but the result of the reduction in their numbers was a different sort of farm management and a different sort of diet, setting twelfth-century Icelanders apart from their forefathers as well as their neighbours.

In Iceland as well as the rest of the Norse world, building styles changed towards the end of the Viking Age. The boat-shaped long-houses, a very distinct cultural symbol common to all the Norse lands during the Viking age, made way for new building styles, styles that varied from one to another of the many different geographical zones of the post-Viking Norse world. Instead of a common architectural expression there developed building types that reflected the local rather than the regional culture. In Iceland the boat-shaped long houses were replaced by narrower buildings with straight walls and a number of smaller rooms branching off from the central hall. These changes reflect new engineering solutions as to how a roof should be supported, and also, possibly, different use of materials; they clearly also reflect new ideas about the use of space and about the symbolism of domestic architecture.

There developed from the late tenth century onwards a specific Icelandic paradigm of what domestic buildings should look like and what functions they should be able to serve, a paradigm different from the earlier Viking-Age one as well as from those developing in other Norse lands. In the later stages of this process, as late as the thirteenth century in some parts of Iceland, the long-fire – the hearth central to the Viking-Age halls – disappears from the halls, the function of which must by that time have become very different from what it used to be in the Viking Age. In Iceland and Shetland this is also the time when bi-perforated sheep metapodials begin to appear in the animal bone assemblages (Bigelow 1993). The practice of boring into

both ends of sheep leg-bones to extract the marrow suggests that in these regions boiling was replacing roasting as the principal method of cooking meat. Roasting makes the bone brittle enough to be broken easily, whereas boiling tends to make the bone relatively dense, so that special excavation techniques are required to extract the marrow. This change in cooking practice is probably associated with the abandonment of the floor-level central hearths of the halls as the principal focus of cooking activity, and with a new preference for raised fireplaces in special kitchens. These changes no doubt have complex reasons reflecting issues ranging from fuel usage to the status of women, but they certainly indicate that the organization of the Norse household was undergoing major transformations in the wake of the Viking Age. To the archaeologist such transformations suggest that society as a whole was changing in fundamental ways.

At Reykholt in southwest Iceland buildings have recently been excavated which are believed to have been in use in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, at the time that the writer Snorri Sturluson lived there. The excavations have revealed two rectangular cellars, one possibly connected to a steam conduit (for heating?) and the other to a passage leading to the famous outdoor pool mentioned in thirteenth-century accounts and still to be seen at the site. It is believed that these cellars supported large timber buildings representing a completely new departure from the Viking-Age paradigm of house construction. If this was the setting of Snorri's literary activity, it serves as a poignant reminder of the enormous changes that Norse society had undergone between the end of the Viking Age and the pinnacle of literary activity in the mid-thirteenth century.

Conclusion

The fundamental nature of the changes to Norse society at the end of the Viking Age has long been apparent to archaeologists, and this is the reason why they distinguish quite emphatically between the Viking Age and the following centuries. It is also the reason why relatively few archaeologists or historians deal with both periods or the transition between them, most preferring to specialize either in the Viking Age or in the following medieval period. It therefore makes good sense for an archaeologist to stress these changes in a *Companion* to Old Norse-Icelandic literature and culture. It does not follow at all from the fundamental nature of the changes undergone by Norse society in the intervening period that the sagas need to be considered fictitious. The fact of this transformation does, however, mean that any student of the sagas who wishes to use them as guides to Viking-Age society and culture must proceed with the utmost care, and consider at every turn how the differences between the time of writing and the times in which the stories are set may have affected the creation of the narrative.

Because archaeology bases its discourse on a completely different set of data from history or philology, and furthermore a set of data that is continually expanding, it is also useful to review from its separate vantage point some of the basic notions that

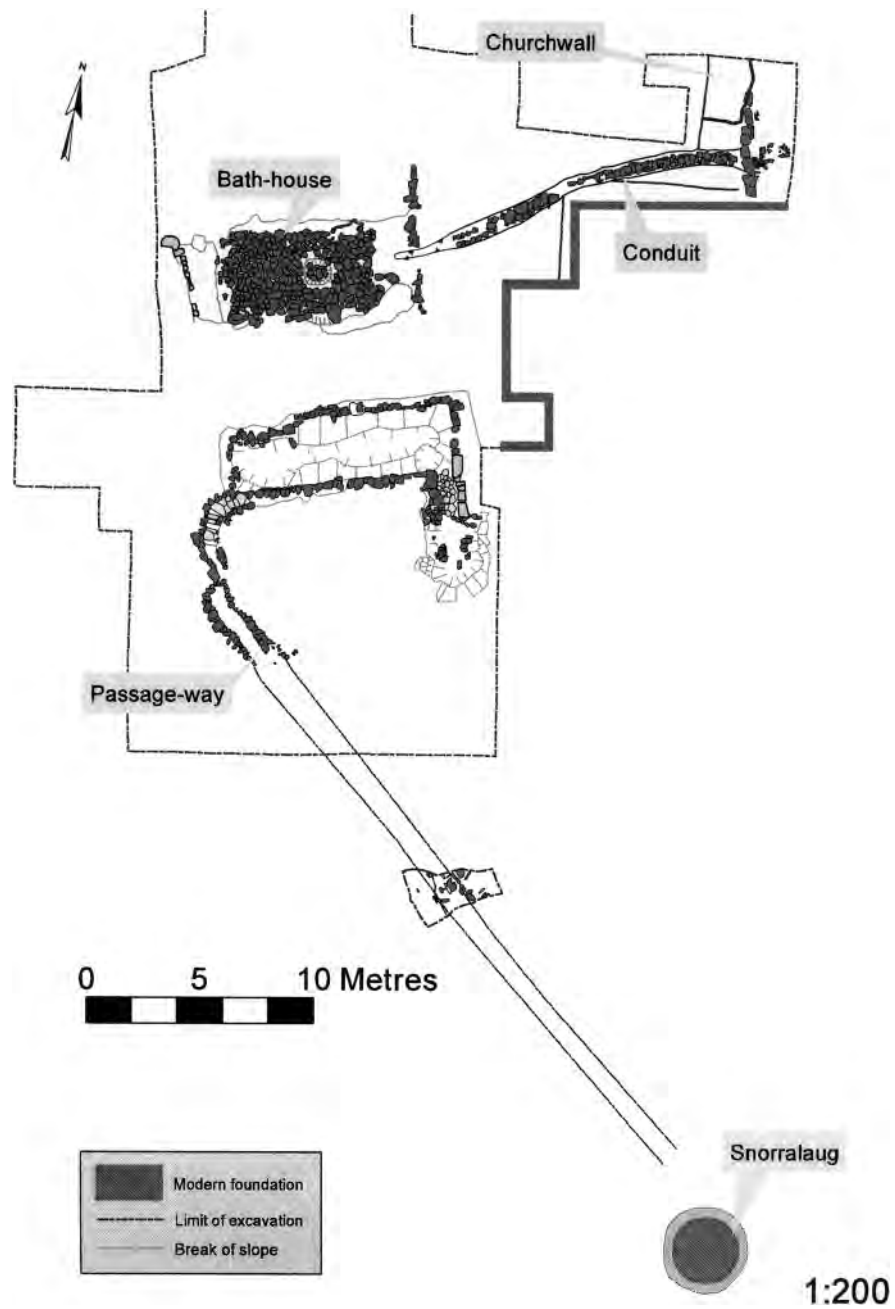


Figure 1.5 High medieval house foundations and other features at Reykholt, southwest Iceland. © Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir, Þjóðminjasafn Íslands.

have followed saga studies. Such an exercise shows these notions to be either without grounds or – and this seems more often to be the case – in need of little more than rearticulation to become meaningful. A small selection of such notions has been discussed here – in the most cursory manner – but it is hoped that it may serve as an encouragement to students of sagas and saga-time archaeology alike to proceed in a critical manner when seeking to unravel the tangled interrelationship of, on the one hand, medieval texts and, on the other, several centuries' worth of scholarly (and sometimes not so scholarly) notions about those texts and the society that created them.

See also CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; EDDIC POETRY; FAMILY SAGAS; GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PSEUDO-HISTORY; LANGUAGE; LAWS; MANUSCRIPTS AND PALAEOGRAPHY; METRE AND METRICS; ORALITY AND LITERACY; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; RUNES; SAGAS OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY; SKALDIC POETRY; SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS; WOMEN IN OLD NORSE POETRY AND SAGAS.

NOTE

- 1 This discussion has been informed by discussions with Adolf Friðriksson.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Bigelow, Gerald F. (1993) 'Archaeological and Ethnohistoric Evidence of a Norse Island Food Custom.' In C. E. Batey, J. Jesch and C. D. Morris (eds.) *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic*. Edinburgh, pp. 441–53.
- Byock, Jesse (2001) *Viking Age Iceland*. London.
- Einarsson, Árni, Hansson, Oddgeir and Vésteins-son, Orri (2002) 'An Extensive System of Medieval Earthworks in NE-Iceland.' *Archaeologia islandica* 2, 61–73.
- Friðriksson, Adolf (1994a) *Sagas and Popular Antiquarianism in Icelandic Archaeology*. Aldershot.
- Friðriksson, Adolf (1994b) 'Sannfræði íslenskra fornleifa.' *Skírnir* 168, 346–76.
- Friðriksson, Adolf and Vésteinsson, Orri (1992) 'Dómhringa saga: grein um fornleifaskýringar.' *Saga* 30, 7–79.
- Gestsdóttir, Hildur (1998) 'The Palaeopathological Diagnosis of Nutritional Disease: A Study of the Skeletal Material from Skeljastaðir, Iceland.' Unpubl. MSc dissertation, University of Bradford, Bradford.
- Grieg, Sigurd (1947) *Gjermundbufunnet: En hövdingegrav fra 900-arene fra Ringerike* (Norske oldfunn VIII). Oslo.
- Jochens, Jenny M. (1980) 'The Church and Sexuality in Medieval Iceland.' *Journal of Medieval History* 6.4, 377–92.
- Maurer, Konrad (1852) *Die Entstehung des isländischen Staats und seiner Verfassung*. Munich.
- Maurer, Konrad (1874) *Island, von seiner ersten Entdeckung bis zum Untergange des Freistaats*. Munich.
- Maurer, Konrad (1907–38) *Vorlesungen über altnordische Rechtsgeschichte*, vols. I–V. Leipzig.
- Meinig, D. W. (1986) *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective of 500 Years of History*, vol. I: *Atlantic America 1492–1800*. New Haven, CT, and London.
- Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben (1993) *Fortælling og ære: Studier i islændingersagaerne*. Aarhus.
- Miller, William I. (1990) *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law and Society in Saga Iceland*. Chicago.

- Munch, Gerd, Stamsø, Larssen, Ingegerd and Johansen, Olav Sverre (1987) 'A Chieftain's Farm at Borg, Lofoten, N. Norway.' *Medieval Archaeology* 30, 88–90.
- Roberts, Howell M. (2002) 'The Skáli in a Broader Context.' In Howell M. Roberts, Mjöll Snæsdóttir and Orri Vésteinsson (eds.) *Fornleifarannsóknir við Aðalstræti 2001/Archaeological Investigations in Aðalstræti 2001: Áfangaskýrsla/Interim Report*. Reykjavík, pp. 49–66.
- Rockman, Marcy and Steele, James (eds.) (2003) *Colonization of Unfamiliar Landscapes: The Archaeology of Adaptation*. London.
- Shetelig, Haakon (1912) *Vestlandske graver fra jernalderen*. Bergens museums skrifter, n.s. 2.1. Bergen.
- Vésteinsson, Orri (1998a) 'Íslenska sóknaskipulagið og samband heimila á miðöldum.' *Íslenska söguþingið* 28.–31. maí 1997, *Ráðstefnurit* 1, 147–66.
- Vésteinsson, Orri (1998b) 'Patterns of Settlement in Iceland: A Study in Pre-History.' *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* XXV, 1–29.
- Vésteinsson, Orri (forthcoming) 'A Divided Society: Peasants and Aristocracy in Medieval Iceland.' In Árni Daniel Júlíusson and Orri Vésteinsson (eds.): *New Approaches to Medieval Iceland*.
- Vésteinsson, Orri, Einarsson, Árni and Sigurgeirsson, Magnús Á. (2003) 'A New Assembly Site in Skuldabingsey, NE-Iceland.' *Current Issues in Nordic Archaeology: Proceedings of the 21st Conference of Nordic Archaeologists, September 6th–9th 2001, Akureyri*. Reykjavík.
- Vésteinsson, Orri, McGovern, Thomas H. and Keller, Christian (2002) 'Enduring Impacts: Social and Environmental Aspects of Viking Age Settlement in Iceland and Greenland.' *Archaeologia islandica* 2, 98–136.

Christian Biography

Margaret Cormack

The traditional division of sagas by subject matter (kings' sagas, family sagas, sagas of ancient times, etc.) distinguished between sagas about Scandinavian royalty, Icelandic bishops and continental saints. Since the nineteenth century, the former have been published and discussed in groupings appropriate to the status of the protagonist, as sagas of 'kings' and 'bishops' respectively. Sagas dealing with the saints of the Catholic church were treated separately as 'sagas about holy people' (*heilagra manna sögur*). These categories corresponded roughly to contemporary judgements as to the historicity of the subject matter. *Heilagra manna sögur*, whose heroes and settings were generally far from Scandinavia, had scholarly value primarily as linguistic and literary artefacts; sagas about Scandinavian kings or Icelandic bishops (several of whom were also saints) were native compositions which were thought to preserve historical information.

If we look at the distribution of these materials in medieval manuscripts, however, the lines become blurred. While certain manuscripts are devoted to the kings of Norway and Denmark, these 'national histories' included (and sometimes centred on) kings who were also saints, such as Óláfr Haraldsson and Knútr Sveinsson. It is also possible to find the sagas of St Óláfr and St Jón Ögmundarson (bishop of Hólar) in a manuscript containing sagas about St Peter, St Cecilia and a host of other saints. A fragmentary collection of miracles of St Þorlákr is followed by the sagas of apostles, and a manuscript containing the sagas of the holy Icelandic bishops follows them with the saga of Edward the Confessor. A distinction between the 'religious' and the 'historical' may have influenced the compiler of *Sturlunga saga*, which incorporates the early history of Guðmundr Arason, one of Iceland's three holy men, while it makes no use of the sagas of the two recognized saints, Þorlákr and Jón. The compiler also omitted tales of miracles found in his sources. One of the two medieval manuscripts of *Sturlunga* also includes the saga of Bishop Árni Þorláksson, which deals with political matters. Arguably the sagas of the other Icelandic bishops who were not saints (Páll Jónsson of Skálholt and Lárentíus Kálfsson of Hólar) should be classified with

contemporary sagas as well. The only medieval manuscript to contain *Lárentíus saga* (AM 180b fol.) shows that medieval manuscripts may not be dedicated to modern genres; it includes saints' lives, a king's saga, and romances. *Páls saga* has not been preserved in manuscripts from the Middle Ages.

In the present volume, medieval precedent has been followed in treating kings' sagas as a distinct genre. Foreign and native saints are grouped together in the present chapter, along with the Icelandic bishops, saints or not. The classification is not perfect; however, by treating as a group sagas whose protagonists were seen first and foremost as representatives of the Christian religion, it is hoped that light will be shed on the similarities – and differences – among them. Rather more space is devoted here to the sagas of native saints and bishops than to translated saints' lives in order to allow comparison of the former with both translated saints' lives and native writings.

The term 'biography' in the chapter title is used loosely. Of the translated sagas, some are translations of the lives of saints (*vitae*) while others (based on *passiones*, 'martyrdom narratives') focus on their deaths. Among the sagas which focus on the lives of their protagonists, material is chosen to illustrate the individual's sanctity or devotion to the church rather than to produce an accurate historical record or character analysis. In none of these sagas (any more than in other Icelandic literature) is much said about the childhood of the protagonists, although brief anecdotes about their youth may highlight some aspect of an individual's character or prefigure his or her future life.

The sagas treated in this chapter vary considerably in length, from five pages in a modern edition to lengthy narratives that fill many vellum folios. Not taken into account are brief anecdotes and *exempla* found in collections featuring short narratives about various saints. For *exempla*, see chapter 19. A list of saints mentioned in such tales can be found in Widding, Bekker-Nielsen and Shook (1963), which remains the most comprehensive catalogue of West Norse literature about saints. For more recent discussion on sources, dating and manuscript relationships see Cormack (1994: 239–45) and Kalinke (1996).

Before discussing the literature itself, it is worthwhile to take a brief look at the historical context in which it was produced.¹ Iceland formally adopted Christianity in the year 999 or 1000, at the instance of Óláfr Tryggvason, king of Norway, who also imposed it in his native land. There the process was completed during the reign of Óláfr Haraldsson (St Olaf), 1015–30. Although some of the early saints' lives were probably translated in Norway, extant manuscripts and evidence of hagiographic activity are overwhelmingly from Iceland. Whether this reflects the vagaries of manuscript preservation or whether higher standards of Latin learning in Norway made the need for translation less urgent is impossible to ascertain.²

For Christianity to establish itself in either country it was essential that it be preached in the vernacular. Practically speaking, this could not happen until a native clergy had been established. Given the country's small and dispersed population, only a select few could afford to travel abroad to obtain an education. The first to do so was Ísleifr Gizurarson, sent as a young man to the convent at Herford in Saxony, who

eventually became bishop of Iceland (1056–80). His son Gizurr was also educated in Saxony and succeeded his father as bishop (1082–1118). During Gizurr's lifetime the country was divided into two sees, Skálholt (the original seat of Ísleifr and subsequently of Gizurr) and Hólar (established as the diocese of the northern quarter in 1106). Its first bishop, later to be declared a saint, was Jón Ögmundarson, who brought teachers with him when he returned from his consecration journey. A contemporary of Jón's was Sæmundr Sigfússon of Oddi in southern Iceland, who had also studied abroad, either in France or in Francia. A clerical education could now be obtained from these men and from those they had taught, that is, at the episcopal sees Skálholt and Hólar, as well as the farms Oddi and Haukadalur (home of the priest Teitr, son of Bishop Ísleifr). The priests so trained could in turn educate others, and it is probably in this way that most boys learned Latin. The results were not always satisfactory; we are told that in the last decades of the twelfth century Bishop (later Saint) Þorlákr dreaded the necessity of consecrating ill-prepared candidates for the priesthood.³

It was therefore essential to translate the writings of the church into the vernacular. The work had begun by the middle of the twelfth century, when the author of the *First Grammatical Treatise* refers to the existence of *þýðingar helgar* – 'holy expositions' – in Icelandic. These were most probably homilies or biblical commentary, for the use of priests who might not be able to compose or translate such material for themselves. Monasteries, the first of which was founded at Þingeyrar in 1133, would also have been consumers of such works. Many of the early monks were not novices eager for learning, but retirees hoping to save their souls after a lifetime of feud and bloodshed. For such men, memorizing a few Latin prayers would have been effort enough, and vernacular versions of religious materials would have been a necessity.

The earliest evidence for the existence of vernacular saints' lives is from the second half of the twelfth century. The saints whose lives were translated, then and later, were primarily those whose feasts were of a high grade in the liturgy and whose observance was obligatory for laypeople. The oldest list of such feasts, composed between 1122 and 1133, is found in the law code *Grágás*. It consists of a core of 'universal' saints such as the apostles and the Virgin Mary, as well as other saints popular in the countries around the North Sea. To this list the feasts of new saints were gradually added: the Icelanders Þorlákr and Jón, and Magnús of Orkney. Vernacular reading material for these feasts, and for the feasts of saints to whom churches were dedicated, would have been needed. On the whole, extant saints' sagas fulfil this demand.⁴ The needs of the church probably account for the fact that the number of extant medieval manuscripts and manuscript fragments of saints' lives is more than double the number of sagas of Icelanders and contemporary sagas combined.⁵

Sagas about saints who are not prominent in the liturgy or as church patrons also exist. The most striking example is *Plácíðus saga*, the earliest manuscripts of which date from the second half of the twelfth century. In addition, a *drápa* (see chapter 3) was composed about Placidus around 1200. Although no churches were dedicated to him, and observing his feast was not obligatory for the lay population, St Eustace (the name given Placidus on his conversion) is entered in most extant Icelandic calendars,

and would therefore have been known to the clergy. The exciting story of Placidus/Eustace's adventures may account for the translation and preservation of his saga and of the poem about him.

Not all hagiographic activity during the last decades of the twelfth century took the form of translation. Two brief hagiographic narratives would appear to have been composed in Icelandic from the start: a pair of miracles appended to the saga of St Cecilia are stated to have taken place before her feast was adopted in 1179 (*HMS I*, pp. 294–7). In subsequent centuries Icelandic miracles were added to manuscripts of the sagas of St Magnús of Orkney and the Virgin Mary.

Nor was Latin composition neglected. Two monks of Þingeyrar, Oddr Snorrason (writing 1170–90) and Gunnlaugr Leifsson (d. 1219), composed Latin *vitae* about the Norwegian king, Óláfr Tryggvason, at whose instigation Christianity had been adopted in Iceland; presumably their aim was to promote Óláfr as the country's patron saint. In this they were unsuccessful, perhaps because the excitement over the sanctity of Þorlákr Þórhallsson around 1200 threw their efforts into the shade. The *vitae* of Óláfr Tryggvason have not survived; we have only Icelandic translations of Oddr's work and of parts of Gunnlaugr's. Latin *vitae* must also have been composed for the native saints, Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson of Skálholt and Bishop Jón Ögmundarson of Hólar, once their sanctity had been proclaimed. This happened for Þorlákr on 20 July 1198, for Jón on 3 March 1200.⁶

In the case of St Jón, we know the author of his *vita*: the same Gunnlaugr Leifsson who composed the second *vita* of Óláfr Tryggvason. He also composed an office of St Ambrose and wrote up (presumably in Latin) some visions in which St Þorlákr appeared. It is worth noting that he was a vernacular poet as well; Gunnlaugr made a verse translation of the 'Prophecy of Merlin' (*Merlínusspá*) from book 7 of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*.

Early Thirteenth-Century Sagas of Native Bishops

The early translated sagas were for the most part based on a single source and rendered into simple prose that could be understood by an audience without formal education; their authors are unknown. Similar style and anonymity characterize the first sagas of native bishops, composed in the first half of the thirteenth century: the sagas of the two saints, Þorlákr and Jón,⁷ that of Þorlákr's nephew and successor, Bishop Páll of Skálholt (1195–1211), and *Hungrvaka*, a chronicle of the bishops of Skálholt who preceded St Þorlákr.

Turning first to the sagas of St Þorlákr and St Jón, it should be noted that while they are presumed to bear a close relation to the lost Latin *vitae*, the precise degree of similarity cannot now be ascertained. Both sagas consist of a biography of the protagonist followed by a series of miracles providing proof of his sanctity. Most of these took place within a few years of the time when Jón and Þorlákr were declared saints, and they are similar to those collected at the shrines of continental saints

(Whaley 1994/6). The stories are simple ones, which would not only be reported at the cathedral or to a local priest, but would also travel by word of mouth and spread the bishops' saintly reputation. There are numerous cures of men and animals, lost objects are found, scoffers punished, and individuals saved from storms at sea or other perils. Given the climate in Iceland, it is hardly surprising that the saints often intervene to improve the weather. Weather miracles play a special role in Icelandic hagiography, where they serve to confirm the truth of visions.⁸ As a group, the miracle stories provide a rare glimpse of the lives of women and the poor in medieval Iceland.

If the miracles attributed to them are similar, the biographical portions of the sagas of Þorlákr and Jón are strikingly different. Þorlákr was the son of impoverished parents distantly related to the chieftainly lineage at Oddi, but for whom claims of nobility could not be made. His saga, composed while those who knew him were still alive, concentrates on his virtues as bishop and ascetic, and is replete with biblical quotations. It has little to say about the controversies of his day, viz. attempts by the archbishop of Niðaróss to reform the sexual morals of the Icelandic aristocracy and, possibly, to obtain more control over churches owned by laymen (*Eigenkirchen*). The picture of Þorlákr presented by the first version of the saga is of a rather passive figure focused on religion and morality and uninvolved in politics of any kind.

The saga of Jón Ógmundarson was written a good two generations (approximately 80 years) after Jón's death. Jón's family gave his biographer some genealogical scope; his lineage is traced to a primary settler, to the first Christian in the eastern quarter, and to another prominent chieftain. We are told that in their youth, Jón's mother and subsequently Jón himself had accompanied their parents to royal courts and attracted the attention of (respectively) St Óláfr and the queen of Denmark, who prophesied about them. And, although the hagiographer notes that people were cautious about attributing miracles to Jón during his lifetime, the writer is none the less able to fill out his tale with visions and exemplary narratives of the sort that could, perhaps, occur to any pious priest, but which in this context serve to presage Jón's future sanctity. Jón is presented as a pillar of the church; if he was involved in any political struggles or intrigues, we are not informed of the fact.

Neither of the sagas contains any verse. In this they contrast with the saga of Bishop Páll of Skálholt, which incorporates stanzas from a funeral elegy. *Páls saga* is a brief biography of a man who appears to have been more at home in the role of chieftain than in that of bishop. Its author defends him against charges that he was lukewarm regarding the cultus of his uncle, Þorlákr, by emphasizing his concern to do the thing properly; the Lincoln-educated Páll might well have been dubious about the rapidity with which his uncle's sanctity had been proclaimed.⁹ Páll did not sympathize with his fellow-bishop, Guðmundr Arason, when the latter came into violent conflict with lay chieftains; he was not an activist for the church.

Hungrvaka, a chronicle of the bishops of Skálholt before the time of St Þorlákr, was also composed in the early thirteenth century; together with the sagas of Þorlákr and Páll, the history of the bishops of Skálholt through the early twelfth century had now

been recorded on parchment. They have been seen by modern scholars as forming a history of the bishops (*gesta episcoporum*) of the diocese, although it must be pointed out that no medieval manuscript contains all three sagas. Of the three works, as far as can be ascertained, only *Þorláks saga* had a Latin counterpart, although the Latin fragments pertaining to Þorlákr also contain some material that overlaps with *Hungrvaka*. This could, however, merely represent a brief preface to Þorlákr's *vita* rather than a full translation of the latter work, which was composed in Icelandic.

These works – *Þorláks saga*, *Hungrvaka*, *Páls saga*, the *Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar* (which will be treated below) and the Latin *vita* of Jón Ögmundarson (known from the fourteenth-century version of his saga) – date events not according to the Dionysian method of reckoning dates on the basis of the Christian era (that is, *anno Domini* or AD), but instead using the *computatio Gerlandi*, the chronology of Gerlandus, which begins seven years earlier. This chronology is also found in *Sverris saga*, composed, like them, in the early thirteenth century.

Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century Translation and Revision

During the course of the thirteenth century, translation of Latin works continued, and translators appear to have gained confidence, or perhaps simply acquired more sources, enabling them to create sagas which did not correspond to any single Latin work. By the end of the century, they had begun to experiment with styles that differed from the simple language of the first translations.

One saga which illustrates both these characteristics is that of the Virgin Mary, *Maríu saga*, which incorporates apocryphal gospels, Josephus' *Antiquitates Judaicae*, theological commentaries and other writings, including collections of miracles. There has been disagreement as to whether this work is that of the priest Kygri-Björn Hjaltason (d. 1238), known to have written a saga about the Virgin Mary. If the preserved saga is his work, the stylistic characteristics and use of sources mentioned in the previous paragraph must have begun considerably earlier than is considered likely on the basis of other evidence.

We are on firmer ground with the sagas about the archangel Michael and St Dunstan composed early in the fourteenth century. Both were compiled from a variety of sources by known authors. The monk Bergr Sökkason (fl. 1312–45) tells us that *Michaels saga* was 'written and composed for the sole purpose that it always be read on Michael's feast-day for the enjoyment of the parishioners, especially in those places where he is patron' (*HMS* II, p. 676). The desirability of a church owning a saga of its patron saint is confirmed by church inventories, which often list the sagas of saints (as well as the occasional Latin *vita*) along with liturgical books, crosses, chalices and other religious objects. Árni Lárentíusson does not envisage churches dedicated to St Dunstan as recipients of his saga (there were none in Iceland at this time); rather, he justifies his work on the grounds that the saint was more likely to pray for those who would honour him as the result of knowing his story (*DS*, pp. 1, 2). Like Placidus,

Dunstan had a firm place in the ecclesiastical calendar, even though his feast was not obligatory for laymen.

In addition to providing sagas for saints who had none, towards the end of the thirteenth century and in the fourteenth many existing sagas were rewritten or revised using the techniques described above. The authors experimented with style and incorporated commentaries and other learned writings in products that were more sophisticated – though not necessarily more comprehensible – than those of previous centuries.

One such saga is introduced by the following epistle, which illustrates both the concerns and the style of the translator:

Virðuligum herra Runolfi abota i Veri sendir Grímr prestr qveðio guds ok sina sanna vinattu. Þers truir ek yðr minniga vera, at þer baðut mik saman lesa or likama heilagra gudspialla lif hins sæla Johannis baptiste ok setia þar yfir tilheyrligar glosur lesnar af undirdiupi omeliarum hins mikla Gregorij, Augustini, Ambrosij ok Jeronimi ok annarra kennifedra . . . Truir ek, at nockurum monnum syniz i mörgum stöðum mörg orð yfir sett, þar sem fá standa fyrir. Gorða ek því sva, at þat var ydvalt atkvædi, at ek birta ord hans med glosum. I annan stad truda ek, ef obóckfrodur menn heyrdi hans hin fögru blom ok hinar myrku figurur, at þeim mundu þær a þa leid onytsamar, sem gimsteinar ero svinum, ok at betra væri at lysa hans spásogur ok skynsemdir morgum manni til trubotar, helldr enn at sinna heimskra manna þocka, þeira sem allt þickir þat langt, er fra Cristz kóppum er sagt, ok skemtaz framarr med skröksögur. I þridja stad syndiz mer sa orskurdr her til heyra. at miklum soma miklir lutir. Af því lét ek frammi allt þat, er mer þotti af þessa dyra mannz lofi her til heyriligt, ok þat sem ek truda vitrum monnum mundu sögubót i þickia.

[The priest Grímr [Hólmsteinnsson, d. 1298] sends the honourable Lord Rúnólfr, abbot of Ver, God's greeting and his true friendship. I believe that you will recall that you requested me to collect from the body of the Holy Gospels the life of the blessed John the Baptist and to supply appropriate glosses thereupon, collected from the profundities of the homilies of Gregory the Great, Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome and other fathers of the Church . . . I believe that some people may think that in many places, many words are used where there are few in the original. I did it that way, because it was your command that I publish his words with glosses. In the second place I believed that, if men without book learning heard his beautiful flowers and the obscure symbols, these things would be as useless to them as jewels are to pigs, and that it would be better to proclaim his prophecies and reasoning for the improvement of the faith of many, rather than to pay any attention to the preferences of foolish people, who are bored by everything that is said about the heroes of Christ, and would rather be entertained by fables. In the third place it seemed to me that the judgement that a great person is honoured by great things is appropriate here. For that reason I presented everything which I thought would contribute to the praise of that glorious man, and which I thought wise men would consider an improvement to the story.] (*Jóns saga baptista II*, in Unger, pp. 849–50)

The aim of the new generation of redactors was not exclusively spiritual; as in the case of *Stjórn* (see chapter 19 below), care was taken to provide historical and

geographical background information, rearrange the action into chronological order, and supplement the story with material from other sagas. A classic example is the incorporation of material from the Pseudo-Turpin chronicle, part of the Charlemagne cycle, in the saga of the Apostles John and James. A concern with dating and historicity may lie behind the use of annals in several sagas of Icelandic bishops (see next section). Political or institutional interests may also have been at work. Karlsson (2000b) has pointed out that two of the translations of the saga of Thomas Becket appear to correspond to periods of stress between the Icelandic church and lay powers, while the third was probably by Arngrímr Brandsson, author of a saga about Guðmundr Arason, whose career he represents as paralleling Becket's.

In addition to glossing and elaborating the contents of the sagas, the new generation of redactors ornamented them with rhetorical devices derived from both Latin and native tradition. The terms 'ornate' or 'florid' are used to characterize a wordy style which had appeared by the last third of the thirteenth century. It does not represent word-for-word translation from Latin, but rather incorporates Latinate features such as *cursus* (rhythmic sentence endings) and a more complex syntax and sentence structure than are found in earlier writings. It has some common features with, but is distinct from, the court style used to translate romances in the thirteenth century (see chapters 20 and 21). Native forms of adornment such as alliteration are found alongside Latin ones. And although both can be described as 'Latinate', the styles of individual hagiographers like Bergr Sökkason and Arngrímr Brandsson can easily be distinguished from each other.

It is impossible to know whether these new works were intended for a clerical audience who could appreciate the rather baroque style, or whether Icelandic laymen were now sufficiently sophisticated and familiar with the plot lines of the better-known saints' lives to want the latest edition of their sagas. It is striking that in the diocese of Hólar, multiple copies of *Nicholas saga* exist at several churches, perhaps indicating enthusiasm for the new redaction produced by Bergr Sökkason.¹⁰ Furthermore, the most rhetorical version of the saga of Guðmundr Arason has survived in more medieval manuscripts than any other.

As the above examples show, a small number of fourteenth-century hagiographers were self-conscious workers willing to name themselves and tell us something about their aims. It is therefore all the more frustrating that the individuals who revised the sagas of the native saints remain, with a single exception, anonymous. It is impossible to generalize about these sagas except to say that, like translated lives, the sagas of native holy men also got longer and more elaborate.

Þorláks saga was revised towards the end of the thirteenth century. The basic text has undergone little change, although miracles have been added, revised and rearranged. There is, however, one major addition to the saga itself. The author of the younger (B) version of *Þorláks saga* comments that:

Þat dregr oss mjök til at skrifa líf ok jarteinir þessa virðuligs herra ok andaligs fōður at í fornum framburði sōgunnar virðisk oss hann varla hafa verðuga minning af þeim

þrautum ok meingörðum, sem hann hefir þolat af sínum mótstøðumönnum, þeim sem upp váru á kirkjunnar skaða í hans byskupsdómi, ok af þessu efni þykkir oss minna talat en vér vildim.

[We are drawn to write the life and miracles of this venerable lord and spiritual father because the older version of the saga does not seem to us sufficiently to commemorate the trials and tribulations which he suffered at the hands of his opponents, who were working against the church during his episcopacy. Less is said about this than we would wish.] (BS II, p. 144)

The reference is to the narrative known as *Oddaverja þáttur*, which contains dramatic descriptions of Þorlákr's encounters with secular leaders and miraculous escapes from their machinations, at which the earlier version of the saga had not even hinted.

The fourteenth-century (L) version of *Jóns saga* also contains material not in the thirteenth-century (S) version.¹¹ Lively and suspenseful accounts of Jón's rescue of Sæmundr fróði ('the Knowledgeable') from a sorcerer and Gísl Illugason from the gallows build on events which must have been mentioned in the earliest version of the saga but are treated at greater length in this one. In addition, L contains a much more detailed account of an anchoress named Hildir, who in S was the subject of a single miracle. *Jóns saga* also underwent stylistic elaboration along the lines described above.

The major questions about the material added to the sagas of Þorlákr and Jón concern (1) its possible presence in earlier versions of the saga, and (2) its historical accuracy. Do the 'new' passages reflect traditional oral material that has been incorporated into the saga, learned material that existed in the *vitae* but somehow escaped translation for a century, pure invention of the redactor, or some combination of all of these? The question is the same as that facing the scholar of *Morkinskinna* with its *þættir* (see chapter 26), or of *Fóstbræðra saga* with its learned clauses. Which is the more 'original' version, the longer or the shorter one? At stake are questions of historicity, of oral tradition, of textual relations and of early accounts of Icelandic women.

In the opinion of the present author, the additional material in the younger saga versions should be assumed to be interpolated unless it can be proved otherwise. Beginning with *Þorláks saga*, it has been argued by Jón Böðvarsson (1968) that there is reason to see *Oddaverja þáttur* as originating in the time of Bishop Árni Þorláksson in the second half of the thirteenth century rather than dating from the time of Þorlákr himself. Bishop Árni underwent considerable vicissitudes in his attempt to establish ecclesiastical control over privately owned churches; in the eyes of many it would seem a major fault in his predecessor, the patron saint of Iceland, not to have done so as well.¹² Whatever the truth concerning St Þorlákr and church ownership, the passage quoted above leaves no doubt that this material was lacking in the earlier version of the saga. It is also worth noting that the author's stated reason for including the material is not to make a political point but rather to emphasize the trials and tribulations of his hero. This emphasis brings the saga more into line with the sagas of

other bishops that were being written in the early fourteenth century, that is, those of Guðmundr, Árni and Lárentius.

In *Jóns saga* the situation is complicated by the fact that we know – or seem to know – a little more about the redactors of each version. Most tantalizing is the fact that we can identify the author of the lost Latin version of the saga, the monk Gunnlaugr. He is referred to periodically in the L version, which dates from the first half of the fourteenth century. The S version, composed somewhat earlier, is not always a more accurate rendering of the original; it rejects the chronology of Gerlandus that Gunnlaugr must have used, which differs from AD dating by seven years (as shown above), omits material such as personal names, and abbreviates to an unknown extent. It is thus not clear without close examination whether the material found in L but not in S has been added in L or deleted in S.

There is agreement that two of the most striking stories, those about Jón's rescue of Sæmundr Sigfússon and Gísl Illugason, must be interpolations into L in their present forms. The original saga behind S and L probably made reference to them and contained a slightly different version of the Gísl material, but contained nothing like the present versions of the tales. The real question concerns Hildr, the fullest version of whose story forms a mini-hagiography of an anchoress. Has it, like the stories of Gísl and Sæmundr, been expanded and elaborated by the redactor, or was it present in Gunnlaugr's Latin *vita* but omitted either by the original translator or by the redactor of S? The most recent editor, Peter Foote, advocates the latter possibility.

Whatever its origin, the material in the sagas of native saints which first appears in the fourteenth century contains striking stories of escapes and miracles which are consistent with the increased emphasis on the fantastic and supernatural in post-classical Icelandic literature.

Annals

The thirteenth century saw an interesting development in the lives of bishops other than Jón and Þorlákr, namely the adoption of annals to provide a historical framework. Dates according to *Anno Domini* are rare in secular sagas, which commonly begin by noting the reigning king; in historical or ecclesiastical writings dates may be provided at the death of a notable man, where they are often accompanied by a list of individuals who died in the same year and/or a summary of notable events during the episcopate or lifetime of the deceased. This was common usage in diocesan chronicles and *gesta* (accounts of the deeds) of abbots; in Iceland, the model for this sort of summary had been established in the *Íslendingabók* ('Book of Icelanders') of Ari fróði ('the Knowledgeable').

In sagas about Icelandic bishops written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, we sometimes find a different approach – inclusion of entire annal entries in larger or smaller portions of the text. The first work to make such use of annal entries is the 'Priest's Saga' (*Prestssaga*) of Guðmundr Arason, bishop of Hólar from 1203 to 1237.

This saga is thought to have been composed by Lambkárr Þorgilsson (d. 1249); its use of Gerlandus' chronology is consistent with such a dating.¹³ The early years of Guðmundr's life are more or less a summary of annal entries, with notes as to Guðmundr's age at the time.

Annals are also prominent in the saga of Bishop Árni Þorláksson (d. 1298). This work, probably composed before 1320, makes use of documents available at Skálholt, and the years 1271–89 contain extraneous material that can be identified with existing annals.

The third author who makes extensive use of annals, the creator of *Lárentíus saga* (probably composed 1346–93), is the only one to give an explanation for the practice – in fact, his explanation is something of an apology:

Eru hér ok margir hlutir saman settir af ýmissum atburðum, sem fram hafa farit á ýmissum löndum eftir því sem annálar til vísa hverir mestan fróðleik sýna, svá ok eru margir hlutir inn í settir af byskupum ok öðrum veraldar höfðingjum sem samtíða hafa verit þessi frásögn. Ok þó at þat verði nokkot ónytsamligt starf saman at setja þvílíka hluti sem birtaz ok auðsýnaz í þessu máli, er þó verra at heyra ok í gaman henda at sögum heiðinna manna.

[Here many things are collected concerning various events which have taken place in various countries according to the indication of the annals which contain the most learning, and also many things have been inserted concerning bishops and other secular leaders who were contemporary with this account. And although it may be a somewhat pointless task to compile such things as are published and made manifest in this work, it is none the less worse to listen to, and enjoy, stories of heathens.] (BS III, p. 216)

It is not uncommon to read that saints' lives are more edifying than secular literature, but to find the motif applied to annals within an episcopal biography is distinctly odd. Perhaps their inclusion – and the author's sensitivity – reflect the fact that he was not merely using an existing annal but rather compiling his own. Einarr Haflíðason (1307–93), the bishop's student and assistant, composed *Logmannsannáll*.

Why annals should be so prominent in these works is unclear. Historical pedantry is one possibility, and is consistent with the desire to provide accurate detail as seen in the translated saints' lives. However, it is also possible that the annals serve as an ecclesiastical equivalent of skaldic verse. Whatever the motive, the result is to situate the Icelandic bishops with respect to the 'universal' world of Christian history and geography.

A Case Study: The Sagas of Guðmundr Arason

The various sagas of Guðmundr Arason provide insight into different ideas of what a saga of a bishop and/or saint should be.¹⁴ The *Prestssaga*, dating from the first half of the thirteenth century, contains a lengthy introduction providing a complete family tree, beginning with Guðmundr's grandfather and mentioning the deeds of his

kinsmen, including two whose deaths and well-preserved bodies provide a fitting prelude to the saga of a future saint. The deeds of his father, Ari Þorgeirsson, who died a heroic death in Norway, are also recalled. This introductory *þáttir* is reminiscent of the 'prehistories' of such sagas as *Egils saga* or *Gísli saga*, but contains something not met before in Icelandic literature: the date (three nights after Michaelmas) of the hero's birth.

The next part of the saga is more or less a summary of events that may be found in the annals – including episodes in the life of Ari Þorgeirsson which had just been related – interspersed with notes on the doings of Guðmundr and his immediate relatives. The year of Guðmundr's birth is now given, and although the author claims to be using the reckoning of Bede, it is in fact that of Gerlandus. There follows a year-by-year chronicle dating events according to Guðmundr's age.

There is a half-century break in writings about Guðmundr due, quite probably, to a fire at the church of Laufás in 1258 where documents had been collected. The fourteenth century, however, saw the advent of two Norwegian bishops of Hólar, and a concerted attempt to produce a saga that might contribute to a canonization procedure.¹⁵ Two sagas, designated A and B, were produced in the third decade of the century. The compilers used many of the same sources – the *Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar*, *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* and *Íslendinga saga*. Their procedure is similar to that of the compiler of *Sturlunga* – existing materials were 'cut and pasted' to produce a lengthy biography. The differing interests of the redactors are indicated by other material they chose to add: extracts from the saga of Aron Hjørleifsson and yet more annals in the case of A, a miscellaneous collection of miracles in B.

The as yet unpublished C version of the saga may be another production of Bergi Sokkason. The task was not, as in *Michaels saga*, to put together a saga from a variety of sources – the A and B redactors had done this – but rather to turn the collection of materials into something that was more clearly hagiography. This was accomplished by inserting the miracles collected at the end of B in the proper chronological order, inserting a number of letters to Guðmundr from clergy in Norway (among which is a description of the visions of Elizabeth of Schönau), expanding on Guðmundr's virtues, and presenting the work in a consistent style.

The youngest saga about Guðmundr, that of Arngrímr Brandsson, was based on the C version. It was clearly written for a foreign audience in connection with an attempt to obtain Guðmundr's canonization. It takes care to explain features of Icelandic life and geography which may be unfamiliar (including fishhooks!). Arngrímr idealizes Guðmundr, omitting unedifying features of his early life, such as his illegitimate birth or disinclination for study. The writer also departs from the chronological mode of presentation which had been found hitherto in all forms of Icelandic literature; his presentation of Guðmundr's miracles is organized by theme rather than by date. It draws frequent comparisons between Guðmundr and other saints, such as Thomas Becket.

A feature of Arngrímr's saga which sets it apart from previous sagas of Icelandic holy men is its treatment of poetry. While the A and B versions of the sagas had

included the stanzas found in their sources, Arngrímr's saga is accompanied by poems composed in Guðmundr's honour, including one by Arngrímr himself. In the version represented by AM 219 fol., a poem in honour of Guðmundr follows his saga, in an arrangement like the European *prosimetrum*, a literary form incorporating both verse and prose. In the group of manuscripts represented by Stock 5 fol., verses are interspersed throughout the saga, as well as following it. Like Sturla Þórðarson, Arngrímr created verses to suit his needs.¹⁶

Translations from Low German

The final stage of Icelandic hagiographic production took place on the eve of the Reformation, when translations were made not from Latin, but from Low German. This is not surprising; Iceland had a Dutch bishop, Godsvin Comhaer, from 1437 to 1446, and in 1468 German merchants were granted permission to trade in Iceland. The main works translated from Low German were the saga of St Anne, a translation of the Low German *St Annen Büchlein* probably made in the first half of the sixteenth century, and *Reykjabólubók*, a collection of saints' lives probably translated by Björn Þorleifsson (d. 1548–54). Common to these works is a tendency to translate very closely, which can result in errors when 'false friends' – words which look alike but have different meanings in the two languages – are used for each other.

Women and Saints' Sagas

While Iceland boasted no female saints, there is no evidence that Icelanders were averse to the idea of female sanctity. Churches were dedicated to virgin martyrs, one of whom, St Cecilia, is credited with performance of two miracles in Iceland (see above, p. 30). As elsewhere in Europe, the Virgin Mary soon became by far the most popular saint, and she, too, had local miracles attributed to her. The cults of St Catherine and Mary Magdalen reached Iceland in the thirteenth century, that of St Anne in the late fifteenth century.

Before the foundation of the two Icelandic convents at Kirkjubær in the southeast (1186) and Reynistaður in the north (1295) it was possible for religiously minded women to associate themselves with cathedrals or monasteries. One such anchoress, Hildir, receives considerable space in the fourteenth-century version of *Jóns saga*; enough is said about her to have formed the core of a future *vita*, if anyone had been interested in writing one. And although we know the names of no female scribes, at least two manuscripts can be reliably associated with convents. The first is a manuscript containing world history and a number of saints' lives (AM 764 4to), created by or for the nuns at Reynistaður c.1376–86,¹⁷ the second a collection of sagas and prayers devoted to female saints (AM 429, 12mo), probably written for (but not necessarily by) the nuns at Kirkjubær around 1500.¹⁸

Women were prominent participant-reporters in miracles and visions which appear in the sagas of native saints. Guðmundr Arason was the recipient of the harrowing adventures of a woman who was rescued from various perils by no fewer than four saints, the Virgin Mary, Martin, Þorlákr and Jón.¹⁹ A woman is mentioned as a source for a story involving the anchoress Hildir.²⁰

With a single exception, there is no gender bias in either the supplicants or the recipients of miracles (Cormack 1996/8; Whaley 1994/6). The exception concerns visions in which saintly advice is given which pertains to persons other than the visionary (Cormack 1996/8). One of these, and perhaps the best-known example, is *Rannveigar leiðsla*, a typical 'otherworld journey' with a female protagonist who told her tale to Guðmundr Arason²¹ (see chapter 19).

This pattern is found elsewhere in Europe; visions of the saints enable women (or other unempowered individuals) to find a voice, and to collaborate with clerics in criticizing members of their society and praising the saints. The extent to which the resultant text reflects the voices of the women or those of the clerics is of course impossible to determine.

See also CHRISTIAN POETRY; FAMILY SAGAS; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PSEUDO-HISTORY; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PROSE OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION; RHETORIC AND STYLE; ROMANCE; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; SAGAS OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY; SAGAS OF ICELANDIC PREHISTORY; SHORT PROSE NARRATIVE; WOMEN IN OLD NORSE POETRY AND SAGAS.

NOTES

- 1 For a detailed discussion of the early centuries of Christianity in Iceland see Vésteinsson (2000), Turville-Petre (1953: 70–87) or Foote (1975, rpt 1984).
- 2 Karlsson (2000c) has pointed out that saints' lives were among the manuscripts exported from Iceland to Norway in the Middle Ages.
- 3 BS II, p. 76.
- 4 For information on the Icelandic calendar and saints' sagas see Cormack (1994: 13–24, 32–40).
- 5 Stefán Karlsson, unpublished lecture.
- 6 These dates are those of the translation of the relics under the auspices of the local bishop, which marked the formal acceptance of an individual into the ranks of the saints. Although the papacy was at this time expanding its control over the process that would become known as canonization, the curia had not as yet established an official procedure for approving new saints. Thus, although papal approval of

new saints was considered desirable, it was not yet necessary. In the cases of Þorlákr and Jón, local action was deemed adequate. The incorporation of the feast days of the two saints in the official ecclesiastical calendar at the National Assembly in 1199 and 1200 formalized the legal status of their feasts throughout Iceland. From the point of view of canon law this step was not necessary, as each bishop had authority to determine the feasts celebrated within his diocese. However, since there was a list of feasts to be celebrated throughout Iceland in the 'Christian Laws' section of *Grágás*, formal action was required to add new ones to that list. A comparable event was the adoption of the feasts of St Ambrose, St Cecilia and St Agnes in 1179 (GS, p. 40). This did not establish the sanctity of these individuals, but proclaimed that the observance of their feasts was mandatory throughout Iceland.

- 7 *Jóns saga* is known only through later redactions; see below.
- 8 The most prominent examples of this motif concern the translations of St Jón and St Þorlákr: BS II, p. 85 (Þorlákr); BS I, pp. 268–9, 271, 275 (Jón); see also Bsk II, p. 167.
- 9 The initiative for establishing Þorlákr's sainthood came from the cathedral of Hólar.
- 10 Cormack (1994: 134–7).
- 11 Designations are those of BS I, which should be consulted for details concerning the precise relationships among the manuscripts and the probable contents of the original saga. It should be noted that L is incomplete, and must sometimes be supplemented by the version designated H, which is preserved only in post-medieval manuscripts. The fact that S has been shortened in places makes it difficult to determine what was in the original, early thirteenth-century saga.
- 12 For a summary of the arguments, and their implications for the historicity of both *Oddaverja þáttur* and *Þorláks saga* as a whole, see Vésteinsson (2000: esp. 115–17).
- 13 The saga is, however, not independently preserved, but has been copied by the authors of later works: *Guðmundar saga* A and B (from the early fourteenth century) and *Sturlunga saga*.
- 14 A detailed description of these sagas and the relationships among them is that of Karlsson (2000a).
- 15 Local action was no longer adequate for the designation of saints, as it had been at the end of the twelfth century. For details on the bishops responsible for promoting Guðmundr's cult, see Karlsson (2000a).
- 16 For the treatment of poetry in the different groups of manuscripts, see Helgason (1950) and the summary in Nordal (2001: 100–9). The history of skaldic poetry in praise of saints is complicated; see Cormack (2003). There I argue that the lack of poetry about Jón and Þorlákr represents the current attitude of contemporary ecclesiastical authorities. It was the achievement of Snorri Sturluson and his nephew Óláfr hvítaskáld ('the White Poet') to cleanse skaldic verse of its pagan overtones and make it once again an acceptable vehicle for praise of a Christian saint, as it had been in the mid-twelfth century.
- 17 Óskarsdóttir (2004).
- 18 Wolf (2003).
- 19 BS I, pp. 299–304; Bsk, pp. 198–201.
- 20 BS I, p. 252; Bsk, p. 207.
- 21 Bsk, pp. 451–4. On *Rannveigar leiðsla* see Larrington (1995).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Editions and Translations

- Benediktsson, J. (ed.) *Íslendingabók/Landnámabók*. 2 vols. Reykjavík: 1968.
- BS I = *Biskupa sögur* I (Íslenzk fornrit XV) eds. Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson and Peter Foote. Reykjavík: 2003.
- BS II = *Biskupa sögur* II (Íslenzk fornrit XVI) ed. Ásdís Egilsdóttir. Reykjavík: 2002.
- BS III = *Biskupa sögur* III (Íslenzk fornrit XVII) ed. Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir. Reykjavík: 1998.
- Bsk = *Biskupa sögur* [eds. Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon]. 2 vols. Copenhagen: 1858–78.
- Dennis, A., Foote, Peter and Perkins, Richard (transl.) *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*. Winnipeg: 1980.
- DS = Fell, C. (ed.) *Dunstanus saga*. Copenhagen: 1963.
- GS = Karlsson, Stefán (ed.) *Guðmundar sögur biskups*, vol. I. Copenhagen: 1983.
- HMS = Unger, C. R. (ed.) *Heilagra manna sögur*. 2 vols. Oslo: 1877.
- Tucker, J. (ed.) *Plácíðus saga*. Copenhagen: 1998.
- Turville-Petre, G. and Olzsewska, E. S. (transl.) *The Life of Guðmund the Good, Bishop of Hólar*. Coventry: 1942.
- Unger, C. R. (ed.) *Mariu saga. Legender om Jomfru Maria og hendes Jertegn*. 2 vols. Oslo: 1871.

- Unger, C. R. (ed.) *Postola sögur*. Oslo: 1874.
- Wolf, K. (ed.) *The Icelandic Legend of Saint Dorothy*. Toronto: 1997.
- Wolf, K. (ed. and transl.) *The Old Norse-Icelandic Legend of Saint Barbara*. Toronto: 2000.
- Wolf, K. (ed.) *Saga Heilagrar Önnu*. Reykjavík: 2001.
- Secondary Literature*
- Böðvarsson, Jón (1968) Munur eldri og yngri gerðar Þorláks sögu. *Saga* 6, 81–94.
- Collings, L. (1969) 'The Codex Scardensis: Studies in Icelandic Hagiography.' Cornell University dissertation.
- Cormack, M. (1994) *The Saints in Iceland: Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400*. Brussels.
- Cormack, M. (1996/8) 'Visions, Demons and Gender in the Sagas of Icelandic Saints.' *Collegium Medievale* 7, 185–209.
- Cormack, M. (2003) 'Poetry, Paganism and the Sagas of Icelandic Bishops.' In Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir and Anna Guðmundsdóttir (eds.) *Til heiðurs og hugbátar: greinar um trúarkevðskap fyrri alda*. Reykholtt, pp. 33–51.
- Foote, P. (1975, rpt 1984) 'Aachen, Lund, Hólar.' In Michael Barnes, Hans Bekker-Nielsen and Gerd Wolfgang Weber (eds.) *Aurvandilstá: Norse Studies*. Odense, pp. 101–20.
- Helgason, Jón (1950) 'Introduction' to *Byskupa Sogur, Ms. perg. fol. No. 5 in the Royal Library of Stockholm*. Corpus Codicum Islandicorum Medii Aevi XIX. Copenhagen.
- Jørgensen, J. H. (1982) 'Hagiography and the Icelandic Bishop Sagas.' *Peritia* 1, 1–16.
- Kalinke, M. (1996) *The Book of Reykjabólar: The Last of the Great Medieval Legendaries*. Toronto.
- Karlsson, Stefán (2000a) 'Guðmundar saga biskups.' In *Staferókar*. Reykjavík, pp. 153–71.
- Karlsson, Stefán (2000b) 'Icelandic Lives of Thomas à Becket.' In *Staferókar*. Reykjavík, pp. 134–52.
- Karlsson, Stefán (2000c) 'Islandsk bogekspert til Norge i middelalderen.' In *Staferókar*. Reykjavík, pp. 188–205.
- Kristjánsson, Jónas (1981) 'Learned Style or Saga Style?' In *Speculum norroenum*. Odense, pp. 260–92.
- Larrington, Carolyne (1995) 'Leizla Rannveigar: Gender and Politics in an Otherworld Vision.' *Medium Aevum* 64, 232–49.
- Nordal, G. (2001) *Tools of Literacy*. Toronto.
- Ólason, Vésteinn (1999) 'Rímur og miðaldarómantík: Um úrvinnslu goðsagnamanna og goðsagnamynstra í íslenskum rómönsum á síðmiðöldum.' In Haraldur Bessason and Baldur Hafstað (eds.) *Heiðin minni. Greinar um fornar bókmenntir*. Reykjavík, pp. 221–39.
- Óskarsdóttir, Svanhildur (2004) 'Writing Universal History in Ultima Thule: The Case of AM 764, 4to.' *Mediaeval Scandinavia*.
- Pulsiano, Phillip, Acker, Paul and Wolf, Kirsten (eds.) (1993) *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*. New York. s.v.: 'Annals', 'Árna saga biskups', 'Biskupa sögur', 'Guðmundar sögur biskups', 'Jóns saga ens helga', 'Laurentius saga biskups', 'Maríu saga', 'Páls saga', 'Thómas saga erkibiskups', 'Þorláks saga'.
- Tómasson, Sverrir (1988) *Formálar íslenskra sagnaritara á miðöldum*. Reykjavík.
- Tómasson, Sverrir (1992) 'Kristnar trúarbókmenntir í óbundnu máli.' In *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, vol. 1. Reykjavík, pp. 421–82.
- Tómasson, Sverrir (1993) 'Trúarbókmenntir í lausu máli á síðmiðöld.' In *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, vol. 2. Reykjavík, pp. 249–83.
- Turville-Petre, G. (1953) *Origins of Icelandic Literature*. Oxford.
- Vésteinsson, Orri (2000) *The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power, and Social Change*. Oxford.
- Whaley, D. (1994/6) 'Miracles in the Sagas of Bishops: Icelandic Variations on an International Theme.' *Collegium Medievale* 7, 155–84.
- Widding, O., Bekker-Nielsen, H. and Shook, L. K. (1963) 'The Lives of the Saints in Old Norse Prose: A Handlist.' *Mediaeval Studies* 25, 294–337. Updated in M. Cormack (1994) *The Saints in Iceland: Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400*. Brussels, pp. 240–5.
- Wolf, Kirsten (2003) 'Kirkjubæjarbók: Codex AM 429 12mo.' In Rudolf Simek and Judith Meurer (eds.) *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages: Papers of the Twelfth International Saga Conference*. Bonn, pp. 532–8.

3

Christian Poetry

Katrina Attwood

The history of Old Norse-Icelandic Christian poetry is at once one of continuity with the established traditions of skaldic (and, to a lesser extent, eddic) poetry and of their gradual subversion. As we shall see, Christianity brought to Scandinavia a vast, constantly expanding, body of story material, hymnody and liturgy, all of which was to have a profound effect on the content, diction and metre of skaldic poetry, as well as on the circumstances of its composition, reception and transmission. The poets, however, were inheritors of a proud tradition, mythologized as the heirs of Bragi the Old and, ultimately, of that thief of the poetic mead, Óðinn himself. Nor was this pagan inheritance merely spiritual: the skaldic tradition was suffused with, and structured around, complex kennings and *heiti* (see chapter 27) alluding to pagan myths. As I hope to demonstrate in this chapter, poets throughout the Christian period were attempting a delicate chemistry. Could the heady, Odinic mead of poetry be blended with the sacramental wine of European Christendom, or would the resulting liquor split the wineskins of traditional poetic forms even as it was poured into them?

The Earliest Christian Poetry

The earliest Christian poetry is very much in the tradition of skaldic court-poetry: encomia for newly converted, royal Norwegian patrons, composed by professional, usually Icelandic, retainer-poets. Thus we find poets such as Eilífr Goðrúnarson and Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, already established as poets composing in the traditional style for the pagan Earl Hákon (d. 995), altering the subject matter of their verses to suit the Earl's Christian successor, Óláfr Tryggvason (995–1000). For Eilífr, the composer of the latest preserved *Þórsdrápa* ('Þórr's Lay') (c.1000), there is little to suggest that the change was more than a superficial one: the only surviving Christian poem ascribed to him is a half-stanza alluding to the conversion in which he describes

how *Róms konungr* (the King of Rome, Christ) has brought heathen lands under his power very much in the manner of a Viking leader (Edwards 1982–3: 35; Jónsson 1912–15: B1, 144). The Christ-kenning, however, is qualified by the expression *kveðja sitja . . . at Urðar brunni* – this God is said to sit beside the spring of Urðr, one of the pagan goddesses of Fate. For Eilífr, then, there is no contradiction in representing the dramatic effects of the conversion with traditional skaldic themes and diction: Christ is a conqueror-king in the Norse mould and, as such, takes his place in the landscape familiar from Norse mythology.

Hallfreðr, by contrast, affects no such synthesis between pagan and Christian material. Although the verses he composed in praise of Earl Hákon had, like those of his contemporaries, been peppered with references to the pagan gods, the poems he composed for Óláfr Tryggvason after his conversion are remarkable for the relative plainness of their diction. For example, in *Hákonardrápa* 5 (Jónsson 1912–15: B1, 148), Hallfreðr uses the kenning *eingadóttir Ónars*, a reference to Óðinn's wife Jörð, whose name means 'earth', to indicate that Hákon has captured Norway in the same way as a husband might 'overcome' his bride. This contrasts sharply with the unaffected prayer for the soul of Óláfr Tryggvason in the concluding lines of his *erfidrápa* (memorial lay) for Óláfr:

Kœns hafi Krístr enn hreini
konungs önd ofar löndum.

[May the pure Christ keep the judicious king's soul in heaven above (lit. 'above the lands')] (stanza 29; Jónsson 1912–15: B1, 153)

Among the most famous poems attributed to Hallfreðr are four remarkable *lausavísur* (see chapter 27) in which he records his gradual and anguished conversion from paganism to the Christianity demanded by his patron, Óláfr Tryggvason. The authenticity of these poems, and their attribution to Hallfreðr, have been the subject of considerable scholarly debate. Although the evidence is far from conclusive, recent metrical and dictional analysis suggests that it is at least possible that the verses are genuinely Hallfreðr's work (Whaley 2000). The poems are presented in a narrative sequence in *Hallfreðar saga*, in which Óláfr exacts a grudging revocation of the pagan gods and a gradual acceptance of Christ. The narrative opens with a familiar saga scene, in which the patron offers a critique of his retainer's latest offering: Hallfreðr recites a half-strophe (*lausavísa* 6; Jónsson 1912–15: B1, 158) wistfully recalling past pagan sacrifices, which Óláfr rejects as *allill* (hateful). Hallfreðr is ordered to *bæta* (make amends for) his scurrilousness, and replies with an appeal to the dignity of the skaldic tradition:

Öll hefr ætt til hylli
Óðins skipat ljóðum,
algilda mank, aldar

iðju várra niðja,
 en trauðr, þvít vel Viðris
 vald hugnaðisk skaldi,
 legg ek á frumver Friggjar
 fjón, þvít Kristi þjónum.

[All humankind has crafted poems for Óðinn's favour: I remember our ancestors' fine pieces. But sadly – since the poet thought well of Viðrir's (Óðinn's) rule – do I impugn Frigg's first husband (Óðinn), because I serve Christ.] (*lausavísa* 7; Jónsson 1912–15: B1, 158; translation after Whaley 2002)

At this point, then, Hallfreðr is allying himself strongly with skaldic tradition. For him, poetry is the preserve of Óðinn and his followers, and its dignity is threatened by Óláfr's attempt to appropriate it – and him – for Christ. Hereafter, the emphasis of the exchange shifts from the poems' literary quality to their content. Hallfreðr counters Óláfr's charge that he pays too much attention to the pagan gods with a short verse, in which he professes neutrality towards Óðinn. When this fails to satisfy the king, he recites a third, beautifully crafted verse in which Christ's love is juxtaposed with the wrath of the pagan gods – the consequence of his abandoning the old religion. As in the *erfidrápa* and the other praise-poems composed for Óláfr, the complex mythological kennings have been dispensed with – the poet simply names the pagan gods outright or uses familiar *heiti* – and the diction is as straightforward as the sentiment:

Mér skyli Freyr ok Freyja,
 fjörð lætk oðul Njarðar,
 líknisk grøm víð Grímnir,
 gramr, ok Þórr enn rammi;
 Krist vilk allrar ástar,
 erum leið sonar reiði,
 vald es á frægt und foldar
 feðr, einn ok goð kveðja.

[Freyr and Freyja and the mighty Thor will be cross with me – last year I abandoned the deceit of Njord (the pagan faith), let fiends ask Grímnir (Óðinn) for mercy. I will ask Christ alone, and (he is) God, for all love – the son's anger is ugly to me: he holds power under the father of earth.] (*lausavísa* 9; Jónsson 1912–15: B1, 159; translation after Whaley 2002)

In the final verse, Hallfreðr is finally brought to his knees in a prayer to Christ. He is keen to state, however, that it is his sovereign who has forced him into this anguished repudiation of the 'words of Óðinn':

Sá's með Sygna ræsi
 Siðr, at blót eru kviðjuð;
 verðum flest at forðask

fornhaldin sköþ norna;
 láta allir ýtar
 Óðins ætt fyr róða;
 verðk ok neyddr frá Njarðar
 niðjum Krist at biðja.

[For the ruler of Sogn, it's customary to forbid sacrifices. We are forced to forgo many a long-held decree of the norns (the Fates of Old Norse mythology). All humankind throws Óðinn's promises to the winds. I must now also turn from Njord's kin and pray to Christ.] (*lausavísa* 10; Jónsson 1912–15: B1, 159; translation after Whaley 2002)

Whether or not these remarkable verses really are the work of Hallfreðr, the saga's account of his anguished rejection of the pagan gods and his reluctant acceptance of the Christian faith enjoined on him by his patron fictionalizes a genuine change in the prevailing style of skaldic verse in his milieu. Many critics have noted that poetry ascribed to Icelandic poets working in the courts of the two missionary kings, Óláfr Tryggvason (995–1000) and St Óláfr Haraldsson (1015–1030), and their successors appears to move away from the artifice of tenth-century skaldic art, towards a more streamlined, simplified art-form (see, for example, Edwards 1982–3; Paasche 1948: 36–9; Lange 1958: 48–74). As suggested by the examples from Hallfreðr's *Hákonardrápa* and *Erfidrápa* above, the most striking difference is in the use of allusions to pagan material: where pre-conversion poets, such as Tindr Hallkelsson and Einarr skálaglamm, require their audience to trawl their knowledge of Norse mythology in unravelling numerous kennings, the eleventh-century poets seem to shun reference to the pagan myths (see Noreen 1922). For these newly Christianized poets, the mythological kenning, the vehicle for most of the convoluted word-order and for the pagan burden of traditional skaldic verse, represents a particular challenge. So soon after the conversion, the alternative possibilities provided by the extended Christian 'pantheon' of Trinity, Angels, Virgin and saints had not permeated the religious consciousness of the Norwegian courts – Christian references in the poetry of Hallfreðr, Þórðr Kolbeinsson and other early eleventh-century court-poets are largely restricted to generalized mentions of 'Kristr' and God as Father – so the possibilities for exploitation of the kenning in a new sacral context must have appeared limited. Nor was it likely that the proselytizing Óláfr, whether or not he intervened in his poets' work as directly as envisaged by the author of *Hallfreðar saga*, would countenance praise-poetry which flaunted its links with paganism (Edwards 1982–3: 34). Aesthetic considerations, too, may have had a part to play: impressive though such works as Tindr's *Hákonardrápa* and Einarr's *Vellekla* undoubtedly were, their sheer complexity was in danger of choking the *dróttkvætt* form (see chapters 15 and 27), and the incomes of its practitioners. Not only was the 'kenning-encrusted artifice' of the tenth-century pagan skalds a hard act to follow (Edwards 1982–3: 34) – there is little to be gained from panegyric if its patron cannot construe it.

The Later Eleventh Century

For the poets of the generation after Hallfreðr, the impetus to incorporate Christian material into their works was as much personal as political. Once again, the catalyst for a radical change in the style of skaldic verse was to be a king called Óláfr. Óláfr Haraldsson died at the battle of Stiklastaðir in the summer of 1030. Within a few years of his death, Óláfr was the focus of a movement to establish him both as a martyr-saint – an extensive cult centred on his shrine at Niðaróss (modern Trondheim) – and as *rex perpetuus Norvegiae*, the eternal guardian-king of the (inviolable) Norwegian state. Contemporary poets, both supporters and opponents of Óláfr in life, were quick to join in this propaganda campaign. Shortly after Stiklastaðir, Þórarinn loftunga composed his *Glælognskviða*, addressed to King Sveinn Knútson (also known as Alfifuson), whose flight from Norway in 1035 provides a *terminus ante quem* for the poem. *Glælognskviða* is composed in the *kviðubáttir* metre (see chapter 15), and is a eulogy for Óláfr, in which miracles said to have taken place at his shrine are described:

En þar upp
af altári
Kristi þæg
kerti brenna;
svá hefr Áleifr,
áðr andaðisk,
syndalauss,
sölu borgit.
En herr manns,
es heilagur es,
konungr sjalfr,
krýpr at gagni,
ok beiðendr
blindir sökja
þjóðan máls,
en þaðan heilir.

[7. Tapers, which are acceptable to Christ, flare from the altar; thus, without sin before he died, did Óláfr save his soul. 8. And a crowd of people kneels, (asking) for help, at the place where the holy king himself is, and the dumb and blind come, and leave healed.] (*Glælognskviða* 7–8; Jónsson 1912–15: B1, 300–1)

The most prolific poet of his age, and a favourite of St Óláfr and his son Magnús, Sigvatr Þórðarson appears to have been genuinely affected by the king's death. His grief finds expression in several *lausavísur* and in an elaborate *Erfidrápa* for St Óláfr. Although this memorial lay survives only in fragmentary form, it clearly represents the flowering of Sigvatr's mature style, and a move back towards the artistry of the

tenth-century skalds. As Martin Chase has observed, the *Erfidrápa*, more obviously than *Glælognskviða*, approaches a 'synthesis' between traditional skaldic encomia and hagiography (Chase 1993a: 74). For the first time in a generation, gold can be described as *lóns log* (flame of the lagoon) and its generous dispensers as its *breytendr* (hurlers) (*Erfidrápa* 13; Jónsson 1912–15: B1, 242). In adopting something of the stylistic sophistication of the tenth-century skalds, of course, Sigvatr needs to come to terms with their secondary subject matter: the tapestry of pagan kennings, references and allusions which forms the backdrop to their work. Although Sigvatr himself was a Christian (one of his surviving *lausavísur*, indeed, is a prayer composed for the baptism of his daughter Tófa, a god-daughter of St Óláfr), he was writing at a time when Christianity had not been completely assimilated in Norway (Fidjestøl 1992: 112). It was not yet possible to treat stories of the pagan gods, or even their names, as devoid of religious meaning, even in a poem celebrating the sanctity of the most Christian of kings.

In general, the kenning-structure of the *Erfidrápa* avoids direct mention of the pagan gods, though it does allude to the more clichéd (and therefore, presumably, less meaningful) aspects of the traditional mythology. Thus, in the first stanza, a group of Swedes executed by hanging are described as *ríða besti Sigarrs til Heljar* (riding Sigarr's horse to Hel) (Jónsson 1912–15: B1, 239). The ride to Hel is a commonplace of skaldic poetry (see Jónsson 1931: 241–2), and gallows-kennings referring to the horse of the sea-king Sigarr occur frequently in skaldic poetry dated to this period, although the origins of the expression are obscure (Jónsson 1931: 493). Although it is difficult to be sure whether, in a poem of this period, the primary religious resonance of *Hel* is pagan or Christian, it seems likely, as Diana Edwards notes, that Sigvatr's purpose here is to use the pagan allusion as a direct rebuttal of paganism itself (Edwards 1982–3: 34). Here, the effect of the phrase is to underline the paganism of the hanged Swedes and with it their opposition to the saintly Óláfr. Later in the poem, Sigvatr's renouncing of the warrior's life to undertake a pilgrimage to Rome is handled in a similar way: the sword the poet relinquishes is described as *Gjallar vöndr*, the wand of Gjöll, a valkyrie (Edwards 1982–3: 34). For Sigvatr, then, although pagan referents are not devoid of their original sacral connotations, they can be appropriated for Christ (or, at least, for his saint).

The impact of Christianity on the subject matter and style of skaldic poetry is perhaps most keenly observed in the verses that survive from the generation after Sigvatr. Pre-eminent among skalds of this period is Arnórr Þórðarson jarlaskáld (after 1011 to after 1073). Most of Arnórr's surviving poetry is conventional panegyric addressed to his various patrons, Þorfinnr Sigurðarson and Rognvaldr Brúsason, earls of Orkney, and the Norwegian kings Magnús Ólafsson and Haraldr Sigurðarson. One fragmentary *helmingr* (see chapters 15 and 27), preserved in *Snorra Edda*, however, does provide a tantalizing glimpse of the nature of the Christian teaching available in Iceland a century or so after the conversion. It is possible that the *helmingr* is all that survives of a *drápa* in honour of the archangel Michael or that it belongs to the now-lost *erfidrápa* for Gellir Þorkelsson which *Laxdæla saga* describes Arnórr as having

composed (Sveinsson 1934: 229; see also Whaley 1998: 35). The surviving lines depict the Last Judgement:

Mikjáll vegr þat's misgørt þykkir,
mannvitsfróðr, ok allt eð góða;
tyggi skiptir síðan seggjum
sólar hjalms á dæmistóli.

[Michael weighs, ripe with wisdom, what seems wrongly done, and all that is good. The sovereign of the sun's helmet (= sovereign of the sky = God) then separates out men at his judgement-seat.] (Fragment 7; Whaley 1998: 134, 312)

Tyggi sólar hjalms (sovereign of the sun's helmet) is one of a series of six God-kennings of the form 'lord of heaven' that Arnórr uses in his work (see Edwards 1982–3: 38). Two more of these kennings have determinants in the form of sky-kennings referring to the sun, or to daylight. Thus we find God described as *stillir sóltjalda* (ruler of the tents of the sun) in *Rognvaldsdrápa* 3 (Whaley 1998: 113, 141), and as *konungr dags grundar* (king of the land of day) in the fragmentary *erfidrápa* for Hermundr Illugason (Fragment 6; Whaley 1998: 134, 312). Although imagery associating Christ with light or with the sun is common in contemporary European liturgy and hymnody, Arnórr appears to be the first skaldic poet to make use of it. In doing so, he anticipates and inspires the great Christian *drápur* of the twelfth century.

Christian hymns and liturgical sequences might have influenced another skaldic innovation with which Arnórr has been credited. His *Hryn benda*, a praise poem for Magnús Ólafsson, is the earliest extant example of *brynbent* metre, a development of *dróttkvætt* (see chapters 15 and 27) which stretches the six-syllable, three-stress line to include eight syllables and four stresses (Chase 1993a: 74; Whaley 1998: 80). Although the rhythmic and assonant structure of *dróttkvætt* is maintained, *brynbent* lines have a falling cadence, which is likely to have been influenced by the trochaic metre used in Latin hymns and metrical sequences (Whaley 1998: 80; cf. chapter 15). Whether or not the innovation was Arnórr's, the extension of *dróttkvætt* into *brynbent* metre was very important in the development of Christian poetry: many later poets chose it as the vehicle for Christian praise-poems, including Gamli kanoki, who employed it in his *Jóansdrápa*, and Eysteinn Ásgrímsson, who used it for his great Marian encomium, *Lilja*.

The Twelfth Century

The twelfth century was the 'Golden Age' of Christian skaldic poetry. Once again, the literary history of this period is characterized by a simultaneous continuation of and subversion of the traditions established by previous generations of skalds, though, as we shall see, the poets of this period exhibit a rather more relaxed attitude to some of

these traditions than did the poets of the age of conversion. The most significant change is not so much in the poetry itself as in its social context.

The poetry we have considered so far in this chapter has been composed by, and for, a social elite: it has been the work of poets who are members of relatively wealthy and important Icelandic families, and it has been composed in and around royal and ducal courts, to be heard by, and to curry favour with, the ruling elite of Norway. Even the hagiographical works of Sigvatr and Þórarinn must be seen as political texts, intended as much to secure the support of the next generation of royal patronage as to establish the nascent cult of St Óláfr. By the twelfth century, however, the church was sufficiently established to offer a social, political and ideological alternative to the royal court. This was particularly true in Iceland, where the reforms inaugurated by Bishop Gizurr Ísleifsson (bishop of Skálholt 1081–1118) led to the dominance of the church, itself essentially the preserve of the leading families, in secular and state affairs (see further Foote 1984: 86–9; Vésteinsson 2000). An education in one of the church schools – for example at the cathedrals of Skálholt or Hólar, or the centres of learning associated with the church farms at Haukadalur and Oddi – became a social prerequisite for the male offspring of the ruling classes, whether or not they were destined for a clerical career. Most importantly, after the foundation of the Benedictine house at Þingeyrar in 1133, a further six religious communities were established, providing Icelanders with access to the learned literature, secular and spiritual, of Christian Europe. Like its literary antecedents, then, twelfth-century skaldic poetry was produced by, and for, a literary elite. Although, for the most part, they clothed their identities in anonymity or pseudonym, perhaps motivated by monastic vows of humility (Chase 1993a: 75), the authors of the great Christian *drápur* were almost certainly scions of the great Icelandic families whose sons had once composed for the courts of Norway and its dependencies.

Although it is perhaps unrealistic to bring full-blown medieval theories of individual, self-conscious authorship (see Minnis 1984) to bear on Old Norse-Icelandic literary history before the thirteenth century, it is reasonable to refer to the twelfth-century Christian poets as ‘authors’, as opposed to ‘skalds’. Whereas their predecessors were composing in an exclusively oral context, their verses being committed to memory and preserved for centuries only in the memories of others, the monastic poets were working in a complex literate culture. Although it is conceivable that their works might have been composed for ‘live’ performance within the monasteries – as alternatives to the liturgy, versified homilies or even accompaniments to refectory meals, for example – they were written down shortly after, or even during, their composition. Close dictional and structural parallels between the poems, as well as echoes of religious prose texts, also suggest that, in some cases, their authors wrote with copies of earlier works before them (see Attwood 1996a; Skard 1953).

Outstanding among the monastic poetry of the twelfth century are the four great *drápur*, *Geisli*, *Plácitus drápa*, *Harmsól* and *Leiðarvísan*. These are the earliest poems in the *drápa* form to have been preserved intact, rather than as scattered *vísur* (that is, verses or stanzas; cf. chapter 27) in prose texts, and are therefore of considerable

significance for the study, and reconstruction, of earlier skaldic poems. Each is composed in the *dróttkvætt* metre, and is divided into three sections: the *uppbaf* (introduction), the *stefjabálkr* (refrain-section), usually comprising two refrains spaced at three- or four-stanza intervals, and the *slæmr* (ending), which is roughly equal in length to the *uppbaf*. The variety of subject matter evinced by the *drápur* also indicates the sheer wealth of the Latinate source material available in their twelfth-century Icelandic monastic context.

Of the four poems, only *Geisli* can be dated with any degree of certainty. It is the work of the twelfth century's most prolific poet, Einarr Skúlason, a priest from the west coast of Iceland, who composed panegyric verses for various Scandinavian monarchs in the period c.1114–c.1161 (Chase 1993b: 159). To some extent, Einarr's reputation relies on the fact that he was a favourite of Snorri Sturluson, whose *Snorra Edda* and *Heimskringla* record, stanza for stanza, twice as much of Einarr's work as any other poet's (Chase 1993b: 159). *Geisli* is Einarr's most famous work, and is preserved complete in the *Bergsbók* version of *Óláfs saga helga* and in a fragmentary state in the *Flateyjarbók* text. Isolated stanzas are also quoted elsewhere in *Heimskringla*, in *Snorra Edda* and in the so-called 'Great Saga' of St Óláfr (Chase 1981: 12–19). As Einarr makes clear at the poem's outset, *Geisli* is an occasional poem, written for recitation at St Óláfr's shrine in Niðaróss cathedral in the presence of the joint kings of Norway, Eysteinn, Sigurðr and Ingi, sons of Haraldr Gilli, and Archbishop Jón Birgisson (see stanzas 8–9). Although the date of the recital is not known for certain, it is likely that it occurred on St Óláfr's feast day – 29 July – in 1153, the first celebration of this festival after the establishment of Niðaróss as the seat of the Norwegian bishopric (see Chase 1981: 44; Attwood 1996a: 225).

Like Sigvatr's *Erfidrápa* and Þórarinn's *Glælognskvíða*, *Geisli* is part eulogy, part saint's life: a celebration of St Óláfr's death and posthumous miracles. Whereas the works of Sigvatr and Þórarinn represent Óláfr's cult in its earliest phase, however, Einarr's poem demonstrates the maturity of Scandinavian Christianity in the high Middle Ages. His Óláfr is portrayed not merely as the heroic Viking king who sought to unite Norway, but as a typological representation of Christ, with whom he is identified from the opening stanza:

Eins má orð ok bænrir
 – allsráðanda hins snjalla
 vel er fróðr sá er getr góða –
 Guðs þrenning mér kenna.
 Gofugt ljós boðar geisli
 gunnøflugr miskunnar
 – ágætan býð ek ítrum
 Óláfi brag – sólar.

[The Trinity of the one God can teach me words and prayers – he who tells of the grace of the excellent ruler of all is extremely well taught. The battle-strong beam of the sun

of mercy (Christ) brings the promise of a gracious light – I offer the great Óláfr a worthy poem.] (*Geisli* 1; Chase 1981)

Plácitus drápa is preserved only in MS AM 673 b 4to, which is one of the earliest surviving Icelandic manuscripts and has been dated to c.1200 (Louis-Jensen 1998: 89). The text contains several mistakes, and can therefore be used to postulate the existence of at least one earlier copy of the poem, now lost (Louis-Jensen 1998: 89). *Plácitus drápa*, then, existed, and was circulated, in written form shortly after its composition. AM 673 b 4to is badly damaged, and the beginning and end of the poem (some 19 stanzas) are now lost (Louis-Jensen 1998: 89). We are left with some 59 stanzas, which recount most of the legend of St Eustace (known in Old Norse by his pre-baptismal name, Plácitus (that is, Placidus), from his conversion after receiving a vision of Christ crucified between the antlers of a stag, through the various trials and tribulations suffered by him, his long-suffering wife and their children, during which they are separated and eventually reunited, to Plácitus's recall to the military service of the Emperor Trajan. The manuscript breaks off at this point, so we are left to supply the end of the story from other sources, notably *Plácitus saga*, of which several versions survive (Tucker 1998): the by now elderly Plácitus and his entire family are martyred for their faith by being roasted in a brazen bull.

Stylistically, *Plácitus drápa* is a tour de force. The poem abounds with complex kennings, particularly man-kennings, which draw on classical skaldic battle and seafaring imagery, and often refer directly to pagan mythology. In stanza 48, for example, Plácitus is referred to in a warrior-kennung whose base word is one of the traditional names of Óðinn:

Herferðar rak harðan
 byr-Þrótr í stýr flótta
 odda þings ok eyddi
 eirlaust heruð þeira.

[The fire-Óðinn of the meeting of spears (= Óðinn of the fire of battle = Óðinn of the sword = warrior) vigorously pursued the retreat of the troops in the battle and harried their homelands mercilessly.] (*Plácitus drápa* 48/1–4; Louis-Jensen 1998: 116)

Similarly, in the account of Plácitus's Christian generosity in stanza 30, the hero is referred to in a remarkably ornate seafarer-kennung, which alludes both to the god Baldr and to an obscure sea-king:

Ok til aumra rekka
 atvinnu gaf Þvinnils
 vigg-Baldr víðrar foldar
 verkkaup þat es sér merkði.

[And the horse-Baldr of the vast lands of Þvinnill (horse-Baldr of the lands of the sea-king = Baldr of the horse of the sea = Baldr of the ship = seafarer) gave away the wages he had set aside for himself for the relief of the poor.] (*Plácitus drápa* 30/1–4; Louis-Jensen 1998: 107)

Given the overtly Christian nature of the poem, and its self-consciously learned expectations of its audience (who are expected, for example, to pick up on the comparison between the sufferings of Plácitus and his family and the *mannraun* [ordeal] undergone by *Jób enn gamli* [Job of old], referred to in stanzas 1 and 26), it is highly unlikely that these mythological references actually carry any sacral connotations. As will be clear from the examples quoted above, the appellations of pagan gods are little more than formal – they are not embedded in either the alliterative structure of the *belmingar* in which they occur or in the moral burden of the verse, as, for example, some of Sigvatr's pagan allusions appear to be. The mythological references are more likely to be a reflection of an antiquarian interest in literary paganism in the monasteries and church schools of twelfth-century Iceland, an interest which would lead, some two or three decades after *Plácitus drápa* was copied into MS AM 673 b 4to, to the compilation of Snorri Sturluson's great survey of the mythology of pagan Scandinavia, *Snorra Edda*.

Harmsól and *Leiðarvísan* are both preserved in MS AM 757 a 4to, a fragmentary codex from the fourteenth century, which contains an anthology of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Christian poems, as well as texts of two important grammatical treatises, Snorri Sturluson's *Skáldskaparmál* and the *Málskrúðsfræði* section of the *Third Grammatical Treatise*, compiled by Snorri's nephew, Óláfr Þórðarson (see Attwood 1996b: 1–30). The contents of this manuscript are evidence for the importance of skaldic poetry in the intellectual study of *grammatica* in Icelandic centres of learning, and for the academic 'afterlife' of the poems (Attwood 1996b: 30; Nordal 2001). *Harmsól* and *Leiðarvísan* seem to be conceived as versified homilies, addressed to the authors' monastic siblings, their *systkin* (*Harmsól* 46/5, 62/1–3-, 64/1–8; *Leiðarvísan* 2/4, 39/1, 45/1).

A marginal note in AM 757 a 4to attributes *Harmsól* to 'Gamli kanoki'. Although this is clearly a monastic pseudonym, Gamli's status as a poet is confirmed by the shorter version of *Jóns saga postola*, which describes him as *kanunk austr i Þykkabe* (a canon at Þykkvibær in the east [where the Augustinian house was founded in 1168]) and quotes four verses of his *Jóansdrápa*, a poem about John the Apostle in *brynbent* metre (Attwood 1996a: 225). *Harmsól* is an exploration of and an exhortation to the theme of penance, which explains how the Incarnation was intended to allow sinful men access to God's glory. The theme is illustrated by the *exempla* of three famous penitents – King David, Mary Magdalene and St Peter – and its urgency is underlined by an account of the Last Judgement and picturesque descriptions of the fate of the impenitent and the rewards of the just. This summary, however, does scant justice to the beauty and complexity of Gamli's work, which, to judge from the numerous echoes of it in later poetry, was much admired by generations of Christian poets.

The emotional centre of *Harmsól* is the partially dramatized account of the Passion in stanzas 21–7. Gamli’s mastery of the skaldic medium is clear as he simplifies both his diction and his word-order to exploit the full pathos of Christ’s treatment of the two thieves crucified with him, the models of penitence and impenitence. The starkness of the narrative, which is reproduced almost verbatim from the Passion account in St Luke’s Gospel and represents one of the earliest uses of direct speech in skaldic verse, is deeply effective:

Þjófr annarr tók þannig,
þrifvaldr gøfugr, aldar,
sál var hans ófs ok ælig
ósæl, við gram mæla:
‘Nú sýn afl, ens eina
alls er þú Guðs sonr kallask,
ok með öflgu ríki,
oss, stíg niðr af krossi!’

Yðr nam annarr kveðia
illvirki svá, stillir
háss, þá er hræddisk þíslir,
hríðar nausts, með trausti:
‘minnstu, mildingr sunnu,
mín’, kvað bauga tínir,
‘þitt, á ek hag til hættan
heldr, er þu kemr í veldi.’

[22. One of the two thieves – and his soul was excessively wretched – began to speak thus to the prince of men (Christ), O noble promoter of well-being (God): ‘Now show us your strength, since you call yourself the Son of the One God, and come down from the Cross with (your) mighty power!’ 23. The other malefactor began to call on you thus with faith, when he dreaded tortures, O regulator of the high boat-shed of the tempest (= regulator of the high heaven = God): ‘Prince of the sun (Christ), remember me’, said the gatherer of rings (= man, thief), ‘when you come into your kingdom; I am in a rather too perilous situation.’] (*Harmsól* 22–3; Attwood 1996b: 227)

After this evocation of the salvation of the Penitent Thief, Gamli suspends his Passion narrative, delaying his account of the Resurrection to force the hearer to pause at the foot of the Cross and meditate on the magnitude of the events he has witnessed. This type of response may have been influenced by quasi-dramatic liturgical rituals like the *improperia* (that is, Christ’s ‘reproaches’ from the Cross), responses chanted during the Good Friday *adoratio crucis* (‘adoration of the Cross’), or the Latin hymn *Stabat mater dolorosa* (‘The mournful mother stood . . .’; see further Attwood 1996b: 141). The emotional impact, following close on a sequence in which the poem’s stylistic pyrotechnics (which, like the Christ-kenning quoted below, could have been inspired by the stormy weather Gamli may have witnessed from his monastery on the

south coast of Iceland) have been pared down to an austere, resonant minimum, is quite profound:

Hverr mundi svá hendir
 harðgeðr loga fiarðar,
 éla ranns, ef ynni,
 ítr gervir, þér, rítar,
 at þreknenninn þinni
 þollr, sættandi, mætti
 ógrátandi, ýta,
 ormlands hiá kvöl standa?

[O glorious creator of the shield of the house of storms (= creator of the shield of heaven = creator of the sun = Christ), which distributor of the fire of the fjord (= distributor of gold = man) would be so hard-minded, if he loved you, that (he), a tree of the land of the snake (= a tree of gold = a man), might stand by your Passion without weeping, O powerful reconciler of men?] (*Harmsól* 26; Attwood 1996b: 228)

Leiðarvísan is concerned with a popular, though now somewhat obscure, medieval legend: the so-called ‘Sunday Letter’, which purports to have been written by Christ and dropped into Jerusalem from heaven one Sunday:

Tek ek til orðs þar er urðu
 alfregnar iartegnir,
 tákn eru sýnd í slíku
 sǫnn, lórsala mǫnnum;
 sendi salvörðr grundar
 snillifimr af himni,
 borgar lýð til biargar,
 bréf gollstöfum sollit.

[I begin to speak at the point where renowned miracles befell the people of Jerusalem; true omens are revealed in such (an event); the eloquent house-warder of the land (= warder of the house of the land = warder of the roof of the land = warder of heaven = God) sent from heaven a letter swollen with golden letters, as help for the citizens.] (*Leiðarvísan* 6; Attwood 1996b: 172)

The letter warns that damnation will follow soon for those baptized people who fail to pay tithes or to observe the feasts of the church and, above all, who work on Sundays. This theme is developed in the *stefjabálkr* (stanzas 13–33), which comprises an enumeration of occasions in biblical history when God demonstrated his love for humankind by performing acts of grace on a Sunday. The poem ends with a series of prayers, and a ‘göfugr prestur’ (noble priest) called Rúnolfr is thanked for his help in the composition of the poem, which is described in a striking metaphor playing on

the similarity between the construction of an intricate poem and the building of a house:

Réð með oss, at óði,
er fróðr sá er vensk góðu,
greitt, hvé grundvöll settak,
göfugr prestur at hlut mestum;
yðr mun allra verða
auðsætt, bragar þætti,
ramligt hús þar er reistum
Rúnolfr, hvé fekk snúnat.

[A noble priest readily gave me advice as to how I should establish a foundation for the poem; wise is he who accustoms himself to (what is) good; to you of all people, Rúnolfr, it will be clear how I made this poem, where we built a solid house.] (*Leiðarvísan* 43; Attwood 1996b: 181)

Although *Leiðarvísan* lacks the beauty and emotional range of *Harmsól*, with which it shares several kennings and lines (Attwood 1996a), it is an impressive poem, structured to exploit the rhetorical possibilities offered by the *drápa* form. In the *stefjabálkr*, in particular, there is a clear attempt to group incidents around the symbolic number three (Chase 1993a: 75). The poem also provides interesting evidence for the reception of Christian apocrypha in Scandinavia: analogues of the ‘Sunday Letter’ exist in a variety of European vernaculars, and, although its actual source is unknown, *Leiðarvísan* has been shown to bear striking similarities to two surviving accounts of the theme in Middle High German, which might suggest a transmission route for similar folkloristic elements into Scandinavian Christianity (Attwood 1997: 39–44).

The Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries

As the subject matter of *Plácitus drápa* and *Leiðarvísan* suggests, by the end of the twelfth century, the inhabitants of the Icelandic monastic houses, and the products of the education system fostered in them, were spiritually mature counterparts of their continental *systkin* (siblings), subject to the same religious and intellectual influences. Although, as Guðrún Nordal has recently demonstrated, grammatical education in Iceland remained focused on examples drawn from traditional skaldic poetry (Nordal 2001), the Christian poetry of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, while still drawing extensively on the twelfth-century *drápur* for its dictional models, finds its inspiration more easily in mainstream Christian material, such as hymns, liturgical texts and, increasingly, the legends of the Virgin and the saints.

Two of the poems preserved alongside *Leiðarvísan* and *Harmsól* in the AM 757 a 4to anthology illustrate this shift in Christian skaldic sensibility. *Líknarbraut*, which was probably composed in the late thirteenth century, is essentially a meditation on the

Cross, which explores the tension between, on the one hand, the profound sorrow engendered by the sufferings of Christ and, on the other, the joy occasioned by the grace of the salvation they bring:

Því ber ek angr, at engu
 árs launa ek sárar
 skírs, sem skyldugt væri,
 skilfingi píníngar;
 þó gleðr enn sem aðra
 oss, sú er hlauz af krossi
 lýð ok lofðungs dauða,
 líkn dýr, himinríkis.

[On this account I bear sorrow – that I requite not at all, as duty would demand, the king of the pure year (Christ) for his sore torments; nevertheless, the precious grace which was allotted to people from the Cross and from the death of the king of heaven's kingdom (Christ) still gladdens me as well as others.] (*Líknarbraut* 10; Tate 1974: 55, 124)

As in *Harmsól*, the emotional burden of the poem is carried by an account of the Crucifixion, which here occupies the first part of the *stefjabálkr* (stanzas 14–20). *Líknarbraut* reflects contemporary Christian sensibilities in presenting the crucified Christ as a broken, suffering figure, rather than as the king or judge of earlier representations, and as deserving the audience's pity, rather than awe. The dramatic pathos and horror of the scene are captured in the jarring simplicity of diction, clause arrangement and word-order, and in a relentless attention to detail:

Nisti ferð í frosti
 fárlunduð við tré sáran
 (vasa hann verðugr písla)
 várn græðara iárnum;
 glymr varð hár af hómrum
 heyrðr, þá er nagla keyrðu
 hialms gnýviðir hilmí
 hófs í rístr ok lófa.

[A harm-minded host pinned our wounded saviour with irons to the tree in frost – he was not deserving of torment; high clanging was heard from hammers when din-trees of helmet (= warriors) drove nails into the insteps and palms of the prince of moderation.] (*Líknarbraut* 16; Tate 1974: 61, 138)

The tone of *Líknarbraut* changes completely in the *slæmr* (stanzas 30–52), which focuses on the Cross as an object of religious veneration. In a series of striking metaphors, it is apostrophized as a key (31), a ship carrying its precious cargo (Christ) towards heaven (stanza 33), a ladder (34), a bridge between heaven and earth (35),

scales balancing men's sin against the redemptive power of Christ's death (36) and a sacrificial altar (37). All of these images are patristic commonplaces, and many have been traced to Latin hymns and poems (Tate 1974: *passim*): the concept of the Cross as key, for example, occurs in St Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos* and in an early hymn to the Cross, which contains the verse *Agni Dei mors occasi / cruce clavi paradisi / reseravit ostium* ('The death of the slain Lamb of God unlocked the door of Paradise with the key of the Cross'; Tate 1974: 174). George Tate has also noted an apparent connection between the *slæmr* of *Líknarbraut* and the Good Friday liturgy, in which a reading of the Passion narrative from St John's Gospel is interspersed with the sung *improperia*, Christ's 'reproaches' from the Cross. That this ritual was current in Icelandic devotion is suggested by its inclusion in the fragmentary Ordinary from Gufudalur in the Skálholt diocese preserved in AM 266 4 to (c.1400), with which Tate has traced verbal and situational parallels in the final section of *Líknarbraut* (see Tate 1974: 170–213).

Heilags anda vísur, which is also preserved in AM 757 a 4 to, is roughly contemporary with *Líknarbraut*. The surviving fragment, 17 complete stanzas and one *helmingr*, appears to represent part of the *stefjabálkr* of a *drápa* in praise of the Holy Spirit. The tone is elevated, and there are several Latinisms, such as the rather complex phrase in stanza 3, where the Spirit is said to have *grænkæt geðfjöll snjöllu liði siðferðar blómi* (made the soul-mountains green for wise men with the bloom of morality), which perhaps recalls the Postcommunion Sentence of the Mass for Pentecost: *Sancti Spiritus, Domine, corda nostra mundet infusio: et sui roris intima aspersione faecundet* ('May the pouring in of the Holy Spirit, Lord, cleanse our hearts: and may it make fertile the inmost parts with the sprinkling of its moisture'; Attwood 1996b: 158). Elsewhere, the diction is similar to that of the twelfth-century Christian *drápur*, as in the God-kenning *rennir regns bátunnu ranns* (setter in motion of the house of the high-barrel of rain = setter in motion of the house of cloud = setter in motion of heaven = God). Sveinsson has demonstrated that stanzas 11–17 are a direct translation of the famous Latin Pentecost hymn *Veni creator spiritus* ('Come Creator spirit'), ascribed to Hrabanus Maurus (d. 856) (Sveinsson 1942: 140–50). The translation is literal and highly accurate, and it is interesting to note that the rather 'un-skaldic' imagery and phraseology are not permitted to disturb the structure of the anonymous poet's delicately balanced *dróttkvætt*. In stanza 14, for example, the intricate rendition of the Latin couplet which inspires the first *helmingr* is balanced by the equally well-wrought God-kenning in the second:

Accende lumen sensibus,
infunde amorem cordibus.

[Kindle light in our senses, pour love into our hearts.]

Tendra þú liós í leyndum
lundgóðr vitum þjóðar

bqls hirtir, vek biqrtum,
 biqrt, elskuga hiqrtu;
 hagr efl hallar feqrir,
 hverr er leystur er þér treystisk,
 várn líkama veykan
 vagns eilífu magni.

[Benevolent chastiser of sin, kindle bright lights in people's secret consciousness; rouse our hearts with incandescent love; skilful beautifier of the hall of the Wain (= beautifier of heaven = Holy Spirit), strengthen our weak body with everlasting strength; everyone who trusts in you is redeemed.] (*Heilags anda vísur* 14; Attwood 1996b: 154)

At times, the poet seems to be self-conscious about the curiously hybrid nature of his work. The intercalated phrase in the first *belmingr* of stanza 13, for example, which punctuates one of the most complex of the Latinate prayers, may be read either as a boast about the poem's impressive structure, or as an expression of anxiety:

Þinn er salkonungs sólar
 siauskiptur frami gipta,
 vandask, hægri handar
 hreinn fingur, bragar greinir.

[Pure finger of the right hand of the hall-king of the sun (= king of the hall of the sun = king of heaven = God, whose finger is the Holy Spirit), your glory is sevenfold; the poem's branches are becoming tangled (alternatively, the poem's parts are carefully ordered).] (*Heilags anda vísur* 13/1–4; Attwood 1996b: 154)

Probably the most famous of all Christian skaldic poems, and in many ways the logical culmination of the process of fusion of traditional skaldic elements and continental influences which we have traced through the history of Old Norse-Icelandic Christian poetry, is Eysteinn Ásgrímsson's *Lilja*. The poem is conventionally dated to the middle of the fourteenth century, and is a *drápa* in the *brynhent* metre in honour of the Virgin Mary. Its title, 'Lily', is familiar from Christian tradition as an honorific for the Virgin, and perhaps derives from a twelfth-century Latin hymn:

Tua sunt ubera
 vino redolentia,
 candor superat lac et lilia,
 odor flores vincit et balsama.

[Yours are breasts redolent with wine, their whiteness outdoes milk and lilies, their scent conquers flowers and balsam.] (Anonymous; quoted in Warner 1976: 192)

Although the poem is addressed to Mary, *Lilja*'s scope is far more expansive: its 100 stanzas essentially comprise a summary of the history of the world, from Creation to

the Last Judgement. The formal structure of the *drápa* is exploited to emphasize the circularity of the biblical narrative (Hill 1970, 1993). The *upphaf* consists of 25 stanzas, which begin with an invocation of the Trinity and narrate the story of the world from the Creation to the Incarnation, which, as we might expect in a poem dedicated to the Virgin, is represented by the Annunciation. This is balanced perfectly by the 25 stanzas of the *slæmr*, which comprises a series of prayers for the poet's forgiveness and stanzas in praise of Mary and the various persons of the Trinity. The *stefjabálkr* divides neatly into two sections, the second refrain being introduced at stanza 50. Stanzas 26–50 narrate the events of the life of Christ up to the Crucifixion, while stanzas 51–74 describe the defeat of Satan in the Passion, the Harrowing of Hell, the Ascension and Last Judgement. In addition to this circular patterning, Thomas Hill has drawn attention to a 'triangular' positioning of events relating to the atonement: the birth of Christ is narrated in stanza 33, his triumph against Satan (described in terms of the capture of an *ormr* – at once an allusion to the Miðgarðr Serpent and to Leviathan – on a fishing-hook) occurs in stanza 66, and Mary is thanked for her contribution to salvation in stanza 99, which, since stanza 100 repeats the opening stanza, effectively brings the poem to a close (Hill 1993: 392). Hill argues that 'this circular and triangular pattern . . . suggests the emblem of the circular triangle, usually represented in art as an equilateral triangle inscribed within a circle, frequently used as an emblem of the Trinity, and in some texts associated with the incarnation as well' (Hill 1970: 564–5).

In addition to this structural complexity, *Lilja* is a technical masterpiece, in which Eysteinn demonstrates his command of the skaldic form and an astonishing emotional range. One of the most moving passages is the account of the arrest and crucifixion of Christ in stanza 49, where the urgency of the events described in the first *belmingr* is reflected in the repetitious structure of the stanza:

Fúsir hlupu ok fundu Jésúm,
fundinn hrøktu, lǫmdu ok bundu,
bundinn leiddu, hæðnir hæddu,
hæddan, rægðan, slógu ok afklæddu;
fjandans börnin þröngum þyrni
þessum spenna um blessat ennit,
þessir negla Krist á krossinn,
keyra járn, svá stökk út dreyri.

[Eagerly, they ran to find Jesus. Found, they whipped him, bruised and bound him. Bound, they led him, the mockers mocked him. Mocked and slandered, they struck and stripped him. The devil's children placed a tight circlet of thorns around his blessed forehead. They nail Christ to the Cross, drive in iron nails, so that the blood flowed.]
(*Lilja* 49; Jónsson 1912–15: 2B, 403)

The metrical beauty and dictional simplicity of *Lilja* were greatly admired by subsequent generations of Christian poets, to the extent that a famous Icelandic proverb, *öll*

skáld vildu Lilju kveðið hafa (all skalds would like to have composed *Lilja*), arose (Hill 1993: 392). Its influence, however, was to prove too much for those traditional wine-skins of Old Norse-Icelandic poetry, *dróttkvætt* and the classical kenning, which are not a feature of late medieval Christian poetry. Instead, the poets of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries wrote exclusively on the themes brought to them from the mainstream of European Christian poetry: the saints, the Cross and the Virgin Mary (Chase 1993a: 76). Long neglected by scholars, these texts are beginning to receive critical attention (see, for example, Wrightson 2001), and it is hoped that their place in, and relationship to, continental literature will be a focus for future research.

Perhaps the most idiosyncratic of all Norse-Icelandic Christian poems is *Sólarljóð*. This poem is the only surviving Christian text to have been composed in the eddic *ljóðabáttr* metre (see chapter 15). It takes as its models both the gnomic or wisdom poems of the Poetic Edda, notably *Hávamál*, and European vision literature, particularly accounts of hell and the other world. Parallels have also been drawn with *Hugsvinnsmál*, a *ljóðabáttr* translation of the *Disticha Catonis*, which dates from the thirteenth century (Amory 1993: 607). Largely on the basis of these parallels, the poem – which is preserved only in paper manuscripts from the seventeenth century – is usually dated to the thirteenth century, though some linguistic details might suggest a later dating, perhaps to the beginning of the fourteenth century (Amory 1993: 607). The basic narrative of the poem is not immediately clear, but it appears to be a dream vision, in which a recently dead father returns from the other world and appears to his son. The father offers guidance about moral behaviour, illustrated by a series of *exempla*, and goes on to give eyewitness accounts of the punishments of the wicked in hell and the rewards of the righteous in heaven.

At the heart of the poem is a beautiful and moving passage which seems to be an evocation of the father's death (stanzas 39–46). In an apparent allusion to the biblical and exegetical image of Christ as the 'sun of righteousness' (Malachi 4:2), the narrator begins each of the six stanzas with the haunting phrase *Sól ek sá* (I saw the sun), before describing each successive manifestation of the sun and the effect that the sight had on his soul as it approached the moment of death. It is interesting to note that the poet uses generalized 'reminiscences' of the imagery of pagan poetry, such as mentions of runes or the religiously ambiguous 'Hel', to add a sinister edge to his vision, just as, elsewhere in the poem, more explicit references to *Hávamál* (see chapter 5) are used to render his account of hell more terrifying:

Sól ek sá, sanna dagstjörnu,
drúpa dimmheimum í;
en helgrind heyrðak annan veg
þjóta þungliga.

Sól ek sá setta dreyrstøfum,
mjök vark þá ór heimi hallr;
móttug hon leizk á marga vegu
frá því sem fyrri var.

[39. I saw the sun, the true day-star, bending low in dark worlds; and on the other side, I heard Hel's barred gate creak heavily. 40. I saw the sun bedecked with bloody runes; I was then pitching out of the world. (The sun) seemed mighty in many ways, compared with how it was before.] (*Sólarljóð* 39–40; Njarðvík 1993: 45–6)

Although the author of *Sólarljóð* is unknown, the careful allusions to pagan material in his poem, both the generalized 'reminiscences' and the reworkings of literary texts, suggest that he is likely to have been a cleric who was both sensitive to the resonances of the classical themes of Norse pagan poetry and alert to the possibility of requisitioning it for Christ. In this unique Christian eddic poem, then, we at last find the richly flavoured, full-bodied liquor that results from the blending of Odinic mead with the wine of European Christian communion.

See also CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; EDDIC POETRY; FAMILY SAGAS; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; METRE AND METRICS; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; PROSE OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION; RHETORIC AND STYLE; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; SKALDIC POETRY.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Editions and Translations

- Attwood, Katrina (1996b) 'The Poems of MS AM 757 a 4to: an Edition and Contextual Study.' Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds.
- Chase, Martin (1981) 'Einar Skúlason's *Geisli*: A Critical Edition.' Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toronto.
- Jónsson, Finnur (ed.) (1912–15) *Den norske-islandske skjaldedigtning*, vols. A.1–2: *Tekst efter håndskrifterne*, vols. B.1–2: *Rettet tekst*. Copenhagen.
- Louis-Jensen, Jonna (ed.) (1998) '*Plácitus drápa*.' In J. Tucker (ed.) *Plácitus saga* (Editiones Arnarnagæanæ B.31). Copenhagen, pp. 87–124.
- Njarðvík, Njörður (ed.) (1993) *Sólarljóð: Solsången* (Akademisk avhandling för filosofiedoktorsexamen i nordiska språk, Göteborgs universitet, Institutionen för svenska språket). Gothenburg.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur (ed.) (1934) *Laxdæla saga* (Íslensk fornrit V). Reykjavík.
- Tate, George (ed.) (1974) '*Líknarbraut*: a skaldic *drápa* on the Cross.' Unpublished PhD thesis, Cornell University.
- Tucker, John (ed.) (1998) *Plácitus saga* (Editiones Arnarnagæanæ B.31). Copenhagen.

- Whaley, Diana (1998) *The Poetry of Arnórr jarla-skáld: An Edition and Study* (Westfield Publications in Medieval Studies 8). London.
- Whaley, Diana (transl.) (2002) 'The Saga of Hallfred Troublesome-Poet.' In Diana Whaley (ed.) *Sagas of Warrior-Poets*. London, pp. 71–108.
- Wrightson, Kellinde (ed.) (2001) *Fourteenth-Century Icelandic Verse on the Virgin Mary*. London.

Secondary Literature

- Amory, Frederic (1993) 'Sólarljóð.' In Philip Pulsiano, Paul Acker and Kirsten Wolf (eds.) *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*. New York, pp. 607–8.
- Attwood, Katrina (1996a) 'Intertextual Aspects of the Twelfth-Century Christian *drápur*.' *Saga-Book* 24, 221–39.
- Attwood, Katrina (1997) '*Leiðarvísan* and the "Sunday Letter" Tradition in Scandinavia.' In *Sagas and the Norwegian Experience: Preprints of the 10th International Saga Conference, Trondheim, 3–9 August 1997*. Trondheim, pp. 33–46.
- Chase, Martin (1993a) 'Christian Poetry: West Norse.' In Philip Pulsiano, Paul Acker and Kirsten Wolf (eds.) *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*. New York, pp. 73–7.

- Chase, Martin (1993b) 'Einarr Skúlason.' In Philip Pulsiano, Paul Acker and Kirsten Wolf (eds.) *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*. New York, p. 159.
- Edwards, Diana (1982–3) 'Christian and Pagan References in Eleventh-Century Norse Poetry: The Case of Arnórr jarlaskáld.' *Saga-Book* 21, 34–53.
- Fidjestøl, Bjarne (1992) 'Pagan Beliefs and Christian Impact: The Contribution of Scaldic Studies.' In A. Faulkes and R. Perkins (eds.) *Viking Revaluations*. London, pp. 100–20.
- Foote, Peter (1984) 'Observations on "Syncretism" in early Icelandic Christianity.' In M. Barnes, H. Bekker-Nielsen and G. W. Weber (eds.) *Aurvandilstá: Norse Studies*. Odense, pp. 84–100. (Originally published 1974.)
- Hill, Thomas (1970) 'Number and Pattern in *Lilja*.' *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 69, 561–7.
- Hill, Thomas (1993) 'Lilja.' In Philip Pulsiano, Paul Acker and Kirsten Wolf (eds.) *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*. New York, pp. 391–2.
- Jónsson, Finnur (1931) *Lexicon Poeticum Antiquae Linguae Septentrionalis* (rpt 1966). Copenhagen.
- Lange, Wolfgang (1958) *Studien zur christlichen Dichtung der Nordgermanen 1000–1200* (Palaestra 222). Göttingen.
- Minnis, Alastair (1984) *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*. London.
- Nordal, Guðrún (2001) *Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. Toronto.
- Noreen, Erik (1922) *Studier i fornvästnordisk diktning*, vol. 2 (*Uppsala Universitetes Årsskrift. Filosofi, språkvetenskap och historiska vetenskaper* 4). Uppsala.
- Paasche, Fredrik (1948) *Hedenskap og kristendom*. Oslo.
- Skard, Vemund (1953) 'Harmsól, Plácítúsdrápa og Leiðarvísan.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 68, 97–108.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur (1942) 'Íslenzk sálmaþýðing frá 13. öld: Heilags anda vísur.' *Skírnir* 116, 140–50.
- Vésteinsson, Orri (2000) *The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power and Social Change, 1000–1300*. Oxford.
- Warner, Marina (1976) *Alone of all her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (rpt 1990). London.
- Whaley, Diana (2000) 'Myth and Religion in the Poetry of a Reluctant Convert.' In M. Clunies Ross and G. Barnes (eds.) *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society: Proceedings of the Eleventh International Saga Conference*. Sydney, pp. 556–71.

Continuity? The Icelandic Sagas in Post-Medieval Times

Jón Karl Helgason

In 1945, the first year of Iceland's independence after almost 700 years of Norwegian and later Danish rule, the writer Halldór Kiljan Laxness wrote his classic article 'Notes on the Sagas' ('Minnisgreinar um fornsögur'). In this work, Laxness airs his views on the early Icelandic sagas, with special emphasis on *Njáls saga*. He asks literary scholars not to be annoyed with him or to regard him as a trespasser in their field; his simple plea is that, as an Icelandic writer, he 'cannot exist without constantly thinking about the old books' (Laxness 1946: 9).

Laxness was in fact thinking quite a bit about 'the old books' in the 1940s, as he was not only responsible for certain controversial modern-spelling editions of several sagas that came out at the time, but was also working on his novel *Iceland's Bell* (*Íslandsklukkan*). One of the main characters in this historical novel is the seventeenth-century manuscript collector Arnas Arnæus – alias Árni Magnússon (1663–1730) – a figure who makes his first appearance in the third chapter, looking for pages of vellum from valuable manuscripts in the farmhouse home of the central character, Jón Hreggviðsson.

Iceland's Bell, like Laxness's 'Notes on the Sagas', deals in part with the Icelanders' reception of the ancient literature. No sooner has Arnæus entered Jón Hreggviðsson's poor abode than the farmer starts to praise the saga heroes. Unfortunately, he says, the household has only a few books and nobody there really knows how to read except his mother. From her, however, Jón Hreggviðsson has learned:

all the necessary sagas, ballads, and old genealogies, and he claimed to be descended from Haraldur Hilditönn, the Danish king, on his father's side. He said that he would never forget such excellent ancients as Gunnar of Hlíðarendi, King Pontus, and Örvar-Oddur, who were twelve ells high and could have lived to be three hundred years old if they hadn't run into any trouble, and that if he had such a book he would send it immediately and for free to the king and his counts, to prove to them that there had indeed once been real men in Iceland. On the other hand, he reckoned, it was hardly due

to impenitence that the Icelanders were now fallen into misery, because when had Gunnar of Hlíðarendi ever done penance? Never. (Laxness 1943: 37–8; Laxness 2003: 20)

In these few lines, Laxness gives a good idea of the role the sagas may have played in the lives of the common people in Iceland in earlier times. First of all, they supplied them with suitable role models; second, they provided them with a noble ancestry; and third, they offered a Golden Age of the past as a counter to contemporary miseries. The premise for all these points seems to be a firm belief in the historicity of the sagas, in spite of their no more than flickering verisimilitude.

Laxness addresses the same points in his ‘Notes on the Sagas’. In his conclusion, he states that throughout its ‘long dark ages’ the Icelandic nation practically owed its survival to this ancient literature: ‘This gift was its life-line, its life in death. The confidence in the hero who lets neither injuries nor death upset him and does not know how to surrender – this belief in manhood was our religion.’ And Laxness (1946: 65–6) continues: ‘When we were at the height of our humiliation the ancient sagas still stated that we were heroes and of royal lineage. The ancient sagas were our invincible fortress and it is on their account that we are an independent nation today.’ At the same time, Laxness thought it was high time for the independent Icelandic nation to abandon its belief in the historicity of the sagas; in fact one of his main purposes in writing the article was to argue that the sagas were great works of fiction rather than factual history.

Laxness was not the first Icelander to undermine the historicity of the sagas in this period, but what makes his claims particularly interesting is the status he himself has since acquired within the canon of Icelandic literature. More will be said about his status in the conclusion to this chapter, the main purpose of which, however, is to look at other sources revealing the popular reception of the saga literature in Iceland in post-medieval times. As in Laxness’s article, the focus will be placed on the reception of *Njáls saga*, since much of what can be said about this renowned work applies to the corpus of Icelandic sagas as a whole. In addition, reference will be made to two surveys of which records are preserved in the Icelandic National Museum, and in which two groups of Icelanders (the first born in 1850–1900, the second in 1900–30) answered questionnaires regarding the impact the sagas had had on their lives and ideas. The first survey was conducted by the Danish scholar Holger Kjær in the 1920s and the second by the Icelandic National Museum in 1994.¹

Heroic Literature

During their initial 300 years, after which they were first written down, the sagas circulated within Iceland mainly orally and in the form of transcripts. The contemporary documentation of how these texts were utilized between 1300 and 1600 is scarce, but as Pálsson has convincingly illustrated, we may suppose that semi-public

readings of family sagas and various forms of non-secular literature were a favourite pastime on Icelandic farms in this period. In support of his case, Pálsson quotes a passage from an account written in Latin by the Reverend (later Bishop) Oddur Einarsson in 1590, describing the hospitality of Icelandic farmers: 'The concern that even farmers have for their guests is so great that nothing they think might offer entertainment is neglected. Sometimes they grab the storybooks of the homestead and, in a clear voice, read for several hours of various people and other ancient texts of interest' (Pálsson 1962: 35). This tradition of reading, which continued into the twentieth century, reveals how the typical Icelandic audience of the ancient sagas initially received these narratives in oral form. And just as individual scribes rewrote the manuscripts they were transcribing – adding and omitting words, sentences, verses and even passages – so one can imagine that each reading (or performance) of a particular manuscript would be different from another.

Regarding the manuscript tradition, it is interesting to note how some of the scribes even felt the urge to curse the enemies of saga heroes such as Gunnarr Hámundarson and Njáll Þorgeirsson in *Njáls saga*. For example, in one fifteenth-century manuscript of *Njáls saga*, notable for its additional comments, the scribe refers to Gunnarr's killers as 'bastards' and to Mǫrðr Valgarðsson, who plots Gunnarr's death and may be seen as partly responsible for the burning of Njáll's farm at Bergþórshváll, as an 'infamous moron' (cf. Sveinsson 1953: 18–19). Comments of this sort, alien to the detached style of the saga, can be regarded as a belated literary revenge for the death of individual saga characters, but they testify more generally to the tendency of the Icelandic audience to think about the saga plot in terms of heroes and villains.

More evidence for this claim will be presented below, but one should bear in mind that it is quite possible that more ironic attitudes towards the saga heroes circulated within the society of these early times, particularly among women (cf. Kress 1996: 101–34). However, the evidence for such views is scarce; the most typical theme in the popular reception of the saga in Iceland in earlier times is found in sentences like the following from *Njáls saga*, ch. 77: 'The slaying of Gunnar was spoken badly of in all parts of the land, and his death brought great sorrow to many' (Hreinsson et al. 1997: III, 90). The same view is reiterated within the saga in a skaldic verse ascribed to Þorkell Elfaraskáld, a thirteenth-century poet whose identity is unknown outside this reference. According to this testimony, Gunnarr showed great daring as he defended himself, wounding 16 and killing two (ibid.). Predating the oldest manuscripts of *Njáls saga*, this verse serves as a verification of the foregoing prose account of the hero's defence. It suggests that years before the first written version of the saga came into existence, medieval Icelanders had found Gunnarr's death remarkable, and his skill in arms a praiseworthy quality.

A number of other poems referring to the sagas have been preserved from the early period of the sagas' reception, most notably those belonging to the genre of hero-poems, in which male characters from diverse sagas and romances are glorified in poetic form, one verse generally being devoted to each hero. One such hero-poem,

composed by Bergsteinn Þorvaldsson and dating from the second half of the sixteenth century, may serve as an example. Here, two characters from *Njáls saga* – Kári Sölmundarson and Skarpheðinn Njálsson – are briefly portrayed, alongside Roland and about 20 other heroes known to the Icelandic public at the time, either through prose narratives or through the versified narrative form of *rímur* (see chapter 12). Kári is specifically praised for avenging those who died in the burning at Bergþórshvöll: ‘on behalf of his burned best kinsfolk / he sent farmers to hell’ (cf. Helgason, Egilsson and Einarsson 2001). Another similar example from the eighteenth century is a poem called ‘Skarpheðinn’s Axe’, composed by Páll Vídalín in the metre and style of a skaldic verse, in which the masculine power of Skarpheðinn Njálsson is glorified. Even as late as 1931, Kári S. Sölmundarson composed a traditional hero-poem of almost 80 stanzas, calling Gunnarr Hámundarson a ‘valiant gentleman’ and Skarpheðinn Njálsson ‘sturdy’, while praising his own namesake, Kári Sölmundarson, for his skill at arms (ibid.).

Up until the late nineteenth century, almost all the written poetry in Iceland was composed by male poets. A notable exception is the work of Steinunn Finnsdóttir. Born just before the middle of the seventeenth century, she is the first woman in Icelandic literary history known to have left us with a considerable corpus of poems, including at least one traditional hero-poem. As Kristjánsdóttir (1998) has pointed out, Steinunn Finnsdóttir, unlike the male poets, often expresses a humorous and even ironic attitude towards the saga heroes. For instance, she seems to have a detached view of the heroes of *Njáls saga*: when she praises them she does so by referring to the views of others: ‘One could hear that no hero / had a greater ability to fight’, she says about Gunnarr Hámundarson, without really stating whether she agrees. In her conclusions, furthermore, she states that she is happy to acknowledge that the saga ends with Christian forgiveness and compensation (cf. Helgason, Egilsson and Einarsson 2001).

Ólason (1989: 209) claims that the traditional emphasis on the sagas as heroic literature played a vital role in the life of the Icelandic nation in earlier times, in particular between 1300 and 1550. In that period the heroes served as role-models, encouraging men to become stronger, not only for when their chieftains needed them as troops but also, and perhaps even more importantly, in their daily conflict with the harsh nature of Iceland. The central figure of *Iceland’s Bell*, Jón Hreggviðsson, reflects a fictional personification of this view, but how far did it fit in with the realities of nineteenth-century Icelandic farms? The HK survey certainly supports Ólason’s view, suggesting that the sagas continued to strengthen the spirit of the male (and perhaps also the female) population of Iceland into the twentieth century. A man born in 1889 recalls the literature that was read aloud at the nightly gatherings in his childhood home in western Iceland:

The main readings were the ancient sagas about Icelandic heroes and strong men, and the *rímur* were romances about valiant men and beautiful women . . . And I know that the stories about Gunnarr and Egill and Grettir filled many Icelandic men with energy.

And I know too that the stories about Bergþóra, Helga the daughter of the jarl, and Auðr, the wife of Gísli Súrsson, have served many good women as role-models. (HK 45: 407)

Another man from northern Iceland, born in 1852, states that the literature of the Golden Age undoubtedly inspired some people, at least, with 'heroism and bravery' (HK 12: 108). A third, born in southern Iceland in 1857, makes a similar claim, adding: 'I don't think the fighting-spirit in the sagas had a negative influence...; indeed it inspired us and made us more ambitious in our daily work; it was a conflict that we wanted to win' (HK 13: 121).

More generally, however, it seems that the greatest impact that sagas had was on the younger generation. A man born in 1892 in northern Iceland states that toys were scarce in his youth, but that sometimes skilful adults would carve little human and animal figures out of wood: 'The children often gave these wooden people various names, in particular names drawn from the old literature, and with them, they acted out certain scenes from the sagas' (HK 35: 319–20). It was also common for boys to take on the roles of certain saga heroes and imitate their fights. Another man from northern Iceland, born in 1898, writes about this tradition: 'One was Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi, another one was Grettir, the third Skarpheðinn, and so on. Each had his own "sword" which would be the shaft of a broken rake. You needed to break the "sword" of your enemy to win' (HK 24: 199).

This traditional view of the sagas as heroic seems to have weakened considerably in the twentieth century. The change can be noted when one compares the HK survey (made up of testimonies of people born between 1850 and 1900) with the INM survey (testimonies of people born between 1900 and 1930). Certainly, in the latter group the traditional views can still be found. A man born in northwestern Iceland in 1908 states, for example, that he started to read the Icelandic family sagas at the age of 8, and considers it likely that these texts made people adore the heroes, 'but at the same time they encouraged you to be honest, and a man of your word' (INM 11403). A few also fondly recall the role-playing games, but others describe the saga heroes in negative terms. A woman from northwestern Iceland, born in 1920, criticizes the violent nature of these games and points out that the violence inspired by the sagas contradicted the religious upbringing of children (INM 11298). She does not degrade the sagas directly, but another woman, from Reykjavík and born in 1913, certainly does, stating that 'I never read the old sagas; I found them ugly and boring' (INM 11251). Other women make similar claims.

It is possible that Icelandic men and women have always had somewhat different attitudes towards the sagas. A woman born in western Iceland in 1906 says, for instance, that the ancient literature most certainly influenced the world-view of her brothers, but not her own (INM 11359). On the other hand, it is interesting to find how many Icelandic men born between 1900 and 1930 claim to be untouched by the sagas, some of them agreeing with the aforementioned female opinion that the sagas are boring and even had a bad influence on the young. A man from northwestern

Iceland, born in 1905, states: 'I did not particularly enjoy reading the family sagas. I had a hard time figuring out all their complex genealogy, and from early on I disliked all the killings described in them' (INM 11323). Another man from northern Iceland, born in 1927, seems to be fully aware of the possible negative side-effects of saga reading but is nevertheless happy to acknowledge their influence on himself: 'Heroes such as Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi and Kári Sölmundarson became my role-models... I think the family sagas toughened me up for confronting the realities of life; they made me a better Icelander, but perhaps also more harsh-tempered' (INM 11930).

Returning to the poetic tradition, it is interesting to note that traditional heroic poetry inspired by the sagas is harder to find in the works of twentieth-century Icelandic poets than in the literature of previous generations. This transition towards a more critical and even ironic view could be located somewhere in the period between 1882, when the poet and politician-to-be Hannes Hafstein published his poem 'Skarphéðinn in the Burning' ('Skarphéðinn í brennunni'), and 1937, when the modernist poet Steinn Steinarr published another poem with the same title. Hafstein belonged to a group of Icelandic literary realists and was accordingly critical of the way in which earlier poets had idealized the Golden Age described in the sagas. None the less, he found that the description of Skarphéðinn Njálsson's death in *Njáls saga* presented a supreme image of masculinity (Helgason, Egilsson and Einarsson 2001). Steinarr's approach, however, was very different, even though in his poem he follows the testimony of the saga rather closely. In Steinarr's poem, Skarphéðinn speaks in the first person:

It is a lie, what they say.
I did try to escape,
I did try to escape, in the paralyzed terror
Of a dying man.

But there was no way out.

And I could hear you whisper:
Let him die.
What is it to us?
It is not our fault!

You should be thankful!
That I didn't escape. (ibid.)

Symbolically, this poem describes not only the last moments of Skarphéðinn Njálsson but also the end of the heroic saga tradition in Icelandic literature. As Ólason (1989: 227) has argued, Halldór Laxness directly confronted that tradition in his novel *Independent People* (*Sjálfstætt fólk*), which was published in two parts, in 1934 and 1935. Laxness later ridiculed it in his saga pastiche *The Happy Warriors* (*Gerpla*), published in 1952.

The Moral Lessons of the Golden Age

Alongside the worship of the masculine qualities of the saga heroes, another, very different tradition flourished in Iceland, in which more general educational and ethical questions were at stake. Pálsson (1962: 143–55), quoting various Icelandic prose works from the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries, has shown that this tradition is as old as the sagas themselves, but it should be sufficient to open the present discussion with examples from several books written in Latin by Arngrímur Jónsson (1568–1648). Arngrímur's patron was his cousin, Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson, one of the pioneers of Icelandic printing, renowned for publishing (and partly translating) the first Icelandic edition of the Bible in 1584. Agitated by several inaccurate and unflattering descriptions of Iceland published in Europe in the sixteenth century, Guðbrandur urged Arngrímur to write his earliest work, *A Short Account of Iceland* (*Brevis commentarius de Islandia*; Ionam 1593). This was followed by three other books relating to the history of Iceland, most significantly *Crymogæa, or The History of Iceland in Three Books* (*Crymogæa, sive rerum Islandicarum libri III*, 1609).

Eager to portray the cultivation of his nation in both the past and the present, Arngrímur Jónsson frequently refers in his books to characters and incidents from the family sagas. In *A Short Account of Iceland*, for instance, he rewrites *Njáls saga's* characterization of the peacemaker Njáll Þorgeirsson, highlighting the saga's description of Njáll's final hour:

[When Njáll] saw death approaching, he said: 'No one can escape their destiny', meaning, 'This is according to God's will. But I put all my hope and faith in Christ, and trust that even though our base bodies will suffer the same fate as all mortal flesh and will be devoured by the flames of the enemy, God will not let us [i.e. himself and his wife] burn in the eternal fire.' With these words on his lips he died in the fire in the year of 1010, with his wife and son...; his words would be worthy of any of God's children and gave him the utmost comfort in his bitter death-struggle. (Ionam 1593: 53)

It is not known for certain which version of the saga Arngrímur was citing, for in the preserved manuscripts, Njáll's final words are not given in the first person. We are told only that Njáll and his wife Bergþóra 'crossed themselves and the boy and turned their souls over to God's hands' (Hreinsson et al. 1997: III, 156). Arngrímur's rendering of these lines, on the other hand, certainly fits his broader ideological purpose, since he is trying to illustrate how 'advanced' the Christian faith in Iceland already was just a few years after the acceptance of Christianity.

This theme of Christianity resurfaces several times within the reception of *Njáls saga* in the following centuries. In her hero-poem, already quoted, Steinunn Finnsdóttir favours those characters of the saga who display compassion and forgiveness.

The best example of this kind, however, is a seventeenth-century poem by the Reverend Bjarni Gissurarson, called 'Some Noblemen in *Njáls saga*' ('Um göfugmenn nokkur í Njálu'). This contrasts with traditional hero-poems in concentrating on those characters of the saga that converted to Christianity. The first stanza, for instance, is devoted to Njáll and reads like a rhymed paraphrase of the chapter from *A Short Account of Iceland*, quoted above (Helgason, Egilsson and Einarsson 2001).

It is particularly interesting to read the testimonies of the HK survey from this point of view. Icelanders born in the latter half of the nineteenth century do not seem to have adored their heathen saga heroes blindly, but rather to have been inspired by the sagas to discuss fundamental ethical questions. A man born in northern Iceland in 1861 claims that discussions of such questions commonly followed readings from individual sagas:

Both the older and younger members of the audience paid close attention to what was being read, and at intervals people would talk about the subject; they would often have different opinions, and when the sagas were being read people favoured different characters. Some people even made excuses for the evil deeds and flaws described in the sagas and tried to argue that this was inevitable, while others contradicted them, and often there was heated debate. This discussion would sharpen our [the children's] sense of the personalities of individual characters; we could see how they wove their thread of destiny towards fame and valour, happiness and success, or towards disgrace and a fall, life or death. My heart was burning and my eyes were often filled with tears of happiness or sorrow. (HK 1: 5–6)

It is also noted that in their role-playing games, children would at times follow those ethics that Bjarni Gissurarson had favoured in his poem. A man from northern Iceland, born in 1854, writes: 'We boys wanted very much to be like the noble-minded saga-heroes. We held the highest respect for those heroes that showed mercy to their enemies, and we acted out their roles' (HK 19: 166). These testimonies can be confirmed by the research of the historian Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon. Referring primarily to autobiographical writings, Magnússon claims (1995: 66) that even though the Protestant church exercised a strong cultural influence on the Icelandic rural community of the nineteenth century, its teaching was neither very attractive nor comprehensible to children. On the contrary, the church and its morality, along with the harsh living conditions of the time, suppressed children emotionally. Autobiographies of people born in the latter half of the nineteenth century suggest that the children found more accessible role-models in the sagas than they found in church.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, various changes brought an end to the tradition of the nightly readings of sagas on the Icelandic farms. A greater variety of literature, social development and technical progress (notably the radio) all had an effect in this respect. A few of those Icelanders who took part in the HK survey mention these changes. One man from northern Iceland, born in 1852, writes in his testimony from 1924:

People hardly read the literature of our Golden Age any more. It is hard to find young people these days that are familiar with the family sagas, for instance; what you can say is that the public is to a large extent reading pulp-fiction and rubbish. The old literature has kept our language and culture alive, but if we neglect it our nationality is at risk. (HK 12:109)

Icelanders born in the period 1900 to 1930 confirm the decreasing importance of the ancient literature. More than 60 per cent of the people claim that the sagas have had little or no influence on their views. The rest see themselves rather as exceptional cases. They too are often fully aware of the fact that some people find the family sagas morally suspect. A man from northwestern Iceland, born in 1917, says that he had started to read the sagas at the age of 10. He then adds:

These were the thrillers of the time; the plots kept my interest awake. The feuds and the bloody fights were exciting. The hero, the champion, was elevated in a gleam of fame. Most often, according to the saga, he was also more honourable than the villain. I don't remember ever feeling bad about those who lost, were cut into pieces or crippled from their injuries. And I am afraid I never thought about the surviving relatives, women, children or parents in their old age. I didn't doubt the historicity of the sagas; in my view their testimony was more or less accurate. I recognized that the difference between homicide in the saga-age and killing in our own times could be explained by reference to different religions and morals. I probably got that idea from people who were older and wiser than I. (INM 12262)

The most important aspect of the sagas discussed by those Icelanders born between 1900 and 1930 in the INM survey leads us back to the writings of Arngrímur Jónsson. Benediktsson (1957: 31–81) has claimed that it is in Arngrímur's works that the saga period was initially defined as a Golden Age in Icelandic history. This is particularly evident in his *Crymogæa*. Here Arngrímur's use of saga literature is even more substantial than it is in *A Short Account of Iceland*, with the genealogy and deeds of individual saga characters being used as a substitute for those descriptions of royal lineage and international warfare that are found in similar histories of other countries. One of Arngrímur's aims with the book is to provide his countrymen with a past comparable to the glorious past of other European nations, but at the same time he regrets the current state of affairs in Iceland.

Similar attitudes can be detected in some of the poems already quoted. In his 'Some Noblemen in *Njáls saga*', for instance, Bjarni Gissurarson regrets that Njáll's equals would be hard to find among seventeenth-century Icelanders. Most commonly, however, the poets would follow Arngrímur Jónsson in comparing the poor contemporary state of the economy, nature and society with the more impressive state of affairs in the saga period. Hallgrímur Pétursson's 'State of the Times' ('Aldarháttur') and Eggert Ólafsson's 'Iceland' ('Ísland'), composed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively, are cases in point, but as far as the poetry inspired by *Njáls saga*

is concerned, 'Fljótshlíð', composed by Bjarni Thorarensen in 1821, must be the best example of this approach:

Now Fljótshlíð,
 Once considered
 So very beautiful
 Has become a wet turf,
 Its feet, once standing
 On green pastures,
 Is now covered
 In mountain mud.

From his high cairn
 Gunnarr views this area,
 Once delightful,
 Now colourless,
 And he regrets
 That he returned
 To have his black bones
 Buried in this place of stones.

(Helgason, Egilsson and Einarsson 2001)

In this period, however, one can also see signs appearing of a new and more politically motivated use of the saga. Influenced by the philosophy of Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) and general political developments in Europe, Icelandic students and intellectuals in Copenhagen developed the idea that their country also deserved to be given independence; in fact, it was seen as a prerequisite for the nation to experience once again the Golden Age described in the saga literature. A key figure in the creation of this conception was the poet Jónas Hallgrímsson, who found the inspiration for his 1838 poem 'Gunnar's Holm' ('Gunnarshólmi') in a chapter of *Njáls saga* where Gunnarr Hámundarson makes a speech about the 'lovely... hillside' of Fljótshlíð. Already explored in a poem by the Reverend Gunnar Pálsson in the middle of the eighteenth century (cf. Johannessen 1958: 25–35), the scene reveals the hero's strong affection for nature and his home. In Jónas Hallgrímsson's poem, however, Gunnarr's decision to stay in Iceland, rather than accept a sentence of outlawry, is interpreted for the first time as an optimum symbol of Icelandic patriotism. The poet rephrases Gunnarr's speech from the saga, stressing his romantic, yet somewhat practical, sense of beauty:

'Never before has Iceland seemed so fair,
 the fields so golden, roses in such glory,
 such crowds of sheep and cattle everywhere!
 Here will I live, here die – in youth or hoary
 hapless old age – as God decrees. Good-bye,

brother and friend.’ Thus Gunnar’s gallant story.
 For Gunnar felt it nobler far to die
 than flee and leave his native shores behind him,
 even though foes, inflamed with hate and sly,
 were forging links of death in which to bind him.
 His story still can make the heart beat high.

(Ringler 2002: 137–8)

By the middle of the twentieth century, Gunnar’s ‘return’ had become so fully accepted by the Icelanders as a patriotic gesture that the scene – and thereby the saga which contained it – had begun to acquire the status of a national emblem, encompassing the Icelandic character as a whole. Johannessen (1958: 167) sums up the case in his study of the poetic tradition of *Njáls saga*: ‘If you mention *Njáls saga*, everybody knows what you mean. And “lovely is the hillside” has only one meaning: the deepest and the truest patriotism you can imagine.’

One further stepping-stone in this development is apparent in the public lectures of the Icelandic historian Jón Jónsson that were published in two volumes in 1903 and 1906 under the titles of *Icelandic Nationality* (*Íslenskt þjóðerni*) and *The Golden Age of the Icelanders* (*Gullöld Íslendinga*). In these books, Jón Jónsson uses the sagas to exemplify how advanced the life of the Icelanders was before the nation became subject to Norwegian and later Danish foreign rule. He sees the colonial period from 1262 as a dark age in Icelandic history, but suggests that since 1750 the nation has been experiencing a national awakening that will finally result in complete independence from Denmark. Jón Jónsson’s (1903: 256) basic views regarding the connection between the Golden Age and the prosperous future are summed up in the following statement from *Icelandic Nationality*: ‘What the nation was once, it can hopefully become again.’

Only a few of those Icelanders who took part in the HK survey express similar sentiments, referring to the sagas as a literature belonging to the Golden Age. One man, born in southern Iceland in 1857, certainly writes in this spirit:

The beauty of nature where majesty and elegance go hand in hand, tenderness and ruthlessness, scenes both lovely and sublime, all of these made an impression on us and empowered us, they kindled our love for our homes and our country. And this is no wonder, as we would often hear the poems of the poets that we loved so dearly. The reading of the sagas had the same effect and was combined with the voices of nature. Right in front of us we could see the mountain of Þríhyrningur, the Fljótshlíð ridge and the Eyjafjöll glacier, all reminding us of Gunnar and Njáll, and at the same time of freedom and fame, but also its antithesis, the poverty and enslavement of the present.
 (HK 13: 121)

Such views are more commonly expressed in the INM survey. Those Icelanders, born between 1900 and 1930, who acknowledge the positive influence of the sagas on their youth often glorify their nationality. Unlike the earlier poets, however, they

hardly ever talk about the poor contemporary state of affairs. A man born in Reykjavík in 1914 gives the following answer to the question, 'Have the sagas influenced your basic views of life?': 'Yes, most certainly. Primarily [they have] made me proud to be an Icelander, equal to anyone else' (INM 11250). Another man, born in Reykjavík in 1916, says he had not read the sagas himself in his youth but that his father had always had them close at hand: he 'told me a lot of these tales, and it made an impact. They turned me into a great Icelander, and made me hate the Danes!' (INM 11406). The most interesting testimony, however, comes from a man born in western Iceland in 1924:

Influenced my basic views of life? It's hard to say. I have always had the sense that I am nothing other than an Icelander, and indeed no more of a European than I'm a human being, but I'm not sure that this is especially because of the sagas . . . Their influence on society at large, however, was twofold: they were the source of the language and they justified our striving for recognition as a nation. (INM 11872)

These words echo those of Halldór Laxness in his 'Notes on the Sagas', where he says that it was on account of the sagas that Icelanders were 'an independent nation today'.

History or Fiction?

The premise for the public admiration of the Golden Age was the firm belief that the sagas were historically reliable, that is, that the nation had indeed experienced the glorious time described by the sagas. This seems to have been a general belief among the Icelanders from an early stage. Voices critical of this opinion are once again hard to find. The best-known is that of the manuscript collector Árni Magnússon, who specifically chastised the saga authors for elevating the Icelanders and their merits, 'as if they were superior to all other nations. The author of *Njáls saga* has been especially impudent in this respect' (Þorkelsson 1889: 786). Similar views became common among certain foreign saga scholars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, although many of them did not see the questionable historicity of the sagas in negative terms. They instead defined this literature rather as being the artistic composition of great writers.

In Iceland, however, belief in the factual historicity of the family sagas continued to prevail for some time. One of the signs of this was the extensive archaeological research carried out in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on the basis of individual sagas. Particularly prominent was the approach to some of the *Njáls saga* sites taken by Sigurður Vigfússon under the auspices of the Icelandic Archaeological Society. This work resulted in the publication of a number of articles on the issue and even in a scientific investigation of certain mysterious white chemicals that were found at the site of Bergþórshvoll. On the basis of the reference made in *Njáls saga's* account of the burning to the women trying to put out the fire with whey (ch. 129),

these white chemicals were believed to be ‘the remains of Bergþóra’s “skyr” [whey], or in other words preserved remains of milk products that had been prepared at Bergþórshvoll in the year in which Njáll and his sons were burnt, according to the saga’ (Storch 1887: 3). The chemicals were not unambiguously identified, but in a published report by the Danish chemist Vilhelm Storch it was admitted that they might be remains of a milk-product of some sort, most probably ‘cheese, which has been prepared from sour milk’ (ibid.: 22). The purpose of this investigation, like most of the archaeological research inspired by *Njáls saga*, was to verify the testimony of the narrative ‘scientifically’.

There were indeed some sceptical voices in Iceland by then also, but it is interesting that those who questioned individual points in *Njáls saga*, for instance, seemed to believe, none the less, that it was possible to infer the true account of Gunnarr, Njáll and other saga characters ‘behind’ the preserved narrative. In 1839, the poet Sigurður Breiðfjörð published a poem in defence of Hallgerðr Høskuldsdóttir, the wife of Gunnarr Hámundarson of Hlíðarendi. Within the poetic tradition, Hallgerðr had generally been held to be responsible for her husband’s death, since in the saga she refuses to give him strands of her hair to make a bow-string in his fatal hour (ch. 77). Breiðfjörð, on the other hand, doubted whether one could make bow-strings from human hair and suggested that some malicious person must have fabricated the scene to belittle Hallgerðr (Helgason, Egilsson and Einarsson 2001).

Even more remarkable examples of this search for the ‘true story’ of *Njáls saga* were the dreams of Hermann Jónasson, which he introduced to the Icelandic public in a lecture in February 1912 and published a few months later. Jónasson opened his lecture by relating various prophetic dreams he had dreamed from an early age, dreams that enabled him to locate lost sheep and save himself and fellow travellers from danger. Having established his credibility as an oracle, he then described how Ketill Sigfússon of Mork, one of the characters of *Njáls saga*, had visited him in a dream in 1893 to rectify the narrative of the saga. Early in their conversation, Ketill said he knew that Jónasson doubted the reliability of specific scenes in *Njáls saga*. Ketill said that some of that mistrust was justified, but stated that in other instances, the preserved text was historically truthful. His main concern was to reveal how the story of Høskuldr Þráinsson Hvítanessgoði – originally a separate saga, according to the dream – came to be falsified in the preserved version of *Njáls saga*. At this point, Jónasson noted, the dream became a mixture of Ketill’s voice, recounting the saga of Høskuldr word for word, and a vision of the events described. When the telling was over, six hours or 30 pages later, Ketill asked Jónasson (1912: 80) to publish this original version: ‘otherwise some people will continue to believe a fabrication, while others will dispute the validity of the saga as a whole because they sense that some of its points must be faulty’.

The HK survey seems to confirm the general belief of nineteenth-century Icelanders in the historicity of the sagas. One man born in northeastern Iceland in 1852 speaks for many others when he says that in his youth people were used to listening, at nightly gatherings on the farm, to readings from the Icelandic family sagas, the

legendary sagas, the sagas of the Norwegian kings, ‘and other historical works’ (HK 12: 107). The testimonies of certain other people suggest furthermore that the public conceived of the sagas not only as factual histories but also as having the more general character of encyclopedias. A man born in northeastern Iceland in 1883 says that he gleaned various kinds of information about Iceland from the sagas, ‘for instance from those chapters describing people’s travel. It was my first geographical knowledge’ (HK 28: 248–9). Similar views are expressed by a woman from western Iceland, born in 1920, who participated in the INM survey. She claims that the reading of the sagas prepared young people for further studies (INM 11582).

More generally, the INM survey testifies that in the twentieth century the sagas gradually became a part of the curriculum in the developing Icelandic school system. A man from Reykjavík, born in 1916, has an illuminating story to tell:

My sister Valgerður was in the Women’s College [Kvennaskóli], studying for exams. Our nephew, Eggert, was the farmer at Mýrar; he was both intelligent and widely read. He stayed at our house in Bankastræti. He asks Valgerður what she is reading. She says she is reading *Njáls saga*, and that she is not enjoying it. He then offers to tell her its story, which would make her life much easier. She accepts his good offer and from then on she says she knows *Njáls saga*. And in the exam she excelled with her knowledge of the saga. (INM 11406)

Another man participating in the INM survey, born in western Iceland in 1930, claims that when he was young, children generally would not read the sagas as they thought that they knew ‘the main points regarding characters and events from the history of Iceland written by Jónas Jónsson’. The man is referring to an influential textbook, *The History of Iceland for Children (Íslandssaga banda börnum)* by Jónas Jónsson, which was originally published in 1915 and used in elementary schools into the 1980s. In some respects, the book is a simplified version of Jón Jónsson’s *The Golden Age of Iceland*, since the Icelandic family sagas form Jónas Jónsson’s primary sources for the ‘saga age’. ‘Never since then,’ writes Jónas Jónsson, ‘have so many excellent people, men and women alike, lived in Iceland. However, all too seldom did their human qualities walk hand in hand with blessedness.’ Accordingly, Jónas Jónsson (1915: 57) finds this period both ‘admirable and sad’. Yet he does not ask his young readers to doubt the testimony of the sagas; indeed, a large part of his work consists of summary biographies of major saga characters, in the manner of Arngrímur Jónsson’s *Crymogæa*.

This development, though, was not to everyone’s liking. A man from northeastern Iceland, taking part in the HK survey, wrote in 1929 that the nightly readings of the sagas on the Icelandic farms ensured that young people would get ‘a firm knowledge of history and the human character, very different from the “summarized learning” that characterizes the elementary schools of the present’ (HK 28: 251). One senses here a class difference between the conservative older generation on the one hand and, on the other, the younger generation of intellectuals who were in charge of the

developing public school system. This class difference in generations can also be sensed in the writings of those Icelandic literary scholars who were influenced by foreign ideas in the first part of the twentieth century. Instructive here are the words of Björn M. Ólsen (1937–9: 43), the first professor of Icelandic studies at the University of Iceland, who claimed in the 1920s that some of his countrymen found it ‘near blasphemous to question the historical value of our sagas. They feel that the sagas are denigrated if anything in them can be doubted.’ Ólsen himself was of a different cast of mind. Influenced by the Swiss saga scholar and translator Andreas Heusler, Ólsen approached the sagas specifically from an aesthetic viewpoint. As time passed, an increasingly large proportion of the general population began sharing the doubts expressed by Ólsen and Laxness about the historical accuracy of the sagas. Symbolic in this context are the words of one woman, born in western Iceland in 1920, who claimed in the INM survey that the family sagas were ‘fictional, violent stories that were of no use to anyone and have no significance for me whatsoever’ (INM 11362).

Of course, the picture of this development given above has been simplified. Many of those who participated in the INM survey, for instance, make no mention of the sagas as being the most important literary influence in their youth, but rather focus on frequent readings from religious works. Others fail to make any great distinction between, on the one hand, what the sagas had to say about the achievements of their heroes and, on the other, contemporary discussions in the Reykjavík parliament, or the latest news from South Africa about the Boer War. Even so, it seems indisputable that in the first half of the twentieth century a growing class of Icelandic intellectuals and artists were busy redefining their cultural and literary heritage and its significance, as well as that of the saga heroes.

Conclusions

The social significance of the saga heroes in Iceland has been subject to considerable change over the centuries. In the present chapter, two major stages in that development have been outlined. Even in the thirteenth century, the hero had come to be defined by reference to his personal merits, most importantly his physical strength. It was in this tradition that Þorkell Elfaraskáld composed his verse about Gunnarr Hámundarson’s valiant last stand. Icelandic poets of every century since then have followed this lead, partly in order to strengthen the spirit of the Icelanders during periods of intense physical hardship. A similar approach is explicit in the works of Arngrímur Jónsson from around 1600. He also presents the period of the saga heroes as Iceland’s Golden Age. The Romantic poetry of Jónas Hallgrímsson implies that a new definition of the saga heroes in Iceland was evolving during the nineteenth century. According to Jónas Hallgrímsson, it was not enough to be physically or even mentally strong; you also had to love your native soil. The concept of the Golden Age was redefined in this period too: the times in which the sagas took place were now

perceived as being the epoch of political independence. Like most other Golden Ages, it also held out the promise of a new Golden Age, somewhere in the near future, this time featuring a politically independent Iceland.

These two sides of the saga hero were united during the first decades of the twentieth century within the popular Ungmennafélagshreyfing (Icelandic Youth Movement). The main emphasis was on physical training and competition in sports, but an underlying concern was to strengthen the patriotic sense of Icelandic youth. The Skarphéðinn Athletic Club (Íþróttasambandið Skarphéðinn), established in 1911, may be taken as the literary embodiment of this unity. Here, Skarphéðinn Njálsson of *Njáls saga* – ‘a big and strong man and a good fighter. He swam like a seal and was swift of foot’ (Hreinsson et al. 1997: III, 30) – was confirmed as the idol of young athletes in the counties of Árnessýsla and Rangárvallasýsla, which form the main setting of *Njáls saga*.

Halldór Laxness has been characterized above as one representative of a new generation of Icelanders who challenged the traditional celebration of the masculine saga heroes. An avid critic of romanticized heroes such as Gunnarr Hámundarson and Skarphéðinn Njálsson, he admired the sagas far more for their artistic qualities than for their sometimes violent ethics. In this respect Laxness was in agreement with Björn M. Ólsen and certain other contemporary Icelandic scholars – an unofficial group generally referred to as ‘the Icelandic School’ in saga studies. Traditionally, those Icelanders who had read *Njáls saga* and other family sagas as reliable narrative reflections of an oral tradition hardly envisioned the ‘original’ text as having been created by an individual author. The plot of the saga, they assumed, was a manifestation of the divine force that shapes history. Inspired by Ólsen and various foreign saga scholars, the members of the Icelandic School renounced this idea of a natural connection between sagas and reality. Instead, they referred to the sagas as human constructions. In his study of *Hrafnkels saga*, Sigurður Nordal (1940: 3) expressed among other things his conviction that the saga owed ‘its final cast and refinement’ to an author, implying the work of a smith or a craftsman. Nordal’s colleague Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1943: 21) wrote similarly in his *At Njáll’s Booth: A Study of a Literary Masterpiece* (*Á Njálsbúð: bók um mikið listaverk*): ‘All things are made out of some substance, indeed there is no evidence of anyone, except the Lord Almighty, creating something out of nothing. Human originality is different; it can rather be compared to the art of transforming lead into gold. And that was something which the author of *Njáls saga* had mastered.’

In recent decades, scholars have pointed out how the ideas of the Icelandic School were in many ways a logical step towards the development of Icelandic nationalism in the twentieth century. According to Byock (1994: 181): ‘The literary basis of the sagas equipped Iceland with a cultural heritage worthy of its status as an independent nation.’ In particular, Byock outlines some of the premises for Nordal’s approach to the sagas. First, Nordal’s emphasis on the family sagas as works of thirteenth-century Icelandic authors, rather than as products of an oral tradition, can be seen as a response to the claims of some Danes, Norwegians and Swedes, who approached this literature

as a part of a common Scandinavian cultural heritage. Second, Byock suggests, the aim of the Icelandic School was to place the sagas, ‘reinterpreted in the light of standard European concepts of literary development . . . among the artifacts of European high culture’ (ibid.: 184). It is indeed significant that the members of the Icelandic School frequently compared the family sagas to the works of Dante, Shakespeare and Kleist. Sveinsson was particularly active with such comparisons, both in his *At Njáll's Booth* and in separate articles dealing with topics such as the similarities between Clytemnestra and Hallgerðr Høskuldsdóttir.

Laxness, on the other hand, made different comparisons. In 1939, he wrote an article on Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi, this ‘fictional character . . . whom Icelanders have been so fond of and who has played no insignificant role in shaping our personal identity – or giving us the wrong impression of who we are’. Laxness found Gunnarr’s characterization to be a ‘classic example of the Icelandic lack of realism’ and pointed out the degree to which it had been inspired by unrealistic French romances. In this respect, he compared *Njáls saga* to a modern novel that would place a male film star from Hollywood on a small contemporary Icelandic farm: ‘That a character of this kind is so admired by us can be explained by reference to the fact that it is a symbol of the Icelanders’ wishful thinking’ (Laxness 1942: 356–7).

In the following decades the popularity of Gunnarr and other saga heroes decreased, a growing emphasis being placed on the authors of the sagas. In later years, it has been furthermore suggested that Laxness has taken the place of the saga authors as the Icelandic national hero. Laxness’s career, especially after he received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1955, was by many of his contemporaries interpreted as proof of an image of a new Icelandic cultural Golden Age of great artists in modern times. It seems fair to say that in the second half of the twentieth century, it was Laxness, rather than Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi, who was the most important figure in shaping Icelanders’ national identity – ‘or giving us the wrong impression of who we are’.

See also ARCHAEOLOGY; FAMILY SAGAS; GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL; LATE SECULAR POETRY; ORALITY AND LITERACY; METRE AND METRICS; POST-MEDIEVAL RECEPTION; ROMANCE; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; SAGAS OF ICELANDIC PREHISTORY; SKALDIC POETRY; WOMEN IN OLD NORSE POETRY AND SAGAS.

NOTE

1 The Holger Kjær collection is here referred to as HK, followed by the number assigned to each informant, and then by a page number locating the informant’s testimony in the collection as a whole. The Icelandic National

Museum questionnaire is referred to as INM, followed by the number assigned to each informant in the archive of the Department of Ethnology at the museum.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Editions

- Helgason, Jón Karl, Egilsson, Sveinn Yngvi and Einarsson, Þórir Már (eds.) (2001) *Vefur Darraðar* (CD-ROM). Reykjavík.
- Hreinsson, Viðar, Cook, Robert, Gunnell, Terry, Kunz, Keneva and Scudder, Bernard (eds.) (1997) *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders, Including 49 Tales*. Reykjavík.

Secondary Literature

- Benediktsson, Jakob (1957) *Arngrímur Jónsson and His Works*. Copenhagen.
- Byock, Jesse L. (1988) *Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas, and Power*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London.
- Byock, Jesse L. (1994), 'Modern Nationalism and the Medieval Sagas.' In Andrew Wawn (ed.) *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga*. Enfield Lock, pp. 163–87.
- HK survey: answers to questions posed to Icelanders between 1927 and 1930 by Danish teacher Holger Kjær, preserved by the Department of Ethnology at the National Museum of Iceland.
- INM survey: answers to a questionnaire (no. 86, November 1994) about daily life in rural and urban areas in the twentieth century, sent by the Department of Ethnology to its informants in 1994, and preserved by the Department of Ethnology at the National Museum of Iceland.
- Ionam, Arngrímv (1593) *Brevis commentarius de Islandia*. Hafniae.
- Johannessen, Matthías (1958) *Njála í íslenskum skáldskap*. Reykjavík.
- Jónasson, Hermann (1912) *Draumar*. Reykjavík.
- Jónsson, Jón (1903) *Íslenskt þjóðerni: Alþýðufyrirlætrar*. Reykjavík.
- Jónsson, Jónas (1915) *Íslandssaga handa börnum*, vol. I. Reykjavík.
- Kress, Helga (1996) *Fyrir dyrum fósturu*. Reykjavík.
- Kristjánsdóttir, Bergljót Soffía (1998) "'Egill lít nam skilja...": Um kappakvæði Steinunnar Finnsdóttur.' *Skírnir* 172, 59–88.
- Laxness, Halldór (1942) 'Þjóðin, landið, guð. Raunsæishugleiðingar.' In *Vettvangur dagsins*. Reykjavík, pp. 355–64.
- Laxness, Halldór (1943) *Íslandsklukkan*. Reykjavík.
- Laxness, Halldór (1946) 'Minnisgreinar um fornsögur.' In *Sjálfsgæðir blutir*. Reykjavík, pp. 9–66.
- Laxness, Halldór (2003) *Iceland's Bell*, transl. Philip Roughton, intro. Adam Haslett. New York.
- Magnússon, Sigurður Gylfi (1995) 'Siðferðilegar fyrirmyndir á 19. öld.' *Ný saga* 7, 57–72.
- Nordal, Sigurður (1940) *Hrafnkatla*. Reykjavík.
- Nordal, Sigurður (1958) *Hrafnkells saga Freysgoða: A Study*, transl. R. George Thomas. Cardiff.
- Ólason, Vésteinn (1989) 'Bóksögur'. In Frosti F. Jóhannsson (ed.) *Íslensk þjóðmenning*, vol. IV: *Munnumennir og bókmennning*. Reykjavík, pp. 161–227.
- Ólsen, Björn M. (1937–9). *Um Íslendingasögur*. Reykjavík.
- Pálsson, Hermann (1962) *Sagnaskemmtun Íslendinga*. Reykjavík.
- Ringler, Dick (2002) *Bard of Iceland: Jónas Hallgrímsson, Poet and Scientist*. Madison.
- Storch, Vilhelm (1887) *Kemiske og mikroskopiske Undersøgelser af et ejendommeligt Stof...* Copenhagen.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur (1943) *Á Njálsbúð: bók um mikið listaverk*. Reykjavík.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur (1953) *Studies in the Manuscript Tradition of Njáls saga* (Studia Islandica 13). Reykjavík.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur (1971) *Njáls saga: A Literary Masterpiece*, transl. Paul Schach. Lincoln, NE.
- Þorkelsson, Jón (1889). 'Om håndskrifterne af Njála.' In Konráð Gríslason and Eiríkur Jónsson (eds.) *Njála, udg. efter gamle håndskrifter*, vol. II. Copenhagen, pp. 647–783.

5

Eddic Poetry

Terry Gunnell

The Main Manuscripts

It must always be remembered that when scholars refer to eddic poetry, or the Poetic Edda, they usually mean the contents of a single, fairly insignificant-looking, medieval manuscript known as the Codex Regius of the Elder Edda, rather than a genre defined on the basis of a particular school of authorship or literary style. The manuscript in question, written c.1270, contains a body of 29 poetic works in Old Norse-Icelandic, 10 of them dealing with mythological material, and 19 with Scandinavian and Germanic heroes of ancient times. As will be shown below, this material varies in terms of poetic form, as do works in other manuscripts that have been classified as belonging to the same 'eddic' category.

The term 'eddic poetry' essentially covers those anonymously transmitted 'poems' (as we may call them for the moment) that deal with the myths or heroic world of the Nordic countries and make use of the *ljóðabáttr*, *fornyrðislag* or *málabáttr* metres (see chapter 15). This is a grouping well understood by most scholars as a means of distinguishing these works from skaldic poetry, but it is also somewhat misleading, not least because the generalized classification tends to obscure the variety and individuality of the works in question. Indeed, several features indicate that the Codex Regius is first and foremost a thematic collection of material from differing backgrounds, similar to other well-known medieval manuscripts, such as the German *Carmina Burana* (which includes, among other things, both drinking songs and a liturgical drama) and the Icelandic personal collection known as *Hauksbók*.

For logical reasons, the Codex Regius (Gammel kongelig samling 2365 4to: see Ólason 2001) is today regarded as one of the national treasures of Iceland. Significantly, it was one of the first two manuscripts to be returned to Iceland from Denmark in 1971. Its central importance is that it contains a (slightly rusty) key to the pagan religious world not only of the settlers of Iceland, but also of the people of Scandinavia as a whole, displaying the kind of raw poetic material that Snorri Sturluson utilized

when assembling his prose *Edda* c.1220, and of which Saxo Grammaticus was clearly aware when writing his *Gesta Danorum* c.1200. It must never be forgotten, however, that the manuscript in question was written nearly 300 years after the official acceptance of Christianity in Iceland (in 999/1000). The manuscript's contents may well have ancient, pagan roots, but researchers seeking to make use of this material should remember that it is likely to have existed in oral tradition long before it came to be recorded; and that while it now exists in textual form, it was originally meant to be received orally and visually in performance rather than read privately.

Very little is known about the origin and early history of either the Codex Regius or the fragmentary AM 748 4to manuscript, the latter being another, relatively small collection of mythological poems which is nowadays retained in Denmark and is believed to have been written shortly after the Codex Regius in c.1300 (for this manuscript, see Wessén 1945). To judge from the small size of these manuscripts and the economical use they make of space, neither was judged by the people of the time as being as important as, for example, the *Möðruvallabók* and *Flateyjarbók* manuscripts of the sagas, or the *Stjórn* manuscript of part of the Bible. What is certain is that the Codex Regius was in the possession of Brynjólfur Sveinsson, bishop of the Skálholt diocese in southern Iceland, in 1643. We also know that Brynjólfur sent it as a gift to the king of Denmark in 1662. It is conceivable that Brynjólfur was sent the manuscript by the Icelandic poet Hallgrímur Pétursson, who had been living in Suðurnes, near Reykjavík (see Karlsson 2000: 252).

It is Bishop Brynjólfur who appears to have been responsible for referring to the contents of the Codex Regius manuscript as an 'Edda'. The manuscript itself has no title page, but Brynjólfur seems to have been aware of close links between the poetic works it contains and the prose *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson. Brynjólfur himself referred to the manuscript as 'Sæmundar Edda', to distinguish it from the so-called 'Snorra-Edda' (that is, Snorri's prose *Edda*), believing erroneously that it had been written or assembled by the early Icelandic scholar Sæmundr Sigfússon (1056–1133).

As the Swedish palaeographer Gustav Lindblad has pointed out, however, the genesis of the Codex Regius manuscript is by no means as simple a matter as Brynjólfur Sveinsson supposed (see Lindblad 1954, 1980). The careful arrangement of the poems by theme and subject matter, and the general nature of the introductory prose comments, suggest, it is true, that at least one editor carefully supervised the collection it contains. It is very unlikely, however, that the contents were ordered in this way from the start. Lindblad suggests that the process of collecting the Codex Regius material must have begun around the time when Snorri Sturluson was writing his prose *Edda*, in other words c.1200. It seems clear that Snorri had access to complete versions of *Völuspá*, *Grímnismál* and *Vafþrúðnismál* similar to those in the Codex Regius. He was obviously also aware of the basic storylines of other works from which he quotes odd strophes (sometimes in very different form, as in the case of the strophe that seems to originate in a version of *Lokasenna*; see Gunnell 1995: 221). Some of the collection, however (such as *Brymskviða* and the *Rúnatal* section of *Hávamál*), seems to have been unknown to Snorri. Lindblad's argument, based on

careful palaeographic examination, is that various smaller collections of poems were assembled at different times according to different themes and differing editorial principles, some collectors having fewer scruples than others about substituting prose for narrative strophes or cutting and pasting poetic fragments to form thematic wholes (as seems to have happened with poems like *Hávamál*, *Reginsmál*, *Fáfnismál* and *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*, for example).¹ One of these early collections might have been related to the early life of the hero Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, while others could have involved material concerning the heroes Helgi Hjörvarðsson and Helgi Hundingsbani, or various mythological poems. The AM 748 manuscript (in which there is no sign of a heroic poem) perhaps has in its background an early mythological collection of the kind that Snorri Sturluson might have had in front of him.

The Material

As noted above, the core of the material classified as belonging to the Poetic Edda comes from the Codex Regius.² It is thus worth briefly outlining the subjects and nature of this material. The manuscript commences with *Völuspá* ('The Prophecy of the Seeress'),³ a work which effectively provides an overture and framework, not only for the mythological works which follow, but also, indirectly, for the heroic poems in the second half of the manuscript which lead to a Ragnarøk, or final doom, of their own. In short, *Völuspá* takes the form of a carefully structured monologue in *fornyrðislag* metre, telling of the creation, destruction and rebirth of the world. Supposedly uttered by a seeress who addresses both gods and humans alike, the poem begins by telling how the world was raised from the sea, and the celestial bodies appeared. The gods then give order to things and bring about the first signs of civilization.

The following section (sts 8–18) tells of the first threat from outside with the arrival of three giant maidens, the subsequent creation of dwarfs and humans, and the appearance of the world ash, Yggdrasill, and the norns, or Fates. The end is already in sight.

The next part of the poem (sts 21–7) recounts the first war, between the Æsir gods (Óðinn and his fellow creators) and the Vanir gods (of whom Freyr and the goddess Freyja are among the best-known; on the two groups of deities see chapter 17), a conflict that is won only by broken oaths and self-sacrifice (both of which are key features of the heroic poems). The account of the past is now concluded and the inevitability of Ragnarøk is even clearer.

After a short pause in which the seeress describes an earlier meeting with Óðinn in which he opened up to her a vision of the future, she now proceeds to describe that vision. Stanzas 30–43 are marked by the ominous refrain: 'Vitoð ér enn, eða hvat' ('Do you understand yet, or what?', which first occurs in st. 27),⁴ as she describes how she saw the *valkyrjur* (valkyries) appear, Baldr meet his death and Loki being bound. The final battle itself is then described, as the gods meet their deaths at the hands of the monsters and giants, and the world and Yggdrasill are overcome by flames and water

(sts 44–58). This, however, is not the end of the poem, because the final strophes (sts 59–66) detail the surfacing of a new world, and the appearance of a new generation of gods accompanied by the serpent Níðhöggr, whose presence underlines the potential for further destruction.

Völuspá is the first of four poetic works in the manuscript which centre on the figure of Óðinn, and concentrate on the presentation of gnomic, mythological and magical knowledge. Like *Völuspá*, *Hávamál* ('The Words of the High One'), *Vafþrúðnismál* ('The Words of Vafþrúðnir') and *Grímnismál* ('The Words of Grímnir') all take the form of direct speech, this time, however, in the *ljóðabáttr* metre.

In all likelihood, the extant *Hávamál* is an amalgamation of several earlier poetic works. Generally assumed to be spoken by Óðinn, it is usually divided by scholars into five parts: *Gestaþáttur* ('The Visitors' Section': sts 1–77); *Dæmi Óðins* ('Óðinn's Exempla': sts 78–110); *Loddfáfnismál* ('Words for Loddfáfnir': sts 111–37); *Rúnatal* ('The List of Runes': sts 138–45); and *Ljóðatal* ('The List of Chants': sts 146–64). The first part is essentially a guide to survival in the Viking-Age world, aimed at the small farmer. As such it offers us a valuable insight into the daily life and values of the time, ranging from advice to look behind doors to underlining the necessity of avoiding too much alcohol, of holding your tongue when among your peers, and of remembering to repay the favours done to you by a friend. The key point, however, is for the listener to remember that after death, the reputation you have acquired in life lives on (sts 76–7). There is a change in tone in the following section (*Dæmi Óðins*) as the speaker launches into bitter complaints about the fickleness of womanhood (sts 104–10). *Loddfáfnismál*, which comes next, is similar in form to the *Gestaþáttur*, but more formal in shape in that it is addressed directly to a particular listener, one Loddfáfnir. The last two sections of the poem have particular value because they seem to take us into the heart of pagan ritual activity. Starting with information about the origin and carving of runes (sts 138–9), they proceed to list 18 magical spells or chants (*ljóð*) designed to help the warrior and the lover.

Vafþrúðnismál and *Grímnismál* are also more expository than narrative (though both have narrative frameworks). The former, like *Alvíssmál* and *Gátur Gestumblinda* (see below), takes the form of a knowledge contest presented in direct speech, here between Óðinn and the giant Vafþrúðnir. The encounter in Vafþrúðnir's hall is carefully structured. Óðinn announces his arrival and has to prove his worthiness by answering four questions on fundamental mythological knowledge ending with the name of the battlefield where the last battle of all will take place (sts 11–18). This section forms a brief overture to the questioning of Vafþrúðnir, which now begins as Óðinn takes a seat alongside Vafþrúðnir, and the contest becomes a matter of life and death. Starting with an alternative account of the creation of the earth to that given in *Völuspá*, Vafþrúðnir goes on to answer 12 questions about the origin of day, night, the seasons, the earliest giants and the generations that follow, eventually moving on to the subject of preparations for the final battle (sts 20–43). The last six questions involve the future, dealing with the world during and after Ragnarök. For his final, winning move, Óðinn poses a question only he can answer, asking what he himself

whispered to his dead son Baldr on his funeral pyre. He thereby also reveals his identity.

Grímnismál has a less carefully structured format, but is no less important as a primary source of mythological knowledge. It follows a long prose account clearly intended to provide a narrative framework for the monologue that follows, which Óðinn, under the name of Grímnir, is presented as uttering after spending eight nights bound between two fires by a king called Geirrøðr. The speech, directed at Geirrøðr's son Agnarr, has the quality of a shamanistic, hallucinatory vision of the mythological world. Beginning with an enumeration of the halls of the gods (sts 4–17) and a detailed description of Valhöll (that is, Valhalla, the hall of the slain) (sts 18–26), it moves on to listing the rivers of the mythological world, and the horses ridden by the gods (sts 27–30). Attention is next drawn to the world tree; the animals that live on – and off – it; the *valkyrjur*; the potential swallowing of the sun at Ragnarøk; and the creation of the earth from the body of the giant Ymir (sts 31–41). The speaker finally raises his head and starts enumerating the various names under which Óðinn is known, thereby revealing his identity.

The next poem in the manuscript, *Skírnismál* ('The Words of Skírnir'), tells how the god Freyr won Gerðr, the daughter of the giant Gymir. Various interpretations have been given for the poem, ranging from suggestions that it depicts the awakening of the winter earth (Gerðr) by the sun (Freyr's emissary Skírnir [literally 'shining one']) to more recent proposals that it refers to the relationship between the king of Norway and his country. Whatever the meaning of the work, it is of special interest that the course of its events is conveyed solely through the medium of dialogue in *ljóðabáttr*, offering striking parallels to the forms of drama known elsewhere in Europe in the early Middle Ages (see further Gunnell 1995).⁵ The poem begins by presenting the situation in which Skírnir is awoken, and informed by a despairing Freyr that he has seen Gerðr from afar and is smitten with her. Skírnir now sets off for Jötunheimar (the abode of the giants) on horseback, and eventually comes face to face with the giantess, who promptly spurns his offers of golden apples and a magic ring. This leads to the climax of the work (sts 25–36), in which the central monologue, spoken by Skírnir to Gerðr, rapidly gains in intensity, moving from threats of violence to a humiliating curse, and finally to powerful rune magic (st. 29: a strophe which parallels a thirteenth-century runic inscription from Bergen in Norway). Gerðr now reluctantly agrees to an assignation with Freyr in a grove in nine nights' time.

The next four works, which vary greatly in style, are all connected in one way or another with the god Þórr. *Hárbarðsljóð* ('The Chant of Hárbarðr') is another dramatic work in direct speech telling of an argument (essentially a *mannjafnaðr*, or comparison of qualities) between Þórr and Óðinn (here in the guise of the ferryman, Hárbarðr, who is refusing to offer Þórr passage over a fjord). Like most other poems concerning Þórr, *Hárbarðsljóð* is humorous in tone, here showing how Þórr is easily outwitted by the wilier Óðinn.

Hymiskviða ('The Lay of Hymir'), a narrative composed in *fornyrðislag*, relates the myth of how Þórr visits the giant Hymir to acquire a cauldron for a banquet. While

fishing with the giant, Þórr hooks the Miðgarðsormr, the world-encircling serpent of Norse mythology.

Lokasenna ('The *senna* of Loki', that is, 'Loki's Contest of Insults'), while briefly involving Þórr, centres on the figure of Loki. This is yet another apparently dramatic work, also composed in direct speech and in *ljóðabátttr*. Following a prose introduction designed to provide the work with a context, *Lokasenna* describes how Loki arrives at a banquet of the gods and proceeds to accuse each of them in turn of various moral crimes. Humorous and lively in tone, the work partly takes the form of a mythological guessing-game in which the listeners are expected to guess the identity of each god who speaks before being named by Loki. The conflict is resolved only by the late arrival of Þórr, who ejects Loki by force.

Þrymskviða ('The Lay of Þrymr') continues this burlesque tone, recounting in *fornyrðislag* the myth of how Þórr had to go to Jötunheimar dressed as a bride in order to regain his stolen hammer from the giant Þrymr. The poem, which was later transformed into a well-known Norwegian ballad, has attracted the attention of scholars from various fields in recent years, not least because it is open to interpretation on different levels of meaning.

Völundarkviða ('The Lay of Völundr'), which comes next, and does not concern Þórr, is regarded by some as being out of place in the general framework of the Codex Regius, not least because it is followed by a fifth Þórr poem, *Alvíssmál* ('The Words of Alvíss ["All-wise"]'). This latter poem presents a knowledge contest between Þórr and a dwarf who has kidnapped his daughter (once again wholly in direct speech and in *ljóðabátttr*), in which the dwarf has to list the names given by different races of beings (Æsir, Vanir, giants, dwarfs and elves) to various natural phenomena. Whether the aberration in order is deliberate or the result of a mistake by the scribe, *Völundarkviða* offers a bridge between the higher mythological world of the gods, giants and elves, and the lower world of dwarfs and humans covered in the next, heroic section of the manuscript, since it deals with supernatural figures while also introducing the themes of greed and blood-vengeance that run through the heroic poems.

The poem begins (sts 1–5) by offering an early version of the migratory legend of the swan-wife (or seal-wife), telling in *fornyrðislag* how Völundr gained and lost the love of his life (a *valkyrja* swan-maiden). Völundr's talents as a smith come to the attention of a king named Níðuðr who has him hamstrung and placed on an island where he is forced to make treasures for the king. Völundr, however, takes revenge by killing the king's young sons, turning their skulls into goblets, their eyes into precious stones and their teeth into brooches (their deaths are paralleled by those of Atli's sons, described later in the heroic section). The last scene depicts Völundr taking to the skies, laughing as the king learns from his daughter that Völundr has raped her.

After *Alvíssmál*, the manuscript moves on to semi-mythological heroic poems starting with three works on two apparently Norwegian heroes named Helgi (literally, 'the sacred one'): *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* ('The First Lay of Helgi Hundingsbani'), *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* ('The Lay of Helgi Hjörvarðsson') and *Helgakviða*

Hundingsbana II ('The Second Lay of Helgi Hundingsbani'). The illogical ordering of these poems is probably due to haphazard copying from an earlier collection. All three poems are predominantly in *fornyrðislag* metre, and the second and third (which probably had a longer prehistory than the first) seem to give evidence of more editorial activity than is shown by, for example, the mythological poems. These last two poems give a fragmentary impression, and are made up of short dialogues connected by brief prose accounts which have conceivably replaced lost narrative strophes or unnecessary repetitions.

Each of the three Helgi poems concentrates on the youth of the hero, telling of his early battles and of his relationship with a *valkyrja*, before moving on, in the second and third poems, to the hero's death (after which both he and his partner are supposedly reborn). Each poem is centred on a *senna* between two figures, here in a pre-battle context.

Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar comes first in the chronological sequence of the events with which the poems deal, and is the most fragmentary of the three. Following a prose introduction outlining Helgi's royal father's search for a fourth wife, the poem opens with a strange dialogue between the king's emissary, Atli, and a raven who knows just the girl for him. The following prose section explains how the king acquired her, and how they had a child, Helgi. Subsequent speech-filled scenes include Helgi's first encounter with the *valkyrja* Sváva, who names him, points out a sword for him to use, and protects him in battle; and a *senna* in *ljóðabáttir* between Atli and a giantess called Hrímgærðr (a section often referred to as *Hrímgærð-armál* ['The Words of Hrímgærðr']: sts 12–30). The final dialogue is between the dying Helgi and Sváva, with the former bequeathing the latter to his brother Heðinn.

Of the two poems dealing with Helgi Hundingsbani, *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* is the more tightly constructed, wholly lacking in prose interpolations. This recounts the birth of the hero, the spinning of his fate by the norns, his defeats of Hundingr and his sons, and, finally, of a man named Høðbroddr who is a rival for Helgi's beloved *valkyrja* Sigrún. The central *senna* (sts 32–46) here involves Helgi's brother Sinfjötli and Høðbroddr's representative, Guðmundr.

Helgakviða Hundingsbana II is relatively fragmentary, but covers the same material, a fact which seems to have caused the scribe a number of difficulties, not least because he clearly wished to avoid wasting valuable manuscript space with unnecessary direct repetition of material that had already appeared in the previous Helgi poem.⁶ The additional feature here is a powerful final dialogue between Sigrún and Helgi after his death, as Sigrún reposes in Helgi's grave mound in order to meet him when he returns from the dead for one night.

The next section of the manuscript is dedicated to the intertwined fates of five key figures: Sigurðr Fáfnisbani (the slayer of Fáfnir), his wife Guðrún Gjúkadóttir, her brother Gunnarr Gjúkason (Gundaharius, king of the Burgundians), his wife, Brynhildr Buðladóttir, and her brother Atli (Attila, king of the Huns). Associated with them are other historical and legendary figures from the Age of Migrations, such as

Jǫrmunrekr (Ermanaric) and Þjóðrekr (Þiðrikr; Didrik; Dietrich; Theodoric), both kings of the Ostrogoths.

Broadly speaking, the poems in this section can also be divided into three thematic groups. They are introduced by *Grípisspá* ('The Prophecy of Grípir'), which is unusual in that it seems to have been deliberately composed in the thirteenth century to serve as a framework for the poems that follow, containing as it does a prophecy addressed to Sigurðr about his future life and the consequences of his death. Following this comes a group of three poetic works (*Reginismál*, *Fáfnismál* and *Sigrdrífumál*: 'The Words of Reginn', 'of Fáfnir' and 'of Sigrdrífa') which form an unbroken block of text in the manuscript.⁷ These deal first of all with the mythological origin of the dwarf Andvari's gold (that is, the Rhine gold), and then proceed to cover Sigurðr's youth, as he meets Óðinn at sea; as he slays the serpent Fáfnir and his mentor Reginn; and finally as he is educated in the use of runes and in gnomic wisdom by the *valkyrja* Sigrdrífa whom he has awoken on a mountain-side.

In their present form, these works seem to be an amalgamation of several earlier works composed in different poetic metres, one of them a *fornyrðislag* poem about Sigurðr's youth, while another seems to have been a semi-dramatic work composed in *ljóðabáttr* and direct speech, concentrating on his killing of Fáfnir (and probably also his meeting with Sigrdrífa) (see further Andersson 1980: 82–93; Gunnell 1995: 256–69). Central to this latter work, and offering direct parallels to the mythological poems in *ljóðabáttr*, are: the encounter between Sigurðr and the dying Fáfnir, who, in his death throes, passes on mythological wisdom; the prophecy uttered by the nuthatches that Sigurðr is enabled to understand by tasting the froth of Fáfnir's roasted heart; and finally the wisdom strophes passed on to Sigurðr by Sigrdrífa.

The rest of the heroic section is mostly in *fornyrðislag* (except for *Atlamál in grænlenzku* ['The Greenlandic Story of Atli', referred to below simply as *Atlamál*], which is mainly in *málabáttr*). Interspersed with long prose passages in which attempts are made to explain variations in the poetic accounts, the poems concentrate on Sigurðr's tragic death and those that follow it. As in the previous heroic poems, however, and especially in those poems dealing with the anguish of female figures, there tends to be an emphasis on direct speech.

Following *Sigrdrífumál* (which is incomplete in the Codex Regius), there is an eight-leaf lacuna in the manuscript where roughly 200 strophes of verse have gone missing. Their contents, about which there has been much scholarly speculation, can only be guessed at on the basis of a late paper manuscript of *Sigrdrífumál* and the contents of *Völsunga saga*, which is based closely on the heroic material preserved in the complete Codex Regius (see further Andersson 1980). The poems following the lacuna deal first of all with Sigurðr's slaying by his wife's brothers, Gunnarr, Högni and Guttormr, at the instigation of Brynhildr (whose character varies considerably from one to another of these works). A particularly powerful feature of *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu* ('Fragment of the Lay of Sigurðr'), which follows on directly from the lacuna, is its subtle depiction of the conflicting feelings of duty, guilt, fury and grief felt by Gunnarr and Brynhildr as the former realizes the immensity of the crime in

which he has been involved (killing a sworn brother on the basis of a lie), and as the latter swings from rage to anguish. *Guðrúnarkviða I* ('The First Lay of Guðrún') concentrates even more on the grief of women in time of war, as various women describe their own losses in an attempt to get Sigurðr's wife, Guðrún, to express her feelings on her husband's death. This, however, does not happen until Guðrún's sister displays the corpse. The description of Guðrún's anguish as it finally bursts forth (st. 16) is particularly memorable.

Sigurðarkviða in skamma ('The Short Lay of Sigurðr') focuses again on the position of Brynhildr, who loved Sigurðr but was tricked into marrying Gunnarr. The highlight of the poem is Brynhildr's speech to Gunnarr after she has stabbed herself in order to join Sigurðr in death. As in the other poems, proximity to death gives rise to prophetic skills: Brynhildr foresees the course of future events before going on to describe in detail the grandeur of Sigurðr's funeral pyre. *Helreið Brynhildar* ('Brynhildr's Ride to Hel', also contained in *Nornagests þáttur* in *Flateyjarbók*), follows indirectly on from this account. It takes the form of a dialogue between Brynhildr, who is now riding to Hel, and a giantess whom she meets on the way. Brynhildr's lengthy monologue (sts 5–14) concentrates on her meeting with Sigurðr when she was a *valkyrja*, suggesting, if not a blending of myths, then at least the existence of a myth parallel to that depicted in *Sigrdrífumál*.

The five poems that follow deal with the period during which Guðrún is married to Atli, and especially with Atli's execution of Gunnarr and Högni, and the resulting murder by Guðrún of her own sons (served up to Atli as a meal), and of her husband. *Guðrúnarkviða II (in forna)* ('The [Ancient] Second Lay of Guðrún') is a complex work in that it is essentially a monologue supposedly spoken by Guðrún to Þjóðrekr, who is staying with Atli, but also contains several quoted dialogues. An effective bridge between the earlier poems and those that come next, it traces Guðrún's life from Sigurðr's death up to her arranged marriage to Atli. As in many of the other poems centring on female characters, prophecies are spoken about the future (the deaths of Gunnarr and Högni), though we also see Guðrún deceiving Atli by wrongly interpreting his warning dreams. The listeners' knowledge of the legends is here deliberately played on.

Guðrúnarkviða III ('The Third Lay of Guðrún'), also largely in the form of speeches, covers a side episode in which Guðrún has to undergo an ordeal to prove that she has not committed adultery with Þjóðrekr. She is proved innocent. The female informer is shown to be a liar, and so is drowned in a bog, like many sacrificial victims of the Iron Age found in Denmark and northern Germany.

Oddrúnargrátr ('The Lament of Oddrún'), which like the previous poem may have had a relatively short life in oral tradition, takes up another loosely related side episode describing how Oddrún, Atli's sister, helps another woman to give birth. In this situation, Oddrún feels drawn to relate the sorrows and injustices of her own life in that she had hoped to marry Gunnarr Gjúkason, but was cheated of him by Óðinn, Sigurðr, Brynhildr and her brother.

The following two poems, *Atlakviða* ('The Lay of Atli') and *Atlamál*, both cover in detail the deaths of Gunnarr, Högni and Atli. Here we find the heroic parallel to the mythological Ragnarök described in the first part of the manuscript. The two poems are obviously closely related even if their styles are different. The first poem presents the epic events in flashes that are rich in allusion, while the second places them in a living setting, adding scenes to amplify the element of fate, the heroism with which Gunnarr and Högni meet their deaths, and the extent of Guðrún's hatred as she serves up her sons for her husband to eat.

The last two poems in the Codex Regius deal with events that take place at the time of Guðrún's marriage (her third) to a king named Jónakr. Guðrún's daughter by Sigurðr, Svanhildr, has been trampled to death by horses at the bidding of her husband Jǫrmunrekr, on a charge of committing adultery. Both *Guðrúnarhvot* ('The Whetting of Guðrún') and *Hamðismál* ('The Words of Hamðir') tell how Guðrún eggs on her sons Hamðir, Sǫrli and Erpr to avenge their half-sister. In both poems, Hamðir questions his mother's motives by reference to her past, knowing that the mission will lead to his and his brothers' deaths. The former poem, however, follows the model of other eddic poems of lament, as Guðrún recounts the sorrows of her life to her sons. The final strophe (st. 21) indicates that the poem was meant to have universal application:

Iǫrlum ǫllum
óðal batni,—
snótum ǫllum
sorg at minni, —
at þetta tregróf
um talið væri.

To all warriors
— may your lot be made better;
to all ladies
— may your sorrows grow less,
now that this chain of griefs
has been recounted.

Hamðismál is designed not so much to assuage sorrow as to underline the fickleness of fate and the nature of heroism by concentrating on the bloody slaughter of Jǫrmunrekr in his hall, and the subsequent deaths of Hamðir and Sǫrli.

These, then, are the poems contained in the Codex Regius which form the core of the Poetic Edda. To their number editors commonly add the following five works from other manuscripts: *Baldrs draumar*, *Hynndluljóð*, *Rígsþula*, *Grottasǫngr* and *Svipdagsmál*.

Baldrs draumar ('The Dreams of Baldr'), sometimes known as *Vegtamskviða* ('The Lay of Vegtamr'), and found only in the AM 748 manuscript, is composed in

fornyrðislag. Here, Óðinn summons up a reluctant seeress from her grave to discover why his son Baldr has been having bad dreams. He is informed of the approaching deaths of his son and himself, in a vision similar to that described in *Völuspá*.

Hyndluljóð ('The Chant of Hyndla') is preserved only in the fourteenth-century *Flateyjarbók* manuscript, and is probably a combination of two *fornyrðislag* poems. These are *Hyndluljóð* itself, in essence a complicated conversation between a giantess named Hyndla and the goddess Freyja, who is inquiring about the ancestry of her protégé Óttarr; and *Völuspá in skamma* ('The Shorter *Völuspá*': sts 29–44 of the total *Hyndluljóð*), which provides fragmentary mythological knowledge with a linking refrain comparable to that which occurs in the latter half of *Völuspá*.

Rígsþula ('The Account of Rígr'), preserved in the Codex Wormianus manuscript of the prose *Edda*, written around 1400, is an incomplete poetic narrative in *fornyrðislag*. It tells how the god Heimdallr, under the name of Rígr, travels the countryside, visiting – and sleeping with – various couples, thereby engendering the different social classes, the qualities, appearance, occupations and offspring of which are all described. It ends by describing how the first king, 'Konr ungr', is destined to spring from the race of earls.

Grottasöngur ('The Song of Grotti'), a mythologically based poem in *fornyrðislag*, is preserved in two manuscripts of the prose *Edda*, the oldest from the fourteenth century. It possibly has its origin in a work-song sung by women. With a pounding rhythm, it depicts the moral myth of how a Danish king gets two female slaves to grind him everything he desires from a magical mill called Grotti. At first this goes well, but eventually greed destroys all as the mill produces an army destined to destroy the king.

Svipdagsmál ('The Words of Svipdagr'), preserved in a seventeenth-century manuscript, is a combination of two poems: *Gróugaldur* ('The Magic of Gróa') and *Fjolsvinnsmál* ('The Words of Fjolsvinnr'). Using *ljóðabáttr*, it has a structure loosely parallel to that of *Skírnismál* in that it is wholly in direct speech, and tells of Svipdagr's quest to find a girl, Menglǫð, without whom he can never achieve happiness. Connections with the wonder-tale form are clear, as are direct links to the later Danish ballad, 'Ungen Svejdal'.

As noted above, these five poems are commonly published together with the eddic poems of the Codex Regius. In overall discussions of the 'genre', however, scholars often also include other parallel material drawn especially from the *fornaldarsögur* (see chapter 25) and from Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, as well as various mythological poetic fragments quoted in the prose *Edda*. Many of these other items, including the poem *Darraðarljóð* ('The Chant of Darraðr') from *Njáls saga*; *Gátur Gestumblinda*, *Hlǫðskviða* and *Hervararljóð* ('The Riddles of Gestumblindi', 'The Lay of Hlǫðr' and 'The Chant of Hervǫr') from *Hervarar saga*; and *Bjarkamál* ('The Words of Bjarki'), from Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, are published with commentary in Heusler and Ranisch's *Eddica Minora* (1903).

Age and Provenance

As the above summaries indicate, there can be little doubt that the subject matter of the poetic works under discussion is older than the manuscripts in which they are contained. Along with problems of philology and interpretation, some of the questions most often addressed by scholars have been the age and provenance of the 'poems', the interrelationships of various texts, and the relationship of the poems to classical and Christian learning. (On earlier scholarship concerning dating, see especially Fidjestøl 1999.)

As noted above, it is now generally accepted that the Codex Regius was based on smaller earlier collections going back perhaps to the early thirteenth century. Since its contents are not attributed to any named authors and almost certainly existed in oral tradition before that time, it is highly questionable whether the manuscript reflects the 'original composition' (if we can use such an expression) of any of the works it contains. We may assume that the Nordic oral tradition, which probably varied as much from time to time as from place to place, involved a mixture of memory and improvisation (see Harris in Glendinning and Bessason 1983: 210–42; Sigurðsson 1990, 1998: xv–xxiii), but all that the extant texts can confidently be said to reflect is the form in which the works were 'recorded' or memorized by scribes in the thirteenth century.

At the same time, it is also clear that the traditions we are faced with have a close relationship to those encountered in older non-Scandinavian works like the Old English *Widsith* (which mentions Jǫrmunrekr), *Deor* (which mentions both Jǫrmunrekr and Vǫlundr) and *Beowulf* (which mentions Sigmundr, Sigurðr's father, and Fitela, who represents the same figure as Sigmundr's son Sinfjǫtli), and even the Old High German *Hildebrandslied*, all of which go back at least to the ninth or tenth centuries. Similarities in metre are found in early poetic runic inscriptions like that on the ninth-century Rök stone in Sweden (which also mentions the name Þjóðrekr); while mythological and heroic motifs known from the eddic poems are depicted in early carvings in wood, ivory and stone from Gotland, Norway and England. Variants on the figure of Vǫlundr seem to have been known throughout early medieval northern Europe, while the originals of Gunnarr, Atli, Jǫrmunrekr and Þjóðrekr go back even further, to the Age of Migrations. The material had been in people's minds and on their lips long before it was recorded.

Studies of oral tradition show that its subject matter is unlikely to survive unchanged in oral form for a long period of time, especially if it undergoes changes in context (Sigurðsson 1998: xx–xxi). Details and poetic expressions that have acquired fixed and/or formulaic status may, however, often survive intact. This needs to be borne in mind when considering, for example, references in the eddic poems to archaeological objects that would not necessarily have been known to the

scribes, such as the *brímkálkr* ('frosted crystal goblet') and the damascened sword mentioned in *Skírnismál* sts 37 and 23.

At the same time, it is clear that several eddic poems reflect the influence of the language and imagery of skaldic poetry, a feature that is commonly regarded as evidence of a relatively late origin. Particular examples of such influence are seen in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, *Hymiskviða*, *Hyndluljóð* and *Guðrúnarkviða I*.

It must be considered unlikely, however, that the mythological poems were originally composed by Christian writers, and certainly not those poems that seem to refer directly to ritual acts, such as *Sigrdrífumál*, *Skírnismál* and the latter part of *Hávamál*, all of which, it would appear, were expected to be performed 'live' (see below). Scholars have long debated the possibility of later Christian influences in, for example, *Völuspá*, *Völuspá in skamma*, and even the burlesque *Lokasenna* and *Hárbarðsljóð* (arguing with questionable logic that believers could not make fun of the gods they believed in). None the less, it remains probable that the majority of the mythological poems have deep roots in the period before Christianity was formally declared in Iceland in 999/1000. The poems give us, at the very least, a more genuine picture of the variety and nature of Old Norse pagan belief than does the prose *Edda*, which is essentially an attempt to construct a coherent narrative from conflicting ancient sources.

The Poetic Edda obviously contains elements of varying age. This brings up the question of provenance. As already noted, the roots of much of the narrative material lie outside Iceland. The same would seem to apply to many smaller elements: fir, oak and ash trees, for example, did not grow in Iceland but are a common feature of the landscape described in poems like *Hávamál* (st. 50), *Guðrúnarhvöt* (st. 20) and *Grímnismál* (st. 35). The same can be said of the wolves, stags, bears, owls and nuthatches found in, for example, *Sigrdrífumál* (sts 16 and 17), *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (sts 33 and 37–8) and the prose accompanying *Fáfnismál*. These features may admittedly belong to older oral formulae rather than to the works as wholes; but they none the less indicate the existence of a northern Germanic tradition that has crossed the sea to Iceland. The most logical place to look for an origin is mainland Scandinavia, although scholars have at different times pointed to possible origins in the British Isles, at least for *Rígsþula*, the Helgi poems and *Völundarkviða*, on the basis of linguistic evidence and Celtic motifs (such as that of reincarnation). Certain Christian motifs might point in the same direction. Yet other scholars, less comfortable with the idea of these works as having lived in a fluid oral tradition among ordinary people before being recorded, have raised the possibilities of influence from classical learning, especially with regard to *Hávamál* (cf. the *Disticha Catonis*: see the discussion of this in Ólason 1992: 115; Sigurdsson 1998: 55) and *Völuspá* (cf. the Christian *Cantus Sibyllae* and the *Prophetia Sibyllae magae*: see Dronke 1997: 93–104).

The discussion of age and origin may well go on for ever. As already noted, the only certainty is that the extant poems were recorded in Iceland in c.1270. Everything concerning their history before that date is a matter of speculation. This realization has led in recent years to less discussion of dating and provenance and more concen-

tration on the extant form of these works, their structure, their themes, their message and reception past and present, and, not least, the information they provide about the way in which they were transmitted and performed. (See further the detailed bibliographies of critical research in Harris 1985; Lindow 1988; von See et al. 1997–2000; and the collections of articles in Glendinning and Bessason 1983; Acker and Larrington 2002.)

Context and Performance

As indicated above, it must never be forgotten that the poetic works under discussion here were more often received aurally than read in silence. They should be analysed with this in mind, in much the same way as plays are examined today, with the shape of the work being seen as determined by the audience, the setting, and the demands of performance, and the work itself being acknowledged as intended for reception in a living context, visually, orally and temporally. It should also be recognized that much is lost in translation from the original language. (Compare, for example, the written text of the eddic poems with the recent experiments of these works in performance conducted by the medieval music group, *Sequentia*: see *Edda* [Deutsche Harmonia Mundi: DHM 05472 77381]; *The Rheingold Curse* [Marc Auel: MA 20016].)

There is all the more reason, in the light of these considerations, for questioning the general classification of the works under discussion as ‘poems’, rather than as ‘songs’, ‘chants’ or ‘dramas’. As already noted, the format of the works varies not only in metre, but also in content, style, likely origin and context, and manner of presentation. Some works, such as *Grottasöngur* and *Darraðarljóð*, seem to have a close relationship to work-songs; others, such as those depicting the deaths of Helgi Hjörvarðsson, Gunnarr and Högni, and Hamðir and Sörli, seem to have been designed to encourage warriors to emulate acts of heroism, thus connecting them potentially to the ancient genre of *barditus* that Tacitus refers to in ch. 3 of his *Germania*.⁸ (On the early forms of oral Germanic poetry, see, for example, Opland 1980: 7–73.) Yet others seem to be designed for female audiences, especially at times of grief, providing examples of stoical courage in the face of loss (as in *Guðrúnarkviður I* and *II*). An emphasis on applicability beyond the immediate context is apparent in the final strophes of *Guðrúnarhvöt* (as shown above) and *Atlamál*, for example. Yet other narrative works may have been meant simply to entertain, perhaps at weddings, as in the case of *Þrymskviða*, or at male or female gatherings (cf. the different approaches to the same theme in *Helgakviður Hundingsbana I–II*, *Atlakviða* and *Atlamál*; and *Guðrúnarhvöt* and *Hamðismál*: see further Sigurðsson 1998: xxviii–xlvii).

This leads on to yet another central question too rarely considered by philologists, who prefer to regard the material as set written ‘texts’, rather than as snapshots of a living spoken tradition: in terms of performance and content, there is a radical difference between the works composed in *ljóðaháttur* and those in *fornyrðislag*. The very names of the metres (the first relating to ‘magical chants’, the second to ‘ancient

words') draw attention to this difference. Most of the poems summarized in this chapter place emphasis on direct speech as a means of communicating feelings and events, something that in an oral context brings the characters relatively close to the audience. The works in *ljóðabáttr*, however, go further. As indicated above, *ljóðabáttr* (with the exception of just one strophe in the entire corpus, that is, *Vafþrúðnismál*, st. 5) is used only for direct speech, the poems composed in this metre taking the form either of monologues, or of dialogues involving as many as 16 speakers (in *Lokasenna*).⁹ This means, at the very least, that these works have no 'intermediary' relating the events of the past to the people of the present (as happens in works like *Atlakviða*). Instead, the performers, like actors, remain in character from start to finish. In *Grímnismál*, for example, it is 'Óðinn' who speaks to the audience, not a storyteller. As I have argued elsewhere (Gunnell 1995: 206–23, 282–329), the unique (in Iceland) speaker notation found in the margins of both the Codex Regius and the AM 748 manuscripts alongside the texts of at least four of the dialogic *ljóðabáttr* works (*Vafþrúðnismál*, *Skírnismál*, *Lokasenna* and *Fáfnismál*; cf. also *Hárbarðsljóð*) strongly suggests that the scribes viewed these pieces as similar in kind to the rudimentary dramas that were being recorded elsewhere, in England and northern France. This suggestion is supported still further by the amount of accompanying direct action (in the way of movement, gesticulation, rune carving, etc.) that seems to be implied by the speeches in these works. Indeed, it is interesting to note that in *Skírnismál*, *Fáfnismál*, *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál* key climactic action (the final meeting of Freyr and Gerðr, and the killing of Fáfnir, Vafþrúðnir or Geirrøðr) seems to be ignored in the extant works, raising the question of whether it was meant to be conveyed by movement rather than words (see further Gunnell 1995: 236–81).

In short, the *ljóðabáttr* works seem to belong to a performance genre and a contextual background different from those of the works composed in *fornyrðislag*. Not only do the former seem to work solely through the medium of speech; they are also directly connected to the pagan world of myth and religion, often centring on gnomic, mythical and magical knowledge, and on ritual activities. As indicated above, it is highly questionable whether they were originally composed by Christian scholars, as some have suggested. While it is unlikely that these works were seen as being much more than dramatic games or folkloristic remnants in the late thirteenth century, there is good reason to believe that they have their roots in pagan ritual, and that they give us some faint insight into the ways in which such rituals might have been conducted: rituals related, perhaps, to seasonal change or to male rites of passage, for the latter of which works such as *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Grimnismál* and parts of *Hávamál*, along with *Fáfnismál* and *Sigrdrífumál*, would provide an effective context.

In short, and as noted at the outset, literary classification on the basis of an early, thematically arranged collection of material must be regarded as a misleading oversimplification. The generic qualities of the individual works, and their likely origin and context as well as their form, should rather be taken into account. Far from constituting a single genre, the eddic poems include a wide range of material that comes from different roots and was designed for different purposes, audiences and contexts. This

material is united by the fact that its authorship was seen as being unimportant. What we are dealing with is essentially ‘folk’ material, drawn from early Scandinavian oral tradition which at some stage seems to have adopted the poetic form as a means of dealing with mythological and heroic subjects. One central value of this material is the more genuine vision it provides of the diversity of this tradition than would be gained if we had to rely solely on the mainly prose accounts of, say, Snorri’s *Edda* and *Völsunga saga*. As such, it presents us with a measure of living insight into the non-scholastic general world-view, not only of the poets but also of the common audiences of Iceland and (at the very least) western Scandinavia, in the early Middle Ages.

See also ARCHAEOLOGY; LATE SECULAR POETRY; MANUSCRIPTS AND PALAEOGRAPHY; METRE AND METRICS; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; RUNES; SAGAS OF ICELANDIC PREHISTORY; SHORT PROSE NARRATIVE; SKALDIC POETRY; WOMEN IN OLD NORSE POETRY AND SAGAS.

APPENDIX: THE POETIC EDDA: MANUSCRIPTS, FORM, DATING AND DEGREES OF
DIRECT SPEECH

Poem ^a	Sources ^b	Metre ^c	EÓs date ^d	Type ^e	Lines ^f	Total sts ^g	Spch sts ^h	Narr sts ⁱ	Mxd sts ^j
Vsp	R/H	F	Old?	Mon	538	66	66	-	-
Háv	R	L	Old	Mon	1087	164	164	-	-
Vm	R/A	L	Old	Dia	331	55	54	1	-
Grm	R/A	L	Old	Mon	360	54	54	-	-
Skm	R/A	L	Old	Dia	264	42	42	-	-
Hrbl	R/A	F? L?	Old	Dia	256	60	60	-	-
Hym	R/A	F	Rec	NarSp	316	39	5	24	10
Ls	R	L	Old?	Dia	396	61	61	-	-
Prk	R	F	Old	NarSp	256	32	7	10	15
Vkv	R	F	Old	NarSp	329	41	18	16	7
Alv	R	L	Rec	Dia	247	35	35	-	-
HHI	R	F	Rec	NarSp	456	56	24	26	6
HHv	R	F (L)	Old	Dia(Nar)	318	43	42	1	-
HHII	R	F	Old	Dia(Nar)	438	51	48	3	-
Grp	R	F	Rec	NarSp	424	53	50	-	3
Rm	R/F	L (F)	Old (Rec)	Dia	176	26	26	-	-
Fm	R	L (F)	Old (Rec)	Dia	279	44	44	-	-
Sd	R	L (F)	Old (Rec)	Fmon	251	37	37	-	-
Br	R	F	Old	NarSp	160	19	8	4	7
GðrI	R	F	Rec	NarSp	214	27	10	9	8
Sgk	R	F	Rec	NarSp/ FMon	565	71	43	19	9
Hlr	R/F	F	Rec	Fmon	108	14	14	-	-
GðrII	R	F	Rec?	Mon/FSp	349	44	44	-	-

(Continues)

Poem ^a	Sources ^b	Metre ^c	EÓŠ date ^d	Type ^e	Lines ^f	Total sts ^g	Spch sts ^h	Narr sts ⁱ	Mxd sts ^j
GðrIII	R	F	Rec	NarSp	80	11	7	2	2
Od	R	F	Rec	Fmon	250	34	28	6	-
Akv	R	F	Old	NarSp	349	43	15	21	7
Am	R	F/M	Rec	NarSp	762	103	49	40	14
Ghv	R	F	Rec	Fmon	173	21	16	3	2
Hm	R	F	Old	NarSp	220	31	11	10	10
Bdr	A	F	Old?	Dia/ NarSp	114	14	10	4	-
Rþ	W	F	Old	Nar?	365	47	1	45	1
Hdl	F	F	Rec	Fmon	390	50	50	-	-
Grt	RS	F	Old	NarSp	182	24	17	4	3

^a Poems are listed in the order in which they appear in the edition of Neckel and Kuhn (1962) (which follows the ordering of the Codex Regius as far as it goes). The list is restricted to poems printed in that edition, though it excludes the last two poems printed there (*Hiðskviða* and the death-song of Hildibrandr), which are counted among the *Eddica Minora* and are also edited in Heusler and Ranisch (1903). Akv = *Atlakviða*; Alv = *Alvismál*; Am = *Atlamál*; Bdr = *Baldrs draumar*; Br = *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu*; Fm = *Fáfnismál*; GðrI = *Guðrúnarkviða I*; GðrII = *Guðrúnarkviða II (in forná)*; GðrIII = *Guðrúnarkviða III*; Ghv = *Guðrúnarhvot*; Grm = *Grímnismál*; Grp = *Grípissþá*; Grt = *Grottasongr*; Háv = *Hávamál*; Hdl = *Hyndluljóð*; HHI = *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*; HHII = *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*; HHv = *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*; Hlr = *Helreið Brynildar*; Hm = *Hamðismál*; Hrbl = *Hárbarðsljóð*; Hym = *Hymiskviða*; Ls = *Lokasenna*; Od = *Oddrúnargrátr*; Rm = *Reginismál*; Rþ = *Rígsþula*; Sd = *Sigrdrífumál*; Sgk = *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*; Skm = *Skírnismál*; Þrk = *Þrymskviða*; Vkv = *Völundarkviða*; Vm = *Vafþrúðnismál*; Vsp = *Völuspá*.

^b A = AM 748; F = *Flateyjarbók*; H = *Hauksbók*; R = Codex Regius; RS = Codex Regius of the prose *Edda*; W = Codex Wormianus.

^c F = *fornyrðislag*; L = *ljóðabáttur*; M = *málabáttur*.

^d Based on divisions given in Sveinsson (1962). Old = Comparatively old; Rec = Comparatively recent; Old (Rec) = Mainly (comparatively) old, but containing a (relatively) recent element or elements.

^e Dia = Dialogue; Fmon = Framed monologue; FSp = Framed speech; Mon = Monologue; MonFSp = Monologue framing a speech or speeches other than the monologue itself; Nar = Narrative; NarSp = Mixture of narrative and speech.

^f Number of lines.

^g Number of strophes.

^h Number of pure speech strophes.

ⁱ Number of pure narrative strophes.

^j Number of strophes using both narrative and speech (often narrative introducing speech).

NOTES

1 There are many obvious parallels here to the varying approaches adopted in the folk collections of the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, other thirteenth-century European manu-

scripts such as the *Carmina Burana* in Germany, and that containing Adam de la Halle's carnivalesque drama *Le Jeu de la Feuillée* in France, point to a growing interest in

- permanently recording 'folk' material for posterity alongside more 'enlightening' material.
- 2 The most respected editions of the texts of the eddic poems are those of Helgason (1971) and Neckel and Kuhn (1962), which provide not only trustworthy versions of the main manuscript texts but also all manuscript variants. See also Sigurðsson (1998), and the detailed editions of some poems published by Dronke (1969–97). Dronke, however, permits herself to alter the original texts for one reason or another. In the present discussion, references to poems preceding the lacuna in the Codex Regius are to Helgason's edition; references to other poems are to the edition of Neckel and Kuhn.
 - 3 A somewhat different version of *Völuspá* is contained in the early thirteenth-century manuscript *Hauksbók*.
 - 4 Translations in this chapter are based loosely on those given by Larrington (1996).
 - 5 *Skírnismál*, and also *Lokasenna* and *Hárbarðsljóð*, have in fact been effectively performed as dramas in Iceland in recent years.
 - 6 On the problems encountered by the scribe as he tries to avoid repeating from *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, see especially Joseph Harris's article 'Eddic Poetry as Oral Poetry' in Glendinning and Bessason (1983: 210–42).
 - 7 It may be noted that few of the modern titles for the eddic poems are found in the original manuscripts.
 - 8 Cf. Þormóður Bersason's performance of *Bjarkamál* for the troops before the battle of Stiklastaðir in 1030.
 - 9 Admittedly, many of these works have prose introductions and interpolations, but as I have noted elsewhere (see Gunnell 1995: 194–203, 223–35), it is highly questionable whether these originally accompanied the 'poems'.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Editions and Translations

- Dronke, Ursula (ed. and transl.) (1969–97) *The Poetic Edda*. 4 vols. (vols. III–IV still in preparation). Vol. I: *Heroic Poems*; Vol. II: *Mythological Poems*. Oxford.
- Helgason, Jón (ed.) (1971) *Eddadigte*. 3 vols. (Nordisk filologi, serie A: tekster). Vol. I: *Völuspá. Hávamál*; vol. II: *Gudedigte*; vol. III: *Helteedigte, første del*. Copenhagen.
- Heusler, Andreas and Ranisch, Wilhelm (eds.) (1903) *Eddica Minora*. Dortmund.
- Larrington, Carolyne (transl.) (1996) *The Poetic Edda*. Oxford.
- Neckel, Gustav (ed.) and Kuhn, Hans (rev.) (1962) *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, vol. I: *Text*. 4th edn. Heidelberg. (1st edn., 1914.)
- Ólason, Vésteinn (intro.) (2001) *Konungsbók Eddukvæða: Codex Regius, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi Gl. Kgl. Sml. 2365 4to* (Íslensk miðaldahandrit: Manuscripta Islandica Medii Aevi III). Reykjavík.
- Sigurðsson, Gísli (ed.) (1998) *Eddukvæði*. Reykjavík.
- Wessén, Elias (intro.) (1945) *Fragments of the Elder and the Younger Edda AM 748 I and II 4:o* (Corpus codicum Islandicorum medii aevi XVII). Copenhagen and Reykjavík.

Secondary Literature

- Acker, Paul and Larrington, Carolyne (eds.) (2002) *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology*. London.
- Andersson, Theodore M. (1980) *The Legend of Brynild* (Islandica XLIII). Ithaca, NY.
- de Vries, Jan (1964–7) *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*. 2 vols (Grundriss der germanischen Philologie, ed. Hermann Paul, 15–16; 2nd edn., rev.). Berlin. (1st edn. 1941–2.)
- Fidjestøl, Bjarne (1999) *The Dating of Eddic Poetry: A Historical Survey and Methodological Investigation*, ed. Odd Einar Haugen (Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana XLI). Copenhagen.
- Glendinning, Robert J. and Haraldur Bessason (eds.) (1983) *Edda: A Collection of Essays*. Winnipeg.
- Gunnell, Terry (1995) *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*. Woodbridge.
- Harris, Joseph (1985) 'Eddic Poetry.' In Carol J. Clover and John Lindow (eds.) *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide* (Islandica XLV). Ithaca, NY, pp. 67–156.
- Karlsson, Stefán (2000) 'Orðsnilling og skriftin.' In Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (ed.) *Staferók-ar*. Reykjavík, pp. 249–52.

- Kristjánsson, Jónas (1988) *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature*, transl. Peter Foote. Reykjavík.
- Lindblad, Gustav (1954) *Studier i Codex Regius af Äldre Eddan*. Lund.
- Lindblad, Gustav (1980) 'Poetiska Eddans förhistoria och skrivskicket i Codex regius.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 95, 142–67.
- Lindow, John (1988) *Scandinavian Mythology: An Annotated Bibliography*. New York.
- Lord, Albert B. (1960) *The Singer of Tales*. Cambridge, MA.
- McKinnell, John (1994) *Both One and Many: Essays on Change and Variety in Late Norse Heathenism*. Rome.
- Ólason, Vésteinn (1992) 'Eddukvæði.' In Guðrún Nordal, Sverrir Tómasson and Vésteinn Ólason, *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, vol. I, ed. Vésteinn Ólason. Reykjavík, pp. 73–186.
- Opland, Jeff (1980) *Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetry: A Study of the Traditions*. New Haven, CT.
- Sigurðsson, Gísli (1990) 'On the Classification of Eddic Heroic Poetry in View of the Oral Theory.' In *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (Atti del 12. Congresso internazionale di studi sull'alto medioevo; The Seventh International Saga Conference, Spoleto, 4–10 September 1988). Spoleto, pp. 245–55.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur (1962) *Íslenskar bókmenntir í fornöld*. Reykjavík.
- von See, Klaus, La Farge, Beatrice, Picard, Eve, Priebe, Ilona and Schultz, Katja (eds.) (1997–2000) *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda: Götterlieder*, vols. II–III. Heidelberg.

6 Family Sagas

Vésteinn Ólason

The Icelandic word *saga*, pl. *sögur* – a derivative of the verb *segja*, ‘to speak’, ‘to say’ – means ‘a tale’ or ‘a story’. It is sometimes also used to describe a sequence of events out of which a story could be made. Sagas about Icelanders from a certain period and written by anonymous authors are known as *Íslendingasögur*, ‘sagas of Icelanders’, or, as they are frequently referred to in English, ‘family sagas’, albeit that this latter term is really only appropriate for some of them. It is used only about tales of considerable length which centre on the lives of people from a relatively small group of Icelandic families. The important part of the action in such tales takes place during the first century of the Icelandic Commonwealth, from c.930 to c.1030, though introductory sections may deal with events in Norway and Iceland during the main period of the settlement of Iceland, c.870–930. While the saga heroes may travel to foreign lands, most frequently Scandinavia or the British Isles, the main action usually takes place in Iceland and is rooted in the ways in which men feuded vigorously and eventually resolved their conflicts through the operation of a judicial system whose courts were unsupported by any common executive power. Exceptions to this familiar pattern are the two *Vínland sagas*, in which most of the action takes place in either Greenland or North America,¹ and *Egils saga*, whose hero, although born in Iceland, is mainly involved in conflicts in Norway and England. Such elements hardly justify referring to these 40 works or so as a separate genre, but taken together the narratives are characterized by a group of features which play a markedly less important role in other Icelandic sagas and tales. There are, therefore, good reasons for the long-standing tradition of dealing with this group of sagas as a single entity, regarding them as a separate family within the saga-tribe.

An important characteristic of many sagas is that the prose is sometimes interspersed with poetry, usually single stanzas spoken by the characters themselves, but exceptionally whole poems that are quoted in the main text. This poetry is often an important vehicle for the expression of thoughts and feelings that it would be improper for a character to give expression to in conversation. While especially

important in sagas about skalds, such as *Egils saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, *Kormáks saga*, *Bjarnar saga Hítðelakappa* and *Gunnlaugs saga*, a great number of verses are included in other sagas, such as *Víga-Glúms saga*, *Gísla saga* and *Grettis saga*. Several sagas, however, include no verse at all; others include none of importance.

Apart from a handful of fragments which have been dated to the second half of the thirteenth century, the *Íslendingasögur* are preserved either in vellum manuscripts from the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, or in paper manuscripts of more recent provenance. All these texts are copies, and sometimes represent the text at several removes from an early archetype; no saga text survives which can be said to be an author's original copy. There are, however, good reasons for believing that a majority of the sagas, perhaps almost two-thirds of the texts in the corpus, and including most of the major works, were composed during the thirteenth century. The remaining texts were composed in the fourteenth century; though one or two may date from even later.

At the heart of the plots which form the backbone of the *Íslendingasögur* lie feuds in which honour and even life itself are at stake. Whatever the origins of feuds, they come to exercise a fundamental influence on characters' honour and status in society. Feuds invariably arise through some incident or event which is considered to have compromised a victim's honour, whether or not this had been the intention of the perpetrator. The attempts of the victim or his family to reclaim their honour, and the repercussions, constitute the main elements of the plot. In some sagas many feuds, more or less closely connected to each other, form the substance of a complex drama which comes to an end when all conflicts are resolved or exhausted.

In what follows the most striking characteristics of the *Íslendingasögur* will be identified and key issues from the scholarly debate about them examined. While it is not possible to offer a detailed *Forschungsgeschichte* in the limited space available, reference will be made to important contributions.

Íslendingasögur as a Form of Narrative

Like most narratives of all types and all periods, the *Íslendingasögur* describe conflicts that often centre on property, social influence or a relationship between a man and a woman. The way in which these conflicts develop and are woven into the narrative is, however, shaped by special factors that cause them to follow a particular course. These factors are, on the one hand, the concept of honour, and, on the other, society's laws and traditional methods of resolving disputes. Thus, the form of the narratives is influenced by the society and its ideology – not necessarily as it actually was in reality, but as it is portrayed in the text. Consequently, it is not possible to say that the world presented in the sagas is identical with the world in which the events related took place, or with the world at the time that they were written. The text presents the ideas and attitudes prevalent at the time of writing about a past that was in many ways different from that time. These conceptual premises are an integral part of the

narrative tradition and determine the choice of subject and the development of the saga; the texts themselves contain a great number of features that are also traditional and were determined by the way the writing of *Íslendingasögur* had developed on the basis of popular narrative tradition and European literary tradition.

Each saga's structure is influenced to a substantial degree by its subject matter. Many sagas trace one or more feuds, describing their background, development and eventual resolution. In such cases, all or most of the narrative material relates to the feuds. Two of the most famous examples of this type are *Njáls saga* and *Hrafnkels saga*. In other sagas, the main structural element is rather the life of a single protagonist, often with an introductory account of his ancestors and even the settlement of Iceland, and then tracing the life of the central character and his main exploits until his death. *Egils saga* and *Grettis saga* are examples of this type, in which the plot is frequently less tightly structured than in sagas of the first group. Most of the fights and feuds in *Egils saga* take place while Egill is a young man in his prime; after that the pace of the saga slows down as he ages, and, eventually, he dies in his bed. *Grettis saga* has a more dramatic structure, as Grettir dies a hero's death. This is followed by a lengthy aftermath describing how his slaying was avenged. It is interesting to note that the main characters in the biographical sagas are frequently poets or outlaws (or both), while the main characters of the first group are chieftains, respected figures in society and participants in the struggle for power and esteem. There is no sharp distinction between these two groups of sagas, as in most cases the feuds in which the individuals are involved form an important element in the saga plots; other important elements may include journeys abroad, heroic exploits in Viking raids, and honours and riches earned from foreign kings or princes in return for valour in battle or the composition of praise-poetry. Outlaws in the sagas become involved in various adventures; though as these are the extended consequences of feuds, they are really of another type.

Sagas generally span more than one generation, and the introductory chapters usually contain a detailed account of the ancestors of the generation, whose members play the leading roles in the saga. However, *Laxdæla saga* is one of the very few that could be termed a 'family saga'. The history of four generations occupies a great deal of the work, with early feuding leading up to a slaying within the clan; in the fourth generation the conflict spreads outside the clan. There are other examples of sagas in which a dispute in one generation is repeated or mirrored in another, such as *Egils saga* and *Gísla saga*. The feuds related in *Ljósvetninga saga* between the Eyfirðingar and Ljósvetningar also extend over several generations.

Narratives about feud in the sagas share a number of elements in all the phases of the story. They always start with an incident which is or can be interpreted as an assault on the honour of a man, or a family. Men do not always react to assaults on their honour by resorting to the sword, and sometimes the initial points of contention seem of little importance – infringements of grazing rights or random actions which unintentionally cause offence. The first step is often to demand compensation; yet by the time terms have been agreed, both contending parties have more often than not gathered round themselves a band of supporters, chieftains or other prominent men,

who are intent on resolving the dispute. In the saga world it often proves very difficult to restore equilibrium in such a way that all the parties involved can be satisfied, no matter whether the dispute is resolved by mutual agreement, independent arbitration or due process of law. The honour of all those drawn into the affair is at stake, not least supporters and intermediaries, and even when terms are agreed by the leading protagonists, it is by no means certain that all the interested parties will accept the settlement. In seeking their own solutions, people can cause the cycle of violence to begin all over again. The danger of killings is often greatest when settlements have been reached which prove unacceptable to one particular individual. That person cannot demand compensation; instead he must wait for an opportunity to attack his adversary. In *Reykðæla saga*, after the slaying of Áskell the chieftain, one of his sons is content to accept compensation for his dead father; but his brother is overseas at the time and takes no part in the settlement. Returning home, he duly avenges his father and the feud rumbles on. After the burning of Njáll in *Njáls saga*, a settlement is negotiated between Njáll's relations and the burners. However, his son-in-law Kári, father of a boy who perished in the flames at Bergþórshváll, took no part in the settlement, and exacts his own grim revenge before a reconciliation is achieved at the end of the saga between Kári and Flosi Þórðarson, leader of the burners.

When matters reach the stage where individuals have been killed, the likelihood of vengeance killings is high, even though the case has been settled; in this way feuds can continue, until the injury to both parties is so grievous that settlements are eventually arrived at. Only then can the saga end. It is often the case that by the conclusion of a saga all those involved in the original dispute are either dead or outlawed.

Although in many respects similar to each other, *Íslendingasögur* are not as fixed in their form as fairy tales and many other popular forms of narrative. Attempts have been made, however, to identify recurrent narrative patterns or narrative elements in the *Íslendingasögur*. Andersson (1967) divides each saga into a fixed number of segments, depending on how the conflicts develop: (1) introduction; (2) conflict; (3) climax; (4) revenge; (4b) counter-revenge; (5) reconciliation; (6) aftermath. This structure is, however, rather too rough and ready to be fully satisfactory; and in the case of some sagas it seems almost wholly inapplicable. The feud pattern can recur many times in the same saga as we trace the details of many unconnected feuds. When a saga describes more than one feud story happening at approximately the same time, the narrative usually takes the form of a number of separate strands; that is, the narrator jumps from one feud to another. A good example of this is *Eyrbyggja saga*. Long and complicated sagas such as *Njáls saga* can often be divided into two halves. These devices of composition have been described by Clover (1982). Lönnroth (1976: 69–82) uses Andersson's feud pattern with minor modifications when analysing, not the whole of a saga, but a continuous section from a saga. He also establishes a framework for analysing overseas journeys in sagas, similar to the model which Harris (1972) had developed to describe the *Íslendingaþættir*. Lönnroth describes the travel

pattern of *Njáls saga* as follows: (1) departure; (2) a series of tests, including court visits and Viking adventures; (3) homecoming.

Another way of analysing feuds is to examine their minimal constituent elements (Byock 1982: 47–142). It is possible to show, first, that each feud story can be divided into conflicts and searches for reconciliation which follow certain fixed rules, and second, that solutions are always found, some of them lasting ones, and others all too temporary. These basic elements, which Byock calls feudemes, appear repeatedly in feud narratives, albeit not always in the same order, and form feud clusters and feud chains, according to his analysis.

Though it is possible to analyse the formal structure of plots narrated in the *Íslendingasögur* in terms of notions such as feud patterns, travel patterns or feudemes, these schemes can never account for every element in the text, and hence for the saga as a whole. The beginnings and endings of sagas lie outside the saga plot, along with various authorial observations which are introduced into the narrative. Another kind of material may also be said to function outside the plot – prophecies, dreams, and other indications of the future which at the same time point towards supernatural forces. All these elements contribute to the composite meaning of the saga and can point to interpretative possibilities.

The main characteristic of the narrative technique of the *Íslendingasögur* is that the stories are narrated as if they were history. The characters are often known from other sources, and place names and descriptions of local conditions correspond to reality, at least when the locations involved are those that Icelanders knew well, either from their own experience or by report. Thus, for the most part, there is consistency not only in saga depiction of Icelandic society, culture and local conditions, but also in their descriptions of individuals and their chronology. That said, it is clear that notions of what society was like in the Viking Age became less and less clear as time passed. Sometimes they include references to accounts, even contrasting accounts ('it is said that...'; 'some say...others say'), or comments which suggest that customs had changed in the period between the time when the events related may have taken place and the time when the saga was composed. This indicates that the time of the saga events is part of external historical time. The sagas stand out from the continuum of the past, and yet they are a part of it – part of a greater history that began in a remote past, and which continues after the sagas are brought to conclusion. The *Íslendingasögur* participate in what might be termed the textualization of Icelandic history and, in a larger context, the textualization of world history (Bruhn 1999). They create history as soon as it is written down. Thus, the sagas express the view held at their time of writing, by their authors and others, of the past they describe. Frequently, their semi-historical nature makes the sagas more effective than narratives that are evidently invented. Various scholars have seen these features of the sagas as a direct reflection of the oral accounts on which they believe the sagas were based, with the authors regarding these accounts as being factually or essentially true, even though the sagas themselves filled in many gaps with material of their own invention (Steblyn-Kamenskij 1973). Yet, in a more recent study, Meulengracht

Sørensen (1993) has argued that the guise of historicity is itself a device that saga authors cultivated by imitating oral narrative in an attempt to enhance the effectiveness of their works.

Whatever its origin, the respect for historical time in the *Íslendingasögur* appears in the attempt to present events in their proper chronological order. The narrators never state in advance what will happen later, and never describe the same events more than once. Frequently, however, events are anticipated, and at other times viewed retrospectively, so that the reader has the sense of being omniscient, but anticipatory references are never of the sort which involve the narrator describing some future event as if it has already happened. Such references for the most part take the form of warnings, incitements, dreams, prophecies and other more overtly supernatural events. Prophecy and prediction create anticipation and prepare the reader for the events to come, but do not overdirect or overinform – rather, they prompt the feeling that the plot is being driven by uncontrollable forces and that the outcome of events is inevitable. Most subtle are the anticipatory and retrospective references which appear in saga conversations. These either give expression to characters' memories of and feelings towards past events, or refer forward in time through reasonable and well-informed conjecture. A good example of a conversation with deep roots in the past, but which also points to the future without involving any discernible supernatural element, is the final exchange between Gunnarr and Hallgerðr in *Njáls saga* ch. 77, when Hallgerðr refuses Gunnarr a favour that he thinks could save his life and reminds him of the time he slapped her face. The episode reveals the emotional conflict of characters at a fateful moment; the feelings derive from the past and the events have implications for the future.

Even though events in the *Íslendingasögur* are usually narrated in a way which corresponds as closely as possible to chronological time, this is not to imply that sagatime is managed in an unimaginative or mechanical way. On the contrary, it is one of the most powerful rhetorical devices of saga narrators. The summaries of events which are provided between major scenes are generally dealt with rapidly and provide only the information necessary for the development of the saga. However, tension can be heightened and crucial scenes prepared for by retarding and broadening the narrative through a particularly detailed description of events, as can be seen in most sagas where major battles or confrontations are approaching.

The narrative method of the *Íslendingasögur* is marked by its formal objectivity and discretion; the narrator appears to view with an unprejudiced eye the unfolding events, explaining what happens, and reporting the words of men as if they had just been spoken. Sparing in his use of rhetorical language, the narrator is more inclined to understatement than to exaggeration. He adopts the same tone of voice whether major or minor events are being described, and whether he chooses to focus on or digress from the plot. This measured narrative approach serves often to create a powerful contrast with the fateful events being described, and contributes richly to the impact of the stories.

Though the narrator in the *Íslendingasögur* always situates himself outside the plot and narrates in the third person, attention is often directed to a particular character, just as events, either directly or indirectly, are also viewed from that same character's perspective. The result of such attention is to create sympathy for and identification with a character, unless his or her presentation (in words and deeds) has been very negative. From the first occasion on which Egill Skalla-Grímsson appears in his saga he is accorded a great deal more attention than other characters, and there are detailed descriptions of his deeds, even those of his childhood. Egill is unconventional, and his actions are described with an element of humour. He performs various appalling deeds, and yet the narrative method tempers the reader's astonishment and mutes hostility. The saga's narrative art makes it possible for us to share Egill's point of view while we read or hear his saga, and in this way he is made to seem a more substantial and intriguing figure.

Though the vocabulary of sagas is not large, and on the surface there is little rhetorical ornament, words are used tellingly and incisively. Considerable attention is paid to characters' physical appearance and clothing as part of their overall description. Dialogue plays a vital role in identifying the latent forces driving the plot, and the reciprocal relationship between words and deeds is also an important key to character depiction. The sagas reveal a greater faith in the independent life and power of words than is usually to be found in modern literature. This reveals itself both in the interpretation of dreams and in various verbal disputes and flyting matches. The word is at its most intense and powerful in poetry, with saga verses performing a variety of functions, notably the illumination of the inner life of characters not revealed in the prose. In this way it represents an independent layer in the text.

The World of the Sagas

Inevitably, the above account of saga structure and saga plots represents a simplification. A more detailed picture emerges when we turn to the characters, and to the ideas and values that govern their lives and give rise to conflicts and feuds.

Anyone familiar with the *Íslendingasögur* is bound to be intrigued by the descriptions of saga characters. Important figures are usually introduced by a statement outlining the character's outward appearance, abilities and underlying nature. Character portraits can be introduced at crucial moments in the narrative, and some of the greatest heroes are accorded a kind of valedictory tribute. It is likely that medieval scholarly notions about human types and human psychology influenced some *Íslendingasögur* authors, as did translated works such as *Alexanders saga* (Lönnroth 1976: 149–60). Yet there is little doubt that the deepest influence on *Íslendingasögur* character description derives from thirteenth-century Icelanders' traditional and native ideas about character, a sense nourished by heroic poetry, by ancestral tale and, not least, by their experience of everyday life.

Individuals perform a relatively limited number of roles in sagas, and we might imagine that saga characters are all really rather like each other. Yet closer examination reveals considerable variation. This is mainly because saga writers rarely try to depict perfect characters, and in any case a man's excellence is no guarantee of success or even survival in the saga world. In a dispute it is often not clear on which side justice truly lies, and the man who wins our sympathy and admiration by dying bravely after heroic resistance may well have dug his own grave earlier by thoughtless behaviour. Very different types of individual can perform similar roles in a saga, and individuals can conform to type in very different ways. The distinction between good and evil characters tends to be much less clear in sagas than, for instance, in courtly romance, not to mention saints' lives. Heroes may well find themselves under attack by worthy men acting in good faith, as was the case with Snorri the chieftain and his supporters when they attack and kill Arnkell the chieftain in ch. 37 of *Eyrbyggja saga*. Again, the worthiest saga hero often has faults which contribute to his downfall; and among the family and followers of faultless heroes are often to be found ill-starred men who time and again prove to be troublemakers.

Though the hero's opponents may be described as villains or, at best, thoughtless disturbers of the peace, this is by no means always the case. There are often extenuating circumstances, and good men frequently assume a leading role in complex disputes affecting their honour which less worthy men have initiated. This is less in evidence in late sagas, where virtually flawless heroes often find themselves confronted by unmistakably wicked opponents. In these sagas characters are one-dimensional, and the worthy hero normally triumphs over his evil opponent.

The plots and conceptual world of the *Íslendingasögur* require heroes, or at least men who can behave heroically when need arises. Ambition is another important saga theme, inevitably so in a society which values honour so highly. However, limits are placed on heroism by society's need to achieve a resolution of all conflicts so that life (no matter how fraught) can go on. So it is that moderation and a conciliatory spirit are also seen as positive qualities to be set in the balance against aggression and arrogance. Though the overall framework of positive and negative qualities operating within the sagas is not in itself particularly complex, many different combinations of such qualities can be found among individual characters. Additional elements also lend colour and vitality to a character: wisdom and foresight, generosity and loyalty, a sense of humour and a way with words, and on the other hand stupidity, self-importance, cruelty and duplicity. Last, but not least, many sagas pay close attention to a character's physical appearance. An individual's looks are certainly part of his or her personality, and saga writers are skilled in exploiting this.

Women occupy a different space from men in the *Íslendingasögur*, and the importance of different gender roles runs right through the world of the sagas. It is the role of men to represent their families in interactions with others, as for example at *þing* meetings (see chapter 28), and they must protect the family honour, by force of arms if needs be. Men are responsible for their wives, sisters and, if the father is no longer

alive, mothers. The farmers' wives, on the other hand, are in charge of household affairs. Men give women to other men in marriage, and it is not thought appropriate for a woman to be eager to marry in defiance of the wishes of her father or guardian. On the other hand it is considered right for the woman to be consulted, and unwise for a good woman to be married off against her will.

Unsurprisingly in a society where disputes are the province of men, the role of the woman is generally that of a passive victim linked to such disputes by the unwanted wooings and marriage proposals which she attracts. Yet there are many active roles for saga women. Many wives, widows, or even just working women in the household play a part in events by their speeches of incitement, and they can be regarded as the voice of public opinion or of what might be termed the commonly accepted ideology. This is the case with Hrafnkell's working woman in ch. 8 of *Hrafnkels saga*, who incites her master to action when Eyvindr Bjarnason rides past his homestead. Instances of women advocating peace and reconciliation are few and far between. One example is the woman who tells Mǫrðr about the fight between Gunnarr and Otkell at the Rangá river in ch. 53 of *Njáls saga*, and urges him (unavailingly, as it turns out) to intervene. In some of the greatest sagas, like *Eiríks saga rauða*, *Gísla saga*, *Laxdæla saga* and *Njáls saga*, women play decisive roles in the plot.

Recent research into the representation of women in Old Norse literature has identified four principal functions: warrior, sorceress, avenger and inciter (Jochens 1996: 87–123). These roles can be traced back to heroic poetry and sagas, and also to mythology. When it comes to the *Íslendingasögur*, women are never warriors but exceptionally take up arms for revenge. On the other hand, we find women who are engaged in both witchcraft and incitement, but also in the less dramatic functions of arbitrator, peacemaker and healer.

Saga heroes are seldom comic, though they may feature in comical or farcical scenes, as when the outlaws Gísli and Grettir escape from difficult situations. The sagas distinguish between men who are evil and those who are miserably insignificant, even though the two qualities sometimes go together; but being foolish and feeble can seem more comic than being wicked.

We find an ambiguous attitude towards heroism and a clear sense of the comic aspects of excessively heroic behaviour in the description of Þorgeirr Hávarsson in *Fóstbræðra saga*. He is certainly a great fighter, but his insatiable hunger for conflict often seems absurd, and the saga's style and humorous digressions support such a reading. The same can be said about some later sagas, such as *Hávarðar saga*. There is a heavily ironic description of Guðmundr the Powerful in *Ljósvetninga saga*, when he is seen as unable to fulfil the role of the great chieftain which he considers himself to be because he lacks the requisite courage and intelligence. No less ironic is the caricaturing of the chieftains in *Bandamanna saga*. They fail to see through the crafty Ófeigr's trickery as he plays each chieftain off against the others, and naked greed causes them to make fools of themselves. They emerge as comic figures because of the yawning gap between the honour normally due to people of such high social status, and their unscrupulous attempts to better their impoverished lot. The image of the

elderly Ófeigr is also comic in another sense: for all his ridiculous appearance, he proves to be far more capable and cunning than might have been expected.

The previous discussion of saga plots revealed the importance of honour and the obligations imposed on individuals by a vengeance culture. A work such as *Gísla saga* illustrates memorably the burden imposed on men by the demands of honour and retribution. In defining the moral framework within which men live, make decisions, and are judged, we need to remember that emotions such as love and jealousy, envy and wounded pride are woven into stories whose governing themes are honour and shame, or good and bad luck. These themes feature prominently in *Laxdæla saga* where, as in many other sagas, there is a strong sense that misfortune can invade the lives of those who have least reason to expect it. It can derive from various sources, among them an individual's temperament, as can be seen in the description of Grettir in his saga. Good and bad luck are among the most important concepts influencing men's lives in the *Íslendingasögur*, and the same forces lie at the heart of characters' understandings of their own lives.

Sagas in Society

Readers have long asked themselves why the *Íslendingasögur* were written and why they have the features they have. A common answer to these questions is that the explanation is to be sought in Iceland's special political structure and the country's isolation, far from other nations in the cultural region to which it belonged. Obviously, though, the sagas cannot be explained in historical terms without taking into account their roots in the Viking Age. The connection between these narratives and the Viking Age is clearly stated in the many sagas that describe voyages made by Icelanders to other countries, notably their visits to foreign kings and princes and periods spent in their employ, and on their Viking raids or trading voyages, either in their own ships or in company with others. Connected with all this is the glorification of skill at arms, courage, and loyalty to one's companions and leader, and the celebration of generous and victorious warlords. None the less, as has been stated above, the essential basis for the principal constituent elements of the sagas is Icelandic society during the first centuries after the settlement of the country, and the methods used by the settlers and their descendants to defend their rights and resolve their differences. In some respects, the ideology of the Viking Age worked well as an exemplary paradigm of manly conduct. The sagas, on the other hand, were composed long after the Viking Age by Christian authors. Two different cultural worlds played over the minds of Icelanders after Iceland was Christianized. Saga writers were Christians, and an awareness of the special nature of Icelandic society must always have existed among those who had heard reports of, or even come into contact with, monarchical rule overseas. Yet old ideas about the ties of family, the importance of honour, and the obligations of revenge continued to exercise a profound influence on people for as long as these feelings served to bind their society together.

As we have seen, there are many instances in the *Íslendingasögur* of the paradox at the heart of the revenge imperative. The right to take revenge is a necessary defence and insurance for a family wishing to live in peace, and ought therefore to help to promote social harmony, but it can also drive men to act in ways which destroy themselves and their families, and which can threaten society as a whole. This problem and the threat it poses to individual and family alike find expression in *Gísla saga*, as we have already seen, but *Njáls saga* explores the causes and consequences of ill luck more deeply, and shows how it infects the whole society, while in the later part of the saga we glimpse the dawn of another world, Christianized and hence with quite different values. Both sagas thematize issues of crucial interest for thirteenth-century Icelanders.

As analysed by Helgi Þorláksson and Gunnar Karlsson in chapters 8 and 28 of this book, the thirteenth century was a time of radical change in Icelandic society. It is natural to assume that such changes prompted people to reflect on basic values and ‘old virtues’, and made them more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of such values. During the upheavals of that century, and particularly after Iceland became part of the kingdom of Norway, many people must have turned their attention to accounts of earlier times when they believed society had been in a state of equilibrium and people had resolved their differences with dignity. *Egils saga*, which was in all probability written before 1240 (perhaps as early as 1220: see appendix to this chapter), could be an attempt to define the position and problems of the chieftain class in Iceland at a time when chieftains had to fight hard to retain their position and the Norwegian king had begun to show an interest in ruling Iceland. It is likely, though, that additional reasons lay behind the creation of the *Íslendingasögur*, including family pride (which may well have played a part in the writing of *Egils saga*) and also a desire to provide entertainment. A significant interest in social values and norms can be identified in several sagas, such as *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Hænsa-Þóris saga*, *Bandamanna saga* and *Hrafnkels saga* – these works were in all likelihood written after Iceland came under the Norwegian crown. Other sagas seem to reflect a narrower motivation, notably an interest in the history of particular families or districts. In the fourteenth century, the sagas changed in a number of ways, becoming more exaggerated and fantastic.

In a recent study, Jürg Glauser has pointed out that the *Íslendingasögur* can be seen as a ‘medium of cultural memory’ (Glauser 2000: 211). He contrasts ‘“tradition”, which signifies continuity, a continuation through writing and cultural maintenance, with “memory”, which is only made possible through the awareness of historical difference’. He emphasizes that to ‘achieve consciousness and a creation of the past, a break is needed’, and wonders if the *Íslendingasögur* become an instrument of cultural memory after the break of 1262–4, when Iceland lost its independence to Norway. It seems unnecessary, however, to date this break so exactly. An awareness of the present as qualitatively and increasingly different from the past was probably being formed during the whole of the thirteenth century while the most important saga literature was in creation. It is possible that some of the oldest, if not necessarily the very oldest, *Íslendingasögur* were written more out of a sense of the continuity of tradition than

with a developed consciousness of the past, while the most creative saga authors were working with cultural memory, textualizing a past to which they knew there was no return.

The *Íslendingasögur* clearly form part of a larger project aimed precisely at creating a history for the Icelanders, just as the First Grammarian created ‘an alphabet for us Icelanders’. This process of history writing began with *Íslendingabók* and probably also with the first written accounts of the settlement of Iceland. Many of the *Íslendingasögur* can be seen as miniature versions of the greater history of the nation, and therefore as mythic in their nature, yet at the same time they connect individuals and families with this history (Clunies Ross 1998). They deal with the settlement of Iceland – its causes and development. They then proceed to paint a picture of life in the country after a social order was established, highlight conflicts that could have disrupted society, and identify the methods used to resolve them. Many of the sagas describe the conversion, directly or indirectly, and some of the changes in thought and attitude that resulted from it, changes similar to those that must have taken place in the minds of Icelanders when the country submitted to the Norwegian crown. It is precisely this connection between each saga and a central myth or master-narrative that unites them all and enhances their effect. All the sagas are like fragments of one single saga of destiny.

Íslendingasögur in Literary History

When the *Íslendingasögur* were first composed, there was already a flourishing tradition of historical writing in the Icelandic language, and saga writers were developing their skills and extending their range at the same time as Icelandic translations of European romances, and of works of Christian instruction and international learning, first appeared. The existence in written Icelandic form of native Icelandic or Norse narratives, anything from myth to history, confirms that in Iceland before the age of writing men’s minds were already well stocked with many kinds of stories. Whoever first began, no doubt at considerable effort and expense, to commit such tales to vellum, and hence to address an absent audience, was obliged to try to tell these stories better than they had been told before, and to appeal to a larger group of readers and listeners. These authors must have been aware that what they were doing in solitude, the creation of written works, was an activity quite different from that of a sagaman narrating in a hall or at some gathering, and this awareness must have left its mark on the written saga. In crafting a saga, therefore, an author will have looked for possible models in the written literature with which he was familiar. In saints’ lives and kings’ sagas he could observe how authors began and ended their narratives, and how they organized lengthier and more complex narratives than those which could be told during an evening’s oral performance.

There is no way of determining accurately when the very first *Íslendingasögur* were composed, but this probably happened during the first quarter of the thirteenth

century. It seems clear, too, that the genre or sub-genre of the *Íslendingasögur* must have been fully developed before Sturla Þórðarson wrote his version of *Landnámabók* and *Íslendingasaga* between 1270 and 1280.

A factor which gradually changed the conditions for saga writing was the *Íslendingasögur* themselves, and the other literature which saga writers had encountered. As sagas proliferated, so the forms and models available to those composing new sagas changed, though there is no reason to assume that each individual saga writer would have known or had ready access to every work written in Iceland during his lifetime; the dissemination of books within a manuscript culture inevitably occurred on a random basis, though scribes in centres of learning presumably had access to many of the most important works available in Iceland.

Of course the literary tradition of the *Íslendingasögur* was not derived solely from tales and poems existing in oral tradition. Saga writers found among other written stories just the models for creating lengthy written sagas. Saga writers exhibit some (though not a great deal of) knowledge of secular classical texts. Some of them may have known works in Latin, and there was *Rómverja saga*, a translation based on the historical writings of Sallust and Lucan, and medieval works drawing on classical subject matter such as *Trójumanna saga* (based on *Ilias Latina*) and *Alexanders saga* (based on the *Alexandreis* of Walter of Châtillon). Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Breta sögur* (*Historia regum Britanniae*) were known around 1200 and translated during the thirteenth century. Saga writers could learn various lessons from such works, though the interpolations of 'Master Walter' in *Alexanders saga* were sufficiently strange for them not to have seemed appropriate models from which to work. Old Testament stories will also have proved instructive for prospective saga authors, and these were available in Icelandic in *Gyðinga saga* and in the biblical translation known as *Stjórn*.

The artistic representation of speech and conversation to be found in the finest *Íslendingasögur* must to some extent have had bookish origins, and, along with translated works, the kings' sagas were another likely source of inspiration – *Sverris saga*, *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*. There is in fact considerable overlap in material between the kings' sagas and the *Íslendingasögur*. On the one hand these latter works often tell of Icelanders journeying overseas, and of their dealings with the Norwegian kings and other foreign dignitaries; on the other hand, much that the kings' sagas have to say about human relations and the dealings of men resembles what can be found in the *Íslendingasögur* – for example, what is said about the pride and self-respect of Norwegian and Icelandic noblemen.

From the chivalric sagas, *Íslendingasögur* authors with an interest in such material will have learnt how to elevate their characters above mundane life by describing their colourful outward appearance, including details of clothing and weaponry; these authors will also have noted how in the translated romances feelings were expressed more openly than they could allow themselves to attempt in their own sagas. Such influences can be seen in both *Laxdæla saga* and *Gunnlaugs saga*, and still more in late works such as *Víglundar saga*. Sagas about the lives of saints also had some influence in

character descriptions, in speech and conversation, and in individual incidents which were presented with some of the colouring of religious prose.

As the *Íslendingasögur* proliferated and their form established itself, the freedom which authors felt able to exercise in reworking old narrative material must have increased, as must the ability and inclination of authors to make their sagas engage with general ideas – and even adopt particular attitudes, for all that these were never openly discussed. Of course, it was not just ideas about the nature of society which affected men, but also concepts of right and wrong behaviour, which were bound to arise when Christians discussed stories from pagan times, especially if similar events in their own day had been or were being judged in moral terms.

In most fourteenth-century sagas and tales the conflict between the ethics of honour and Christian morality is a thing of the past. In these works, incredible and admirable feats are performed by super-heroes such as Búi in *Kjalnesinga saga*, Finnboði in *Finnboga saga*, and others. These extraordinary events, in turn, reveal the limitations of man's power over nature, and heathen gods sometimes make their presence felt as messengers of Satan himself, as in *Flóamanna saga*. More clearly than ever before, sagas are now works of entertainment. In the fourteenth century, life followed more predictable paths than before and the fates of men lay in the hands of God and the king, both of whom were beyond the reach and influence of ordinary mortals.

See also CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; CONTINUITY; GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PSEUDO-HISTORY; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; PROSE OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION; RHETORIC AND STYLE; ROMANCE; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; SAGAS OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY; SHORT PROSE NARRATIVE; SKALDIC POETRY; SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS; WOMEN IN OLD NORSE POETRY AND SAGAS.

APPENDIX: DATING AND CLASSIFICATION OF THE *ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR*

Not all authorities agree on how many *Íslendingasögur* there are. This is largely because some of the late sagas and some very short narratives are not included in the canon. Although the list given below is alphabetical, it so happens that the last three titles

Title ^a	Oldest ms/fragment ^b	Date according to ÍF ^c	Date according to others ^d
<i>Bandamanna s.</i>	c.1350	c.1250	c.1300/C (ÍB)
<i>Bárðar s.</i>	c.1400	1350–80	L
<i>Bjarnar s. Hítödelakappa</i>	c.1375	1215–30	c.1300 (BG)/E
<i>Droplaugarsona s.</i>	c.1350	1200–40	E
<i>Egils s.</i>	c.1250	1220–30	E
<i>Eiríks s. rauða</i>	1302–10	1200–30	1200–30 (ÓH)/E

<i>Eyrbyggja s.</i>	c.1300	c.1220 (SN 1250–)	c.1265 (BG)/C
<i>Finnboga s.</i>	c.1350	1300–50	L
<i>Fljótsdæla s.</i>	c.1625	1500–50	1300–1400 (SK)/L
<i>Flóamanna s.</i>	c.1400	1290–1330	L
<i>Fóstbræðra s.</i>	1302–10	c.1200	1250–1300 (JK)/E
<i>Gísla s.</i>	c.1400	c.1250	C
<i>Grettis s.</i>	c.1500	1310–20	1400– (ÖTh)/L
<i>Grænendinga s.</i>	1387–94	c.1300	1200–30 (ÓH)/E
<i>Gunnars s. Keld</i>	c.1650	1400–1500	L
<i>Gunnlaugs s.</i>	c.1325	1270–80	C
<i>Hallfredar s.</i>	c.1350	c.1220	E
<i>Harðar s.</i>	c.1400	1235–45/14th century	L
<i>Hávarðar s.</i>	c.1650	1300–50	L
<i>Heiðarvíga s.</i>	c.1300	c.1200, before 1210	c.1260 (BG)/E
<i>Hrafnkels s.</i>	c.1500	by c.1300	by 1264 (HP)/C
<i>Hænsa-Þóris s.</i>	c.1500	1250–70	C
<i>Kjalnesinga s.</i>	c.1475	1310–20	L
<i>Kormáks s.</i>	c.1350	by 1220	E
<i>Króka-Refs s.</i>	c.1475	1325–75	L
<i>Laxdæla s.</i>	c.1275	1230–60	C
<i>Ljósvetninga s.</i>	c.1400	1230?–50	c.1220? (TA)/E
<i>Njáls s.</i>	c.1300	1275–85	C
<i>Reykðæla s.</i>	c.1400	c.1250	E
<i>Svarfdæla s.</i>	c.1450	1350–1400	L
<i>Þórðar s. breðu</i>	c.1400	c.1350	L
<i>Þorskfirðinga s.</i>	c.1400	1300–50	L
<i>Þorsteins s. hvíta</i>	1639	1275–1300	
<i>Þorsteins s. Síðu-Hallssonar</i>	c.1700	1250 ±	L
<i>Valla-Ljóts s.</i>	c.1640	1220–40	E
<i>Vápnfirðinga s.</i>	c.1425	1225–50	E
<i>Vatnsdæla s.</i>	c.1400	1270–80	E
<i>Víga-Glúms s.</i>	c.1350	1220–50	E
<i>Víglundar s.</i>	c.1500	c.1400	L
<i>Qlkofra s.</i>	c.1350	by c.1250	

a s. = *saga*.

b In this column, 'c.' usually means ± 25 years.

c ÍF = Íslenzk fornrit. In this column, 'c.' usually means ± 10 years. SN = Nordal (1953).

d C = Classical sagas (c.1240–1310); E = Early sagas (c.1200–80); L = Late sagas (c.1300–1450). (BG) = Guðnason (1993); (HP) = Pálsson (1971); (ÍB) = Ólason (1993); (JK) = Kristjánsson (1972); (ÓH) = Halldórsson (1978); (SK) = Karlsson (1994); (TA) = Andersson and Miller (1989); (ÖTh) = Thorsson (1994).

are among those that are most frequently omitted. *Þorsteins saga hvíta* is only the beginning of a saga; the author's intention seems to have been to write a new version of *Vápnfirðinga saga*. *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, which survives only in fragments, was probably never a long text; and *Qlkofra saga* has generally been published under

the title *Ólkofra þáttir* and regarded as one of the *Íslendingaþættir* (see chapter 26) rather than as a saga. Nevertheless it is preserved under this name in *Mjóðruvallabók* together with other *Íslendingasögur*, so it seems natural to include it.

The period of composition of the *Íslendingasögur* has long been a matter of disagreement among scholars. In the nineteenth century it was widely believed that they were works of the twelfth century, but this view was abandoned completely in the twentieth century. According to the dating by the ‘Icelandic school’ of editors of the *Íslensk fornrit* series (ÍF; cf. also Nordal 1953; Sveinsson 1958), the great majority of the sagas were composed between c.1200 and c.1400. Some individual datings within this range have been subjected to reasoned criticism. In the table above, the dates in the second column are those of the oldest manuscripts of each saga (note that saga manuscripts can rarely be dated with absolute confidence); those in the third column are the composition dates according to the ÍF editions, while those in the fourth are dates of composition that have been suggested in later studies; generally, though not invariably, these point to later dates than those given in ÍF. No attempt will be made here to determine which of these datings is most likely to be correct.

Íslensk bókmenntasaga II, 42, presents a rough grouping of the sagas according to their features; three groups emerge, overlapping to some considerable extent in time: early sagas c.1200–80, classical sagas c.1240–1310, and late sagas c.1300–1450. Classification of this type is made for practical purposes. The term ‘classical’ has been chosen to indicate a sort of balanced type in which neither ‘early’ nor ‘late’ features are found to any significant extent. The grouping here is intended to relate common ideas regarding dating to the main features of each saga. All the groups contain examples of what could be called a realistic/historical style and also what could be called fantastic/supernatural elements; this latter style is much more conspicuous in the sagas that can be termed late or post-classical (cf. Clunies Ross 1998: 50–1).

NOTES

Some sections of the text of this chapter appeared in almost exactly the same form in my book *Dialogues with the Viking Age: Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders* (1998), transl. Andrew Wawn.

1 One could ask why these sagas are classified as *Íslendingasögur* while *Færeyinga saga* and *Orkneyinga saga* are not. The reason is that the emigrants to Greenland come from Iceland and are supposed to have formed there a soci-

ety of the same kind as that which had developed in Iceland. The explorers of North America were either Greenlanders or Icelanders, and the traditions about these voyages were preserved among the descendants of people who returned to Iceland and lived there. These sagas stand apart from other *Íslendingasögur*, however, not only because of the location of events but also because in them feud is not an important structural element.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Editions and Translations

The Complete Sagas of Icelanders, including 49 tales (1997). General ed. Viðar Hreinsson, eds. Robert Cook, Terry Gunnell, Keneva Kunz and Bernard Scudder, intro. Robert Kellogg. 5 vols. Reykjavík.

Íslenzk fornrit II–XIV (1933–91). Reykjavík.

Secondary Literature

- Andersson, Theodore M. (1964) *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins: A Historical Survey* (Yale Germanic Studies 1). New Haven, CT, and London.
- Andersson, Theodore M. (1967) *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading* (Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 28). Cambridge, MA.
- Andersson, Theodore M. and Miller, William Ian (1989) 'Introduction.' In *Law and Literature in Medieval Iceland: Ljósvetninga saga and Valla-Ljóts saga*. Stanford, CA, pp. 3–118.
- Bruhn, Ole (1999) *Textualisering: Bidrag til en litterær antropologi*. Aarhus.
- Byock, Jesse L. (1982) *Feud in the Icelandic Saga*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London.
- Clover, Carol J. (1982) *The Medieval Saga*. Ithaca, NY, and London.
- Clover, Carol J. (1985). 'Icelandic Family Sagas.' In Carol J. Clover and John Lindow (eds.) *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide* (Islandica XLV). Ithaca, NY, and London, pp. 239–315.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret (1998) *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Society*, vol. 2: *The Reception of Norse Myths in Medieval Iceland*. Odense.
- Glauser, Jürg (2000) 'Sagas of Icelanders and þættir as Literary Representation of a New Social Space.' In Margaret Clunies Ross (ed.) *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*. Cambridge, pp. 203–20.
- Guðnason, Bjarni (1993) *Túlkun Heiðarvígasögu* (Studia Islandica 50). Reykjavík.
- Halldórsson, Ólafur (1978) *Grænland í miðaldarritum*. Reykjavík.
- Harris, Joseph C. (1972) 'Genre and Narrative Structure in some Íslendinga þættir.' *Scandinavian Studies* 44, 1–27.
- Jochens, Jenny (1996) *Old Norse Images of Women*. Philadelphia.
- Karlsson, Stefán (1994) 'Aldur Fljótsdæla sögu.' In Gísli Sigurðsson, Guðrún Kvaran and Sigurgeir Steingrímsson (eds.) *Sagnaþing helgað Jónasi Kristjánssyni sjötugum 10. apríl. 1994*, vol. II. Reykjavík, pp. 743–59. Rpt in Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (ed.) *Staflerókar: Ritgerðir eftir Stefán Karlsson gefnar út í tilefni af sjötugsafmæli hans 2. desember 1998*. Reykjavík, pp. 119–34.
- Kristjánsson, Jónas (1972) *Um Fóstbræðra sögu*. Reykjavík.
- Lönnroth, Lars (1976) *Njáls saga: A Critical Introduction*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London.
- Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben (1983) *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, transl. Joan Turville-Petre. (Original Danish edition 1980.) Odense.
- Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben (1993) *Fortælling og ære: Studier i islændingesagaene*. Aarhus.
- Nordal, Sigurður (1953) 'Sagalitteraturen.' In Sigurður Nordal (ed.) *Litteraturhistorie B. Norge og Island* (Nordisk Kultur 8B). Stockholm, Oslo and Copenhagen, pp. 180–273.
- Nordal, Sigurður (1958) *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða: A Study*, transl. R. George Thomas. (Original Icelandic edition 1940.) Cardiff.
- Ólason, Vésteinn (1993) 'Íslendingasögur og þættir.' In *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, vol. II. Reykjavík, pp. 23–163.
- Ólason, Vésteinn (1998) *Dialogues with the Viking Age: Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders*, transl. Andrew Wawn. Reykjavík.

- Pálsson, Hermann (1971) *Art and Ethics in Hrafnkel's Saga*. Copenhagen.
- Sigurðsson, Gísli (2002) *Túlkun Íslendingasagna í ljósi munnlegrar hefðar*. Reykjavík.
- Steblin-Kamenskij, M. I. (1973) *The Saga Mind*, transl. Kenneth H. Ober. (Original Russian edition 1971.) Odense.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur (1958) *Dating the Icelandic Sagas*. London.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur (1971) *Njáls saga: A Literary Masterpiece*, transl. Paul Schach. Lincoln, NE.
- Thorsson, Örnólfur (1994) 'Grettir sterki og Sturla lögmaður.' In *Samtíðarsögur: The Contemporary Sagas. Forprent: Preprints of the 9th International Saga Conference, Akureyri 31 July–6 August 1994*, vol. II. Akureyri, pp. 907–33.

Geography and Travel

Judith Jesch

The literature of the medieval Icelanders shows a strong awareness of their place in the physical world. This was on a remote North Atlantic island which they well knew had been discovered by their recent ancestors in the course of the Scandinavians' Viking-Age explorations of half the northern hemisphere. The theme of travel both near and far resonates throughout Old Icelandic literature, from the practical opening stanzas of *Hávamál* to the fantastical voyages of romances such as *Yngvars saga*. The Viking voyages of war, trade, discovery and settlement extended the world known to the Scandinavians, and many medieval Icelandic texts grew out of the desire to capture this world for posterity in literary form. The coming of Christianity by the end of the Viking Age not only made such writings possible, but provided new opportunities for travel with an emphasis on pilgrimage and crusades, and an introduction to the world of learned speculation about far-flung places.

The North Atlantic World

The version of *Landnámabók* produced by the lawman Haukr Erlendsson in the first decade of the fourteenth century describes the regular sailing routes to and from Iceland:¹

Learned men say that it is seven days' sailing from Stad in Norway to Horn in eastern Iceland, and four days' sailing from Snæfellsnes [in western Iceland] to Hvarf in Greenland. Hvarf is reached by sailing due west from Hennøya in Norway, and then one will have sailed to the north of Shetland so that it can only be seen if there is good visibility at sea, and to the south of the Faeroes, so that the sea is [i.e. appears to be] halfway up the slopes, and to the south of Iceland so that they can see its birds and whales. From Reykjanes in the south of Iceland it is three days' sea-journey south to Slyne Head in Ireland, and from Langanes in the north of Iceland it is four days' sailing

to Svalbard in the north of the gulf, and from Kolbeinsey [an island north of Iceland] it is one day's sailing north to the uninhabited areas of Greenland. (Benediktsson 1968: 33–5)

The most important geographical relationship described here is that between Norway and Iceland, a vital link throughout Iceland's history. Many of Iceland's first settlers came from Norway, and both law and Christianity are said to have reached Iceland from the same direction. Despite the reference to 'learned men', Haukr's description is more likely to be based on, and it certainly reflects, the actual experiences of many generations of Icelandic travellers. As Haukr spent much of his life in Norway, he made the journey to and from Iceland often enough to observe for himself the way the curvature of the earth makes the cliffs of the Faeroes disappear below the horizon.

Trade and cultural traffic with Norway were important both before and after Iceland's loss of independence to that nation in 1262–4, and the sagas are full of young Icelanders whose career-making voyages abroad began with that trip to Norway. But the Norway–Iceland link must be seen in the broader context of all the North Atlantic routes. Haukr's passage mentions Shetland, Faeroe and Ireland, all very much part of the medieval Norse orbit, as stepping-stones to Iceland for some of the first settlers, and as regions with which later Icelanders maintained frequent contact. Moreover, Iceland was itself a stepping-stone to regions even further west. There was a Norse colony in Greenland for some 500 years, and from there the northern peoples made exploratory voyages to the North American continent around the year 1000.

The primal voyage from Norway to Iceland is fossilized in the directional adverbs used by medieval Icelanders, in life and in literature. To sail *út* 'out' was to sail from Norway to Iceland, while the journey from Iceland to Norway was figured as a return journey, as *útan*, literally 'from the place which is "out"', with Iceland as the outpost, in relation to the point of origin in Norway. Similarly, the expressions *landnorðr* 'northeast' and *útnorðr* 'northwest', even when used in an Icelandic context, reflect the geography of the Norwegian homeland, where the land stretches towards the north-east and 'out' to sea is in the northwest.

The experiences of the North Atlantic travellers are also embedded in the names they gave to the places they discovered and settled. While Norway is *Norðvegr* 'the way north', Iceland (*Ísland*) is named after its imposing glaciers, particularly visible from the southerly approach described in Haukr's passage, above. Greenland (*Grœnland*), with a much larger ice-cap, is more of an 'ice-land', but unfortunately that name was already taken by the time it was discovered. According to Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* (ch. 6), Eiríkr the Red gave it the name 'Greenland' deliberately to attract further settlers (Benediktsson 1968: 13). Although that is only part of the truth, this name is not inappropriate. The summer pastures of Greenland would have seemed particularly lush and green to those raised in the rockier, volcanic island of Iceland. Even the thirteenth-century Norwegian author of *Konungs skuggsjá* (*The King's Mirror*, ch. 19) had heard of the fine pasturage of Greenland, because 'there is beautiful

sunshine there, and the country is said to have rather good weather', so that the sun is sufficiently strong 'to warm the country so that its earth gives good and fragrant grass' (Holm-Olsen: 1983: 32).

The three Icelandic peninsulas named in Haukr's passage all have names which derive from the observations of sailors. Reykjanes or 'Smoky Headland' refers to the steaming hot springs of this geothermally active part of southwestern Iceland, springs which looked like smoke to the first arrivals. Langanes is simply the 'Long Headland', its length most noticeable to those who had to sail past it. Snæfellsnes is the headland with a snowy mountain (like Snaefell on the Isle of Man) on it, visible from a great distance. The other names in the passage are also significant as landmarks for long-distance sailors. Horn in eastern Iceland (there is another one in the west) is the name of a prominent mountain that sticks out like a horn. In Norway, the Stad (ON *Staðr*) peninsula is particularly high and prominent, its name probably meaning 'the upstanding one', and while the etymology of Hennøya (ON *Hernar*) is less clear, this island is also a steep and prominent landmark. All of these would be very visible signs to a sailor that he had arrived in Norway or Iceland, and from which he could judge whether to turn north or south for the last part of his voyage, depending on his destination. Similarly, the name Hvarf (on the southern tip of Greenland, now Cape Farewell), means 'turn, turning-point', and refers to a prominent headland at which the sailor has to change course, in this case to head north along the west coast of Greenland. The same name was the origin of Cape Wrath, the northwestern tip of Scotland, where travellers from the north turned south for the Hebrides, Isle of Man, Ireland, Wales, and places even further south.

A number of Old Icelandic texts have the North Atlantic voyages and discoveries as their theme. *Íslendingabók* starts its history of the Icelandic nation with an account of the first settlers, in particular the Norwegian Ingólfr who, after first landing in the east of Iceland, settled in the west in Reykjarvík (later Reykjavík), named 'Bay of Smoke' because of the smoke-like steam of its geothermal activity, and today the capital of Iceland. In his wake, *Íslendingabók* tells us (ch. 1), there came 'a very great movement of people' to Iceland from Norway (Benediktsson 1968: 5). The discovery and settlement of Iceland are told in some detail in *Landnámabók*, which names several other discoverers and over 400 of the first settlers of the island, giving a unique insight into the processes by which a previously uninhabited island was settled by farmer-pioneers coming from Norway (some via the British Isles). No other nation has such a record of its birth, indeed no other nation was born in quite this way. This work (its title means 'Book of Land-takings') survives in five different versions, and is thus an endlessly reworked, geographically arranged catalogue of the names of the first people to settle on each Icelandic farm. To different degrees, the different versions also include genealogies, explanations of the origins of Icelandic place names, and anecdotes relating to the settlers' journey to Iceland, or to episodes during their first years there.

The more expansive versions of *Landnámabók* were put together at a time when the writing of sagas of Icelanders was at its height. We find the same sorts of anecdotes

about the settlement of Iceland and the experiences of the settlers in the early chapters of most sagas, and it is sometimes the case that the apparently more historical work, *Landnámabók*, has been influenced by the accounts of the sagas. Thus, the land said to have been settled by Skalla-Grímr, father of the hero of *Egils saga*, is much more extensive in the *Sturlubók* version (ch. 30) than in earlier versions of *Landnámabók*, clearly influenced by the inflated claims made in ch. 28 of the saga (Nordal 1933: xxxiii–iv).

Similarly, the epic journeys to Greenland and North America are mentioned in *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók*, but are recorded in more (though not always more convincing) detail in several works usually classed as sagas of Icelanders. *Grœnlendinga saga* (*The Saga of the Greenlanders*) and *Eiríks saga rauða* (*The Saga of Eirík the Red*) are often known as the Vinland (or Vínland) sagas because they give us the most detailed information about Norse voyages to the North American continent, but as their (modern) titles make clear, the focus is as much if not more on the Norse settlers and settlements in Greenland. Both *Landnámabók* (*Sturlubók* ch. 89) and *Eiríks saga* (ch. 2) show Eiríkr discovering and exploring Greenland, and how he *gaf víða ornefni* ‘named places far and wide’ (Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1935: 201; see also Halldórsson 1985: 406). *Landnámabók* (*Sturlubók* ch. 92) names a further nine settlers who went out with Eiríkr, and the fjords and valleys in which they settled, many of which bore their names (Benediktsson 1968: 134).

From Greenland, a number of Icelanders and Greenlanders, most famously Eiríkr’s son Leifr, made voyages to the west, and in particular to the place known to the saga authors (but also to Ari Þorgilsson and Adam of Bremen, on whom see chapters 9 and 17 respectively) as Vínland, the land of wine or vines. While Vínland is the most evocative name, the name that sums up the Norse North American voyages for modern readers, the sagas mention a substantial number of places, large and small, visited on these voyages, showing how Norse naming practices could be extended right across the North Atlantic. The North American names recorded in the sagas are mostly descriptive, reflecting the explorers’ wonder at the landscapes they were seeing, which must have been pretty exotic to eyes that were accustomed to Iceland and Greenland. North of Vínland, the two great regions of Markland ‘Forest Land’ (probably Labrador) and Helluland ‘Flat-stone Land’ (probably Baffin Island) reveal the predominant visual impression of these two regions to those sailing past them for more southerly areas. Markland in fact continued to be a useful source of timber to the Greenlanders, as shown by an entry in the Icelandic annals for 1347. South of Markland were the Furðustrandar, ‘Wonder Beaches’, so-called because it took so long to sail past them, according to *Eiríks saga rauða* (ch. 8). The fjord Straumfjörðr and the island Straumey were both named after the sea-currents (ON *straumur*) in that area (ch. 8), while Hóþ ‘Tidal Inlet’ was a name descriptive of its location (ch. 10).

Other North American names reflect the visitors’ activities there. Leifsbúðir was the name of a camp established by Leifr Eiríksson (*Grœnlendinga saga* ch. 5),² the second element *búð* ‘hut, booth’ indicating clearly that it was only a temporary or seasonal settlement, as in the booths the Icelanders would erect for their annual two-

week visit to the Althing. According to *Grænlandinga saga* (ch. 5), Kjalarnes 'Keel Headland' was the place where Leifr's brother Þorvaldr raised the broken keel of their ship after landing there, and Krossanes 'Crosses' Headland' where he was buried in Christian fashion after being fatally wounded in a clash with the natives (Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1935: 256). The saga explanations may not, of course, always be correct: Kjalarnes is also the name of a prominent peninsula in Iceland, and may simply have been transferred, or it may refer to the shape of the headland, or it may have been named after a ship's keel found there, as *Eiríks saga rauða* (ch. 8) would have it (Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1935: 223; Halldórsson 1985: 423). Even less probable is the same saga's account of the voyagers' glimpse of Einþœtingaland 'Uniped Land', with its associated story of a one-legged creature (ch. 12), which owes more to medieval marvel tales than to real experiences in North America (Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1935: 232; Halldórsson 1985: 432).

Faeroe, the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland, and Ireland were also very much a part of the North Atlantic world. For many Icelandic settlers, the journey from Norway took a detour of a generation or two through one or more of these places, as can be seen in the emblematic emigration of the Norwegian-born Auðr, as described in *Landnámabók* (*Sturlubók* ch. 95; her story is also told in *Laxdæla saga* chs 4–5):

Óleifr the White went on Viking raids in the west and conquered Dublin in Ireland and its hinterland and became king over it; he married Auðr the Deeply Wealthy, daughter of Ketill Flat-nose; their son was called Þorsteinn the Red. Óleifr died in battle in Ireland, and Auðr and Þorsteinn then went to the Hebrides. There Þorsteinn married Þuríðr, daughter of Eyvindr the Norwegian and sister of Helgi the Lean; they had many children. Their son was called Óláfr feilan, and their daughters Gróa and Álǫf, Ósk and Þórhildr, Þorgerðr and Vigdís. . . .

Auðr was in Caithness when she heard of the death of Þorsteinn. She then had a ship built secretly in a wood and, when it was ready, she sailed for the Orkneys; there she married off Gróa, Þorsteinn the Red's daughter; she was the mother of Grélǫð, whom Þorfinnr Skull-splitter married. After that, Auðr set out to look for Iceland; she had 20 free men on the ship with her. . . .

Auðr sailed first for the Faeroes and there she married off Álǫf, Þorsteinn the Red's daughter; the Götuskeggjar are descended from her. Then she went to look for Iceland. (Benediktsson 1968: 136, 138)

The remaining granddaughters were married off in Iceland, and Auðr is remembered in *Íslendingabók* (ch. 2) as one of the four most prominent settlers of Iceland (Benediktsson 1968: 6).

With such close family connections, the Icelanders maintained their links with the Faeroes and the islands to the south. Like Greenland, both Faeroe and Orkney have their own sagas, written by Icelanders in the thirteenth century, describing significant events in their history in a genre and style very similar to, though not identical with, the sagas of the Icelanders themselves.

The Viking World

Viking activities in the British Isles were not restricted to the northern and western parts, although these areas are best represented in saga literature because of their long-lasting contacts with medieval Iceland. Other than some archaeological evidence, we have no Scandinavian sources at all for the Viking raids on England of the ninth and early tenth centuries, which were in any case mainly carried out by Danes. Later in the tenth century, the renewed raids on England had a different character: they were more likely to be carried out by Swedes and Norwegians as well as Danes, and more likely to be led by men whom tradition identifies as kings. And so, from the mid-tenth century, we have Scandinavian evidence for Viking activity in England from two groups of contemporary sources: runic inscriptions from mainland Scandinavia (but mainly Sweden), and the skaldic verse composed in honour of Scandinavian leaders and preserved in Icelandic texts, mainly the historical sagas of the kings of Norway. The same sources also provide evidence of Viking activity on the European continent and in the east.

One of the late tenth-century royal Vikings commemorated in skaldic verse was the Norwegian king Óláfr Tryggvason. His court poet, the Icelander Hallfreðr Trouble-some-skald, summed up the king's career in *Óláfsdrápa*. This poem is cited at some length in *Fagrskinna* (a history of the kings of Norway) as evidence for the fact that 'Óláfr won many kinds of renown in Russia (Garðaríki) and widely throughout the East (Austrvegr), in Europe (Suðrlönd) and in the British Isles (Vestrlönd)' (Einarsson 1984: 141). The poet begins by stating that he has heard that the king had 'piled the corpses high in many places' and goes on to list the many groups of people over whom he triumphed. First, these are his near neighbours in Jamtaland (Jämtland, on the border between Norway and Sweden), Götaland, and Skåne in present-day Sweden, in Wendland on the south coast of the Baltic, and in Denmark to the south of Hedeby. From there he progresses to defeat the continental Saxons and the Frisians. With a detour to Russia, he then returns to the Low Countries, fighting the inhabitants of Walcheren and the Flemings. The last stage of his Viking progress takes him to the British Isles, where he triumphs over the English, specifically the Northumbrians, the Welsh and the Cumbrians, and then devastates the Isle of Man, and defeats the Scots, the Hebrideans and the Irish. Hallfreðr's poem has little useful or even convincing detail, indeed he makes clear that his account of his patron's career is very much at second hand. Thus, the list of Óláfr's opponents may be more emblematic than factual, nor is it certain that he went to all of those places in that order. But the poem usefully outlines the various arenas for Viking activity in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, as we also know them from other sources.

Many of the same places are mentioned or alluded to on some of the thousands of rune stones erected in memory of the wealthy landowners, traders and occasional Vikings of late tenth- and eleventh-century Scandinavia, especially Sweden. Although

the memorial inscriptions are generally formulaic and not very informative, occasionally they stretch to telling us what the deceased achieved in his lifetime, or where he died, and these often involved journeys either to the east or to the west. Some of those commemorated must have travelled very widely, such as Ásgautr, commemorated by his son Ketilfastr at Ubby in eastern Uppland, who is laconically said to have been both ‘west and east’ (Wessén and Jansson 1943–6: 353). He presumably returned from all of his voyages to die at home, unlike Holmsteinn, from Tystberga in Södermanland, who had ‘long been in the west’, but died, along with his son Hróðgeirr, ‘in the east with Ingvarr’ (Brate and Wessén 1924–36: 134).

Ingvarr’s expedition to the east is alluded to on some 26 runic memorials from east central Sweden (Uppland, Södermanland and Östergötland), commemorating members of the expedition, most of whom, including their leader, are said to have died in the east. Neither the purpose nor the exact destination of this expedition is known, although the Gripsholm stone, which commemorates Ingvarr’s brother Haraldr, hints at both:

They went gallantly, far for gold,
and in the east fed the eagle.
They died in the south in Serkland.
(Brate and Wessén 1924–36: 154)

This verse, as well as displaying the heroic light in which the expedition was seen, links to the Old Norse-Icelandic poetic tradition in its use of the *fornyrðislag* metre (see chapter 15) and the poetic conceit of the warrior feeding the eagle (by providing it with a lot of corpses; cf. also chapter 23).

The name ‘Serkland’ occurs in several of the Ingvarr inscriptions, and learned discussion about exactly where it was is inconclusive. A strong contender is the region around the Caspian sea, with the name possibly deriving from the city of Sarkel in the territory of the Khazars, a very long way from central Sweden. King Haraldr harðráði (‘the Hard Ruler’) of Norway (d. 1066), who spent his youth in the east, also fought a campaign in Serkland, calling it *fjarri fóstrlandi* (‘far from my homeland’; Jónsson 1912–15: B. 1). In both runic inscriptions and skaldic verse it has emblematic status as the southeasternmost destination of the far-travelling Vikings, wherever it was. The romance of Serkland touched the Icelandic imagination, and Ingvarr’s expedition is fictionalized in *Yngvars saga víðfjörta*, a full-blown and quite conventional Icelandic *fornaldarsaga* (see chapter 25 below) with the usual motifs of giants, princesses and dragons, yet clearly having some connection with the historical expedition commemorated on the Swedish rune stones. Though the author of the saga has been described as an ‘armchair traveller’, the imaginary landscape of Yngvarr’s travels corresponds to the well-attested eastern route from central Sweden to Constantinople, via the Baltic and the Russian river systems. Many runic inscriptions demonstrate that this route was frequently travelled, at least in the eleventh century, and name the most significant places along the route.

For most such eleventh-century travellers, their destination was not Serkland, but the Byzantine Empire and, in particular, its capital Constantinople (Mikligarðr). Constantinople was where Scandinavians could make both a name and a fortune for themselves by serving in the Emperor's Varangian Guard. The most famous member of this troop was the Haraldr (harðráði) already mentioned, younger step-brother of St Óláfr and later king of Norway himself. His activities there are alluded to in skaldic verse, which is both a source for and embroidered upon in historical sagas like *Heimskringla*. But there were others, such as a certain Ragnvaldr from Uppland in Sweden who, while ostensibly commemorating his mother on a splendid runic boulder, took the opportunity to mention that he had been in Grikkland (Byzantium), where he had been *liðs foringi* 'captain of the troop' (Wessén and Jansson 1940–3: 159). The way to *Grikkland* went through Russia, which was known as *Garðar* or *Garðaríki* from its most distinguishing feature, the fortified enclosures or 'towns' (*garðar*) which were centres of trade and craft, where Scandinavians traded or fought as mercenaries for the rulers of Novgorod and Kiev. Of these towns, Ladoga (ON *Aldeigja*) is mentioned in one skaldic stanza, while Novgorod (ON *Holmgarðr*) is mentioned as the place of death of three Swedes who were commemorated by runic inscriptions in Gotland, Södermanland and Uppland.

While the far-travellers to Russia and Byzantium were probably more concerned with making money as mercenaries, the runic inscriptions also record voyages to places just across the Baltic, which are as likely to have been undertaken for purposes of trade. Most famous of these is the Mervalla inscription from Södermanland, again in simple verse (see also chapter 23 below):

He often sailed to Semigallia,
in a dearly bought craft, around Domisnes.
(Brate and Wessén 1924–36: 173)

The place names show that Sveinn, commemorated here by his wife Sigríðr, made regular trips to the area around the Gulf of Riga in his *knorr*, a word that can refer to different kinds of ships but here most likely is a trading ship. Sveinn was presumably commemorated at the end of a successful life, but not all who made this journey came home. One Bergviðr 'drowned in Livonia', the region around the Gulf of Riga, as recorded in the memorial put up by his brother back home in Södermanland (Brate and Wessén 1924–36: 30).

Ships and Boats

Such raiding and trading in both east and west, the discovery and settlement of Iceland and Greenland, and the exploration of North America, all depended on Scandinavian skill in ship-building and seafaring. Ships and boats of all kinds feature extensively in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, and are also well represented in the

archaeology of both the Viking Age and the medieval period, with many discoveries made over the last century or so. While these finds have the potential to bring the texts to spectacular life, there are problems of reconstruction, chronology, function and source criticism to be solved before there can be a successful reconciliation of the textual and artefactual evidence.

The most famous Viking ships, found in the two high-status burials (one female, one male) of Oseberg and Gokstad in Norway, are from the early Viking Age (from before 834 and before c.900, respectively), a time from which there is little linguistic or textual evidence with which to compare them. The Skuldelev ships found underwater in the Roskilde Fjord in Denmark, on the other hand, correspond rather closely in date (tenth- or eleventh-century) to the late Viking-Age skaldic poetry in praise of kings and chieftains and their seafaring and martial achievements, providing a good basis for comparison. Both the poetry and the ships reveal the wide geographical range of these warrior leaders: the Skuldelev ships, though found in Denmark, were made in Denmark, Norway and Ireland, while the kings and earls celebrated in skaldic verse also ruled in Norway, Denmark, England, Scotland and Ireland. Archaeology is gradually also providing more evidence of ships and boats from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries: in 1997, nine medieval wrecks (all but one dated to after 1100) were discovered underwater during building works to extend the Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde, providing evidence for ships that were in use at the time the sagas were written. There is, however, very little relevant archaeological evidence from Iceland itself. The few Viking-Age boat graves (five at last count) found there originally contained very small boats. Timber was always a problem for boat-building in Iceland, and it is likely that most vessels were imported, or built from imported timber.

All such finds of early Scandinavian ships and boats are of course fragmentary, in many cases extremely so, and the fine drawings and reconstructions we are used to seeing of them are inevitably based to some extent on intelligent guesswork. Similarly, it can be difficult to know how to understand the literary descriptions. Are Snorri's descriptions (in *Heimskringla*) of Viking-Age sea-battles based on the customs of his own time or are they extrapolated from the contemporary, but cryptic, evidence of the skaldic verses he cites? (A bit of both.) Terminology is also a problem. Can we equate the words used of ships and sailing in the literary sources with actual ships? (Not always.) Would the Gokstad ship, for instance, have been called a *knorr*? (Probably.) Skuldelev 2 seems to correspond very closely to what would have been called a *skeið*, but did anyone other than poets talk of 'dragon'-ships? (Probably not.) The problem of terminology intersects with those of chronology and geography. If Gokstad is a *knorr*, is that also the case with Skuldelev 1? (Probably.) Did a *knorr* mean the same kind of vessel in Saga-Age Iceland as in eleventh-century Sweden (where the word appears in a number of runic inscriptions)? (Not necessarily.) The archaeological finds show that ships were gradually more and more differentiated by their purpose and function from the late tenth century onwards, and to some extent this development can also be traced in the terminology of, first, skaldic verse and,

then, the sagas. The ship-finds also reveal developments in ship-building techniques, although Scandinavian vessels continued to conform to the classic clinker-built 'Viking ship' model until the arrival of the Hanseatic cogs in the fourteenth century. Indeed the native ship-building tradition lived on in the small boats of both Scandinavia and the North Atlantic region until the present day, and in the slightly larger fishing boats of northern Norway and the Faeroes until the nineteenth century.

The creative skill of ship-building had its counterpart in the craft of the skald, also concerned with fashioning disparate elements into a functioning whole, in which each part fitted exactly into the overall structure. Much of the best skaldic verse is about seafaring, in contrast to the rather more conventional accounts of the leader's success in battle and generosity to his men. Stanzas about sailing are naturalistic and descriptive and, eschewing the more outlandish kennings, paint as clear a picture of ships and sailing as is possible within the generic constraints of the difficult skaldic metres. The twelfth-century Icelandic poet Einarr Skúlason, more famous for his religious poem *Geisli*, is said in *Morkinskinna* to have composed a stanza in response to a challenge by the Norwegian king Eysteinn Haraldsson. A woman called Ragnhildr, who kept her own longship, is leaving Bergen harbour, and the king challenges the poet to come up with a stanza about her before the ship is out of sight:

Hola báru rístr hlýrum
 hreystisprund at sundi
 (blæss élreki of ási)
 Útsteins (vefi þrútna):
 varla heldr und vildra
 víkmarr á jarðríki
 (breiðr viðr brimsgang súðum
 barmr) lyptingar farmi.

[The woman of valour carves the hollow wave with the prow towards Útsteinn's sound, the storm-driver {wind} blows the swollen sail over the yard; hardly any inlet-horse {ship} on earth carries a more pleasing poop-cargo; the broad rim [= ship] conquers the surf with strakes.] (Jónsson 1912–15: IB, 456)

This stanza has only one true kenning, *víkmarr* 'inlet-horse [= ship]', and little purely poetic language (*hreystisprund* 'woman of valour'). But it is full of the everyday vocabulary of the sea (*hola báru* 'hollow wave'; *brimsgang* 'surf'), the weather (*blæss élreki* 'the storm-driver {wind} blows'), and technical terms for parts of the ship (*hlýrum* 'prow'; *ási* 'yard'; *vefi* 'sail'; *súðum* 'strakes'; *barmr* 'rim'; *lyptingar* 'poop'). The name 'Útsteins sund' locates the occurrence in a specific place, while the poetic allusion to Ragnhildr as 'cargo' also indicates the purpose of her voyage, her trading activity making her a *hreystisprund* 'woman of valour'.

We do not know where Ragnhildr was sailing to, though much of the traffic out of Bergen in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries headed west, to Iceland, but also to Orkney, the Hebrides, Greenland, and other parts of the North Atlantic world. Such

journeys were not easy, for the ships provided no protection from the elements. Although Viking-Age ships did have decking, they were not large enough to provide sufficient room under the decking for passengers to shelter – the space was used mainly for cargo. It is not until the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, when ships were larger, that there is some evidence in the sagas for cabins, usually for royal or other important passengers. In addition to the vagaries of wind and weather, passengers had to endure not only each other's company, but often that of their domestic animals as well. Certainly, there was no other way for sheep, cows and horses to reach Iceland with the first settlers, other than closely packed into the emigrants' ships with them. Conditions in the North Atlantic are generally not easy, even in the summer sailing season, and many lives must have been lost. *Landnámabók* (*Sturlubók* ch. 90) records that only 14 of the ships that left Iceland for a new life in Greenland arrived, out of the 25 that set out (Benediktsson 1968: 132). And, according to the *Vínland sagas*, Leifr Eiríksson 'the Lucky' received his nickname because he rescued some people who had been shipwrecked and whom he came across sheltering on a reef (*Eiríks saga* ch. 5, *Grænlandinga saga* ch. 4; (Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1935: 212, 253–4; Halldórsson 1985: 415). In truth, it was those whom he rescued who were lucky. Even more local voyages could end in tragedy. *Laxdæla saga* (ch. 76) describes in some detail the drowning of Guðrún's fourth husband Þorkell Eyjólfsson in a storm while crossing Breiðafjörðr, watched by people on both sides (Sveinsson 1934: 222).

Overland Travel

Despite the dangers, sailing was usually the easiest way to travel any distance in Viking-Age and medieval Scandinavia, and even Iceland. Geography and climate conspired to make overland journeys often difficult and sometimes impossible, and literary descriptions of such journeys foreground the difficulties.

The horses the settlers brought to Iceland with them adapted well to their new home and proved to be essential to the development of Icelandic society. Even those who lived in the northeast could ride to the annual assembly at Þingvellir in the southwest, though it did take a long time. According to *Hrafnkels saga* (ch. 7), Hrafnkell needed 17 days for the journey, taking the usual route for people going to the assembly (Jóhannesson 1950: 109). But good local knowledge could make trips on horseback either shorter, or easier. Thus, Sámr can get the advantage of surprise on Hrafnkell in their dispute by taking a shorter route to Þingvellir and arriving there before him (ch. 7; Jóhannesson 1950: 109). Earlier in the saga (ch. 2), it says that Hrafnkell and his father used to visit each other regularly, but because Hallfreðr found the route across Fljótsdalsheiðr rocky, wet and difficult to cross, he found a longer and drier route, used only by those knowledgeable about the district (Jóhannesson 1950: 99). Later on, Hrafnkell is able to make good use of this knowledge in his revenge killing of Eyvindr (ch. 14). Eyvindr, newly arrived from a trip abroad with 16 pack

horses, gets bogged down twice on Fljótsdalsheiðr, with one manuscript version of the saga describing the dangers in some detail:

Eyvindr rides west until he came to the middle of the heath; it is called Bersagotur. There is a turfless bog there, and it is like riding through mud; it often reached up to the knee, or the middle of the leg, and sometimes the belly [of their horses], but underneath it is as hard as rock.

[Then there is another bog ahead of them, called Oxamýrr. It is very grassy, and has wet patches so that it is difficult to cross by those who are not familiar with it. The two bogs take equally long to cross, but the second one is worse in that it is wetter, and people often have to unload the horses. That is why old Hallfreðr had made the higher track, even though it was longer.] (Jóhannesson 1950: 127–9)

By using the track established by his father and well known to him, Hrafnkell is able to catch up with Eyvindr and kill him.

The trials and tribulations of travel within Scandinavia are amusingly described by the poet Sigvatr in his *Austrfararvísur*, an account of a diplomatic mission he undertook, using various methods of transport, to Sweden on behalf of the Norwegian king St Óláfr. One stanza describes the pain of walking through the vast Eiðaskógr:

Vasa fyrst, es rannk rastir
reiðr of skóg frá Eiðum,
menn of veit, at mœttum
meini, tolf ok eina.
Hykk á fót, en flekkum
fell sár á il hvára,
hvasst gengum þó þingat
þann dag, konungs mǫnnum.

[It was not the first time, everyone knows, that we met with trouble when, angry, I traversed thirteen leagues of forest from Eiðir. Yet I think we went there fast on foot that day, and the kings' men got bad blisters on both their soles.] (Aðalbjarnarson 1979: 136)

Sigvatr's poem is in essence a report back to the king, and he uses much of it to complain about the conditions on the journey.

Overland travel could be easier in winter. Skiing was invented in northern Scandinavia in the Stone or Bronze Age, judging from the evidence of rock carvings, and there are a number of references to it in sources from the Viking Age and the medieval period. Adam of Bremen writes (IV, 32) of the Scritefingi, the northern neighbours of the Norwegians and Swedes, who 'cannot live without snow and frost' and who 'run faster than wild animals in their coursing through the deepest snow' (Trillmich and Buchner 1978: 478). The term 'Scritefingi' represents ON **Skrið-finnar* 'sliding Finns', referring to the characteristic skill of the Lapps, and in many sources the

activity is indeed associated with strange figures from remote places. In Old Norse mythology, the giantess Skaði has her home in the mountains, where she 'goes about a lot on skis and with a bow and shoots animals' (Faulkes 1982: 24). Snorri's saga of St Óláfr in *Heimskringla* tells of the Icelander Þóroddr Snorrason's encounter with the archetypal Norwegian backwoodsman, Arnljótr gellini, who is later baptized and dies with Óláfr at Stiklarstaðir (Stiklestad). After many adventures on a tax-collecting journey to Jamtaland, Þóroddr and his companion are helped to escape by Arnljótr (ch. 141). Arnljótr's skis are said to be 'both broad and long', and he uses a single stick called a *geisl*. Finding that the two Icelanders cannot ski as fast as he can, he puts both of them on his own skis, holding on to him from behind, and he is said to have 'glided as fast as if he were unburdened' (Aðalbjarnarson 1979: 259).

Although the Icelanders were familiar with the concept of skiing, the story of Arnljótr contrasts their lack of skill at it with that of the Norwegians, and there is little evidence that Icelanders did much skiing themselves. In *Valla-Ljóts saga* (ch. 6), a minor character called Sigmundur uses skis to get about in a snowstorm, but he may well have been Norwegian (Kristjánsson 1956: 250). In Norway, however, skiing was essential, and could be a useful military tactic as well as simply a method of transport. Thus, in *Sverris saga*, King Sverrir sends a company of Upplendingar (from the snowy interior of eastern Norway) on skis to spy on their opponents, because 'there was a lot of snow and good skiing conditions, while walking conditions were so bad that one would sink into deep snowdrifts as soon as one left the track' (ch. 163; Indrebø 1920: 174).

Whatever the method of transport, it was good to arrive at a place where there was shelter, warmth and food. The feelings of all travellers are summed up in a stanza from the beginning of *Hávamál*:

Fire is needed by one who's come in
and who's chilled to the knees;
food and clothing are needed by the man
who's travelled over the mountains.

(Evans 1986: 39)

Hospitality was both a duty and a virtue in early Northern society. There was little accommodation specifically for travellers and most had to ask for shelter in whatever farmhouses they passed on their journeys. But with the coming of Christianity, there was a greater need to travel, both to church and on pilgrimage, and a greater need to show piety, by doing good works. Such works could include the building and maintaining of roads and bridges, as recorded on many rune stones from late Viking-Age Sweden. One such inscription (at Karberga in Uppland) also records the building of a wayfarers' shelter or *sáluhús* (Wessén and Jansson 1953–7: 167). Such shelters must have been well used, as the Norwegian *Gulathing Law* (§100) needed to legislate for what should happen when such a shelter becomes overcrowded:

Now, all people have equal rights in a shelter. Now, it is well if all can be inside with their baggage; but if all cannot be inside with their baggage because of crowding, then all should carry their baggage out, and then it is well if they then have room. They shall all be inside if they all have room to sit. Now, if some of them have been there three nights needlessly, then they shall go out; otherwise they shall choose who to put out by lot; then it is well if those who are chosen by lot are willing to go. But if they are not willing, they who were chosen by lot to go out, and were not willing, shall owe the robber fine. They shall pay the full indemnity if those who were chosen by lot to remain inside die outside. (Eithun, Rindal and Ulset 1994: 91)

Such shelters may well have been intended to serve pilgrims on their way to the shrine of St Óláfr in Niðaróss (modern Trondheim). But travelling anywhere in Norway in winter, and crossing its mountains at any time of year, were never easy for the ordinary traveller, who might well worry about what would happen if the inn was full. Thus, Adam of Bremen (IV, 33) recommends that pilgrims coming from the south sail right round the coast of Norway rather than attempting the overland route, which is both longer and more dangerous (Trillmich and Buchner 1978: 480).

Christian Voyages

The coming of Christianity to the north brought both new reasons to travel and new destinations abroad. While Adam records that people came from far and wide to the shrine of St Óláfr, the exigencies of piety also took many northern peoples to the holy places of Europe and the Middle East, from at least the eleventh century.

Rome was a relatively easily reached destination, and even King Knútr is said to have walked there in the eleventh century (*Knýtlinga saga* ch. 17). This information comes in an enthusiastic skaldic praise-poem, and the possibly more reliable English sources admittedly fail to detail his mode of transport (Jónsson 1912–15: IB, 234). But travellers were going even further already in the eleventh century, and Jerusalem is mentioned in the commemorative inscriptions of two Swedish rune stones. The lost stone from Stäket in Uppland, commissioned by a woman to record her intention to go to Jerusalem, can hardly refer to anything other than a pilgrimage (Wessén and Jansson 1949–51: 6). While a man might have been in that region for military purposes, it is hard to imagine what, other than a pilgrimage, could have drawn a woman to make such a long and arduous journey. Of Eysteinn from Broby in Uppland, however, commemorated by his wife Ástriðr, it is said that he *sótti Jórsali*, which could mean either ‘attacked’ or ‘visited’ Jerusalem (Wessén and Jansson 1940–3: 202).

By the twelfth century there are copious records of northerners’ journeys to Rome and Jerusalem, several of them also with a strong military element. The Danish king Eiríkr made a pious progress across Europe (detailed at length in Markús Skeggjason’s *Eiríksdrápa*; Jónsson 1912–15: IB, 414–20) and died in Cyprus in 1103 before reaching the Holy Land (*Knýtlinga saga* chs 79–81). The young Norwegian king

Sigurðr led his followers east and assisted King Baldwin of Jerusalem in the siege of Sidon c.1110 (*Heimskringla, Magnússona saga* chs 3–13). His crusading exploits ensured that he was remembered ever after as *Jórsalafari* ‘Jerusalem-farer’. In about 1152, Nikulás, a Benedictine monk of Þingeyrar in northern Iceland, travelled all the way to the river Jordan, via Rome and Jerusalem, keeping a detailed diary of his itinerary and the sacred and other sights he saw along the way. The pilgrimage must have helped his career, for by 1155 he had been elected abbot of the newly established monastery at Þverá. At around the same time, Rognvaldr, earl of Orkney, led a mixed group of Norwegians, Orkney men and Icelanders on a rollicking journey to the Holy Land via France, Spain and the Mediterranean, immortalized in the verse of the participants and the narrative of *Orkneyinga saga* (chs 85–9; Guðmundsson 1965: 208–37).

Of these travellers, Nikulás was a true pilgrim, Eiríkr’s voyage is presented as a royal progress as much as a pilgrimage, while the narratives of both Sigurðr’s and Rognvaldr’s journeys concentrate more on their piratical adventures and deeds of derring-do than on the religious implications of seeing the cradle of Christianity, and are very much in tune with the crusading spirit of the times. Rognvaldr and his men, for instance, discover courtly love with the countess Ermengarde in Narbonne, attack a castle in Galicia, plunder and loot throughout Spain, engage a shipful of Saracens in battle in the Mediterranean, and get very drunk along the way. In the Holy Land, they visit ‘all the most sacred places’, including Jerusalem, and bathe in the river Jordan. Despite the many satisfactorily heroic adventures, Rognvaldr does not completely lose sight of the spiritual significance of his destination, symbolized in this verse by the pilgrim’s palm-branch he has earned:

Kross hangir þul þessum,
þjóst skyli lægt, fyr brjósti,
flykkisk fram á brekkur
ferð, en palmr meðal herða.

[A cross hangs on the breast of this poet, and a palm between his shoulders [on his back]; the tumult ought to be lower, [as] the group crowds forward on the slopes.] (Guðmundsson 1965: 233)

Exercising his authority as leader of the expedition, Rognvaldr is instructing his high-spirited companions to show the proper respect as they approach the holy city of Jerusalem.

Conclusion

The half millennium from about AD 800 to about 1300 saw the opening up of Scandinavia to the outside world. In this period, many of the inhabitants of Denmark,

Norway and Sweden left their homelands and explored, exploited, visited or settled both the countries nearest to them and regions much further afield, some of them (such as Greenland and North America) then still unknown to the rest of Europe. The most lasting result of this period of expansion was the establishment of a new nation on the island of Iceland from around 900 and the Icelanders, too, participated in the great adventure. Remembering their origins in the expansive Viking Age, and eager to be a part of the flourishing western world of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Icelanders produced a rich literary culture which has this enlarged world as a strong underlying theme. Even the sagas of Icelanders, not just about 'the feuds of farmers', are full of movement and experience, at home and abroad. While economic and demographic conditions brought about a retrenchment, a certain closing-in, from the fourteenth century onwards, the idea of Iceland and Scandinavia as part of a larger world, with which its inhabitants were well acquainted, remained firmly imprinted on the Icelandic imagination, to be experienced and re-experienced through literature, as well as in life.

See also ARCHAEOLOGY; CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; CHRISTIAN POETRY; EDDIC POETRY; FAMILY SAGAS; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PSEUDO-HISTORY; LAWS; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; PROSE OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; RUNES; SAGAS OF ICELANDIC PREHISTORY; SKALDIC POETRY; WOMEN IN OLD NORSE POETRY AND SAGAS.

NOTES

- 1 All translations from Old Norse texts are my own, from the editions cited. Published translations are listed in the bibliography.
- 2 Ch. 4 in Hreinsson (1997). All subsequent references to chapter numbers in this saga refer to Halldórsson (1985), and are one less in Hreinsson (1997).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Editions and Translations

- Aðalbjarnarson, Bjarni (ed.) (1979) *Snorri Sturluson: Heimskringla*, vol. 2. Reykjavík.
- Andersson, Theodore M. and Gade, Kari Ellen (2000) *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157)*. Ithaca, NY.
- Benediktsson, Jakob (ed.) (1968) *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*. Reykjavík.
- Brate, Erik and Wessén, Elias (eds.) (1924–36) *Södermanlands runinskrifter*. Stockholm.
- Einarsson, Bjarni (ed.) (1984) *Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum: Fagrskinna – Noregs konunga tal*. Reykjavík.
- Eithun, Björn, Rindal, Magnus and Ulset, Tor (eds.) (1994) *Den eldre Gulatingslova*. Oslo.
- Evans, David A. H. (ed.) (1986) *Hávamál*. London.
- Faulkes, Anthony (ed.) (1982) *Snorri Sturluson: Edda – Prologue and Gylfaginning*. Oxford.
- Faulkes, Anthony (1987) *Snorri Sturluson: Edda*. London.
- Finlay, Alison (2003) *Fagrskinna: A Catalogue of the Kings of Norway*. Leiden.
- Guðmundsson, Finnboði (ed.) (1965) *Orkneyinga saga*. Reykjavík.
- Halldórsson, Ólafur (ed.) (1985) *Eiríks saga rauða*. Reykjavík.

- Hollander, Lee M. (1964) *Snorri Sturluson: Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*. Austin, TX.
- Holm-Olsen, Ludvig (ed.) (1983) *Konungs skuggsiá*. Oslo.
- Hreinsson, Viðar (ed.) (1997) *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*. Reykjavík.
- Indrebø, Gustav (ed.) (1920) *Sverris saga etter Cod. AM 327 4°*. Christiania (Oslo).
- Jóhannesson, Jón (ed.) (1950) *Austfirðinga sögur*. Reykjavík.
- Johnston, George (1994) *Thrand of Gotu: Two Icelandic Sagas from the Flat Island Book*. Erin, Ontario.
- Jones, Gwyn (1986) *The Norse Atlantic Saga*. Oxford.
- Jónsson, Finnur (ed.) (1912–15) *Den norskislandske skjaldedigning*, vols. A.1–2: *Tekst efter håndskrifterne*, vols. B.1–2: *Rettet tekst*. Copenhagen.
- Kristjánsson, Jónas (ed.) (1956) *Eyfirdinga sögur*. Reykjavík.
- Larrington, Carolyne (1996) *The Poetic Edda*. Oxford.
- Larson, Laurence M. (1917) *The King's Mirror (Speculum Regale – Konungs Skuggsjá)*. New York.
- Larson, Laurence M. (1935) *The Earliest Norwegian Laws, Being the Gulathing Law and the Frostathing Law*. New York.
- Nordal, Sigurður (ed.) (1933) *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*. Reykjavík.
- Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul (1972) *The Book of Settlements: Landnámabók*. Winnipeg.
- Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul (1981) *Orkneyinga Saga*. London.
- Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul (1986) *Knytlinga saga: The History of the Kings of Denmark*. Odense.
- Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul (1989) *Vikings in Russia: Yngvar's Saga and Eymund's Saga*. Edinburgh.
- Sephton, John (1899) *Sverrisaga: The Saga of King Sverri of Norway*. London.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur (ed.) (1934) *Laxdæla saga*. Reykjavík.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur and Þórðarson, Matthías (eds.) (1935) *Eyrbyggja saga*. Reykjavík.
- Trillmich, Werner and Buchner, Rudolf (eds.) (1978) *Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der Hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches*. Darmstadt.
- Tschan, Francis J. (1959) *Adam of Bremen: History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*. New York.
- Thorsson, Örnólfur (ed.) (2000) *The Sagas of Icelanders*. London.
- Wessén, Elias and Jansson, Sven B. F. (eds.) (1940–3) *Upplands runinskrifter*, vol. 1. Stockholm.
- Wessén, Elias and Jansson, Sven B. F. (eds.) (1943–6) *Upplands runinskrifter*, vol. 2. Stockholm.
- Wessén, Elias and Jansson, Sven B. F. (eds.) (1949–51) *Upplands runinskrifter*, vol. 3. Stockholm.
- Wessén, Elias and Jansson, Sven B. F. (eds.) (1953–7) *Upplands runinskrifter*, vol. 4. Stockholm.

Secondary Literature

- Hill, Joyce (1993) 'Pilgrimage and Prestige in the Icelandic Sagas.' *Saga-Book* 23, 433–53.
- Jansson, Sven B. F. (1987) *Runes in Sweden*. Stockholm.
- Jesch, Judith (2001a) *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age: The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse*. Woodbridge.
- Jesch, Judith (2001b) 'Women and Ships in the Viking World.' *Northern Studies* 36, 49–68.
- Jesch, Judith (2004) 'Vikings on the European Continent in the Late Viking Age.' In Jonathan Adams and Katherine Holman (eds.) *Scandinavia and Europe 800–1350: Contact, Conflict and Co-Existence* (Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 4). Turnhout, pp. 255–68.
- Jones, Gwyn (1986) *The Norse Atlantic Saga*. Oxford.
- Macrae-Gibson, Osgar Duncan (1975–6) 'The Topography of *Hrafnkels saga*.' *Saga-Book* 19, 239–63.
- Roesdahl, Else (1998) *The Vikings*. London.
- Sawyer, Peter (1997) *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*. Oxford.

Historical Background: Iceland 870–1400

Helgi Þorláksson

Origins and Settlement

The settlers of Iceland came from mainland Scandinavia and from the Viking settlements in the British Isles. In seeking to date the settlement (Icelandic *landnám*) we can make use of tephras, as they are called; that is, particles of ash, pumice and other matter thrown up by volcanic activity. The tephra-layer that is especially important for excavations of Viking-Age Iceland is known as the *landnám* tephra. Comparisons of elements in ice-core samples drilled from the Greenland ice pack date the *landnám* tephra layer to 871 \pm 2. Some indications of human impact on the soil below the *landnám* tephra have been found, but they are in all likelihood not much earlier than the tephra layer itself, a fact which chimes well with the famous words of Ari fróði ('the Knowledgeable', d. 1148) in his *Íslendingabók*, to the effect that Iceland was settled around 870.

The years 870–930 are known as the Settlement period and the years 930–1262 are called either the Free State period or the Commonwealth period. The expression 'state' is hardly appropriate for the Icelandic society of this period, which was a headless, feuding society. 'Commonwealth' might seem a more accurate description of this island-wide society, even though the term has been thought to have antiquated, romantic associations. The Commonwealth period ended with the imposition of Norwegian rule in 1262 (see the section on 'Upheaval', below).

A Self-Sufficient Rural Society

'To that place of fish let me never come in my old age', said Ketill flatnefr ('Flatnose') at the time of the settlement, according to the thirteenth-century *Laxdæla saga*. The general idea today is that Iceland from the tenth century on was very much

a place of fish or fishing, when it is in fact more accurately described as a rural society. It is nevertheless true that dried fish was consumed there from that century onwards. Coastal fishing from small boats was indeed practised widely, and abundant fish stocks were available in many areas off Iceland's long coastline. Our knowledge of this industry in the period prior to the twelfth century is as yet limited, but dried fish (stockfish) had certainly become a staple food by then, being in all likelihood much in demand for the long Lenten fast. But it was not until the latter half of the thirteenth century that it became the basis for general domestic subsistence, and not until c.1330–40 that it became the major element in foreign trade.

There were no towns, or even villages, in medieval Iceland, a fact which underlines its rural character. In the early stages of the settlement Iceland was more a place of sheep than of fish. The settlers tried their hand at growing cereals, with mixed results, but also realized that the grass and shrubs of Iceland were suitable for the cattle and sheep they had brought with them from Norway. In spite of its fragile sub-arctic ecology, Iceland turned out to be far better suited for sheep rearing than Norway had ever been. Wool was produced in abundance, and homespun, called *vaðmál* (wadmal, wadmole), became the staple of foreign trade. The Icelanders had their own ocean-going vessels in the tenth century, but it seems that these gradually became fewer; by the end of that century the original fleet of the settlement period had almost totally disappeared. Stout, buoyant vessels were not easy to come by, mainly for want of wood and timber. Birch-wood is not suitable for ship-building. Driftwood was certainly abundant in some parts of Iceland but did not always lend itself readily to the building of ships. For ocean-going vessels the Icelanders mostly had to look abroad. During the twelfth century they were relieved of the effort, however, because Norwegian merchants sailed to Iceland to load their ships with cargoes of wadmal. The Icelandic homespun was then more than ever in demand in Norway, being coveted there by the inhabitants of the growing townships, and by fishermen at an increasing number of fishing stations along the Norwegian coast.

Foreign trade from the twelfth century on was sufficient for the chieftains in Iceland to provide themselves with luxury goods from abroad and to maintain and equip the church buildings (which they had an interest in maintaining; see the sections on 'Religion and the Church' and 'The Church and Economy' below). The clergy, too, were furnished with the necessary commodities that could not be found in Iceland. But Iceland did not develop a regular market for its products, and farmers did not, for the most part, depend on regular imports. They were self-sufficient, and tried as far as possible to remain so. Farmers might occasionally encounter foreign merchants in Iceland who would offer them linen in exchange for wadmal, but they did not base their livelihood on trade of this kind, because of its irregular character. A degree of regular exchange with acquaintances in Iceland, for example the exchange of rural products for catch from the ocean, was not discouraged; but since foreign trade was both irregular and limited, self-reliance was the dominant aspiration.

A Society at a Standstill in Spite of Unstable Conditions

Iceland in medieval times was a land of standstill in the sense that all changes were slow, so slow that the inhabitants must in general have felt that nothing ever changed. This was the case in all areas of life; prices, for example, which were set within a well-established, generally accepted frame, must have seemed to remain constant; and even prices considered valid in trade with foreign merchants remained fixed over long periods of time. Methods of production and farming remained very much the same for centuries. Historians look for possible causes of change in the ending of slavery (the extent of which was probably always limited), climatic changes, volcanic eruptions, and diseases. Some of these did indeed have an impact, but it was only temporary. Before long everything became the same again, or seemed to do so. Attitudes were conservative and efforts were made to avert change.

Two factors that affected the land and the production system, namely erosion and the introduction of commercial fishing, did bring about some drastic changes, geophysically and socially, but their effects were played down as far as possible by the dominant farming groups, who were reluctant to accept any fundamental changes. The fisheries that increased along with the dense habitation in some coastal areas were always under the sway of these ruling groups, who defended their rural interests and kept a firm grip on the workforce. The fishing industry never had the chance to develop freely, for example with deck-boats manned by sailors living permanently in seaports. It is easy for us with hindsight to see how much the people would have benefited from such a development, but the ruling groups were understandably not as fond of changes as we are, and found old customs and habits their safest guidelines. During the Middle Ages market forces never became strong enough to change the situation.

Land for agriculture and grazing, as well as agricultural products, were thus the mainstay of society. The free farmer was the cornerstone, the farmer's home was the frame of reference, and the laws were set accordingly. There were the so-called tax-paying farmers, those who paid fees (*þingfararkaup*) to cover the costs raised by those who had to attend the Althing, or General Assembly (*alþing*, *alþingi*). Those paying this fee numbered 4,560 in c.1100; the non-paying peasants, or smallholders, probably numbered around 2,000, and the farmers and peasants together made up around 6,500–7,000 of a total population of at least 50,000. This means that half the population must have been farm labourers under the strict rule of farmers, with a few under the rule of peasants. The number of people living independently by the sea and depending on fisheries was probably low before c.1250, the majority of fishermen being in fact those farm labourers who were equipped and catered for yearly by the farmers, to whom they brought back their catch.

The drastic deterioration of the land caused by heavy grazing, and the overexploitation of forests and shrubs, from which erosion followed, must have been generally destructive of returns and livelihood. Erosion set in early, and there are indications that by the late tenth century the population had begun to strain the country's

resources. But the erosion did decrease at intervals, and soil even returned in some areas; our picture of the way things developed is thus rather unclear. To some scholars it is tempting to explain the growing fisheries of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries as a result of increasing erosion; another reason given is the growing population. (A third reason, not so often mentioned recently, is the postulated growing demand for dried fish abroad.) It seems that the most drastic deterioration of the land set in late in the sixteenth century and continued at intervals until the twentieth. Excessive livestock and grazing had their part to play in this; other factors were: climatic changes bringing severe bad weather; volcanic eruptions resulting in hailstorms of ash, pumice, soil and sand; and the overflowing of glacial rivers.

The Social Order

Iceland in the Commonwealth period has attracted much scholarly attention because it was a society without a king, without any commonly held executive power. At the same time it was a society under common law and had a General Assembly which met once a year.

Iceland was not only a society without kings or their equivalents; it also had no regional princes or warlords. It seems that the situation in Norway at that time was quite different, and that the founders of Icelandic society fell back on relatively old arrangements, politically speaking (Byock 2001: 65). There was evidently no rigid class distinction among farmers and chieftains in early Iceland. Leadership was limited to local chieftains, who often operated like 'big men'; that is, as individuals whose authority was often temporary and had to be fought for constantly. Political hierarchy was limited, and there was an appearance of egalitarianism. Some of the 'big men' were elevated to the status of *goði* (pl. *goðar*), which meant that they were required to participate in the legislative body, *lögretta*, at the General Assembly, the Althing, and also to nominate members for the courts at that Assembly. In spite of these responsibilities scholars like to see the *goðar* as '*primi inter pares*' and speak admiringly of the society's egalitarian ethos. Others feel that it may well have been difficult for the farmers to hold the *goðar* in check at the Althing and that it would be misleading to call the system proto-democratic. In their home districts the *goðar* seem to have been often under the influence of the farmers, and their task was to represent them as their leaders and ensure their security. The question of whether each individual farmer was free to choose his own *goði* is often raised and debated. There are some instances of this in the late twelfth century and it seems to have been the general rule earlier.

We may conclude that there was little social difference between the large-scale farmers, at least, on the one hand, and, on the other, the *goðar*, or at least those *goðar* who had not outdone the farmers in power and influence. Belongings or wealth do not seem to have made any formal difference; even tenants who did not own any land had

equal rights with owner-farmers to the extent of participating in assemblies and being entitled to the same indemnities. The equality went no further than that, however; neither the farm labourers nor the slaves had any rights at all at the assemblies.

Land seems to have been fairly evenly divided among the free farmers and there was evidently no difference in this respect between the *goðar* and the well-off farmers. Many farmers may indeed have been better off than the *goðar*. In other words, property was not a decisive factor for the social order: farmers and tenants were on an equal footing formally, and the *goðar* did not necessarily need to be well off to retain their status. When lack of money was a problem for them and funds had to be raised, however, they had to depend on their followers and the latter's view of them. In such circumstances income would be based on prestige or social esteem – in short, honour, which seems to have been a fundamental factor in the polity of the *goðar*.

The amassing or accumulation of great land-holdings was apparently not the means used by the *goðar* to retain their status. Some scholars think that land rental must have been of great political importance for the ruling groups during the Commonwealth period, but there is hardly any evidence for this. Livestock rental may have been more common, but this possibility remains to be explored.

If the *goðar* were neither men of property nor territorial lords, what were they? They were leaders of interest groups who were constantly jockeying with each other for status. They were supposed to be of good standing and had some hereditary rights that enabled them to preside at spring assemblies (*várþing*) in their home-districts and at the Althing. They had to count on the backing of their followers (*þingmenn*), who expected them to act as sheriffs and protect them. *Goðar* were expected to solve disputes and to bring cases to the courts on behalf of their clients.

According to the rules laid down in *Grágás*, a collection of statutes and rights from the Commonwealth period, there were no fewer than 39 *goðar*; their *goðorð* (that is, their right to make representations at assemblies; the term has both singular and plural application) were evenly distributed among those 39 over the whole country. This system must have evolved during the tenth century and it seems to have held good until the middle or second half of the twelfth. At that time there were even more *goðar* in some districts than the rules required; in such cases they had to share the *goðorð*.

How was it possible for power to be distributed in these circumstances, and what sustained the balance of power? The dispersibility of power was a consideration that weighed heavily in the political ideology of the tenth century. Three *goðar* were supposed to attend each district assembly and could supervise each other. If one of them tended to increase his power he would most probably have to fight the combined forces of the others. The balance was delicate, because *goðorð* could be inherited and sold. But as long as *goðorð* were not combined or made into geographic wholes the followers of the *goðar* would live intermingled, keeping one another in check; and the *goðar*, too, would keep each other under surveillance. A further division of each *goðorð* might even be supportive of this system of power distribution or decentralization.

We are dealing here with what to moderns must look like an exclusively male world. Women were not supposed to perform in the political arena. It appears that they were not permitted to speak publicly at an assembly or to act either as judges or as legal witnesses. Although a woman could inherit a *goðorð*, she was not allowed to function as a *goði*. Women were not without influence, however; they could make their presence felt and sometimes even had the last word. For one thing, women were supposed to be in charge in the home, within its walls (*innan stokks*), taking care of day-to-day affairs. For another, their function as intermediaries between their husbands and homes on the one hand and their own close relatives on the other put them in an important position. The importance of this latter relationship is borne out by the fact that the belongings of a married woman who died childless were returned to her family.

These may be some of the reasons for the so-called 'strong women' who are so prominent in the family sagas and who also figure in the contemporary sagas. An ideal housewife was one who would step in when her husband was away from home and take over its management. 'Strong women' were able to do exactly that; furthermore, they incited men to act against their enemies; it seems that it was the role of women to goad men to take revenge, often in cases where an agreement had been reached.

Modern scholars need to recognize that a clear division between public and private spheres hardly existed in the Middle Ages. The situation of a woman being in charge in the home, for example, was an instance of the public sphere. Such matters as the seating order at tables for feasts, the food and drink provided, and the gifts presented to guests were of the utmost political importance, since they raised questions of social honour, rank and prestige among males that were constantly being debated and revised. In the political context, respect and popularity were matters of life and death for ambitious males, and it was women who dealt with such matters.

Þing and þreppr

The Althing in Iceland was not an absolute novelty; the Nordic people of the Isle of Man had a General Assembly, and in Norway the Gulathing (*Gulathing*) took over as a general assembly from earlier, minor and less regular gatherings. The Icelandic Althing was, however, unusual in the extent of its scope.

According to Ari's *Íslendingabók* Þingvellir was chosen as the site for the Assembly as the land had been confiscated and had become common land. That is hardly the whole story, however, as the location was also convenient for people travelling. The middle of the country was then, unlike today, covered with soil and vegetation, providing a direct thoroughfare in the tenth century from the north for travel on unshod horses (horseshoes were introduced later). The horse became important for communications at an early stage.

While we may take it for granted that part of the genealogy tracing the descendants of Björn buna Veðrar-Grímsson, is fictional, it nevertheless seems possible that

prominent men of this often-mentioned family were quite numerous and successful in the struggle for power in Iceland in the tenth century. Björn is described in *Landnámabók* (see chapter 9 below) as the ancestor of ‘most people of note in Iceland’ and is mentioned in several family sagas (see chapter 6), not least *Laxdæla saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga*, as an ancestor of figures who play major roles. It has been suggested that his descendants found the establishment of a General Assembly useful in strengthening their political position, since they lived scattered all over the country. Certain pressing concerns may also have spurred on the founders, for instance the need for rules for the rounding up of sheep in the highlands and for the reduction of different laws and customs to a single corpus, available to all.

Lögretta, with its 144 members, took care of legislation. The 39 *goðar* and nine supplementary representatives, 48 in all, sat on the middle bench and cast votes. The status of the *lögretta* is rather obscure, since no one member of it was obliged to abide by any law that he himself had not accepted. What happened, for instance, if all three *goðar* from the same spring assembly voted against a decision of the *lögretta*? Did the law then not bind them?

The only significant national official was the law-speaker (*lögsgumaðr*) who was elected chairman of the *lögretta* for a three-year term. He was required to recite a third of the laws from memory at a spot called Lögberg (‘the law rock’) at each annual meeting of the Althing during that term. Although the position of the law-speaker was a distinguished one, it brought little or no official power.

There were also four so-called Quarter Courts, with members nominated by the *goðar*. The verdicts had to be virtually unanimous, it seems; otherwise there was legal deadlock. This difficulty was largely removed by the creation in c.1005 of the so-called Fifth Court, which seems to have been, effectively, a court of last resort, in which verdicts depended on a majority decision.

The family sagas often show people shunning the laws and the courts, and their testimony in this respect cannot be ignored. Serious conflicts were certainly often solved through intermediaries and arbitration. This is also common in the contemporary sagas, first and foremost in the *Sturlunga saga* collection.

If the laws and the courts could thus be shunned, what was their role? In the first place, they were effective in cases of people who had no respect for rules and had lost all support as a result of being found antisocial in their dealings with their enemies. No arbitration could be considered in such cases and the courts, in dealing with them, would often pass severe sentences, sometimes even the sentence of total outlawry. Second, the courts functioned well as a deterrent in so far as the laws were merciless and the sanctions severe. A party reluctant to negotiate would most likely change his mind and submit to arbitration when summoned to court, thus bringing the case to an end.

Þingvellir, then, at the time of the Althing, was very much a place of negotiations, which may well have meant that it served largely as a support to the political system, since negotiation would naturally contribute to the re-establishing of a power balance among the *goðar*.

The cultural importance of the Althing is beyond any doubt. For a fortnight in June each year Þingvellir became a focal point for the whole of Iceland, its capital so to speak. It offered the rustic Icelanders a taste of some cosmopolitan pleasures. Merchants, craft workers, clowns and beggars came together there. People met, tidings from abroad were heard, feasts and sports took place, and there was ample opportunity for people to make themselves known.

Every ninth tax-paying farmer out of the total of 4,560 was supposed to travel to the Althing annually, that is, at least some 500 farmers, with their *goðar*. No fewer than 600 must have attended the Althing each year, the total of those attending probably being closer to 1,000, with twice as many horses.

There is a general idea that the founding of the Althing in the tenth century helped the Icelanders to constitute a nation. The idea of a nation in the modern sense (a people with common geographic, economic and political interests) must have been foreign to them. By at least the twelfth century, however, the Icelanders realized that they were different from the Norwegians. The Althing undoubtedly contributed in no small measure to unifying the inhabitants and giving them their own customs and culture and a degree of conformity (Þorláksson 1999b).

Of the spring assemblies much less is known. Formally they were supposed to be held at 13 places simultaneously, or nearly so, each year; but how regularly they were held is impossible to say. Those we can read about were often crowded and quite lively. For the ordinary farmers and peasants the spring assemblies were probably of greater significance than the Althing.

The communal unit known as *breppr* (pl. *breppar*) was geographically, or territorially, defined, consisting of a minimum of 20 tax-paying farmers who held meetings independently of the *goðar* and independently also, later, of parish arrangements. Like the word *goði*, the word *breppr* (*repp*) is found elsewhere among the Nordic peoples; neither of them, however, is found in exactly the same meaning. Each of them may therefore reflect a specifically Icelandic development.

Home, Family and Bonds

In a society with no executive powers and no police force every farmer was on his own, in the sense that he had to defend himself and his home, that is, his wife, children and other family and household members, as well as his buildings and chattels. His honour depended on how successful he was in doing this. The message he would wish to convey was that he had an able, faithful and chaste wife to support him, that his children were obedient, and his servants and labourers loyal. He was generous and hospitable but ready to defend himself whenever necessary. This was how a successful farmer would convince his community that he was doing well and so earn its respect.

The emphasis on solidarity is brought out in the mutual obligations, called *gríð*, between the farmer and his wife on the one hand and their servants on the other. A farmer was supposed to defend and avenge his servants, but they had to obey and

support their master. In large households with a considerable number of servants a hierarchy existed among the servants and some of them had to reconcile themselves to lowly positions. In many instances in the family sagas the word for a male servant, *búskarl*, is equated with *þræll* 'thrall'. In these circumstances the servants could be all the more easily disciplined. In the main hall (*skáli*) of the farm the labourers and servants could be observed and kept under control.

Privacy seems to have been at a discount; the husband and wife might have a locked bed or closet, but otherwise all those living on a farm occupied the same space, in full view of each other. Latrines could accommodate a substantial number of people at one time, and using them was often a communal undertaking.

Homes of the well-to-do and powerful were 'open' rather than private. It was accepted that opinions expressed by the master of the house in his main hall or living room would soon be made known outside his home by passers-by. Heads of household often made a point of this when they wanted their opinions to be known publicly.

A loyal clientele was hardly enough for a farmer to protect his people and defend his home. He had to take additional precautions. He would strengthen bonds with his family, cultivate close blood kinships and other affinities, and try to be on good speaking terms with his neighbours. He could form new, non-blood relationships, by marriage, fosterage and sworn brotherhood. Furthermore, he could establish networks of various kinds. The most obvious way of doing this was to become the follower of a *goði*, that is, his trusted *þingmaðr*, with all the mutual obligations that this involved. Another way was to enter into a relationship of *vinfengi* or *vinátta*, usually translated as 'friendship'. The emphasis here was not so much on affection, however, as on a political contract which implied reciprocity, that is, mutual help and protection. The exchange of gifts and the holding of feasts could play an important role in cementing the contractual relations of formal friendship. A respected farmer would not only be the *þingmaðr* of a *goði* but would most probably also enjoy his friendship in a formal sense.

Religion and the Church

The word *goði* is cognate with both *guð* and *goð*, words for 'God' or 'god'. Most scholars, however, believe that worship of the pagan gods was not a strong element in tenth-century Icelandic history; the *goðar*, for instance, retained their positions and titles as a matter of course after the introduction of Christianity. Christianity was adopted by a simple decision of the Althing at Þingvellir in 999 or 1000, a fact which tends to support the view that the old pagan religion was not of great importance to the system of government. There are no signs of the existence of temples as such, which suggests that the authority of magnates over religious observances was not of great political importance to them.

A collection of spiritual convictions, non-systematic but having a common basis, and involving worship of the Nordic gods, the Æsir and the Vanir, was transferred by

Norwegian settlers to Iceland, but these ideas, like belief in spirits, must have changed and evolved in the new setting. Settlers from the islands off the Scottish coast had no doubt heard much about Christ and were apparently able to believe in both Christ and Þórr simultaneously.

We know how the Christian message was promulgated. The first precept was that Þórr and Christ were irreconcilable: it was not possible to believe in both; and the second was that Christ was a mighty king in Rome who had already conquered most of the known world. Even Þórr could not compete with him; any comparison with Christ could only be unfavourable.

The eagerness of King Óláfr Tryggvason of Norway to convert the Icelanders showed itself in his taking the sons of principal magnates hostage to ensure the success of Christianization in Iceland. The astonishingly peaceful character of the conversion of Iceland has often been remarked on. For the Icelanders the dispute about the form for their common religion was solved in very much the same way as other disputes. It followed the pattern by which important feuds were settled; third parties intervened and a compromise was reached through arbitration. The law-speaker, Þorgeirr Þorkelsson, was selected to settle the dispute. He proposed that all should abide by the same laws, and this was accepted. He then announced his decision, and in the new laws that he recited it was stipulated that all people should become Christian. The old laws permitting the exposure of children and the eating of horse-flesh were retained and people were allowed to sacrifice to the old gods in private. A few years later this heathen custom, along with others, was abolished.

It was the Mosfell family that took the lead in the adoption of Christianity in Iceland. The most powerful branch in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was the Haukadalur family. The first Icelandic bishop, Ísleifr, was of this Mosfell family and had studied in Saxony. He was consecrated bishop in 1056. Ecclesiastical administration was first stabilized in Iceland after Ísleifr's son Gizurr became bishop of Skálholt in 1082. Gizurr decided that the northerners should have their own bishop. This was Jón Ögmundarson, who became bishop of Hólar in 1106 and built a large wooden cathedral there. He also had a school built and brought in two foreign tutors.

Around 1100 all efforts were directed towards teaching the Icelanders good Christian observance and stamping out anything that smacked of paganism – the names of the days of the week, for example. The Icelanders learned to say the Lord's Prayer, to cross themselves, and to act with reverence in church. The nation did not become Christian overnight; one might say that in 999 or 1000 the Icelanders simply adopted the Christian faith, without fully mastering the rituals until 100 years later. Theological knowledge would not have become fully established until about 1200.

Around 1150 ecclesiastical leaders in Norway felt it was time that the Norwegian church threw off the authority of the king and became an autonomous institution. This was in keeping with the reform policy of *libertas ecclesiae* ('the freedom of the church') that had spread through western Europe, whereby bishops alone had the right of investiture of priests in churches, and they, rather than the 'owners' of

churches, namely kings, magnates and landowners, were supposed to monitor church revenues and expenditure. This arrangement was ratified and put into practice in Norway around 1160.

The main proponent of these changes in Norway was Archbishop Eysteinn of Niðaróss, who also turned his attention to Iceland, intending to make the same changes there. The Augustinian abbot Þorlákr Þórhallsson had been elected bishop and was assigned to preach the virtues of the new system to the Icelanders.

Jón Loptsson of Oddi, grandson of Sæmundr fróði and maternal grandson of King Magnús berfœttr ('Bareleg') of Norway, is said to have remarked to Bishop Þorlákr in 1179: 'I may hear the archbishop's teaching, but I am determined to ignore it.' Why was this? The church at Oddi was one of the church sites known as *staðir* (sg. *staðir*); that is, the church owned the whole manor and property of Oddi, while as magnate Jón retained the rights over the manor (Stefánsson 2000, 2002). The oldest and largest of the *staðir* appear to have been regional church centres with several priests who served other churches also. For these reasons, and perhaps others, these churches had additional revenues, which were to some extent at the disposal of the resident magnates, who were often also priests. The major church manors were the basis of the magnates' power in many parts of Iceland, and they were unwilling to lose their positions of authority.

Archbishop Eysteinn also assigned Þorlákr to do in Iceland what he was doing in Norway: to sanctify the institution of marriage. This involved the condemnation of concubinage, the prohibition of formal divorce, and the requirement of the bride's consent to marriage, which must take place under the aegis of the church.

Mistresses of the magnates were normally women of good birth whose important families supported the magnates against their rivals for power. This could prove highly advantageous to a mistress's family in worldly terms, and such relationships were often quite formal in nature.

In 1203 Archbishop Eiríkr delegated Guðmundr Arason, the newly consecrated bishop of Hólar, to establish the bishops' right to exclusive jurisdiction over the clergy in Iceland. The Icelandic magnates turned fiercely against Guðmundr but gradually realized, since the king and the archbishop had made peace, that they would have to be cautious. When the archbishop demanded that several of them should come to meet him in 1211, some of them obeyed, and after this no more is heard of their opposition to episcopal jurisdiction over the clergy.

Archbishop Eiríkr had prohibited magnates from taking holy orders, and they appear to have accepted this. This was a crucial step, meaning that the priesthood became less worldly than before. Archbishop Eysteinn had already required the clergy to cease carrying weapons, and Icelandic priests now began to follow this rule. The special status of priests was clarified in Iceland by about 1230, and it soon became the rule that priests no longer cohabited with women or had families. But concubinage among priests was tolerated, no doubt on condition that they could provide for their mistresses and children. At the same time they clearly had a separate status in society, which must have contributed to their power and influence.

Bishop Guðmundr was adored by the common people, who called him Gvendr góði ('the Good'); he became one of the Icelanders' informal saints, though he was never canonized in Rome. The other two, bishops Jón Ögmundarson and Þorlákr Þórhallsson, were not canonized by the pope either, but were declared saints at the Althing around 1200 with the approval of the bishops, which was considered perfectly adequate. In canon law it was only in 1234 that the right to canonize was made a papal monopoly, and the Icelandic saints were never accorded that honour in the Middle Ages.

From 1238 to 1268 three Norwegian bishops, chosen by the canons of Niðaróss, held the Icelandic sees. Two were firm supporters of Hákon gamli ('the Old', 1217–63), king of Norway. One of them, Bishop Heinrekr of Hólar, was in fact one of the most active and loyal supporters of King Hákon and his ambitions in Iceland.

Culture, Literary and Political

What is the reason for the outstanding quality of the Icelandic literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries? The chieftain-priests or *kirkjugóðar* are one of the explanations given. These were individuals, such as Ari fróði and Sæmundr fróði, who were both chieftains and priests. This combination was probably without parallel in other countries. The family sagas could well have been written for learned men with worldly tastes; their plots, and the problems with which they deal, are consistent with such a view.

The monasteries have also been given credit for literary activities. The contribution of the monks of the Benedictine monastery of Þingeyrar is important; they produced the oldest saga of St Óláfr before 1180 and two sagas of King Óláfr Tryggvason, one c.1190 and another somewhat later. Abbot Karl Jónsson, author of at least the beginning of a history of King Sverrir, was, by his own account, also from this monastery. Another Benedictine monastery, at Munkaþverá, is also known for literary activities.

The monk Gunnlaugr at Þingeyrar made corrections to his saga of Óláfr Tryggvason in accordance with some comments by Gizurr Hallsson, head of the Haukadall family, and another monk there, Oddr, showed Gizurr his saga about Yngvarr víðförlí ('the Far-traveller'; cf. chapter 7 above) and probably wrote his saga of Óláfr Tryggvason at Gizurr's request. It should also be remembered that Gizurr was a *stallari*, a high official, at the court of King Sigurðr munnr ('Mouth'), the alleged father of King Sverrir.

The Benedictine monks thus had good relations with the chieftain-priests, who also sought assistance in their literary activities among the clerics at their church-manors (*staðir*). We do not know for certain how many clerics served simultaneously at Reykholt in Snorri Sturluson's time (it was his main home from 1206 to 1241), but they were no fewer than four, and may have been five. We know the names of at least four who were there in the late 1220s; two of them were also legally trained, one of these two being Styrmir Kárason, an active scribe and composer of literary works.

Snorri was also in charge at the *staðir* in Stafholt, where the number of clerics was five. Snorri stayed at Stafholt continuously from 1221 until 1225/6. Later the learned Óláfr hvítaskáld ('the White Poet') was in charge at Stafholt. He was ordained subdeacon and one of the priests who also lived there did some teaching, which is evidence that Óláfr ran a school of some sort at Stafholt.

These communities of clerics at Stafholt and Reykholt may well have been just as important as Þingeyrar and Munkaþverá as far as teaching, learning and literary activities were concerned. The number of monks at each of the monasteries was small; before 1300 it was no more than five, a number comparable to that of the five clerics at each of the *staðir* at Stafholt and Reykholt.

Disputes are the very stuff of the sagas and reflect worldly rather than ecclesiastical interests. They were often solved through mediation, truce, settlement or arbitration. This procedure may even have been more common than bringing cases to the courts, and it was in any case a solution guided not by the wish to harm or destroy one of the parties, but rather with the ideas of equality, and of re-establishing a pre-existing order, in mind.

Disputes were often conducted according to unwritten rules, and these are what we call feuds. Feuds were exchanges of insult and/or violent acts against property and persons. The phases in a feud took place by turns, with only one of the parties moving at a time, as in a game of chess. Violence escalated, while neighbours watched anxiously, more and more of them gradually becoming involved. Intermediaries would intervene sooner rather than later, trying to bring about truce and settlement. Feuds could lead to manslaughter and thus turn into blood-feuds.

The parties were under pressure to act appropriately, to fulfil the duty of vengeance and satisfy the standards of honour. If and when a settlement was reached or an arbitration brought about, people would start arguing about which of the parties had done better. The family sagas and contemporary sagas repeatedly tell us that someone was generally considered to have come out of a feud with his honour not only intact, but also considerably increased.

The sagas dwell upon feuds between chieftains who were seeking increased honour or prestige, which for them meant augmentation of their followings and hence growth in power. Here we may speak of political culture: the family sagas indicate that the question of feud and honour was a popular subject for storytelling.

Feuding was so ingrained and taken for granted in early Icelandic society that the church was powerless to eradicate it. Leading clerics acted rather as intermediaries in feuds: abbots and bishops brought about truces and settlements, and some of them functioned as arbitrators.

Upheaval

In feuds violence was always limited and casualties were usually quite few. Although the opposing sides often clashed briefly and a few people might be killed, protracted

battles were consistently avoided. When war broke out around 1235, however, the traditional restraint disappeared and parties tried to destroy one another. Let us investigate why this was so.

The twelfth century brought increased concentration of power. The number of *goðar* decreased, and they became more powerful. There was no longer the possibility of choosing the *goði* of one's liking; some *goðar* seized the *goðorð* of others and became the sole *goðar* of vast areas, which they demarcated geographically. This is how the so-called *béradsvíki* came into being; a powerful *goði* – scholars use the word *stórgoði* – would announce that all the farmers within a certain area, or *bérad*, were his followers. The spring assemblies were either abolished or held irregularly, and feuds were no longer tolerated. The *stórgoði* would solve disputes in their early phases, so that they would not turn into violent feuds, let alone blood-feuds. The *stórgoðar* (pl.) also introduced tolls. They tended to live at manors which were centrally located, close to major highways. Implicit in this concentration of power is the development of a more centralized society.

There are those who think that this development was already beginning around 1050 (Sigurðsson 1999); others, however, think it took place much later, and that the most powerful families of the *stórgoðar* did not emerge as the dominant families in their respective districts until around 1190. If this was the case, then the families at Oddi and Haukadalur/Hruni in the south and the Ásbirningar family in the north were in the lead, with others trying to follow suit. The main reason for the development would have been that 'strong men' were in vogue, men like Jón Loptsson in Oddi, who could settle disputes and secure peace, or were thought to be able to do so. Naturally the church would favour peacemakers.

Around 1220 there were a few domains or *béradsvíki* under the leadership of 10 *goðar* among whom fierce competition loomed. This was the time when the Sturlungar family was taking the lead, not least because it had the support of the Norwegian king, who was to show increasing interest in the events to come. The Sturlungar supported the Sverrir group, the Birkibeinar in Norway, while their most powerful opponents in Iceland, the Oddi family, were on friendly terms with the opponents of the Birkibeinar, namely the Baglar, and their supporters in the Orkneys. The Birkibeinar, with King Hákon and Duke Skúli in the lead, emerged as the stronger group, which was a disaster for the Oddi family but advantageous to the Sturlungar.

The period 1220–62, characterized by struggles between chieftains, is called the Age of the Sturlungar, which is appropriate, because the Sturlungar were not only in the lead and among the most turbulent of those involved, but also fought among themselves. Furthermore, they either wrote or stood behind the writing of the major sources for the period, preserved in the collection *Sturlunga saga*.

It was in 1235 that open warfare began; for this Sturla Sighvatsson has the main responsibility. He was supported by King Hákon of Norway and turned against his own uncle, Snorri Sturluson. During the fierce competition in Norway between the king and Duke Skúli, Snorri sided with the latter, and as a consequence of Skúli's defeat Snorri was executed at Reykholt in 1241.

None of the Icelandic chieftains was able to gain victory or retain an independent position. They killed each other off, leaving the king as the only real winner. The most successful of the Icelandic chieftains was Gizurr Þorvaldsson of the Haukadalur family, whom the king appointed as his earl in 1258. The Icelanders were nevertheless reluctant to accept Norwegian rule, not least because of the tax that the king would claim. The king eventually found in Hrafn Oddsson an able opponent of Gizurr. He played them off against one another on the principle of 'divide and conquer', with the result that Gizurr was made to comply with his wishes in 1262. A covenant (*Gamli sáttmáli*, 1262) between the Icelanders and the king, dictated it seems by Gizurr and his followers, marks the end of the Commonwealth; the Icelanders now accepted Norwegian rule in Iceland. The word 'peace' occurs no fewer than four times in this settlement, indicating that the Icelanders were exhausted by prolonged war and ready for peace.

The family sagas, some of which seem to have been composed on parchment at the end of the Commonwealth period, are well known for their descriptions of hostility and skirmishing between feuding parties. But they contrast sharply with the contemporary sagas, which are full of tales of mindless maiming and mutilation, pillaging, arson and limitless butchering. It occurs to the reader that the family sagas are, in a way, glorifying the times when men showed some restraint and respect for others by the tempering of violence and by honouring the unwritten rules of feud.

The leading author on these turbulent times was Sturla Þórðarson of the Sturlungar family, whose work *Íslendinga saga* is the centrepiece of *Sturlunga saga*. He was witness to many of its main events and was compelled to leave the country and meet the king, who granted him pardon. There are reasons to believe that Sturla opposed the king's policy in Iceland in the Commonwealth period; after 1263, however, he became one of the king's most ardent supporters. For the period 1213–41 Sturla is almost our only source, and we must bear in mind that he may often show the Sturlungar in a favourable light.

Watershed around 1280

Björn Þorsteinsson has been influential in his writings about medieval Iceland; he coined some new designations of individual periods. While his name for the Commonwealth period, *goðaveldisöld* (Age of the *goðar*), has not found favour, his labels for the subsequent periods have been generally accepted. He called the years 1262–1412 *norska öldin* (the Norwegian Age) and the period 1412–75 *enska öldin* (the English Age). Both designations show his conviction that foreign relations were of great significance for the Icelanders. Norwegian political influence was strong in Iceland between 1262 and c.1320 but dwindled thereafter and became slight from 1350 onwards.

The political system and administration of Iceland underwent an upheaval. At the instigation of King Magnús lagaboetir ('the Law-mender', 1263–80), the Icelanders

received two law-books, first *Járnsíða*, a preliminary one, and then, in 1281, *Jónsbók*. There was some clash of ideas here in that the Icelanders felt that they were entitled to reject certain of the stipulations of *Jónsbók* in 1280–1, while the king's representative said that they were grossly mistaken in this, and were obliged to accept them. After doing so, however, they might appeal to the king, asking him in his mercy to amend some paragraphs. The dominant idea in Norway was that the power of the king came from above, from God, whereas the Icelanders, it was felt, were lagging behind, stuck with the old idea of power from below, given to the king by the people at assemblies.

The question of the legislative powers is a classic one in Icelandic history, not least because of its relative obscurity. As we have seen, the king was the first mover in the matter of the law-books, and the Icelanders could ask for amendments if they wanted changes made. In such cases the Icelanders often took the initiative, and the king would hardly introduce new laws without their consent. Law-making in fact was an undertaking shared by the king and the Althing. It was not a very formal procedure, however; there were exceptions; and sometimes there was complete bewilderment as to which provisions accepted in Norway were valid in Iceland.

Lögretta now became a court, while keeping some of its legislative powers. The office of *lqgsqgumaðr* was abolished, and it was the *lqgmaðr* (lawman) who took over as the president of the court.

The role of sheriff or bailiff (*sýslumaðr*) came to replace that of *goði*. This opened up opportunities for 'new' men, in that the king and his highest official, the *hirðstjóri*, tended to appoint men who were well off and gave the impression of being able to pay the king's dues on time. These were men who were in possession of considerable land-holdings. The old *goði* families, of course, tried to maintain their status.

Some of the family sagas bear witness to this upheaval. *Hænsa-Þóris saga* deals with the problem of new Norwegian laws being introduced in Iceland and the reaction they provoked, while *Bandamanna saga* shows signs of the social unrest caused by the 'new' rich seeking power.

The royal authorities were successful in securing peace in Iceland, simply by setting unruly men aside and keeping their representatives in check. It is sometimes stated that the king uprooted feuds or blood-feuds in Iceland, but this is not correct. The king automatically became party to all cases of manslaughter, and murderers were sentenced to death. However, those who killed because they were defending their honour were considered to have some excuse for their actions. After coming to a settlement with the relatives of the dead and paying fines, the killers were sentenced to seeking the pardon of the king. This was usually granted, since tarnished honour was looked upon as mitigating circumstances. The killer would then receive right of residence in Iceland and behave as if nothing had happened.

Feuds and blood-feuds also occurred in Iceland during the fourteenth century; no wonder, then, that the Icelanders continued to compose old-style family sagas about feuds, such as *Kjalnesinga saga*, *Finnboga saga ramma* and *Þórðar saga breðu*. The novelty in these sagas is that the king is ever present and his will is paramount, even in

matters Icelandic. Men like Þórðr and Finnbogi could be seen as the new courtiers who were a menace to sheriffs in office.

King Hákon háleggr ('the Highleg', 1299–1319) had plans for extending his power in Iceland, but all in vain; the Icelanders managed to oppose him. The failure of the king to carry out his plans was partly due to his not being able to send battleships and armed men to Iceland.

Books in Iceland were to some extent produced for export to Norway, but how far-reaching an impact this had on literary activity is impossible to say (Stefán Karlsson 1979). Collections of kings' sagas were in demand and similar collections of family sagas were also compiled. Interest in contemporary sagas faded away after 1330, after which they were no longer written. Charters and annals are our main sources for the following period. No new collections of kings' sagas were compiled after 1400 and this is no doubt connected with the fact that the last Norwegian king died in 1387. Norwegian magnates had difficulties in understanding ancient texts, but it is not possible to say whether this had a bearing on the decline in the composition of new family sagas. Trading links with Norway were almost completely broken after 1430, which is coincidentally the date with which the medieval Icelandic annals come to an end. Connections between Iceland and Norway, though always of great interest to the annalists, were by no means their sole preoccupation, so that the broken connection with Norway can hardly have been the only reason for the cessation of annalistic writing.

The Church and Economy

King Magnús and Archbishop Jón rauði ('the Red') reached an agreement whereby the king compromised, especially in relation to the church's judicial authority. The archbishop instructed Bishop Árni Þorláksson of Skálholt to reopen the issue of the *staðir*. At the end of the twelfth century Bishop Þorlákr had had to yield and drop the matter. The archbishop decided that the *staðir* were to be under the aegis of the bishops, and the king did not object. Our main written source for these events is *Árna saga biskups*.

An agreement made in 1297 settled the disputes over the *staðir*. The crux of the agreement was that the true *staðir*, the ones entirely owned by the church, were placed under episcopal authority. The loss of the *staðir* was probably less of a blow to the magnates in 1297 than it would have been a century earlier, as they had meanwhile had the opportunity to ensure their position by other means, whether by acquiring land that was leased to tenant farmers, or through fisheries, or in royal service.

The saga of Laurentius, bishop of Hólar 1324–31 (*Laurentius saga biskups*), is our main written source for the church's history in 1290–1330, and is the last of the contemporary sagas. Its moral is that Icelanders are better off with Icelandic bishops than with Norwegian ones. The ascendancy of the church is indicated by, for instance, the new and splendid wooden church, over 50 metres long, built at Skálholt after a

fire in 1309. In 1394 the Danish Bishop Pétur of Hólar had a new wooden church built there, 50 metres long.

Iceland escaped the Black Death of 1349–51, while as many as half or even two-thirds of the Norwegian population died. The Norwegians may have numbered no more than 150,000 in the second half of the fourteenth century as against an Icelandic population of about 60,000. Iceland became a more tempting prospect for foreign magnates, and as a rule Norwegians, and later Danes, came to be appointed to Icelandic bishoprics.

By c.1340 stockfish was for the first time being exported in bulk from Iceland to Norway. Because of the Black Death in Norway, however, this new boom did not last long. A generation later there had been a recovery, but this second boom lasted only for some 20 years; signs of regression become apparent around 1392. The impact of this export on the Icelandic economy is difficult to determine; it may have been significant for a few individuals and two monasteries, but in general its effect was limited. The monasteries that possibly benefited from it were those at Viðey and Helgafell, of which the latter is noted for literary activities. This export of stockfish did not, in any case, suddenly lead to the introduction of a market economy, as is sometimes maintained. Iceland was still, at the end of the fourteenth century, a self-sufficient rural society. Fundamental changes had to await the advent of the English, and later the Germans, in the fifteenth century. From 1380, moreover, when Norway became united with Denmark in a personal union (until 1814), Iceland came under Danish rule, from which it did not extricate itself completely until it was proclaimed a republic at Þingvellir on 17 June 1944.

See also ARCHAEOLOGY; CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; FAMILY SAGAS; GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL; HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PSEUDO-HISTORY; LAWS; MANUSCRIPTS AND PALAEOGRAPHY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; PROSE OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION; RHETORIC AND STYLE; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; SAGAS OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY; SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS; WOMEN IN OLD NORSE POETRY AND SAGAS.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Arnórsdóttir, Agnes S. and Þorláksson, Helgi (1998) 'Heimili.' In Guðmundur J. Guðmundsson and Eiríkur K. Björnsson (eds.) *Íslenska söguþingið 28.–31 maí 1997: Ráðstefnurit*, vol. I. Reykjavík, pp. 45–56.
- Byock, Jesse L. (2001) *Viking Age Iceland*. Harmondsworth.
- Childs, Wendy R. (1995) 'England's Iceland Trade in the Fifteenth Century: The Role of the Port of Hull.' *Northern Seas Yearbook 1995*, 11–31.
- Guðmundsson, Gunnar F. (2000) *Íslenskt samfélag og Rómakirkja. Kristni á Íslandi*, vol. II, ed. Hjalti Hugason. Reykjavík.
- Hugason, Hjalti (2000) *Frumkristni og upphaf kirkju: Kristni á Íslandi*, vol. I, ed. Hjalti Hugason. Reykjavík.
- Karlsson, Gunnar (2000) *Iceland's 1100 Years: The History of a Marginal Society*. Reykjavík.
- Karlsson, Stefán (1979) 'Íslensk bogeksport til Norge i middelalderen.' *Maal og Minne*, 1–17. Rpt with an afterword by the author in *Staferókar*, ed. Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson. Reykjavík 2000, pp. 188–205.
- Magnúsdóttir, Auður (2001) *Frillor och fruar: Politik och samlevnad på Island 1120–1400*. Göteborg.

- Sigurðsson, Jón Viðar (1999) *Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth*. Odense.
- Sigurðsson, Jón Viðar (2000) 'Allir sem sjá líta þó ekki jafnt á: sagnaritun um íslenskar miðaldir fram um 1300.' *Saga* 38, 33–57.
- Stefánsson, Magnús (2000) *Staðir og staðamál: Studier i islandske egenkirkelige og beneficalrettslige forhold i middelalderen*, vol. I (Historisk institutt, Universitetet i Bergen, Skrifter 4). Bergen.
- Stefánsson, Magnús (2002) 'Um staði og staðamál.' *Saga* 40.2, 139–66.
- Þorláksson, Helgi (1997) 'Iceland and Norway in the Middle Ages: The Historical Background.' In Lilja Árnadóttir and Ketil Kiran (eds.) *Church and Art: The Medieval Church in Norway and Iceland*. Reykjavík, pp. 7–20.
- Þorláksson, Helgi (1999a) 'Gásar og den islandske handelen i middelalderen.' In A. Christophersen and A. Dybdahl (eds.) *Gásir – en internasjonal handelsplass i Nord-Atlanteren* (Senter for middelalderstudier, Skrifter 9). Trondheim, pp. 83–94.
- Þorláksson, Helgi (1999b) 'The Icelandic Commonwealth Period: Building a New Society.' In W. W. Fitzhugh and E. E. Ward (eds.) *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*. Washington and London, pp. 175–85.
- Þorláksson, Helgi (2001) *Sæmdarmenn: Um beiður á þjóðveldisöld*. Reykjavík.
- Þorsteinsson, Björn and Jónsson, Bergsteinn (1991) *Íslandssaga til okkar daga*. Reykjavík.
- Vésteinsson, Orri (2000) *The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power, and Social Change 1000–1300*. Oxford.

Historiography and Pseudo-History

Stefanie Wüirth

Historiography in General

Although historiography and history were highly esteemed in the Middle Ages, it was very difficult to position them among the *septem artes* of medieval learning. *Historia* was chronologically oriented narrative. As narrative, history was the literary product of scholarly activity and was placed within the field of grammar and rhetoric.

Since historical events, legends and fiction permeated medieval historiography, the latter can be distinguished from fiction only to a limited extent. During the late Middle Ages historiographical compendia developed into specialized encyclopedias which were organized according to the same principles as universal encyclopedias. The compilers selected the sources they used and added them in abridged form to their narratives. It was nevertheless open to the compilers to intervene in a number of ways, ranging from critical selection to the global adoption of complete works. In general there was no limit to the combination of traditions that could be made. It was always possible to update already existing texts. Sometimes the result was a thorough interweaving of several sources. An Icelandic example of an elaborate compilation of this kind is *Flateyjarbók*, containing several kings' sagas, added from supplementary sources by a redactor of the fourteenth century.

Historiography, like other genres, depends on the specific political and cultural circumstances of its production. In Scandinavia, as well as on the continent, medieval historiography was based on classical foundations. The aim of history was to teach and to delight (*prodesse et delectare*). Consequently a text originally intended as historiography could later be included in new and different contexts. Even though the intention behind medieval historiography was to connect specific events to the larger context of salvific history, the clerical emphasis of these texts should not be overestimated. Many authors were involved in secular conflicts in which they often took a clear stand in their works.

The models of Norse historiography are to be found not only in classical literature but also in the medieval literature of the continent, and especially in Anglo-Saxon historiography.

Norse Historiography

In Icelandic and Norwegian historiography a strongly pragmatic stance is noticeable, showing itself most especially in a focus on contemporary history. Norse historiography differs from medieval continental historiography in using the vernacular right from the beginning. In Iceland, as well as in Norway, oral tradition and indigenous poetry were widely used as historical sources. A good deal of research has thus been devoted to the sources of historiography and to the interdependence of the individual works.

Norse historiography makes it clear that the earliest literary fixations of historical events are to be found in poetry. Skaldic praise-poems transmitted events contemporary with their composition to later generations, and the tradition of praise-poetry continued into the period of historiography in its narrower sense, that is, the twelfth century. But interest in historiography also produced genealogies and poetry in the form of catalogues, such as *Ynglingatal* or *Háleygjatal*, which were later integrated into larger works, such as the kings' sagas.

Since all Old Norse literature is characterized by a certain interest in history, it is very difficult to define historiography as a genre. Historiography in a narrower sense overlaps with almost all other genres in its use of historical sources, such as genealogies, and in its reports of historical events.

Icelandic historiography

Old Icelandic literature is characterized by two distinctive features: the absence of verse epics in the classical sense, and the fact that it found written expression in the vernacular from the very beginning. Historiographical texts are among the oldest works written in Iceland, and almost all other genres are influenced by this interest in history. The Icelandic reception of foreign literature is also characterized by a consuming interest in history.

The first works of historiography, written during the twelfth century, gave reports of the Icelandic past immediately before and after the settlement. Towards the end of the century the first historiographical works were translated or adapted from Latin. The works in question, which dealt with a rather distant, non-Icelandic past, included Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, the works of Sallust and Lucan, Dares Phrygius' account of the Trojan War, and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*. In addition, Icelandic annals, which also contain information about Scandinavia and England, bear witness to the Icelandic interest in foreign events.

This noticeable interest in historiography is probably to be explained by, among other things, the fact that the Icelanders were well aware of the historical caesura

marked by the settlement of Iceland and its conversion. The Icelanders referred to written authorities and eyewitnesses in order to reassure themselves of their own history. In their genealogies they sought to verify their descent from royalty, even if this descent was quite often purely fictitious. The written evocation of the past functioned as a system of rules and values, indicating the consequences of esteem or disesteem of those values. For Icelanders it was particularly important to develop such a system of norms in order to counteract the threat to their state of liquidation by foreign intervention.

Despite the interest in historiography in Iceland, Latin was of only minor importance in producing texts there during the Middle Ages. Neither Sæmundr's works nor the two oldest sagas about the Norwegian king Óláfr Tryggvason have been preserved in their Latin forms; but both Óláfr sagas are preserved, if not as wholes, then in fragmentary form, in their Icelandic translations. On the European continent, it was in oral tradition that vernacular literature mainly existed at the earliest stages. The Anglo-Saxons, however, like the Irish, began very early on to make access to literacy available to non-learned people. It was through English clerics that the Icelanders came to know that written records did not necessarily have to be in Latin. The Benedictine monks, who directed the interest in historiography into learned fields, helped to advance the predominance of the vernacular in Icelandic literature (Schier 1994: 147). Their openness to didactic literature in the vernacular eased the spread of learned literature – which in most cases meant historiographical literature – in the Icelandic language.

Sæmundr inn fróði Sigfússon ('Sæmundr the Knowledgeable', 1056–1133) is characterized in *Hungrvaka* as 'forvitra ok lærðr allra manna bezt' ('the most learned of all discerning men'). Although none of his works is preserved, Sæmundr certainly wrote a history of the Norwegian kings. This history was probably in Latin, since Snorri reports in his *Heimskringla* that Ari was the first to write in Icelandic. This is confirmed by the *First Grammatical Treatise* (from the twelfth century; see chapter 10), which in its list of Icelandic literary forms includes a mention of Ari's works, but not of Sæmundr's. Of Sæmundr's history of the Norwegian kings there survive only a few lines, which were incorporated in the Icelandic translation of the monk Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ('The Saga of King Óláfr Tryggvason'). Sæmundr's history of the Norwegian kings was also the basis for the metrical *Nórekskonungatal* ('List of the Kings of Norway'), written between 1184 and 1197 and preserved in *Flateyjarbók* (Ellehøj 1965: 15–24).

Ari inn fróði Þorgilsson ('Ari the Knowledgeable', 1067/8–1148) is the only Icelandic author mentioned by name in the anonymous *First Grammatical Treatise*. All medieval Icelandic authors shared Snorri's respect for Ari as an exceptional witness of Icelandic history.

Although Ari may have written several texts, the only surviving one is *Íslendingabók* ('The Book of Icelanders'), which is one of the most important works of Old Icelandic literature (Benediktsson 1968: xlii–xliii; Turville-Petre 1953: 88–108). In its prologue Ari states that he showed a first version of the work to the Icelandic bishops

Porlákr Rúnólfsson and Ketill Þorsteinsson and to his contemporary Sæmundr fróði, asking them for corrections and additions. In the revised version Ari probably omitted genealogies and biographical passages about Norwegian kings. After the prologue *Íslendingabók* starts with King Haraldr Finehair's genealogy and a table of contents. The main text then concentrates on the Christianization of Iceland, while relatively little is said about the settlement.

The prologue also indicates that the first version of *Íslendingabók* must have been written between 1122 and 1133. The second version is usually dated to 1133. The *raison d'être* of the text and the intention behind it have been matters of debate, but it is generally thought that *Íslendingabók* was written on behalf of the two bishops mentioned in the prologue. Since Ari could not yet draw upon written sources for Icelandic history, he obtained his information mainly from oral tradition. Whenever he mentions a name he also accounts for the credibility of the person named. His model here was probably the Venerable Bede, who also refers to contemporaries as witnesses. But despite his strong reliance on oral tradition, Ari used written sources as well. Abbo of Fleury's *Passio Sancti Eadmundi* ('The Martyrdom of St Edmund') is the only one he mentions explicitly, but parallels and similarities indicate that he knew and used Sæmundr's work, and the church history of Adam of Bremen. It was mainly to establish a chronology and to integrate Icelandic history into world history that Ari used his written sources. Like Bede, he refrains from starting with the Creation but concentrates instead on the history of his own country. In his chronology Ari combined absolute dates, counted from the birth of Christ, with the terms-in-office of Icelandic law-speakers. By thus bringing a specifically Icelandic calculation of time into line with an international time frame he succeeds in integrating Icelandic history into world history.

Landnámabók ('The Book of Settlements') probably has the most complicated textual history of all Old Icelandic writings (Benediktsson 1968: 1–xcvi). It is preserved in five versions, none of them representing the archetype. Three versions are medieval, whereas two were written in the seventeenth century. The relationship between the versions has been discussed by Jóhannesson (1941), whose conclusions are still considered valid.

The versions in *Sturlubók* (c.1280) and *Hauksbók* (between 1302 and 1310) agree to a very large extent. Of the third medieval version, *Melabók* (c.1300), only two leaves in a manuscript from the fifteenth century are preserved. *Skarðsárabók* (seventeenth century), which is a compilation of the versions in *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók*, was the basis for *Þórðarbók* (also from the seventeenth century). From the epilogue to the version of *Landnámabók* in *Hauksbók* it can be concluded that Haukr Erlendsson, the compiler of *Hauksbók*, must also have used an additional version now lost and written by Styrmir inn fróði ('Styrmir the Knowledgeable'). The great popularity of *Landnámabók* is obvious, not only from the many different versions of the text, but also from the citations and allusions reflecting it in a great number of medieval Icelandic writings.

Landnámabók mentions the names of c.430 persons. Although the narrative is often very detailed, its authenticity is under debate. At a first glance *Landnámabók* seems to

consist of a dry list of names and places, but a closer look reveals that it contains a number of small tales, many of them integrated into a larger narrative context in one or other of the sagas of Icelanders. Because of this Walter Heinrich Vogt suspected that these little episodes (*þættir*) were the origin of Icelandic narrative tradition and that the sagas were an expanded form of these episodes (Vogt 1921).

Although *Landnámabók*, including its genealogies, covers a large span of time, it mentions only one absolute date, namely 874, as the starting point of the settlement. It is quite unclear how this date came into being. Probably it was a product of retrospective calculation made in the thirteenth century. *Landnámabók* contradicts Ari's account of the early history of Iceland in a number of details.

Norwegian historiography

Historiography in Norway began in Latin, but here too the vernacular soon came to be used. Because of their summary character the earliest Norwegian works of historiography are called the 'Norwegian synoptics' (Turville-Petre 1953: 169–75). Since all three works cover much the same time span and deal with similar events, it is clear that they are interrelated, either as a result of using the same sources or through mutual interdependence. But the details of this interrelationship are still debated, because of problems raised by the transmission and dating of these works.¹

Historia Norwegiae, written in Latin and preserved only in a defective manuscript (c.1500–10), has been dated to a time between 1160 and 1210 (Kunin and Phelpstead 2001: xi). Ekrem (1998) has suggested a dating between 1140 and 1152/4, because of a possible connection between the *Historia Norwegiae* and the foundation of the archdiocese in Niðaróss (modern Trondheim). If her view is correct, *Historia Norwegiae* is the oldest of the three Norwegian synoptics. But since she cannot prove her theory it is still unclear when, by whom, or for whom *Historia Norwegiae* was composed.

After a prologue, *Historia Norwegiae* starts with a description of the geography of Norway and the countries subject to it. Then follows an account of Norwegian history from the legendary family of the Ynglingar to St Óláfr Haraldsson's return from England (1015). In relation to the long period of time covered, the missionary kings Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson take up a very large part of the whole text. Not a single event is given a specific date.

The author of *Historia Norwegiae* probably used Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* as a model. This consists of a similar combination of geographical and historical information, the latter both secular and clerical. In his introduction to the English translation Carl Phelpstead (Kunin and Phelpstead 2001) suggests that the *Historia Norwegiae* was intended as a reaction to Adam's ideological concerns about the foundation of a Scandinavian archdiocese. *Historia Norwegiae* refers to a number of classical and medieval Latin texts which the author may have known from florilegia, that is, anthologies of classical quotations. In addition to them, the author used Norse sources, including Ari's *Íslendingabók*, skaldic poetry, sources relating to St Óláfr Haraldsson, and probably Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*.

The *Historia de antiquitate regum Norvagiensium* is the only Norwegian synoptic whose author is known. In the prologue he calls himself ‘Theodoricus monachus’ (McDougall, McDougall and Foote 1998: ix–xi). The author seems to be Norwegian, because several times he mentions ‘our king’ and ‘our language’. In Norway during the twelfth century a ‘monachus’ was usually a member of a Benedictine monastery. Since Theodoricus dedicated his work to the Norwegian archbishop Eysteinn he may have lived in a monastery close to Niðaróss. The last event mentioned is the murder of a certain Nikulás Sigurðarson in 1176, which suggests a dating of 1177/78. Theodoricus finished his history proper with the year 1130, indicating that it might be better to be silent about the following years. This refers to the Norwegian civil war caused by the rivalry for the succession to the throne. Like the *Historia Norwegiae*, the *Historia de antiquitate* may have been linked to the foundation of the archdiocese in Niðaróss (1152), from which resulted an ecclesiastical reform intended to prevent secular interventions in church affairs.

A distinctive feature of *Historia de antiquitate* is its economical narration. It covers 270 years of Norwegian monarchy from Haraldr Finehair to the year 1130, its most detailed passages dealing with Óláfr Tryggvason and St Óláfr Haraldsson. Very often the account of Norwegian history is interrupted by digressions for which models can be found in Paulus Diaconus’ *Historia Langobardorum*. Although most of the digressions refer to quite different events of biblical and world history they all are meant to be read as moral exempla referring to the time after 1130, that is, the time with which Theodoricus does not want to deal.

In the prologue Theodoricus mentions that he obtained most of his information from Icelanders who preserved their historical knowledge in oral tradition and skaldic poetry. But Theodoricus also used written sources, among others a ‘Catalogus’ of Norwegian kings, which may have been the work of either Ari or Sæmundr (Guðnason 1977: 107–20). It is astonishing that Theodoricus refers not to any written sources for Norwegian history, but rather to a number of classical and contemporary Latin authors. He strives after a plain and concise style by telling the stories very densely. The episodes are usually short and scenic, containing direct speech followed by a brief authorial statement. It is striking how often the author expresses his personal opinion and refers to himself in the first person. Unlike the authors of the saga literature, Theodoricus evaluates the events and does not refrain from describing his emotions. Although he strives after a fixed chronology, he only mentions three absolute dates.

Ágrip af Nóregs konunga sögum (‘Summary of the History of the Kings of Norway’) is the one synoptic written in the vernacular and is preserved only in a manuscript from the beginning of the thirteenth century. Although the manuscript was written in Iceland, several features indicate that the author of the text was Norwegian. He shows very little interest in Icelandic history and focuses on the Norwegian archdiocese of Niðaróss (Einarsson 1984: v–vii).

Ágrip deals with Norwegian history from King Hálfðan the Black’s death (c.880) to the accession of King Ingi the Hunchback (1136). Since the beginning and end of the

text are missing it is uncertain what time span was originally covered, but it was presumably the period extending from the beginning of Hálfðan's reign to the accession of King Sverrir (1177). Like the other two synoptics, *Ágrip* clearly shows an interest in church politics, but it is striking that the sympathy of the author is with the 'people' in general (Driscoll 1995: xi–xii).

Ágrip has been dated to c.1190, mainly on the basis of the dating of the manuscript. It has been suggested that the author used Theodoricus' *Historia*, whereas similarities to the *Historia Norvegiae* seem to be due to a common source. He probably used other written sources as well, but they have not yet been identified (Lange 1989: 164).

As is often the case with learned works based on Latin sources, *Ágrip* contains long sentences which are sometimes rather complicated syntactically. The most frequently used stylistic device is antithesis, but there are also elements which are quite common in *Riddarasögur* (sagas of knights, courtly romances), such as alliteration and pairs of alliterating synonyms, sometimes even with end rhyme. Characteristic of *Ágrip* also is a huge number of rare or unusual words and hapax legomena.

Historiography in a Broader Sense

In Old Norse literature a number of works, focusing on the past or on contemporary history, have a special position within saga literature. In what follows, however, I shall not consider works which have been dealt with in other chapters of this *Companion*, such as the sagas of the bishops (chapter 2), *Sturlunga saga* (chapter 24) or the kings' sagas (chapter 22).

Among these more broadly historiographical works, *Jónsvíkinga saga*, *Orkneyinga saga* and *Færeyinga saga* have been called 'political sagas' (Berman 1985; Jesch 1993). Their relationship to the kings' sagas is clear from their contents, since they deal mainly with conflicts between the protagonists and the Norwegian kings. But their tradition also shows a relationship to the kings' sagas, since all three of them have been inserted into *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* and *Óláfs saga helga*.

A second and smaller group of texts consists of *Grœnlendinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*, which are mainly related to the sagas of Icelanders. However, their transmission suggests that in the Middle Ages they were thought of as related to the kings' sagas.

Taken as a group, these five sagas are good examples of the problematic categorization of medieval texts into genres. On the one hand they contain a good deal of historical information. On the other, many of the events reported are clearly fictional and have been shaped according to literary models, and with the use of motifs from fairy tales, sagas and/or translated literature. All of them have been preserved in large compilations from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries with a focus on historiography, with the result that the historical aspects are stressed in all existing versions of the texts.

Among the ‘political sagas’ *Jómsvíkinga saga* is the one whose historicity has been the most debated (Halldórsson 1969: 24).² Like *Orkneyinga saga* and *Færeyinga saga*, it was probably written by an Icelandic author in the early thirteenth century. The saga is preserved in five versions, which together indicate the popularity of the text and its adaptation to different contexts. The saga tells of Danish and Norwegian events in the tenth century, culminating in the heroic death of the Jómsvíkingar in the battle of Hjörungavágr (986 or 987). Probably there was a rich tradition about the Jómsvíkingar; early Danish historiography also seems to suggest as much. The sources of the Icelandic saga consisted of skaldic poems, oral traditions and written texts. One reason for the saga’s popularity may have been the clearly hostile view it takes of the Danish king. Since the saga contains many elements from fairy tales, *fornaldarsögur* (see chapter 25), and other literary texts, its value as a historical source for early Danish and Norwegian history is rather doubtful.

Orkneyinga saga mostly deals with events on the Orkneys and the relationship between the Orcadian jarls and Norwegian kings. Nevertheless it was probably written by an Icelandic author c.1200–10 (Guðmundsson 1965: viii).³ In the only medieval manuscript, *Flateyjarbók*, *Orkneyinga saga* is split into five parts which have been inserted into *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* and *Óláfs saga helga*. All post-medieval manuscripts containing *Orkneyinga saga* as a continuous text are based on *Flateyjarbók*. This saga, which covers the time from the legendary ancestors of the Orcadian jarls to the early thirteenth century, has to be viewed in the context of other historiographical literature. The first part of the saga is based on written sources about Norwegian kings. For the time up to the death of King Haraldr Sigurðsson in 1066 the author used Icelandic traditions supplemented by skaldic poetry, but the last part of the saga is also based on oral tradition.

Færeyinga saga, written between 1200 and 1215 by an Icelandic author, was first probably not intended as a continuous history of the Faeroe Islands but only as an account of the events connected with Þrándr í Gøtu and Sigmundur Brestisson (Halldórsson 1967: xiii).⁴ Since all events are described from a perspective sympathetic to Norway, and since the saga contains supplementary information about Norwegian history, it was divided into five parts and integrated into *Flateyjarbók*. A complete version of the text must have existed before this integration, however.

The saga deals with family feuds on the Faeroe Islands during the tenth and early eleventh centuries. In addition, it tells of the conflicts between the ruling class on the Faeroes and the Norwegian kings. Its main sources were oral tradition and chronicles about Norwegian kings, but also *Orkneyinga saga* and *Jómsvíkinga saga*. Since the text was also influenced by subject matter and motifs characteristic of fairy tales, legends and *fornaldarsögur*, it is very hard to determine its precise historical value.

Eiríks saga rauða and *Grænlandinga saga* both deal with the discovery of Greenland, with the Icelandic and Norwegian settlement in Greenland, and with the discovery of Vínland, that is, a region on the east coast of North America. Although these sagas are mostly counted among the sagas of Icelanders they have a special position within saga

literature because of their localization. Since their protagonists are also mentioned in works of historiography, such as *Íslendingabók* or *Landnámabók*, they probably contain at least a minimum of historical fact, although most of the details given have to be considered as fiction.

Their dating is as difficult to determine as their interrelationship, but they are generally both dated to the beginning of the thirteenth century, *Eiríks saga rauða* being regarded as probably the older and more historical text (Halldórsson 1985: 341–99). *Eiríks saga rauða* is preserved in two medieval manuscripts, both copied from a common archetype.⁵ (See further chapter 16 below.)

Grœnlendinga saga is preserved only in *Flateyjarbók*. In this manuscript two passages of the saga have been integrated into *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* and a third passage follows on from *Óláfs saga*.

Translated Historiography

In the Middle Ages vernacular translations were not as common as they are today.⁶ Latin and vernacular literatures coexisted for a long time, and each language had a special function. Although in Iceland too the first texts had been written in Latin, they were soon translated into the vernacular and are preserved only in Icelandic. During the twelfth century many very different Latin works were translated in Norway and in Iceland.⁷

Since medieval translators were regarded as equal in status to authors or compilers, they could alter the foreign texts and adapt them to their own ideas, literary tastes and intentions. In general medieval translators were most interested in keeping the *materia*, that is, the contents. The claim of ‘non verbum pro verbo’ (‘not word for word’), attributed to Cicero, expresses the medieval idea of closeness to the original text, but the negative *non* confirms that this idea of closeness refers to the contents, and not to language and style.

The term ‘pseudo-histories’ is usually taken to include five texts translated from Latin into Icelandic between the end of the twelfth century and the middle of the thirteenth.⁸ Their transmission indicates that they were regarded as a group of related texts. All five texts have in common the fact that they are very free translations reworking the Latin original according to new intentions and needs. But it is not only the contents that the translations adapt to the needs of their new audience; it is obvious that their form, too, is adapted to the traditions of saga literature. The translators intended to give information about historical or supposedly historical facts occurring within a clearly defined span of time. They do not relate the events of the past to contemporary events, and they omit moral reflections and long learned digressions.

The pseudo-histories, in their turn, also influenced the indigenous literary production. In relatively massive historiographical compendia, Icelandic redactors and compilers combined material from antiquity and motifs from their own past. Thus

did they manage to incorporate Iceland into world history. Icelandic chieftains claimed to be related to Norwegian kings who in turn were connected to the English crown and traced back their origins to Troy. Thus Iceland, as a small island in the North Atlantic, ensured its place within the geographical and historical coordinates of the Middle Ages. Since the Icelandic translators rendered the Latin originals very freely and in an independent way, we may suppose that the translators derived their self-confidence from their work as historians.

Rómverja saga, translated c.1180, is a combination of three Latin works which were widely used as school texts: Sallust's *Bellum Iugurthinum* ('The Jugurthine War') and *Coniuratio Catilinae* ('The Conspiracy of Catiline'), from the Roman republican period, and Lucan's *Pharsalia* (that is, *Bellum civile*, 'The Civil War'), from the early Roman empire. Although each of the Latin texts is preserved in a number of manuscripts, their combination is unique in medieval literature. Since the period of the Roman republic was regarded as less important during the Middle Ages than that of the emperors, the Icelandic interest in the Roman republic may have been due to the fact that Iceland was not subject to a king until the middle of the thirteenth century. The combination of two texts in prose and one in verse may seem unusual, but from a medieval point of view all three texts were regarded as historiographical rather than poetic. References to *Rómverja saga* in other texts and library catalogues indicate that there must have been a lively interest in Roman history (Springer 1950: 94). Since the Icelandic translator used a consistent style for Sallust's prose as well as for Lucan's verses, *Rómverja saga* has to be regarded as a textual unity and not as a combination of three independent translations.

On the whole, *Rómverja saga* is a very competent and independent translation. Quite often the translator tried to avoid linguistic problems by skirting round or simplifying complicated expressions. Some mistakes may be due to lack of information about the political background of the texts. This might also explain why discussions of political topics are omitted. Descriptions of battles and military actions are either abbreviated or rendered in stereotypes reminiscent of the Icelandic sagas. Although the argumentation of the Icelandic text is very close to the Latin original, many details are lacking, such as the splitting of society into cliques.

The translator obviously did not intend to instruct his audience about more than the historical facts and he therefore omitted most of the digressions. His concentration on the plot means that he refrains from giving the moral reflections of the Latin original, as well as from reproducing the generalizing or moralizing utterances of the characters. In contrast to medieval continental translations, *Rómverja saga* maintains a certain distance from its historical subject matter. Sometimes it is made explicit that the text deals with specifically Roman conditions by interlacing sentences like 'sem siðr var Rómverja' ('as was the custom of the Romans') or 'eptir siðvenju Rómverja' ('according to Roman custom').

Some of the alterations or additions can be explained by the translator's delight in narration. In almost all cases the additions can be interpreted as supplements stimulated by particular contexts. Since *Rómverja saga* cannot be considered a word-for-word

translation, it was probably intended less as a learning aid than as a literary work written for the sake of its historical contents.

In the Middle Ages the legend of Troy was more popular than Roman history, because there was a widespread tradition of tracing the ancestry of a nation back to Troy.⁹ The main sources for the story of the Trojan War were Dictys Cretensis's *Ephemeris belli Trojani* and Dares Phrygius' *De excidio belli Troiani*. Since Dares took a favourable view of the Trojans his work was more popular than Dictys'. Homer's *Iliad*, however, which was regarded in the Middle Ages as a mendacious account, was known only in the form of an abridged Latin version called *Ilias Latina*, which was widely used as a school-book.

The story of the Trojan War must have come quite early to northern Europe. As can be deduced from *Veraldar saga* and *Snorra Edda*, a Latin version of the story must have been known in Iceland, and probably in Norway too, at the end of the twelfth century.

The Norse *Trójumanna saga* is based on Dares Phrygius' *De excidio belli Troiani*, written between the fourth and sixth centuries. The saga is preserved in two versions: the younger version was thoroughly revised, and passages from *Ilias Latina* and the *Aeneid* were interpolated into it. All manuscripts of this version date from the fourteenth century. The older version, however, which is closer to the original translation, is preserved only in relatively late manuscripts from the seventeenth century onwards.

In comparison with those in other Norse translations, the alterations in *Trójumanna saga* can hardly be considered drastic. Dares' dry and lean style corresponded to the Icelandic ideal of concentration on the plot, and avoidance of long digressions and subjective remarks. Nevertheless there are some alterations, showing that the translator wanted to adapt his text to indigenous literary tradition. *Trójumanna saga* is mainly intended to give historical information and does not imply any background knowledge. Therefore the translator does not distinguish between different groups of Greeks and remains silent about the descent of the Greek military leaders. This tendency towards simplification is not to be equated with a lack of knowledge on the part of the translator. He must in fact have been well read and proficient in the literary tradition of the Trojan War, since he handled the *materia* of the Latin text in a very competent and self-confident way. This is obvious from a large amount of additional information which has parallels in other texts but which can only rarely be traced back to a specific source (Louis-Jensen 1981: xxix–xl). These considerations tend to support the argument that linguistic characteristics suggest a dating of the translation to the beginning of the thirteenth century (Benediktsson 1980: 23).

All medieval manuscripts containing the younger and interpolated version of *Trójumanna saga* also contain *Breta sögur*, a translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britannie*. The combining of Dares' text with Geoffrey's *Historia* was quite common in the Middle Ages. The first five paragraphs of the *Historia*, containing the dedication and the description of the British Isles, are replaced by a summary of Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Breta sögur are obviously a revision of an older translation. Comparison of the translation with the Latin text thus proves difficult. The revised *Breta sögur* are preserved in a longer as well as an abbreviated version. Both manuscripts of the longer version are defective. The shorter version is preserved only in *Hauksbók*.

The translation may have been stimulated by the information given in the original about Icelandic and Scandinavian prehistory: Geoffrey reports that the king of Thule fought on King Arthur's side and that the Orkneys, Norway, Gotland and Denmark were made subject to King Arthur. On the other hand, the *Historia* offered the possibility of connecting the Trojan dynasty with the Norwegian dynasties and hence with the leading Icelandic families, because one of the first Norwegian kings, Hákon, son of Haraldr Finehair, had been fostered at the court of the English king Aethelstan.

In comparison with Geoffrey's *Historia* the Icelandic translation gives a more balanced impression because the translator tried to discuss all rulers equally. Arthur, whose story takes up almost 25 per cent of the whole *Historia*, was, for the Icelandic translator, only one of many British kings. This part could thus be shortened more readily than other passages.

The translator structured paragraphs around each individual king in a manner similar to what is found in *Ágrip*, *Historia Norwegiae* and the work of Theodoricus monachus. The Norwegian synoptics were probably the models for the presentation of the British kings in *Breta sögur*, but *Breta sögur* may in turn have influenced Snorri's presentation of the early Norwegian kings in *Ynglinga saga*. The parallels between *Breta sögur* and the Norwegian synoptics indicate that *Breta sögur* were primarily intended as historiography.

The poor preservation of *Breta sögur* means that a dating of the text is very difficult. But since the author of *Skjöldunga saga* also knew Geoffrey's *Historia*, the Latin text must have been known in Iceland by at least the end of the twelfth century (Guðnason 1963: 184–5).

Gyðinga saga is a compilation of several texts. These texts are not strung together after the manner of *Rómverja saga* but are interwoven. *Gyðinga saga* deals with Jewish history, covering the time span from the death of Alexander the Great to that of Pontius Pilate; that is, from 333 BC to AD 50. Towards its end *Gyðinga saga* overlaps with *Rómverja saga*.

Like all Icelandic pseudo-histories, *Gyðinga saga* is preserved in two versions. The older, longer version is preserved only in two fragments covering different parts of the text. The main manuscript is AM 226 fol., containing the complete text of the younger, abridged version. In its abridged version the saga may be seen as structured in three parts, each of them based on different sources.¹⁰ The first part of the saga, ending with Simon's death, is mainly based on the first of the two Apocryphal Books of the Maccabees, supplemented by insertions from the *Historia scholastica* of Peter Comestor. For the second part, *Historia scholastica* was the main source. The reference to the Roman emperor Tiberius sending Pontius Pilate to Judaea leads over into the last part, which is told from the perspective of Pilate, into whose biography the story

of Judas Iscariot is inserted. Both legends are based on a certain *Historia apocrypha*, which was probably also used by Jacobus de Voragine for his *Legenda aurea* (written c.1265). The last chapter of *Gyðinga saga* summarizes Jewish history from the accession of the Roman emperor Gaius until the death of Herod Agrippa.

Although *Gyðinga saga* is based mainly on biblical sources it is to be seen less as clerical edification than as historiography. Moral and religious topics are dealt with only in the background. At first sight it may seem unusual that the translator combined the biblical text with extracts from *Historia scholastica* and religious legends. In the Bible the two Books of the Maccabees do not provide a linear chronological report of the events with which they deal. The translator therefore started with the first Book of the Maccabees and continued with *Historia scholastica* up to Pontius Pilate's delegation to Judaea. Since *Historia scholastica* mentions Pilate only in a short passage, the translator continued with the legend of Pilate. In the saga, Jewish history culminates and ends with Pilate and Judas Iscariot, indicating the impending destruction of the Jewish people.

The small number of medieval manuscripts suggests that *Gyðinga saga* was not very popular. Other medieval Icelandic texts do not contain any references to Jewish history which might point to knowledge of the saga. After the fourteenth century *Gyðinga saga* was no longer regarded as a historiographical text, and in post-Reformation times its recipients concentrated on the religious aspects of the text. Post-medieval manuscripts usually only contain the last part of the saga, dealing with Pontius Pilate and Judas Iscariot.

In AM 226 fol. an epilogue gives information about the sources, translator and sponsor of the text. According to this the Icelandic abbot Brandr Jónsson (abbot of Þykkvibær 1247–63; bishop of Hólar 1263–4) translated the text on behalf of the Norwegian king Magnús Hákonarson (ruled 1257–80).

Since classical antiquity the figure of Alexander the Great has fascinated authors and their audiences. This subject became one of the favourite topics in the Middle Ages in the Alexander romances. The Old Norse *Alexanders saga*, also translated by Brandr Jónsson, is based on Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis*, written c.1180. The longer version of the saga, which is very close to the original translation, is preserved almost complete in one manuscript (AM 519a 4to).

Alexanders saga is a free translation rendering the Latin verses in prose. The translator was very eager to adapt Walter's imitation of Latin classical style to the style of the indigenous saga literature. He addressed an audience which was interested in politics and history but did not necessarily have specialized knowledge of classical mythology, or geography or Latin. He tried to produce an understandable yet literary text on the basis of his somewhat exotic Latin exemplar. He wanted to make the strange features of the Latin text accessible to an indigenous audience. Alterations and omissions were deliberately used to adapt the text to vernacular literary tradition, but these alterations also reflected the author's idea of style.¹¹

Alexanders saga is the only one of the pseudo-histories that contains allusions to contemporary circumstances which may be identified with the internal conflicts in

Iceland during the thirteenth century. In *Alexanders saga* it is told how ambition leads a king to become ruler over large parts of the world. But if this ruler loses a sense of proportion, it is suggested, he will lose everything. What is also shown here, on the other hand, is how a small country can profit from the reign of a wise and mighty king if his decisions and orders are obeyed. Against the Icelandic background of subjugation to the Norwegian crown, *Alexanders saga* can be read not just as a work of edification for the Norwegian king, but also as a warning to the Icelandic people.

A special case: Veraldar saga

It was long supposed that *Veraldar saga* could well be a translation of an unknown Latin text.¹² Today, however, it is generally acknowledged that the saga is an individual Icelandic compilation whose compiler was very well versed in contemporary historiographical literature (Karlsson 1977: 128). A good deal of its material was common knowledge among learned people. Although it is difficult to trace possible sources, it is assumed that Bede's and Isidore's world chronicles were used as models for the concept of historiography in *Veraldar saga*, albeit with several links in between. The saga is thus on the border line between a translation and an original work in the vernacular, because it is not a translation of one or more foreign sources, but rather a compilation of different texts which could have been either vernacular accounts or Latin originals.

Veraldar saga is preserved in 11 complete manuscripts and fragments, on the basis of which two redactions can be distinguished. The main manuscript of redaction A (AM 625 4to) may be dated to the early fourteenth century. Redaction B of *Veraldar saga* has been preserved in several fragments, the oldest (AM 655 VII 4to) dating from c.1200. In all manuscripts *Veraldar saga* is transmitted in a clerical context, consisting of theological texts, saints' legends or religious poetry. The only exception is an encyclopedic manuscript, AM 194 4to, which focuses on historiography.

Veraldar saga covers the time span from the Creation of the world to the rule of the German emperor Frederick Barbarossa, divided into the six ages. As a history of the world it also refers to the events reported in the pseudo-histories. From the summary of the Trojan War it is difficult to decide whether the compiler used the Latin text or a vernacular translation.

A number of parallel passages also point to a connection between *Veraldar saga* and *Rómverja saga*. One of the two sagas must have taken these passages more or less word for word from the other. Compared to *Rómverja saga*, *Veraldar saga* attaches less importance to narrative elaboration. It consists rather of a dry and linear report which confines itself to listing the events. The compiler of *Veraldar saga* makes little use of direct speech. He refrains from digressions and hardly ever judges or comments on the actions. Adjectives, adverbs or other epithets are used only if they contain information necessary for understanding the narration. The only rhetorical device in *Veraldar saga* is alliteration, used to a very modest extent.

Hofmann (1986) showed that *Veraldar saga* must have used an Icelandic version of *Rómverja saga*. On the other hand, it must have been written before the news of Barbarossa's death had reached Iceland, that is, before 1190. *Rómverja saga* and *Veraldar saga* were probably written in the same milieu, perhaps in the environment of Gizurr Hallson, who is mentioned in *Veraldar saga*'s epilogue (Hofmann 1986: 148). A didactic work such as *Veraldar saga* is likely to have been written close to a school or a place where there was, at the very least, the opportunity for learned studies. Nearest to Gizurr Hallson's home environment were the schools at the big farm of Oddi and at the episcopal see of Skálholt, where Gizurr was brought up.

On the continent there began in the eleventh century a new period of world historiography. The existence of *Veraldar saga*, whose preliminary versions may be traced back to the beginning of the twelfth century, shows that Norway and Iceland took part in this literary development and that literary tendencies from the continent very quickly reached the countries in the north. It is possible that the early existence of a vernacular world history in Iceland influenced the reception of material from antiquity and that it stimulated translations of Latin works. It may have been precisely the short summaries of historical events of antiquity that aroused interest in further information about these events, thus initiating the relatively full translations of Latin texts.

The Transmission of Historiography

In the early and final stages of the reception of classical texts in Iceland there were encyclopedic compendia. The different versions and redactions of the pseudo-histories indicate that the texts could be adapted to the redactors' new intentions or to the audience's different needs. There is a noticeable tendency towards abbreviation (*brevitas*), which can already be seen in the oldest preserved translations if they are compared with their originals. In all five pseudo-histories these abbreviations not only affect the plot; they also leave a strong impression of concentration on the sum of the action, the *summa facti*, of the events reported. Since it was difficult for later redactors and audiences to understand allusions to events that were contemporary with the translators, these allusions came to be omitted in the course of transmission.

Since Icelandic encyclopedias almost always focus on historiography, this historiographical preference tended to affect the selection and redaction of geographical and other learned texts.¹³ The incorporation of the pseudo-histories in such encyclopedias indicates that classical subjects were regarded as information worthy of historiographical treatment.

In all cases the younger and abbreviated versions of the pseudo-histories are better preserved than the longer versions. From the transmission of the pseudo-histories we may conclude that, whatever the intentions of the original translators may have been, in Iceland these texts were read first and foremost as works of historiography. On the continent, too, the romances of antiquity written in the twelfth century were later

integrated into larger chronicles of world history. And here also the abbreviated versions were preferred. These abbreviated versions were not thought of as substitutes for the longer texts, however; quite often their transmission runs parallel.

When the historiographical interest in the pseudo-histories gradually expired, *Breta sögur* and *Trójumanna saga* were stylistically revised in such a way as to adapt them to the genre of *riddarasögur*. However, these efforts had only limited success, because *Breta sögur*, in particular, with their extended and long-winded action, could hardly compete with the *riddarasögur*. The Norse translations of the Arthurian romances had brought to Norway and Iceland relatively short and entertaining tales about King Arthur and his knights.

Although the Old Norse texts have been transmitted for the most part anonymously, their authors and redactors do show a consciousness of their creative activity. There was no hierarchy distinguishing between the work of authors, translators and redactors. Everyone taking part in the transmission of a literary work could intervene in the process of literary production. Every text preserved in a manuscript thus has to be considered as reflecting the creative power of an individual, albeit influenced by historical, social and cultural conditions. The example of *Veraldar saga* shows that an author or redactor could use all the literature available to him. In this process of selection it was of minor importance whether the sources were originally meant to *prodesse* or *delectare*. *Veraldar saga*, based as it is on many different sources, also shows that not even the language of the sources was important. Latin and vernacular sources could be combined if they complemented each other and if they were relevant to the work that was projected. On the other hand, authors and compilers were of course restricted in their freedom by the material available to them. Since in Iceland there can only have been very few libraries that owned several copies of one text, the limited material conditions must have forced the Icelandic compilers to make creative use of their exemplars and to transform them into new literary works on the basis of their own knowledge.

See also CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; FAMILY SAGAS; GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; LANGUAGE; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; PROSE OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION; RHETORIC AND STYLE; ROMANCE; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; SAGAS OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY; SAGAS OF ICELANDIC PREHISTORY; SHORT PROSE NARRATIVE; SKALDIC POETRY.

NOTES

- 1 On the interrelationship of the synoptics cf. Ulset (1983). Relatively new but not undisputed is Ekrem (1998).
- 2 On the relationship between *Jónsvíkinga saga* and the kings' sagas cf. Würth (1991: 67–9).
- 3 On *Orkneyinga saga* in the context of the kings' sagas cf. also Würth (1991: 64–7).
- 4 On *Færeyinga saga* in the context of the kings' sagas cf. also Würth (1991: 60–4).
- 5 For a detailed comparison of both manuscripts see Jansson (1944: 9–171).
- 6 For a survey of medieval translations see Burnett (1989).

- 7 Lehmann (1937) mentions all Latin texts available in mediaeval Norway and Iceland. Halldórsson (1989: 61) even assumes that the earliest translations are from the eleventh century.
- 8 Würth (1991) deals with all five translations.
- 9 Eisenhut (1983) gives a list of medieval versions of the Troy story.
- 10 For a detailed list of the sources see Wolf (1990).
- 11 The Norwegian translators of the courtly romances treated their material in a similar way (Kalinke 1977: 125).
- 12 The title was coined by Konráð Gíslason, who was the first to edit the text.
- 13 All Norse encyclopedic manuscripts contain at least one historiographical text (Simek 1990: 25–30).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Benediktsson, Jakob (ed.) (1944) *Veraldar saga* (Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 61). Copenhagen.
- Benediktsson, Jakob (ed.) (1968) *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók* (Íslenzk fornrit I). Reykjavík.
- Benediktsson, Jakob (ed.) (1980) *Catilina and Jugurtha by Sallust and Pharsalia by Lucan: In Old Norse: Rómverja saga AM 595a–b 4to* (Early Icelandic Manuscripts 13). Copenhagen.
- Berman, Melissa (1985) 'The Political Sagas.' *Scandinavian Studies* 57, 113–29.
- Burnett, Charles (1989) 'Translations and Translators. Western Europe.' In Joseph R. Strayer (ed. in chief) *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, vol. 12. New York, pp. 136–42.
- Driscoll, M[atthew] J[ames] (ed. and transl.) (1995) *Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum: A Twelfth-Century Synoptic History of the Kings of Norway*. London.
- Einarsson, Bjarni (ed.) (1984) *Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum* (Íslenzk fornrit XIX). Reykjavík.
- Eisenhut, Werner (1983) 'Spätantike Trojaerzählungen – mit einem Ausblick auf die mittelalterliche Trojaliteratur.' *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch* 18, 1–28.
- Ekrem, Inger (1998) *Nytt lys over Historia Norvegie: Mot en løsning i debatten om dens alder?* Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim.
- Ellehøj, Svend (1965) *Studier over den ældste norrøne historieskrivning* (Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana 26). Copenhagen.
- Goetz, Hans-Werner (1985) 'Die "Geschichte" im Wissenschaftssystem des Mittelalters.' Quoted in Franz-Josef Schmale, *Funktion und Formen mittelalterlicher Geschichtsschreibung: Mit einem Beitrag von Hans-Werner Goetz*. Darmstadt, pp. 165–213.
- Guðnason, Bjarni (1963) *Um Skjöldunga sögu*. Reykjavík.
- Guðnason, Bjarni (1977) 'Theodoricus og íslenskir sagnaritarar.' In Einar Gunnar Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson (eds.) *Sjötiú ritgerðir belgáðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20. júlí 1977*, vol. 1 (Rit Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar 12). Reykjavík, pp. 107–20.
- Guðmundsson, Finnbogi (ed.) (1965) *Orkneyinga saga* (Íslenzk fornrit XXIV). Reykjavík.
- Halldórsson, Ólafur (ed.) (1967) *Færeyinga saga*. Reykjavík.
- Halldórsson, Ólafur (ed.) (1969) *Jómsvíkinga saga*. Reykjavík.
- Halldórsson, Ólafur (ed.) (1985) *Eiríks saga rauða: Texti Skálholtsbókar: AM 557 4to* (Íslenzk fornrit IV). Reykjavík.
- Halldórsson, Ólafur (1989) 'Skrifaðar bækur.' In Frosti Jóhannesson (ed.) *Íslensk þjóðmenning*, vol. 6: *Munnmenntir og bókmenning*. Reykjavík, pp. 57–89.
- Helgason, Jón (ed.) (1966) *Alexanders saga: The Arna-Magnaean Manuscript 519A, 4to* (Manuscripta Islandica 7). Copenhagen.
- Historia Norvegiae* (1880) In Gustav Storm (ed.) *Monumenta Historica Norvegiae: Latinske kilde-skrifter til Norges historie i middelalderen*. Christiania, pp. 69–124.
- Hofmann, Dietrich (1986) 'Accessus ad Lucanum. Zur Neubestimmung des Verhältnisses zwischen Rómverja saga und Veraldar saga.' In Rudolf Simek et al. (eds.) *Sagnaskemmtun: Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson on his*

- 65th Birthday. Vienna, Cologne and Graz, pp. 121–51.
- Jansson, Sven B. F. (1944) *Sagorna om Vinland*. Lund.
- Jesch, Judith (1993) 'History in the "Political Sagas".' *Medium Aevum* 62, 210–20.
- Jóhannesson, Jón (1941) *Gerðir Landnámabókar*. Reykjavík.
- Kalinke, Marianne (1977) 'Erex saga and Ívens saga. Medieval Approaches to Translation.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 92, 125–44.
- Karlsón, Stefán (1977) 'Inventio crucis, cap. 1, og Veraldar saga.' *Opuscula* 2, 116–23.
- Kunin, Devra (transl.) and Phelepstead, Carl (ed.) (2001) *A History of Norway and the Passion and Miracles of the Blessed Óláfr*. London.
- Lange, Gudrun (1989) *Die Anfänge der isländisch-norwegischen Geschichtsschreibung* (Studia Islandica 47). Reykjavík.
- Lehmann, Paul (1937) *Skandinaviens Anteil an der lateinischen Literatur und Wissenschaft des Mittelalters*. Munich.
- Louis-Jensen, Jonna (ed.) (1963) *Trójumanna saga* (Editiones Arnarnæðæna A, 8). Copenhagen.
- Louis-Jensen, Jonna (ed.) (1981) *Trójumanna saga: The Dares Phrygius version* (Editiones Arnarnæðæna A, 9). Copenhagen.
- McDougall, David and McDougall, Ian (transl.) and Foote, Peter (intro.) (1998) *Theodoricus monachus: Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium: An Account of the Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings*. London.
- Meissner, Rudolf (ed.) (1910) *Rómverja saga* (AM 595, 4to). Berlin.
- Schier, Kurt (1994) 'Anfänge und erste Entwicklung der Literatur in Island und Schweden: Wie beginnt Literatur in einer schriftlosen Gesellschaft?' In Ulrike Strerath-Bolz et al. (eds.) *Kurt Schier: Nordlichter: Ausgewählte Schriften 1960–1992*. Munich, pp. 210–65.
- Simek, Rudolf (1990) *Altnordische Kosmographie: Studien und Quellen zu Weltbild und Weltbeschreibung in Norwegen und Island vom 12. bis zum 14. Jahrhundert*. Berlin and New York.
- Springer, Otto (1950) 'Medieval Pilgrim Routes from Scandinavia to Rome.' *Medieval Studies* 12, 92–122.
- Storm, Gustav (ed.) (1880) *Monumenta Historica Norvegiae: Latinske kildeskrifter til Norges historie i middelalderen*. Christiania.
- Theodoricus monachus (1880) *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*. In Gustav Storm (ed.) *Monumenta Historica Norvegiae: Latinske kildeskrifter til Norges historie i middelalderen*. Christiania, pp. 1–68.
- Turville-Petre, Gabriel (1953) *Origins of Icelandic Literature*. Oxford.
- Ulset, Tor (1983) *Det genetiske forholdet mellem Ágrip, Historia Norvegiae og Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*. Oslo.
- Unger, Chr[istian] (ed.) (1848) *Alexanders saga: Norsk bearbejdelse fra trettende Aarhundrede af Philip Gautiers latinske digt Alexandreis*. Christiania.
- Vogt, Walter Heinrich (1921) 'Die frásagnir der Landnámabók: Ein Beitrag zur Vorgeschichte der isländischen Saga.' *Zeitschrift für Deutsches Altertum* 58, 161–204.
- Wolf, Kirsten (1990) 'The Sources of Gyðinga saga.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 105, 140–55.
- Wolf, Kirsten (ed.) (1995) *Gyðinga saga* (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar Rit 42). Reykjavík.
- Würth, Stefanie (1991) *Elemente des Erzählens: Die þættir der Flateyjarbók* (Beiträge zur Nordischen Philologie 20). Basel and Frankfurt.
- Würth, Stefanie (1998) *Der 'Antikenroman' in der isländischen Literatur des Mittelalters* (Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie 26). Basel and Frankfurt.

Language

Michael Barnes

Old Norse-Icelandic literature is written in a western form of Scandinavian, which in practice means the medieval scribal norms of Iceland and Norway. Although literature may have been composed in other types of western Scandinavian following the settlements of the Viking Age, none has been preserved that bears the unmistakable linguistic stamp of a particular colony. In a few cases word-forms or inflections have suggested an author or scribe from a particular area outside Norway or Iceland, but the texts concerned have in the main been legal and diplomatic, and none has had a strongly local flavour. Runic inscriptions also occasionally exhibit what appear to be dialect features, but none carries a literary text and they are far too laconic to provide the raw material for dialect profiles.

Germanic and Indo-European

Western Scandinavian, together with its eastern counterpart represented by the scribal norms of Denmark, Sweden and Gotland, is a medieval manifestation of a northern variety of Germanic. Germanic is a branch of the Indo-European language family, and comprises, as well as Scandinavian, an eastern and a western variety. East Germanic is known chiefly from fourth-century Gothic, preserved in manuscripts of the sixth or seventh centuries, but subsequently unrecorded and now extinct. The earliest attestations of a recognizably West Germanic type of language are found in runic inscriptions, but these are few in number and very brief. West Germanic in manuscript form begins with Old English (AD c.650) and Old High German (late eighth century), followed by Old Saxon (ninth century), Old Low Franconian (ninth century) and Old Frisian (thirteenth century). The modern counterparts of these early varieties are English, German, Low German or *Plattdeutsch*, Dutch and Frisian respectively. It is to this West Germanic group in its ancient or modern guises that the Scandinavian dialects or languages are most closely related. More distant relatives are, among

others: languages descended from Latin – French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish, etc.; Greek; the Celtic tongues – Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Welsh and Breton; Russian and other Slavonic languages; and Sanskrit. Neighbouring Finnish, Sami and Estonian, belonging to the Finno-Ugrian language family, do not appear to be historically related to Scandinavian at all. Prolonged contact has, however, led to a certain amount of mutual influence.

The Early Runic Language

The very earliest attestations of Germanic (AD c.200–600) come in the form of inscriptions in the older runic alphabet (or *futhork* – so named after the first six characters of the older rune-row: **futhork**). The bulk of these inscriptions have been found within the area that now comprises Denmark, Norway and Sweden, but there is a scattering from elsewhere. England and (present-day) Germany both have a small body of texts, eastern Europe can boast five or six inscriptions, Frisia perhaps one or two. This pattern of distribution can of course be misleading. The early runes often occur on portable objects, and may have been inscribed far from the places they were found. Nevertheless, the north's apparent dominance of the early runic heritage, coupled with the fact that a good many inscriptions from the area are on substantial blocks of stone, has convinced scholars that in the main we are dealing with Scandinavian products. That in turn has led some to expect to find in them a very early form of North Germanic or Scandinavian language. And such expectations have been fulfilled, in the sense that much of the phonology, morphology and vocabulary of the inscriptions (evidence about syntax is limited and uncertain) can be shown to develop regularly into Viking-Age, medieval and modern Scandinavian reflexes. Yet it is also true that there is little in this 'Early Runic language' that rules it out as the ancestor of the 'North-Sea' group of the West Germanic languages (Old English, Old Saxon and Old Frisian). The most thorough recent study of the question concludes:

The main outcome of our deliberations was that the Early Runic language [that of the 24-character *futhork* inscriptions of Scandinavia AD c.200–500] was less directly linked to North-Sea Germanic (Old English) and especially to Old High German than it was to early Norse [the language of the runic inscriptions of Scandinavia c.500–700], but we refrained from calling Early Runic a North Gmc. idiom because the resemblance to Proto-Germanic [the non-attested, reconstructed ancestor of all the Germanic languages] was much more obvious than it was to any of the later attested Gmc. dialects, including Old Norse. (Nielsen 2000: 381)

To illustrate the point and to give a flavour of Early Runic, we may cite the Gallehus Golden Horn inscription from southern Jutland, commonly dated (on somewhat uncertain grounds) to c.400. In transliteration this runs:

ek:hlewagastiz:holtjaz:horna:tawido

The sense is largely clear, but certain details are elusive. The initial word is the pronoun 'I', identical to the Old Norse form. It is followed by a personal name, perhaps meaning 'famous guest' or 'shelter guest'. The third word is problematic, but has by many been taken as **holt** + a patronymic suffix, thus 'son of Holta' or possibly rather 'son of someone the most important element of whose name was Holta'. The sense of **horna** is unsurprisingly 'horn', while the final word translates as 'made', 1st sg. past tense of **taujan*, not attested in infinitive form in Early Runic (and therefore signified as a reconstruction by the asterisk), but found for example in Gothic. Nielsen's proposed Proto-Germanic form of the inscription (2000: 78):

**ek blewa gastiz hultjaz burnan tawiðōn*

shows only a few differences from the Early Runic, whereas his and others' rendering of it into Old Norse:

**ek blēgestr hyltir born gōrða*

indicates radical linguistic development, resulting not least in the loss of vowels and the drastic shortening of words in consequence. If we attempt an 'early Norse' version, based on the language of Scandinavia as it appears in runic inscriptions between c.500 and 700 (and with vowel length added), we get:

**ek blēgæstz hyltiz horn tādālgōrða*

which, although only showing certain points of resemblance with Early Runic (it is uncertain how long the verb **taujan* survived in Scandinavian), is arguably slightly closer to that language than are any of the four West Germanic versions constructed by Nielsen, of which we may cite here the Old English:

**ic blēogiest hylte horn tāwode*

Some have claimed that the Early Runic language does not reflect contemporary speech at all, but is a koine, a norm used by the makers of inscriptions in the older *futhork*. While not inconceivable, the only evidence for such a koine comes from the supposedly uniform language of the inscriptions. But that may be an illusion created by the very limited size of the corpus; and in any case we are not dealing here with an entirely variation-free language (see below). In the absence of positive evidence for the existence of a koine, there seems no reason not to accept the older *futhork* inscriptions as representing (albeit in the most limited fashion) the speech of those who carved them.

The Syncope Period and Early Norse

In Scandinavian runic inscriptions almost certainly to be dated to the seventh century, the results of various radical linguistic changes begin to be seen (in itself an argument against the existence of a koine). While it is difficult to classify the Early Runic language as Scandinavian because of its conservatism, the innovations that characterize the seventh-century inscriptions mark the inception of an identifiably northern form of Germanic – Nielsen’s ‘early Norse’. The changes that lead from Early Runic through this transitional stage to Viking-Age Scandinavian are many and various. Because of the sparseness of the sources, the (presumably) conservative nature of writing, and the difficulty of denoting the products of certain sound changes with the runes of the older *futhork*, we are often uncertain about when particular developments took place.

Syncope (that is, loss) of short, unaccented *a*, *i* and *u* is well attested in seventh- and eighth-century inscriptions, for example in **-lausz** < **-lausaz* ‘-less’, **sate** ‘[he] placed’ cf. earlier **satido** ‘[I] placed’, **sba** < **spabu* ‘prophecy’.

Before their loss, these vowels had a tendency to ‘mutate’ a preceding accented vowel, that is, cause it to adopt one of the features of the unaccented vowel’s articulation. Because in most cases the product was a new vowel quality for which there was no pre-existing runic symbol, the effects of mutation do not normally appear in inscriptions. An exception is the **holtjaz** of Gallehus, where the presence of unaccented *-a* in Germanic **hultan* is considered to have caused an early change to **holta(n)*; no problem arose about the marking of [o], since there was already a rune for the long equivalent [o:], and runic writing does not distinguish length. The effects of *i*- and *u*-mutation are to impart front and labial articulation respectively to the preceding accented vowel – *i*, for example, changing [a(:)] to [æ(:)], [o(:)] to [ø(:)], and [u(:)] to [y(:)], and *u* causing [a(:)] to become [ɔ(:)]. Here the mutated vowels were entirely new in the language and could not easily be signalled by the runic writing of the time. However, since we know that the nom. m. pl. of the ON noun *maðr* ‘man’ is *menn*, we can be reasonably sure that the seventh-century runic equivalent **manz**, with unaccented *i* already lost (cf. earlier **manniz*), represents a pronunciation [mænz], and that mutation has thus taken place – notwithstanding it is unmarked.

Unlike most mutations, breaking – the diphthongization of accented *e* – does seem to be documented in the seventh-century runic sources. At least, it has been widely assumed that a spelling such as **hæru-**, reflecting earlier **heru-* ‘sword’ (ON *hjør*), is the rune carver’s way of marking the presence of a diphthong in the root syllable. Breaking was certainly a fact by the early eighth century, from which time we have the form **hialb** ‘help’ (cf. ON *hjalp*, English *help*).

While syncope, mutation and breaking affected other Germanic languages (though not always in the same way or to the same extent as Scandinavian), loss of initial *j*- in all cases and of initial *w*- before rounded vowels are peculiarly Scandinavian phenomena. They account for the difference between, for example, ON *ár* and English *year*,

German *Jabr*; ON *orð* and English *word*, German *Wort*. Evidence for the loss of *j-* comes from the acrophonic principle according to which the name of each individual rune (where possible) began with the sound the rune denoted. The twelfth rune, whose original name was almost certainly **jāra* and which thus stood for [j], begins early in the seventh century to denote {a(:)} and related vowels (it is the character here transliterated *ʌ* to distinguish it from original *a*). Signs of the loss of initial *w-* come mostly from the late seventh and early eighth centuries, with spellings such as *uþin* ‘Óðinn’ (Old English *Wōden*), *urti* ‘made’ (OE *worbte*, modern *worked*).

Also peculiarly Scandinavian is the loss of unaccented final *-n* and the disappearance of *b* (Germanic [x]) from all but initial position. Indications of these developments can be found in the late seventh-century forms *a* and *sot*, the former a preposition cognate with English *on*, German *an*, the latter a past participle cognate with OE (*ge*)*sobt*, modern English *sought*, German (*ge*)*sucht*.

Loss of final *-n* had a profound effect on the Scandinavian inflectional system. Prior to the change, most weak noun and adjective forms had ended in *-n*; subsequently, as still in the modern Scandinavian languages, their endings were vocalic. The infinitive was affected in the same way, cf. ON *fara* ‘go’, *hafa* ‘have’, OE *faran*, *habban*, German *fabren*, *haben*.

Inflections were being reshaped in other ways, too. In the period immediately prior to 500, an *a*-stem noun would have had the following endings, the singular forms, at least (length in the dative excepted), all documented in inscriptions:

	Sg.	Pl.
Nom.	-az	-ōz
Acc.	-a	-anz
Gen.	-as	-ō
Dat.	-ē	-umz

This paradigm can be compared with its classical Old Norse reflex:

	Sg.	Pl.
Nom.	-r	-ar
Acc.	(zero)	-a
Gen.	-s	-a
Dat.	-i	-um

Inscriptions of the seventh century suggest a system closer to that of Old Norse than Early Runic, with forms like nom. sg. *-wōlafz* (<**wul(a)faz*) ‘-wolf [as the second element of a personal name]’, acc. sg. *stain* (< *staina*) ‘stone’, and acc. pl. *runaz* ‘runes’, an *ō*-stem noun, but with a nom./acc. pl. ending identical to that of the nom. pl. of the *a*-stems. Taken as a whole, the noun inflections of early Norse (in so far as they are documented) and Old Norse show a pattern of retentions and innovations significantly different from those of other Germanic languages.

An important change also affected the present tense indicative of the verb paradigm: the inherited Germanic 3rd sg. ending $-\delta$ was jettisoned in favour of the 2nd sg. $-z$, leading for almost all verbs to a complete coalescence of form between 2nd and 3rd sg. Seventh-century evidence of the change comes from two apparently more or less contemporary versions of the same text (see the Blekinge inscriptions below), one of which exhibits the old form **bariutiþ**, the other its replacement **barutz** ‘breaks’.

Some of the most characteristic Scandinavian innovations, the suffixed definite article, the $-s(k)$ verb form, and the pronouns *hann/hon* ‘he/she’, *nakkvarr/nokkurr* ‘someone’ ‘anyone’, and *engi* ‘no one’, are not documented until long after the early Norse period – *hann/hon* in the tenth century, the suffixed article, the $-s(k)$ verb form and *engi* in the eleventh, and *nokkurr* not until the manuscript age. Any or all of these could be considerably older than their first attestation, however. The etymologies of *hann/hon* are far from clear and it has been suggested they are dialect words that were spreading from eastern Sweden in the tenth and eleventh centuries (Stroh-Wollin 1994: 129–30). Other 3rd person singular pronouns, *sa*, *is* ‘he’ and *su* ‘she’, are not uncommonly encountered in runic inscriptions of the Viking Age. The suffixed definite article is regarded by most as a reduced form of the pronoun *hinn* ‘that’; in the Early Runic language and early Norse, modifiers seem often to have followed their head word, and it is assumed *hinn* became an enclitic and was ultimately identified by speakers as part of the noun, **karlaz hinnaz gamla* ‘that/the old man’, for example, metamorphosing via **karlz inz gamli* into *karlinn gamli*. The $-s(k)$ verb form, it seems universally agreed, arose from a similar process. The 3rd sg. reflexive pronoun, and at least certain 1st person pronoun forms besides (in the 1st and 2nd person there was no special reflexive form), were suffixed to the verb, **sa kallaz sik...* ‘he calls himself...’, for example, growing into *sá kallask...* ‘he calls himself...’ ‘he is called...’. The pronoun *nakkvarr/nokkurr* appears to have arisen through the coalescing of **ne wait ek hwærz* ‘I know not who’ into a single word (partial parallels to this development exist in other languages, including Old English and Old High German), while *engi* is thought to come from the phrase **ne einngi* ‘not one at all’ with the negative connotations transferred to positive **einngi* in the same way as to *personne* ‘no one’ (< Latin *persona* ‘person’) and *rien* ‘nothing’ (< Latin *res* ‘thing’) in French.

One thing at least four of these innovations have in common is the fusion of lightly stressed words with stressed. Although such fusion could in theory have taken place at any time, it is tempting to associate it with syncope, which is commonly believed to have resulted from concentration of stress in the initial syllable and corresponding weakening in others. That would put the development of the suffixed definite article, the $-s(k)$ verb form, *nokkurr* and *engi* back to the seventh century, if not before. Against the weight of this circumstantial evidence could be cited not only the non-appearance of any of the features in runic sources until several centuries later, but also the sparseness with which the definite article is documented in skaldic and eddic poetry. Its absence there, however, may have as much to do with style as with the age of the phenomenon. Additional circumstantial evidence of the article’s antiquity comes from the possibility that it is one of a number of syntactic innovations (including the

periphrastic perfect and the signalling of questions by verb-first word-order) that had a single point of origin (wherever that might have been) and spread through a range of west European languages (Beckman 1934). The existence of a definite article, or something like it, in, for example, the oldest Old English and Old High German manuscript sources (seventh to eighth centuries) might then suggest that the Viking Age is too late a period for the development of the phenomenon in Scandinavian.

Common Scandinavian

The radical changes of the syncope period gave rise, according to many, to 'Common Scandinavian', which, as the name suggests, is seen as a uniform type of speech. Indeed, if most handbooks are to be believed, uniformity is what characterized the Germanic of Scandinavia from its arrival in the BC era until well into the Viking Age. In the present account, too, change has so far been presented as proceeding almost entirely chronologically, with little mention of possible dialectal variation. A powerful reason for this is the sparseness of the sources and the consequent lack of direct evidence. When, for example, we find the runic forms **faihido** and **fahido** '[I] painted' in inscriptions of approximately the same age, and we know that the corresponding Old Norse form is *fáða* with monophthongization of the earlier [ai] diphthong, we naturally see the variation first and foremost in terms of change over time: **fahido** is recognized as the newer form and the tendency is then to think the inscription containing it later than one that has **faihido**. But as we know from studies of sound changes in more recent times (and of language change in general), it is not the case that developments take place simultaneously throughout a whole speech community. By and large a change begins in a particular place, or among a particular group, and spreads. That means that for a time monophthongal *fāhiðō* must have been the rival of diphthongal *faihiðō*, choice of form being dependent on factors such as one's place of origin, status and/or age.

If we apply this insight more generally, it is clear that other examples of variation we can observe in the Early Runic language are likely to have been synchronic as well as diachronic: for example, the -o versus -a nom. m. sg. endings of weak nouns, the -ai, -e, -a 3rd sg. past weak verb endings (if not simply spelling variants), the acc. m. sg. **minino** 'my', which can hardly be the ancestor of ON *minn*. It is, however, when we come to the fundamental and radical changes of the syncope period that we perceive the full extent of the linguistic diversity that must have existed in Scandinavia prior to the Viking Age. The developments sketched in the previous section, which turned the Germanic of Scandinavia into a recognizably Scandinavian idiom, can hardly have taken place, one would think, without considerable dialectal variation.

It is puzzling, then, to be told that what succeeded syncope and its attendant changes was a uniform 'Common Scandinavian'. To be sure, one of the proponents of this idea stresses that the term is 'a useful abstraction for the common elements in

what were no doubt both geographically and historically diverging dialects' (Haugen 1976: 150), but it is clear he nevertheless still sees Scandinavian language development in terms of movement from uniformity to the kind of divergence that confronts us in medieval manuscript sources. Little thought is given to the variation that must once have existed but did not persist, or to the mechanisms which encouraged or caused the spread of many innovations across the whole of the Scandinavian-speaking world. In the kind of society normally assumed to have existed in Migration- and early Viking-Age Scandinavia, without much in the way of centralized authority, we would expect change to have been a piecemeal affair, affecting some areas or groups and not others. But there are many examples of exceptionless change, and it is perhaps to these that the term 'Common Scandinavian' is best applied, if it is to be used at all. Of the numerous developments mentioned in the previous section, all except the suffixed definite article are pan-Scandinavian (some Jutlandic dialects have a preposed article, and although the feature cannot be traced farther back than c.1500, it is thought to be considerably older). Mutation and breaking vary in the extent to which their effects can be seen in runic and manuscript sources, but the processes seem with a few exceptions to have been the same throughout Scandinavia, and of the differences that eventually appear some are, and many may be, due to the workings of analogy.

It is implausible that the uniformity revealed here resulted from abrupt change: that the rising generation in Scandinavia began at some point simultaneously to alter their speech patterns in identical ways. Apart from the fact that such a development is unparalleled, there exists considerable, if sporadic, evidence of dialectal variation in Migration- and early Viking-Age Scandinavian. There are four closely related runic inscriptions from Blekinge, for example (Björketorp, Gummarp, Istaby, Stentoften; Antonsen 1975: 83–8), apparently of the seventh century, whose spellings suggest monophthongization of historical /ai/ and /au/, the lowering of /e(:)/ to /æ(:)/ and the coalescence of /r/ and /z/ after apicals ([d], [ð] and [t]). All three developments are well known in Scandinavian, but seem otherwise to belong to a period three centuries or so later. Furthermore, on the evidence of later runic spellings the monophthongization of /ai/ and /au/ began in Jutland and the Danish islands and spread eastwards. If the orthography of these Blekinge inscriptions has been correctly interpreted, we are thus compelled to assume a series of innovations paralleling ones we find much later, but of different origin and distribution – an otherwise unattested Migration-Age dialect. The alternative view – that developments in the spoken language glimpsed in the four inscriptions were subsequently masked by a widespread, rigid and long-lasting distinction between speech and writing – is scarcely attractive. Another extensive piece of runic writing is the apparently early ninth-century Rök inscription from Östergötland. This, too, contains material suggestive of dialectal variation. There is the 1st pl. present form **sakum** 'say', like German *sagen* lacking the *-j-* element of later Swedish *sighium* etc., ON *segjum*; what appears to be epenthetic /v/ in acc. m. pl. **uintur** 'winters'; the relative particle **suap** (also found sporadically in West Norse poetry); the prepositional form **miz** 'with' (documented in a few other inscriptions

from Östergötland and once in Uppland; Peterson 1994: 34); the acc. m. **fiakura** and dat. **fiakurum** ‘four’ (Old Swedish *fiuralfyra*, *fiuromlfyrom*, ON *fjóra*, *fjórum*); and yet more.

Variation in Migration- and early Viking-Age Scandinavian seems assured, and is indeed unsurprising. Harder to understand are the unifying forces that led to the Scandinavia-wide acceptance of so many innovations. Recent studies (such as Widmark 1994; 2001: 79–100; Barnes 2003a) emphasize the role of prestige groups speaking prestige dialects that inspired imitation. The problem has been to identify such groups. Widmark, reviving an older idea, sees the trading centres of Hedeby and Birka as places from which innovations spread out, with Viking-Age coastal culture acting as a conduit. While the attempt to connect language change with social developments is entirely praiseworthy, and all too often neglected, lack of evidence bestows unusual freedom to speculate. Some have been inclined, for example, to offer Hedeby as the explanation for many or most linguistic developments of the Viking Age. Conceivably this point of view has something to recommend it, but a word of warning is appropriate. Widmark (1994: 203–5; 2001: 75–7) identifies Hedeby as the place in which the reform that led to the younger, reduced Scandinavian runic alphabet was initiated. From there knowledge of the revised alphabet in its short-twig form quickly spread along the trade routes, she thinks, so that very soon all Scandinavian rune carvers were using the new system. This is an impossible scenario, however. The Ribe cranium inscription, dated to the 720s on the basis of a dendro-chronological investigation of the layers in which it was found (Stoklund 1996: 199), is written in a type of younger *fubark* script; yet Hedeby did not come into its own as a trading centre until the early 800s.

To conclude: ‘Common Scandinavian’ is something of a misnomer, and the (largely) variation-free language of many handbooks a myth. Migration- and early Viking-Age Scandinavian was clearly characterized by both variation and standardization. The difficulties are to spot the variation and understand the mechanisms that led to the standardization.

Scandinavian in the Mid- and Late Viking Age

The period c.800–1050 saw the arrival of Scandinavian settlers in places as far apart as Normandy, England, Ireland, the Isle of Man, Scotland, Orkney and Shetland, the Faeroes, Iceland, Greenland, the North American continent, Finland, the southern Baltic coast, and what became Russia. The expansion, naturally enough, led to the establishment of Scandinavian-speaking communities in these areas. In Orkney and Shetland, the Faeroes, Iceland and – in the areas of settlement – Greenland, Scandinavian was or became the dominant tongue. Elsewhere it was in competition with other languages. Of Scandinavian in North America nothing is known, but the number of settlers was probably too small and the settlement too short-lived for an independent speech community to have developed.

No Viking-Age Scandinavian texts from Normandy, Finland or the southern Baltic coast are known (bar a runic fragment recently discovered in Finland). Russia has a few brief runic inscriptions to show, most of them difficult to interpret, and the British Isles a rather more substantial Viking-Age Scandinavian runic corpus. From the Faeroes and Greenland come one or two apparently early inscriptions, from Iceland none. Other sources of information on the language of the first generations of colonists are place names and to a lesser extent personal names, and loan-words in indigenous tongues. For the most part, however, these are preserved in sources that post-date the Viking Age.

We do not learn a great deal from this material about the shape or the development of the Scandinavian immigrant languages. In Orkney and Shetland, the Faeroes, Iceland and Greenland it is probable that to begin with idioms prevailed very similar to those current in western Norway, from where the majority of the settlers, or the most influential among them, seem directly or indirectly to have hailed. In Ireland, Man and Scotland the Scandinavian also seems to have a western flavour, although what appear to be eastern features (see the next section) are also occasionally documented. In England, it is eastern Scandinavian, emanating chiefly from Denmark, that dominates, although in the northwest there is both eastern and western input. Eastern Scandinavian of Danish origin was probably also the majority form of settler speech in Normandy, but that is a conclusion based more on historical than linguistic evidence. The variety of Scandinavian imported into Russia was doubtless of the east, too, given that those who settled there seem chiefly to have come from Sweden; however, the meagre sources do not offer very clear evidence of linguistic affiliation.

Runic inscriptions from Man, Ireland and Scotland, particularly the first, suggest that as early as the tenth century contact with speakers of Gaelic was having its effect on the inflectional morphology and syntax of the Scandinavian spoken in these areas (Barnes 2003b). Several nominative masculine singulars, for example, appear without their *-r* ending; in one of the Manx inscriptions **truian:surtufkals** (that is, *Druían sunr Dufgals* ‘Drúían son of Dufgall’) seems to have replaced the usual *Druían Dufgalsunr*; in another the grammar is so aberrant that no certain interpretation of the text can be made. Similar interference from strong indigenous languages with numerous speakers can safely be assumed elsewhere.

In Scandinavia itself language was clearly evolving too, though perhaps not in such radical ways as in the 500–700 period. And even though linguistic sources become steadily more numerous as the Viking Age progresses, there is still great difficulty in following patterns of development. The rise of Denmark as a strong economic and political power may have encouraged the spread of a number of Danish innovations, such as the monophthongization of historical /ai/ to /e:/ and /au/ to /ø:/ (cf. above; also of /øy/, the mutation product of /au/, to /ø:/) – a development that runic spellings and later manuscript sources combine to suggest originated in Jutland or the Danish islands, was carried to Sweden, and reached eastern Norway before finally petering out (cf. runic Danish and Swedish **stin** /ste:n/ with runic Norwegian **stain** /stein/ ‘stone [acc. sg.]’). Also Danish in origin, judging once again from runic spellings, was the

innovation that saw the initial clusters /hl-/, /hn-/, /hr-/ simplified to /l-/, /n-/, /r-/, a change which ultimately seems to have affected all forms of Scandinavian except Icelandic – and perhaps Greenlandic. On the other hand, there is no clear evidence about where the simplification of the *-sk* verb form to *-s* started (for example, *ændask* versus *ændas* ‘come to the end of one’s life’, ‘die’); *-s* forms are, however, well attested in the eleventh-century Swedish rune-stone corpus. Clearly a West Scandinavian innovation is the coalescence of /z/ with /r/ (whereby, for example, *rūnaz* ‘runes’, *stendz* ‘stands’ become *rūnar*, *stendr*). Exactly when this occurred is unknown, for there are very few relevant sources, but the change was almost certainly well under way by the tenth century. As early as the first half of the eleventh, we find Norwegian carvers using the rune that traditionally marked /z/ to denote /y/; its name in Norway at the beginning of the Viking Age seems to have been **ȳz*, and following the disappearance of /z/ from speech it was available in accordance with the acrophonic principle as a /y/-rune. In Denmark and Sweden it was not until the thirteenth century that rune carvers finally gave up marking historical /z/ (by then probably realized as a sound close to [r]), and on Gotland the usage continued sporadically even longer.

These changes, documented in the Viking Age, do not all begin in the same area. They lead to different temporary or permanent isoglosses. If we view them as merely the tip of the iceberg, as doubtless we should judging by the numerous varieties of Scandinavian that emerge once written material becomes abundant, we are again forced to reconsider traditional opinion. The mid- and late Viking Age is not a period in which a relatively unified form of speech begins to split into easily identifiable eastern and western types, but is characterized by innovations in different places, probably also by different groups, leading to very ragged and fluid dialect boundaries.

Scandinavian in the Period c.1050–1350 – and Beyond

It is unclear how long most of the Norse settlements of the Viking Age retained their Scandinavian speech. In places where settlement was dense and the settlers formed a cohesive and clearly defined status group, as perhaps in the Irish towns or the northern Hebrides, the immigrant language may have continued in use for some hundreds of years. Where the spread was thinner, and the indigenous population relatively more numerous or more powerful, Scandinavian may only have survived for a few generations. Even in the Northern Isles and Greenland, where the settlers’ language to all intents and purposes became the sole form of speech, it eventually succumbed, in competition with Lowland Scots in the former (by the end of the eighteenth century), as a result of the extinction of the Norse colonies in the latter (early sixteenth century). In only three of the areas of settlement do forms of Scandinavian continue in use today. Finland is one, though it is uncertain how far the Swedish still spoken natively by some 6 per cent of the population derives from the language of Viking-Age settlers. It may have been introduced in a wave of secondary immigration into Finland in the Middle Ages (as may the Swedish of

Estonia, which persisted until World War II). In Iceland and the Faeroes the only linguistic challenge came from post-Reformation Danish, but in neither country do the Danes seem to have been numerous enough to effect a language shift.

It is in the course of the eleventh century that the Roman alphabet becomes established in Scandinavia. Knowledge of the Latin language and its associated alphabet spread together with western Christendom, so it can be assumed that religion and script arrived more or less simultaneously. Exact dates for the conversion are hard to give except in the case of Iceland, where according to Ari's *Íslendingabók* it took place following a decision of the law-speaker at the Althing in the year 1000. Denmark was officially Christianized by King Haraldr Blacktooth at some time in the middle decades of the tenth century, while Norway can be considered Christian following the efforts of the two missionary kings, Óláfr Tryggvason (ruled 995–1000) and Óláfr Haraldsson (1016–28, d.1030). The conversion of Sweden appears to have proceeded at a slower pace. Runic commemorative stones show that in the eleventh century many families were already Christian, but other, mostly later, sources claim that heathendom persisted in at least some places until about 1100. We have no information by which we can date the official establishment of the new religion in Sweden.

Christianity came to Scandinavia chiefly from Germany and Anglo-Saxon England. Although influences from both areas are perceptible over the entire region, it is clear that English missionaries had the biggest hand in converting Norway, while it was primarily Germans who were active in Denmark. Iceland and Sweden occupy a middle position, with perhaps stronger English involvement in Iceland and greater German participation in Sweden. In Iceland and Norway it seems that, following English tradition, scribes quickly began to use the new alphabet for writing the vernacular, in Norway even adopting the so-called insular script the English used for their native language (Seip 1954: 5–22). The oldest extant manuscripts in Icelandic and Norwegian (in so far as such languages can be deemed to have existed at this early period) are given a date of c.1150, but there are indications they represent a practice that goes back to the second half of the eleventh century (Benediktsson 1965: 15–17; Seip 1954: 2–4). The earliest preserved vernacular manuscripts from Denmark and Sweden, where German influence was strong, are considered to be late thirteenth-century, and though they may have a reasonably long tradition behind them, it is unlikely to extend back 200 years or more (Haugen 1976: 185–7).

The Viking-Age settlers who came to areas that were already Christian, such as Ireland and England, will have become familiar with the Roman alphabet considerably earlier than their compatriots who stayed at home. Whether any of these settler communities attempted to use the new medium to write their native language has been widely debated. If they did, nothing they wrote has survived. Indeed, Iceland and (to a very limited extent) the Faeroes excepted, we are still almost entirely reliant on non-manuscript sources (runic inscriptions, personal and place names, loans in indigenous languages, post-medieval material) for knowledge of how Scandinavian was evolving in the colonies. From Orkney there are two Scandinavian-language

diplomas issued before 1350 (both 1329), and from Shetland another two (1299 and 1307); these are complemented by a further 11 from the period 1350–1586, after which time we have records, albeit scanty, of the spoken Scandinavian of the Northern Isles. In addition, a certain amount of verse seems to have been composed in Orkney, mostly in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, preserved in later Icelandic manuscripts (Barnes 1998: 11–19). Least well endowed with relevant linguistic source material are Normandy, Finland and Estonia, and Russia. The first three have not a single medieval Scandinavian-language document between them (and but one runic fragment, from Finland), while the last can show only a scattering of runic carvings from the period after 1050 (Melnikova 1998: 656–9), few if any of them linguistically informative.

From the northwest of England we have five inscriptions in Scandinavian runes, four of probable twelfth- and one of perhaps thirteenth-century date. Three are long enough to show considerable influence from English: there are English names and loan-words, the grammar is no longer that of classical Old Norse, and in one case, while the runes are Scandinavian the language is Middle English. Possibly these inscriptions are indicative of the state of Scandinavian in its last stages of decline – not only in northwest England but more generally in the British Isles (cf. the previous section, on Gaelic influence). Runic inscriptions from Greenland, many or most perhaps of late medieval date, exhibit certain characteristic rune forms but only one possible linguistic innovation: the use of **t-** for historical {**θ-**} in, for example, **torir** ‘Þórir’, **tana** ‘this [acc. m. sg.]’, suggests that the {**θ**} > {**t**} change affected even pronouns (contrast Icel. *þenna*, Faeroese *benda*, Norw. *denne* ‘this’). On the other hand, Greenlandic Norse seems to have retained certain features which were subject to change in other types of Scandinavian: initial [hl-], [hr-], for example, simplified to [l-], [r-] everywhere except Greenland and Iceland; [ø:], unrounded and lowered to [æ:] in Icelandic, though preserved in Norwegian. The Scandinavian of Orkney and Shetland, judging chiefly from records of the spoken language made in the eighteenth century, developed in similar ways to Faeroese. It should be emphasized, however, that the records are very limited, and may reflect one dialect among several (Barnes 1998: 16–21).

The increasingly copious manuscript sources from Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Iceland suggest that by the thirteenth century dialectal differences in the Scandinavian-speaking world were rife. We are, though, dealing with the written form, and its relationship with the spoken language is by no means always clear. Some kind of east–west dialect split, widely reported in handbooks, seems assured since most of the characteristic eastern and western features can still be found today. Thus the monophthongization of /ai/, /au/, /øy/, referred to above, is a feature of Danish and most forms of Swedish, while Norwegian (by and large), Faeroese and Icelandic retain diphthongs. Other east–west shibboleths include: East Norse /u/ versus West Norse /o/ (*bup* : *bod* ‘message’); EN lack of *u*-mutation (EN *land* : WN *lond* ‘countries’); EN lack of front mutation in specific cases (present tense of strong verbs, EN *kom(b)er* : WN *kømr* ‘comes’; past subjunctive of strong verbs, EN *vāre* : WN *væri* ‘would be’;

before the combinations /gi/, /ki/, EN *takin* : WN *tekin* ‘taken’; where conditioned by the palatal reflex of historical /z/, EN *glar* : WN *gler* ‘glass’ < **glaza*); additional cases of breaking in EN (EN *jak* : WN *ek* ‘I’); additional types of breaking in EN (EN *siunga* : WN *syngva* ‘[to] sing’); EN nasal + /k/, /p/, /t/ versus WN /k:/, /p:/, /t:/ (*krumpin*, *branter*, *ænkia* ‘crooked’, ‘steep’, widow’ : *kröppinn*, *brattr*, *ekkjá*). What we cannot be sure about is how old many of these isoglosses are. Attempts have been made to date a number of West Norse innovations from their appearance in skaldic and eddic verse (Jónsson 1921: 215–327), but to have confidence in the conclusions we would need to be sure (1) of the age of the verse, and (2) that it had not been altered in transmission. It is thus not always clear how far features suggestive of an east–west divide pre-date others indicative of different dialect constellations.

One example may be offered. The earliest manuscripts from Zealand and Jutland show weakening (to [ə]) or loss of vowels in final syllables. Judging by the consistency with which they are marked, these are not incipient changes, but ones well established in speech. The phonetic reduction involved must have led in the areas affected to the collapse of the Viking-Age inflectional system (which relied heavily on a three-way vowel distinction, /a/, /i/, /u/, in endings). Early fourteenth-century manuscripts from east of Øresund (Denmark and Sweden) show few signs of final-syllable weakening (indeed most forms of modern Swedish still preserve a range of vowels in endings), or of the breakdown of the traditional inflectional system. This Øresund isogloss, though, has about the same claim to antiquity as that which divides areas with *u*-mutation in the west from those without it in the east: the evidence for both comes chiefly from Danish and Swedish manuscripts. It may be time to reconsider the idea that the east–west dichotomy represents the primary dialectal split in the history of Scandinavian.

As urged above, fluidity and raggedness seem likely to have characterized dialect boundaries in earlier times. In the manuscript age that is more demonstrably the case. Illustrative of the general situation is Haugen’s ‘Checklist of Dialectal Criteria in O[ld] Sc[andinavian] Manuscripts (1150–1350)’ (1976: 210–13), which identifies East Norse features in eastern Norway and West Norse forms in western Sweden, as well as registering differences within languages identified as Old Danish, Old Swedish, Old Gotlandic and Old Norwegian. But many local variations did not surface in medieval manuscripts. For example, modern Faeroese *síggja* ‘[to] see’, *tríggjar* ‘three [nom./acc. f.]’, *kníggja* ‘knees [gen.]’ must reflect earlier **sía*, **tríar*, **knía*, suggesting that at least one dialect in the west followed East Norse in remaining immune from the ?Viking-Age West Norse stress shift whereby an /i:/, /y:/ or /e:/ when followed by /a/, /i/ or /u/ becomes [j] while the unstressed vowel is lengthened (for example, *séa* > *sjá* ‘[to] see’). On a more abstract level, each isogloss has its own extension, which changes as features spread and contract. Broad dialectal divisions, our conceptualization of tight bundles of isoglosses, also alter over time. By the fourteenth century, if not before, there are arguments for seeing Scandinavian in terms of central (most Swedish and many Norwegian) and peripheral (other) dialects (Haugen 1970). From the time of the Reformation, however, a division into mainland

(Danish, Norwegian, Swedish) and insular (Faeroese, Icelandic) Scandinavian seems more appropriate (see below).

The reason many local speech varieties are not well reflected in manuscript sources is that scribes did not seek to reproduce natural speech – any more than people writing today. Illustrative of the position is the attitude of the author of the *First Grammatical Treatise*, a tract on the pronunciation and spelling of Icelandic from the twelfth century, probably its first half (Haugen 1972; Benediktsson 1972). This medieval Icelander presents his native language as wholly uniform, notwithstanding the country had been settled only some 250 years previously by people from different parts of Norway and the British Isles, speaking, we must imagine, a number of different dialects – and perhaps languages. What was in the First Grammarian's mind was surely a literary norm of sorts, probably in part reflecting skaldic tradition – a supra-dialectal language that, judging from what he says about pronunciation, had a spoken as well as a written form. It is presumably the existence of a related norm or norms in Norway that gives the appearance of Norwegian-Icelandic linguistic unity during the great age of medieval literary creativity. That is not to say that Icelandic and Norwegian manuscripts of the twelfth, thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries exhibit anything like the rigid linguistic standardization of today. In fact, their language tends to reflect several factors: the practices of the scriptorium in which a scribe had learnt to write or in which he worked, or both; the language of the exemplar from which he was copying (most manuscripts we have are copies of older originals); and – to a much lesser extent – his own forms of speech. Superimposed on this mix are the various traditions of writing that developed in secular or ecclesiastical centres. In Norway, for example, norms for Trondheim, Bergen and Oslo have been identified; as the court and chancellery moved from Trondheim to Bergen and finally around 1300 to Oslo, a type of written language developed that ultimately contained elements from all three.

The First Grammatical Treatise describes the Icelandic phonological system as conceived by a learned Icelander in the twelfth century. Within 100 years or so it had changed considerably, and was to change even more in the late medieval and Reformation period, by which time it was assuming a shape not unlike the one we know today. The Icelandic grammatical system remained fairly static, however, and the basic vocabulary was preserved, which is why Icelanders can still read Norwegian-Icelandic medieval literature without much difficulty.

Norwegian took a different course. Together with Danish and Swedish it was subject to heavy and prolonged influence from Low German, the language of the Hanseatic traders (many of whom settled in the growing Scandinavian towns). In the high and late Middle Ages, great numbers of everyday and more specialized words were borrowed, as well as word-formation elements like *be-*, *und-*, *-heit*, *-inna* – such elements ultimately being used to derive native Scandinavian words. Over roughly the same period, most kinds of Danish, Swedish and Norwegian lost the majority of their nominal and verbal inflections (the distinction between nominative, accusative, genitive and dative case, personal endings in the verb, the subjunctive mood). Some

have seen this, too, as the result of intimate contact with Low German speakers, but other factors were clearly also at work, as the Danish weakening of final syllables shows (cf. above), and it remains unclear precisely how the presence of Low German speakers might have influenced Scandinavians to abandon their traditional grammatical system.

Whatever changes there may have been in speech, the unity of the Norwegian-Icelandic written language lasted until the second half of the fourteenth century. Thereafter written Norwegian became first Swedized and ultimately Danicized, to the extent that by the time of the Reformation written Norwegian as a medium recognizably different from Danish had all but ceased to exist. By this point Icelandic, both spoken and written, must clearly be regarded as a quite separate language from Norwegian, and, as outlined above, a primary division of Scandinavian into mainland (Danish, Norwegian, Swedish) and insular (Faeroese, Icelandic) seems appropriate.

See also ARCHAEOLOGY; EDDIC POETRY; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; MANUSCRIPTS AND PALAEOGRAPHY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; RHETORIC AND STYLE; RUNES; SKALDIC POETRY.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Antonsen, E. H. (1975) *A Concise Grammar of the Older Runic Inscriptions*. Tübingen.
- Antonsen, E. H. (2002) *Runes and Germanic Linguistics*. Berlin and New York.
- Barnes, M. P. (1998) *The Norn Language of Orkney and Shetland*. Lerwick.
- Barnes, M. P. (2000) 'Norse and Norn.' In G. Price (ed.) *Languages in Britain and Ireland*. Oxford and Malden, pp. 171–83.
- Barnes, M. P. (2001) *A New Introduction to Old Norse*, vol. I: *Grammar*. 2nd edn. London.
- Barnes, M. P. (2003a) 'Standardisation and Variation in Migration- and Viking-Age Scandinavian.' In Kristján Árnason (ed.) *Útnorðr: West Nordic Standardisation and Variation*. Reykjavík, pp. 47–66.
- Barnes, M. P. (2003b) 'Norse, Celtic and English in the Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions of the British Isles.' In L.-O. Delsing et al. (eds.) *Grammatik i fokus: Festschrift till Christer Platzack 18 november 2003*. Lund, pp. 1–9.
- Beckman, N. (1934) *Västeuropeisk syntax* (Göteborgs Högskolas årsskrift xl:4). Gothenburg.
- Benediktsson, Hreinn (1965) *Early Icelandic Script*. Reykjavík.
- Benediktsson, Hreinn (1972). *The First Grammatical Treatise*. Reykjavík.
- Haugen, E. (1970) 'The Language History of Scandinavia: A Profile of Problems.' In Hreinn Benediktsson (ed.) *The Nordic Languages and Modern Linguistics*. Reykjavík, pp. 41–86.
- Haugen, E. (1972) *First Grammatical Treatise*. 2nd edn. London.
- Haugen, E. (1976) *The Scandinavian Languages*. London.
- Indrebø, G. (1951) *Norsk målsoga*. Bergen.
- Jónsson, Finnur (1921) *Norsk-islandske kultur- og sprogforhold i 9. og 10. årb.* Copenhagen.
- Melnikova, E. A. (1998) 'Runic Inscriptions as a Source for the Relation of Northern and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages.' In K. Düwel (ed.) *Runeninschriften als Quellen interdisziplinärer Forschung* (Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 15). Berlin and New York, pp. 647–59.
- Nielsen, H. F. (2000) *The Early Runic Language of Scandinavia*. Heidelberg.
- Peterson, L. (1994) *Svensket runordsregister* (Runrön 2). 2nd edn. Uppsala.
- Seip, D. A. (1954) *Palæografi* (Nordisk kultur XXVIII B). Stockholm, Oslo and Copenhagen.
- Stoklund, M. (1993) 'Greenland Runes.' In C. E. Batey, J. Jesch and C. D. Morris (eds.) *The*

- Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic*. Edinburgh, pp. 528–43.
- Stoklund, M. (1996) 'The Ribe Cranium Inscription and the Scandinavian Transition to the Younger Reduced Futhark.' In T. Looijenga and A. Quak (eds.) *Frisian Runes and Neighbouring Traditions* (Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik 46). Amsterdam, pp. 199–209.
- Stroh-Wollin, U. (1994) 'Varför säger vi som?'. *Språk & stil* 4, 99–131.
- Wessén, E. (1967) *Om det tyska inflytandet på svenskt språk under medeltiden* (Skrifter utgivna av Nämnden för svensk språkvård 12). 3rd printing. Stockholm.
- Widmark, G. (1994) 'Birkasvenskan – fanns den?'. *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 109, 173–216.
- Widmark, G. (2001) *Det språk som blev vårt: Ursprung och utveckling i svenskan*. Uppsala.

Late Prose Fiction (*lygisögur*)

Matthew Driscoll

By ‘late prose fiction’ is meant the group of sagas composed in Iceland from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries onwards which take place in an exotic (non-Scandinavian), vaguely chivalric milieu, and are characterized by an extensive use of foreign motifs and a strong supernatural or fabulous element. They are thus to be distinguished from, on the one hand, the translations of predominantly French courtly romances, generally known as *riddarasögur* (‘tales of knights’), which were produced in Norway in the course of the thirteenth century and in imitation of which these younger Icelandic sagas are generally regarded as having been written (see chapter 21), and, on the other, the *fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, or mythical-heroic sagas, which, although written down at about the same time as the sagas here under discussion, have at least some foundation in older heroic tradition, and take place in Scandinavia in the period before the settlement of Iceland (see chapter 25).

The sagas in this group are, like the translated romances, most commonly referred to as *riddarasögur*, usually with a qualifying adjective such as ‘indigenous’ (for example, Kalinke 1985) or ‘original’ (Halvorsen 1969; van Nahl 1981). Other names have sometimes been used, one of the more persistent of which has been *lygisögur*, literally ‘lie-sagas’, but often rendered into English as ‘lying sagas’. Unlike many generic terms, *lygisaga* is actually attested in the medieval period: according to *Þorgils saga ok Haflíða* this was the name used by King Sverrir Sigurðarson to describe *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar*, a lost *fornaldarsaga* now found only in a younger version derived from *rímur* (see chapter 12). The author explains that Sverrir ‘called such lie-sagas most entertaining’ (‘kallaði . . . slíkar lygisögur skemtiligastar’), but comments that people could actually trace their ancestry to Hrómundr Gripsson, suggesting that any implication of untruthfulness was inappropriate. The term is used frequently in succeeding centuries – sometimes with the first element in the plural, *lygasögur*, ‘stories of lies’ – in particular by members of the clergy or, later, champions of the Enlightenment, condemning the effects such fictions could have on innocent minds. *Lygisaga* was adopted as a *terminus technicus* (‘technical term’) by a number of scholars

in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most often as a designation for the indigenous romances (for example, Leach 1921), but by some for both the original romances and younger *fornaldarsögur* (for example, Andrews 1914–15; Lagerholm 1927).

Such use of the term has met with some opposition, however, in particular from Icelandic scholars (for example, Jónsson 1923–4: III, 98; Nordal 1953: 180), on the grounds that it is pejorative, although these same scholars have often been quick to dismiss the sagas to which the term has been applied as unoriginal, tasteless and devoid of merit. In German scholarship, and to a lesser extent internationally, the term *Märchensaga* (literally ‘folktale saga’) has gained some currency (Schier 1970: 105–15; Glauser 1983), although this too has met with criticism, generally on the grounds that it is misleading in that many of the sagas to which it is applied have little or nothing to do with folktales (in which Iceland also has a very rich tradition). In English the word ‘romance’, with the qualifying adjective ‘original’, ‘indigenous’ or ‘Icelandic’, serves reasonably well, but the corresponding word may be less suitable in other languages where it already has an established meaning – in addition, of course, to being equally applicable to most of the *fornaldarsögur* (Pálsson 1979; Pálsson and Edwards 1971; Tulinius 1993), and much else besides.

As this terminological turbidity demonstrates, the distinction between the original *riddarasögur* and the *fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* is, perhaps like most generic distinctions, far from clear cut. Inclusion in the *fornaldarsaga*-corpus is restricted to the 33 sagas edited by C. C. Rafn (1829–30) under the title *Fornaldar Sögur Norðurlanda*, although Rafn’s geographical and temporal criteria – the scene of the action had to be Scandinavia before the settlement of Iceland – are not above question. Certainly the sagas included by Rafn are not all of a piece. One clearly discernible sub-group is the dozen or so sagas referred to by Kurt Schier in his influential survey *Sagaliteratur* as *Abenteuersagas* (‘sagas of adventure’), which purport to relate the histories of early Scandinavian heroes but have little or no basis in older tradition, and which in terms of their formal characteristics have more in common with the indigenous *riddarasögur* than with works such as *Völsunga saga* or *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, which are *Heldensagas* (‘sagas of heroes’) according to Kurt Schier’s tripartite division (Schier 1970: 72–8). In the same way, some half-dozen of the sagas normally classed as original *riddarasögur* are recognized as being borderline *fornaldarsögur* (*Ála flekks saga*, *Hrings saga ok Tryggva*, *Sigurðar saga fóts*, *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*, *Vilmundar saga viðutan* and *Þjalar-Jóns saga*); the scene of the action lies outside Scandinavia proper, but in a Viking, rather than a chivalric, milieu (cf. chapters 21 and 25).

Surprisingly perhaps, the distinction between ‘translated’ and ‘original’ romances can be equally problematic. *Mágus saga jarls*, for example, is classed as an original *riddarasaga*, but the nucleus of the saga manifestly derives from the French *chanson de geste* known variously as *Renaud de Montauban* or *Les quatre fils d’Aimon*. *Tristrams saga ok Ísoddar* is similarly regarded by most as an original Icelandic composition of the fourteenth century, based on, but distinct from, *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, the thirteenth-century Norwegian translation of Thomas of Britain’s Anglo-Norman *Tristan*.

Some would see it merely as a ‘rustic’ retelling, ‘rest[ing] upon an imperfect memory’ of the Norwegian translation (Leach 1921: 184, cf. Jónsson 1923–4: III, 100); others – reading perhaps too much into what is in many ways a typical Icelandic romance – as a deliberate parody, either of the earlier *Tristrams saga* or of Arthurian romance in general (Kalinke 1981). *Clári saga* is, by its own account, a translation of a Latin verse romance encountered by Jón Halldórsson, bishop of Skálholt (1322–39), while a student in France; there is, however, no other evidence for the existence of this Latin romance, and although certain Latinisms are discernible in the style of the saga, these are not sufficient to prove the existence of a source. The reference to a source may be no more than a literary topos, and no more trustworthy than the statement in *Vilbjálms saga sjóðs* in which the saga is ascribed to Homer and said to have been found written on a wall in Babylon. Continental sources now otherwise lost have also been postulated (chiefly by continental scholars) for *Mírmanns saga*, *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* and some of the other ‘better’ romances, largely, it would seem, on the grounds that they are too good to be original Icelandic compositions. Even the relatively straightforward translations present some problems: Icelandic manuscripts of *Elís saga*, the Norwegian translation of the French romance *Elie de St Gille*, contain a continuation which does not correspond to anything in the French, and there are what appear to be Icelandic interpolations in the version we have of *Erex saga*, the Old Norse translation of Chrétien’s *Erec et Enide*.

Given the lack of an accepted typology, it is not surprising to find that there is no complete consensus as to precisely how many sagas constitute the corpus of original Icelandic romances. Kurt Schier lists 30 sagas in *Sagaliteratur*, divided into two categories (Schier 1970: 105–15). The first, ‘jüngere isländische Riddarasögur’ (‘relatively young Icelandic sagas of knights’), comprises seven sagas, those, such as *Mágus saga*, *Konráðs saga* and *Mírmanns saga*, which according to received opinion are among the earliest (that is, from around 1300) and best examples of the genre. Schier’s second category, ‘Märchensagas’, contains 23 sagas, those which are generally thought to date from the late fourteenth or fifteenth centuries and which exhibit a greater eclecticism in use of motifs. Jürg Glauser limits himself to 27 sagas in his book *Isländische Märchensagas*, leaving out *Hrings saga ok Tryggva* and *Jóns saga leikara*, which are preserved only fragmentarily, and *Drauma-Jóns saga*, which is an international *exemplum* and not of Icelandic origin (Glauser 1983: 10–17). In her five-volume collection *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, Agnete Loth (Loth 1962–5) edited the texts of 15 sagas and listed in the preface to vol. V a further 17 already existing in scholarly editions and therefore not included by her in that collection, bringing her total to 32. Kalinke and Mitchell list 33 sagas as having been ‘composed in Iceland’ in their *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances* (Kalinke and Mitchell 1985). Sagas included by Kalinke and Mitchell which are not listed by Schier are *Blómstrvalla saga*, which is found only in paper manuscripts, *Grega saga*, of which only a single vellum leaf now exists, and the younger Icelandic version of *Tristrams saga*, which is also absent from Agnete Loth’s list. Nor does Loth include *Jóns saga leikara*, which is preserved only on paper; she does, however, include *Melkólfs saga*, which is preserved

fragmentarily in a single manuscript from around 1390, but is possibly a translation, or at the very least an adaptation, of a foreign story (Wolf 1990). If *Melkólfs saga* is to be classed as an original romance, one should probably also include a saga such as *Flóvents saga*, which although clearly related to continental material, has no obvious immediate source. And if sagas are to be included which are preserved only in post-medieval paper manuscripts but for which there is evidence – in the form of medieval *rímur* based on them – of medieval provenance, one could also justify the inclusion of *Nikuláss saga leikara*, which is found in a large number of paper manuscripts – certainly over 60 – the oldest of which dates from the first half of the seventeenth century, but was probably once found in Stock. perg. fol. nr 7, a late fifteenth-century vellum (Sanders 2000: 17). If all these sagas are included, the total number of original romances is up to 35.

This number, as should be clear from the foregoing, comprises only those sagas for which there is evidence, direct or indirect, for composition in the medieval period. There is, however, a very large body of original romances for which there is no such evidence. A few of these, although preserved only in younger paper manuscripts, may, like *Nikuláss saga leikara*, be found to be of medieval provenance, but the bulk is clearly the product of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Precisely how many of these sagas there are is difficult to say, as they represent an area still very much in need of investigation. Stefán Einarsson (1957: 165), on the basis of the studies by Leach (1921) and Schlauch (1934) and the catalogue of the manuscript department of the National Library in Iceland (Ólason et al. 1918–96), postulated the total number of romances, translated and original, to be ‘nearly 265’, a figure which includes many sagas which may be derived from German and Danish chapbooks (since investigated by Seelow 1989). Even taking this into account, his figure is probably rather too high, but certainly the number of original Icelandic romances preserved from after the Reformation is over 100. If there is little to distinguish the medieval indigenous *riddarasögur* from, on the one hand, the group of *fornaldarsögur* referred to as *Abenteuersagas*, and, on the other, adaptations of continental material for which there is no direct source, there is virtually nothing to distinguish them from these younger, post-medieval romances. It is to this entire body of material that the term *lygisaga*, if it is to be used at all, should ideally be applied.

The codicological evidence also suggests that all this material – that is, the *fornaldarsögur* and indigenous *riddarasögur*, both medieval and post-medieval – should be subsumed under a single heading. Manuscripts from the medieval period onwards freely mix the various ‘types’ together, while generally keeping other recognized genres – *heilagramannasögur* (saints’ sagas), *konungasögur* (kings’ sagas) and so on – separate, which suggests that, while not recognizing our modern generic distinctions, Icelanders did nevertheless distinguish between narratives on the basis of their historicity and degree of verisimilitude, between what we might call ‘history’ and ‘fiction’. Their term for the latter, it seems, was *lygisaga*. That the term frequently had a disparaging sense, particularly when employed by religious and secular authorities, seems clear enough – even as the words ‘fiction’ or ‘fictive’ can have in English and

other languages – but it is also clear that whatever one chooses to call them, generations of Icelanders agreed with King Sverrir Sigurðarson in finding ‘such lie-sagas most entertaining’ (‘slíkar lygisögur skemtiligastar’; see above).

In the prologue to *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans* (composed probably in the fourteenth century), the author divides sagas up into three types. First there are those which deal with God and his saints, from which one can derive much wisdom, the author says, although most people don’t find stories of holy men very entertaining (‘eru þeir þó fleiri menn, er lítil skemtun þykkir at heilagra manna sögum’). Then there are those which deal with wealthy kings, from which one can learn courtly behaviour. Finally there are stories of kings who have proven their valour through great trials and thus achieved renown. The author goes on to say, with regard to this third category, that there are many men who call such sagas lies which tell of deeds which go beyond their own capabilities (‘þó er þat hátt margra manna, at þeir kalla þær sögur lognar, sem fjarri ganga þeirra náttúru’), but that those who are weak cannot know what deeds strong men bearing good weapons may accomplish, or what those whom fate favours may achieve. Similar sentiments are found in other sagas. The preface to *Sigurðar saga þogla*, for example, which is also found in two manuscripts of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (a *fornaldarsaga*), says that it is typical of many ignorant people that they do not believe anything which they themselves have not seen or heard, especially if they regard it as far from their own nature (‘er þat og margra manna nattura heimskra ath þeir trúa engu utan þeir sia e(dur) heyra. einkanliga ef þeim þikur fiarlægt sinne natturu’). This preface ends by saying:

Nu uerdr huerki þat ne annat gert eptir allra hugþocka. þuiat einngi þarf trunad aa sliet ath leggja nema vile enn þat er bezt og frodligast at hlyda medann fra er sagt. og gera sier helldr gledi af enn anngur þui jafnan er þat ath menn hugsa eigi adra synndsamliga hlute. medann hann gledzt af skemtanninne.

[Now it is possible to do neither one thing nor another to everyone’s liking, and no one need lend credence to such things unless he wants to, but it is best and wisest to listen while a story is being told, and to take gladness in it rather than grief, because it is usually the case that one does not think of other sinful things while one is being entertained.]

Many appear to have heeded this advice, and the great and lasting popularity of this material cannot be denied: of the original *riddarasögur* which have survived from the medieval period over half are preserved in 40 manuscripts or more, and two, *Mágus saga* and *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns*, in nearly twice that many, making them arguably the most popular sagas of all time and of any type. The great majority of these manuscripts are paper, written after 1600, and the bulk of them from the nineteenth century. Of the 45 manuscripts of *Ectors saga*, for example, 25 date from the nineteenth century, as do 26 of the 50 manuscripts of *Vilmundar saga viðutan*. Eighteen of the sagas are found in manuscripts dating from the beginning of the twentieth century, including no fewer than six of the 66 preserved manuscripts of

Nitida saga. In addition, 12 of these sagas appeared in popular printed editions in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth (Kalinke and Mitchell 1985). The post-medieval sagas tend, on the whole, to be preserved in fewer copies, obviously having a shorter period of transmission, but a good many are found in 50 or so, and several also appeared in popular printed editions.

Another clear indication of the popularity of the indigenous *riddarasögur* is the number of *rímur* based on them. All the medieval sagas, with the exception of *Kirjalax saga*, were turned into *rímur*, most of them more than once. There are, for example, eight sets of *rímur* based on *Konráðs saga*, the earliest from around 1500, the latest from the mid-nineteenth century, and there is evidence for the existence of a further three. There are also eight sets of *rímur* based on *Nitida saga*, all post-medieval, and evidence for the existence of at least one other set which has not survived. Altogether, 16 of the original romances are preserved in *rímur* dating from before 1600, one, *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, in two separate sets. This represents roughly half the total number of sagas, a higher proportion than for sagas of any other type. Similarly, *rímur* based on the romances make up a higher proportion of the pre-1600 *rímur* than any other genre (Sigmundsson 1966: II, 189–90).

There are also a number of *rímur* from the medieval period which appear to derive from *riddarasögur* otherwise now lost (or found only in secondary prose versions based on the *rímur*). *Reinalds rímur ok Rósu*, for example, were composed in the first half of the sixteenth century on the basis of a prose saga, now lost – the poet says he is working from a book – in which the influence of *Kirjalax saga* and *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr* is clearly discernible (Þórolfsson 1934: 424–7).

Another example, and perhaps the most interesting, is provided by the *Rímur af Mábil sterku*, which unfortunately remain unedited. They are preserved in 11 manuscripts, the oldest of which is Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 42.7 4to, known as ‘Kollsbók’, an Icelandic vellum dating probably from the late fifteenth century (c.1480–90). The presence of the *rímur* in ‘Kollsbók’ obviously means that they cannot date from any later than the third quarter of the fifteenth century. They appear not to be much older, however, the linguistic evidence pointing to a date of composition not before the mid-fifteenth century. It is impossible to say anything about the age of the prose saga on which they were based, other than that it too must obviously pre-date the Wolfenbüttel manuscript. Nor can we be sure how accurate a representation of the original saga the *rímur* are, although in general *rímur*-poets tended to follow their sources quite closely. One cannot, in fact, be entirely certain that there was a prose saga, although given that nearly all *rímur* are based on previously existing sources – principally the *lygisögur* – the chances that there was are good. One unusual aspect of *Mábilar rímur* is that the chief protagonist is female, and has given her name to the saga (true otherwise only of *Nitida saga* and the lost *Huldar saga*); another is that the story of *Mábil* ends tragically, with her death from exhaustion on the battlefield (Þórolfsson 1934: 427–40; Driscoll 1997b).

The Critical Response

Fondness for the *lygisögur* has not been much in evidence among the critics, however – even among Icelandic critics. Jón Helgason, although elsewhere not unsympathetic to ‘post-classical’ Icelandic literature, deals with the indigenous romances in only a single paragraph in his *Norrøn litteraturhistorie* (Helgason 1934: 217–18), calling them ‘insignificant as art’ (‘ubetydelige som kunst’) and bearing witness to ‘corrupt taste, which takes pleasure in unbridled exaggerations and improbabilities’ (‘en fordærvet smag, der finder behag i tøjlesløse overdrivelser og usandsynligheder’), while admitting that their many motifs may be of interest to historians of literature and folklorists. The very large number of them, he says, ‘bear witness to a penchant for literary activity, but also to an inability to come up with anything new’ (‘vidner om en levende tilbøjelighed til litterært arbejde, men tillige om manglende evne til at finde paa noget nyt’). Sigurður Nordal is equally brief in his ‘Sagalitteraturen’ (Nordal 1953: 268), referring to these ‘home-made *riddarasögur*’ (‘hjemmelavede riddersagaer’) as ‘extremely unoriginal and paltry products’ (‘yderst uoriginale og fattige produkter’), and naming only one, *Mágus saga jarls*.

This tendency to dismiss (or ignore) the *lygisögur* was part of a more general view of Icelandic literary history, formulated chiefly by Sigurður Nordal in the 1920s, which assumed that Icelandic literature had reached its high point with Snorri Sturluson and in *Njáls saga*, while everything else had to be seen as either leading up to or falling off from this apogee. This view must be seen in the light of the movement for political independence from Denmark in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The ‘Golden Age’ of saga-writing had been the mid-thirteenth century, before ‘the fall of the Commonwealth’, when the free and independent Icelanders were forced to swear allegiance to a foreign crown. With this loss of independence – indeed because of it – came a period of decadence characterized by, among other things, rampant foreign literary influence, which led ultimately to the death of saga-writing: Nordal (1924: xv) says in as many words that the writing of prose fiction in Iceland died out completely around 1400 (‘Um 1400 kulnar sagnaritunin alveg út’). The 150 or so sagas written in Iceland after that clearly ‘don’t count’ (Driscoll 1990).

The same attitude towards the *lygisögur* is found among scholars who were not Icelandic, and thus less likely to have been motivated by Icelandic nationalism, but who have been equally dazzled by the splendour of the literature of the Icelandic ‘Golden Age’. W. P. Ker claimed in his influential book *Epic and Romance* that the *Íslendingasögur* were the high point not only of Icelandic literature, but of medieval literature in general. His opinion of the *riddarasögur* was equally categorical: they were, he said, ‘among the dreariest things ever made by human fancy’ (Ker 1908: 282).

And yet, the evidence of the manuscripts is incontrovertible: for some 500 years Icelanders clearly preferred these dreary and unoriginal romances to the sagas of Icelanders. Margaret Schlauch, one of the first scholars to look seriously – and for

the most part sympathetically – at the *lygisögur*, found this ‘amazing revolution in literary taste’ baffling, in view of how ‘lamentably inferior’ they were to the older *Íslendingasögur* (Schlauch 1934: 10).

The explanation which, formerly at least, has generally been offered for this was that the Icelanders experienced a ‘paralysis of discernment’ in the wake of the loss of independence. In Stefán Einarsson’s words:

The once great globe-trotting Vikings had now – with very few exceptions – turned into stay-at-homes that had to be content with their dreams. They were more avid than ever for news from foreign parts, but their critical faculties were sapped, and they could let their imaginations run riot with the flotsam and jetsam which the great tide of foreign romance carried to their shores. They did not create good literature out of this romantic matter, but they kept their interest in reading and writing and even their sanity by escaping from dire reality. (Einarsson 1957: 169)

Jürg Glauser (1983), in what is still by far the best work on the subject, argues that these sagas do not represent a literature of escape, but rather reflect, in idealized, pseudo-chivalric terms, the ideology of the people who produced and consumed them, viz. the ‘aristocracy’ of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Iceland, wealthy landowners and owners of fishing stations, along with the more powerful members of the clergy.

Derivative or Traditional?

The criticism levelled against the *lygisögur* has generally been that they are derivative, that is, make extensive use of borrowed motifs, and are formulaic, that is, combine these motifs in entirely predictable ways. Finnur Jónsson (1923–4: 98) described the use of motifs in the *lygisögur* as ‘like a kaleidoscope; every time it is shaken new configurations and patterns appear, but the component parts are the same’ (‘som et kaleidoskop; hver gang det rystes, kommer nye sammenstillinger og nye figurer frem, men bestanddelene er de samme’). The analogy, while in some ways apt, is not entirely fair. Certainly the *lygisögur*, like most types of popular literature, are ‘schematic’, that is, follow certain set patterns. Their underlying structure is essentially that of traditional tales of masculine seeker-heroes as analysed by Vladimir Propp, Jan de Vries (in terms of the ‘international heroic biography’) and others (Glauser 1983: 145–58; Driscoll 1997a: 133–53). The plots are made longer and more complex than those of traditional fairy tales or folktales through doubling; that is, the addition of episodes in which elements of the basic structure are repeated, usually with variation. Into this underlying pattern are slotted motifs and motif-complexes (type-scenes), a range of which was available for any given slot, producing a surprisingly large number of variations. Their ‘schematic’ nature is manifest also in their surface detail, which is characterized to a great extent by the use of formulae. Battle scenes seem in particular to consist of little else. Descriptions of battles in all types of traditional literature tend

to be highly stylized in form and content, and we might expect them to exhibit a heavier formulaic texture than other parts of the narrative, but the battle is only one of a number of common motifs and type-scenes found in the *lygisögur*, all of which have their attendant formulae.

But if the *lygisögur* are entirely traditional in terms of structure, style and so on, this is not to say that they are ‘all the same’, essentially indistinguishable one from another, as are the patterns produced in a kaleidoscope. They are, as has been said, all of a given type, the narrative possibilities of which are somewhat limited, but the same criticism can be – and often is – levelled against, say, murder mysteries, country and western songs, ‘Bollywood’ – or for that matter Hollywood – films. To the uninitiated, these too can appear ‘all the same’, but to those familiar with, or working within, these traditions, it is clear that the confines are not so narrow as to preclude diversity and innovation entirely; and there is also always the question of individual talent, and the undeniable fact that some combinations, for whatever reason, simply work better than others. Taken on their own terms, the best of the *lygisögur* – *Mírmanns saga*, *Konráðs saga*, *Nitida saga*, *Sigurðar saga turnara* – are as finely wrought as anything written in Icelandic in the same, or arguably any, period, and every bit as worthy of our attention.

Eclecticism, Adventure and Oral Reception

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the *lygisögur* is the way in which they combine and build upon material deriving in part from the native tradition, as found principally in the *fornaldarsögur* but also in the *Íslendinga-* and *konungasögur*, and in part from continental sources, not only the translated *riddarasögur* but equally works such as *Trójumanna saga*, a compilation based chiefly on Dares Phrygius’ *De excidio Trojae*; *Alexanders saga*, a translation of the *Alexandreis* of Walter of Châtillon; and *Rómverja saga*, a translation principally of the *Bellum Iugurthinum* and *Catilinae coniuratio* by Sallust and Lucan’s *Pharsalia*. Learned and encyclopedic literature, such as lapidaries, bestiaries and, not least, geographical works, were also used as sources (Schlauch 1934; Sveinsson 1964). The *lygisögur* are nothing if not eclectic.

This eclecticism is very much in evidence in the settings of the sagas, which reveal as much as anything the wide-ranging influences at work. They take place, as was said, in a chivalric milieu, and many are accordingly set in places like France, England or Saxony, but they also display a fascination with places in the ancient world known through classical sources or the Bible, such as Syria, Egypt, Babylon, Greece (especially Mikligarðr or Constantinople), Chaldea, Thrace, Thracia, Cappadocia and Phrygia. At the same time, some are set in the Viking North Sea area or in Gardaríki, ‘the kingdom of towns’, i.e. Russia (*Sigrarðs saga frækna*, *Vilmundar saga víðutan*). India features in several, generally as a source of marvellous things (*Ála flekks saga*, *Gibbons saga*, *Kirjalax saga*, *Rémundar saga* and *Viktors saga ok Blávus*), and few are without a reference to Bláland hit mikla, literally ‘Blue-land the Great’, and its

inhabitants, the *blámenn*, or negroes, fierce warriors impervious to iron. Other mythical places, deriving chiefly from learned literature, include Ormland, ‘the land of serpents’, identified with Babylon, to which Konráðr keisarasonr is sent in search of a magic stone. The protagonist of *Nitida saga* acquires her magic stones on Visio, an island near the edge of the world. Risaland, ‘the land of giants’, and Glæsisvellir, ‘glittering plains’, are both known from the *fornaldarsögur*. Although some of the sagas seem more rooted in one area than another – the action in *Mírmanns saga* and *Mágus saga*, for example, is largely confined to western Europe, while *Kirjalax saga* and *Ectors saga* are set entirely in places in the ancient world – the scene of the action in most shifts freely between these various worlds. The preface to *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, for example, explains that the saga begins in England, then moves to Saxony, then to Greece and then westwards to Africa, all the way out to where the sun goes down, thence to the southern hemisphere to the great city of Nineveh and from there to the mighty Caucasus mountains at the end of the world (‘Saga þessi heftz fyst j Englandi og fer sidan ut til Saxlandz og þa til Gricklandz og þui næst uestur j Affrika allt ut under solarsetrit og þadan j sudrhalfu heimsins til hinnar miklu borgar Nineve og þadan ut at heims enda til hinna miklu fialla Kakausi’).

Personal names too come from a variety of traditions, and with no apparent connection to the settings. *Sigurðar saga turnara*, for example, is set in Greece (Grikkland), but the names of the characters are chiefly Nordic (Sigurðr, Vilhjálmr, Þrándr, Valdimar, Hermóðr). Although some are called by such names as Flóres, heroes seem in general to have Nordic, or at least Germanic, names, such as Sigurðr and Vilhjálmr, wherever they are from. Female characters, on the other hand, tend to have Latinate names, in particular ones suggestive of flowers, such as Flóra, Flórentía, Flórída, Rósamunda, or of refulgence, such as Nitida, Alba, Albína and Lúcióana, or simply names that sound foreign and exotic, such as Astrónómía or Marmoría. In some sagas, though, such as *Sigurðar saga fóts* and *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, which, as was mentioned, are borderline *fornaldarsögur*, the principal female characters have Nordic names: Signý in the former, Gullbrá and Sóley in the latter. Giants and berserks often have Nordic names, too, as do dwarfs (the dwarf-names mentioned in the Poetic Edda in particular); *blámenn* are often given names like Eskópart, while Soldán, derived from the word ‘sultan’, is the preferred name for Saracen rulers.

Most of the *lygisögur* are, on the surface at least, bridal-quest narratives, in that it is the hero’s search for a wife which precipitates the action. This is not to say that they are in any way ‘love stories’, or concerned with the finer points of *amour courtois*. It is true that the sagas almost invariably end with the protagonist’s wedding and enthronement, but what really drives the narrative is the search for adventure.

The *lygisögur* nearly always begin by stating that a certain king or jarl, generally the father of the hero, ruled a certain country or region. His wife, the hero’s mother, is often also named, along with her place of origin and the name of her father. Sometimes there is an attempt to link these characters to characters in other sagas, or to well-known historical personages. *Mírmanns saga*, for example, begins ‘in the days of Pope Clemens’ (‘A daugum Clementis papa’), and several of the sagas mention

King Arthur. The hero is then introduced, along with any siblings he may have (he may be the youngest of three). There may be one or more 'prehistoric' episodes, dealing with the parents or older siblings of the hero, but most often the narrative turns straightaway to the hero, whose youth is described in a highly stylized way: he is exceptional from an early age, stronger and more handsome than his peers, surpassing them both in knightly accomplishments and in learning, so that few are his equal. Occasionally, however, the hero is a *kolbíttr*, literally 'coal-biter', or male-Cinderella figure, who appears to be lazy or slow-witted, but eventually proves himself. The eponymous hero of *Sigurðar saga þögla*, for example, derives his nickname ('the Silent') from the fact that he does not speak until he is 7, and is for this reason regarded as an idiot. Even an otherwise model hero may have shortcomings; the hero of *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* excels in all knightly pursuits, but has neglected the study of foreign languages, which allows his false friend Röðbert to impersonate him when the two arrive in Constantinople on a wooing expedition.

There may be other obstacles in the hero's path: he may be born in exile, or exposed as an infant and raised in ignorance of his identity. He may also have to deal with a wicked – or amorous – stepmother, who places a curse (*álög*) of some kind on him, inflicts some disease upon him, or brings about his exile.

Having overcome any initial obstacles the hero sets out, either alone or with a sworn brother, on a quest of some kind. The motivation for this quest, as was said, is generally the search for a suitable bride, but it can also be the righting of some wrong, normally one involving succession to the throne (as in the sagas of Adonias and Bæringr), or the search for a lost relative (as in *Blómstrvalla saga* and *Flóres saga konungs*). These journeys are almost invariably by sea, even when the hero is in, say, Hungary and his intended in Paris. On his journey the hero may encounter an adversary, such as a Viking or berserk, whom he defeats, or another prince in search of adventure, with whom he will enter into sworn brotherhood. He may also meet, sometimes through the agency of a child, either a dwarf or a giantess, whose reaction will initially be hostile, but who will later become a 'donor'-figure, supplying the hero with an exceptional weapon, some marvellous object which will prove useful later, or advice or information. These characters, the dwarfs in particular, frequently have exceptional martial skills, and may become the hero's companion, or 'helper'.

Animals can also function as helpers. Grateful lions seem to have had a particular appeal in Iceland, and scenes involving a lion being delivered from a dragon or some other predator and subsequently devoting itself to its deliverer are found in the indigenous medieval romances *Sigurðar saga þögla*, *Ectors saga*, the fragmentary *Grega saga*, *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* and *Vilbjálms saga sjöðs*, and also in several post-medieval romances, for example *Ketlerus saga keisaraefni*, attributed to the clergyman Jón Hjaltalín (1749–1835), *Sagan af Kára Kárasyni* and *Sagan af Vígkaeni kúabirði*. These scenes are all based, directly or indirectly, on *Ívens saga*, the Norse translation of Chrétien's *Yvain*, but a similar episode in *Þiðreks saga* may have contributed a number of elements found in the Icelandic romances not deriving from Chrétien.

While on his journey the hero may be caught in a storm and blown off course to a country other than his intended destination. Going ashore he will make inquiries among the local populace as to where he is and what news there is. He will then be informed that the king has a beautiful daughter whose hand is being sought by some *blámaðr*, giant, or otherwise unsuitable suitor. The king has refused and been challenged by the spurned suitor to meet him in combat in three days' time. The king is at a loss; he may himself be too old to fight, or have either too few men, or none courageous enough, to meet the challenge, and so he has offered his daughter and half his kingdom to the man who will. The hero then steps in, meets and defeats the enemy and wins the maiden for himself, or more usually for one of his sworn brothers, since his own intentions are centred on another. This pattern can be repeated as necessary. Occasionally a marriage-minded giant or berserk, once rejected, will abduct a princess, whom the hero is then obliged to rescue. A hero may also, in the course of his adventures, stumble upon a princess who has been abducted in this way; having killed a hostile giant he will discover a princess in the giant's cave and return her to her father, who will then reward him, or one of his sworn brothers, with the maiden's hand and half his kingdom. Princesses can also be captured by dragons or other creatures, which the hero dispatches.

When the hero does finally reach his destination, the kingdom of his intended bride, he may find further obstacles in his way. The maiden's father may be opposed to the union, in which case the hero will have to prove himself in some way, either in direct combat with the father or some other member of the family, or by undergoing a series of tests; there may be a rival suitor, usually a berserk or a *blámaðr*, whom the hero will have to meet in combat; and finally, the maiden herself may have other plans for her future. She may, in other words, be a *meykóngr*, or 'maiden-king', a young woman who rules over a kingdom and sees no need to take a husband, rejecting all suitors, and generally also humiliating, torturing or even killing those who are so presumptuous as to seek her hand. The narrative then details how the clever hero succeeds in outwitting, usually through humiliation, the haughty woman, whom he then marries and to whose kingdom he succeeds (Wahlgren 1938; Kalinke 1986; Driscoll 1992: lxxviii–lxxxii).

This rather un-PC plot proved exceptionally popular in Iceland. There are some 10 romances in which it features, generally as the driving force behind the narrative: *Ála flekks saga*, *Dínus saga*, *Geirrauðs þáttur* (one of the episodes forming a continuation in the younger version of *Mágus saga*), *Gibbons saga*, *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns*, *Nikulás saga leikara*, *Nitida saga*, *Sigrarðs sagafrækna*, *Sigurðar saga þogla* and *Viktors saga ok Blávus*. It also features prominently in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* and, as a sub-plot, in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, both of them *fornaldarsögur*. Similar figures are found in many other traditions, for example the Grimms' folktale *König Drosselbart*, or 'King Thrushbeard' (no. 52), and Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, but the Icelandic maiden-kings differ from their continental counterparts in several key respects: they are kings, rather than princesses, and frequently insist on being addressed as such, and are far more given to abuse, physical and psychological, of their suitors, for which, to be sure, they are paid

back in kind. The earliest manifestation of the maiden-king figure in Icelandic literature is Serena in *Clári saga*, which, as was mentioned, is to all appearances a translation of a lost continental original; she is referred to throughout the saga as 'jungfrú' (maiden) or 'kóngsdóttir' (princess), however, never as 'kóngur' (king) or 'meykóngur' (maiden-king), which suggests that the maiden-king's position as absolute ruler may be a subsequent Icelandic development. There is also a maiden-king figure in *Partalopa saga*, a version of the French romance *Partonopeus de Blois*; interestingly, she is far more malignant in the Old Norse version than in any of the other redactions of the romance, suggesting that this too may be a later development, perhaps influenced by the native shield-maiden tradition. The treatment of the maiden-king theme varies somewhat, from the excesses of *Dínus saga drambláta*, described by Wahlgren (1938: 15) as 'decidedly the most extreme of the Maiden King sagas as respects vulgarity' (cf. Schlauch 1934: 93–4), to the gentle *Nitida saga*. Nitida is a wise and just ruler, much loved by her people. Seeing no reason to take a husband, she rejects all those who come seeking her hand; when they insist, she is forced to outmanoeuvre them, but her treatment of them is in no way cruel. In the end, when she agrees to marry, it is not because any man has 'tamed' her, but rather because one has succeeded in winning her respect.

The staple of the *lygisögur* is the battle scene. These, Jónsson (1923–4: 62, 99–100) advises us, are best skipped over, as they are too repetitive, 'monstrous' ('uhyrlike') and overblown to be of any interest. The taste of earlier generations was clearly different, and blow-by-blow battle descriptions can make up as much as a third of any of the *lygisögur*. Battle scenes are of two basic types, the land battle, which derives many of its incidental motifs from continental romance, and the battle at sea, of which there are many examples in the *fornaldarsögur*. All the battle scenes, regardless of type or length, follow the same basic pattern, consisting of a series of individual encounters with attendant shifts in point of view, a pattern, incidentally, found also in classical epic. Particularly 'battle-rich' sagas include *Adonias saga*, *Rémundar saga* and, especially, *Saulus saga ok Nikanors*, which, apart from a multiplicity of biblical and classical allusions, has room for little else.

Also *de rigueur* in the *lygisögur* are descriptions of feasts. As has been mentioned, all the sagas, pretty much without exception, end with a wedding, and preferably more than one. The festivities go on for weeks and are described in detail, with lengthy lists of the musical instruments played, the sports and games engaged in, the types of wines consumed and so on, things of which the Icelandic audience is unlikely to have had much first-hand experience. *Nitida saga* ends with a triple marriage ceremony, the magnificence of which, the narrator is forced to admit, it is not easy for a simple tongue on the fringe of the world to describe ('er og ei auðsagt með öfrodre tungu í utlegdum veraldarinnar').

This heavy dependence on traditional structures and phraseology is suggestive of the compositional techniques employed by traditional oral poets according to the so-called 'oral-formulaic theory'. Although the *lygisögur* were composed in writing for a largely literate audience, and are thus not 'oral' in the sense that this could be said of

the Homeric poems or the south Slavic epics studied by Milman Parry and Albert Lord in the 1930s and 1950s, their mode of reception continued to be oral, or rather aural, in that they were intended, certainly in the majority of cases, to be read aloud. Such readings formed part of the *kvöldvaka*, or ‘evening wake’, held during the winter months on Icelandic farms. This practice, known as *sagnaskemmtun* (literally ‘saga-diversion’), dates from medieval times and survived until well into the nineteenth century – in some districts even into the first decades of the twentieth – when fundamental changes in the structure of Icelandic society led to the end of the *kvöldvaka* as a social institution (Pálsson 1962; Driscoll 1997a: 38–46). The sagas themselves often bear direct witness to this mode of reception: several have prologues, such as that cited above, in which the audience is advised to listen while a story is being told. Others, such as *Nitida saga*, begin with a formulaic exhortation to the audience to listen, ‘Heyret vnger menn eitt ævintýr . . .’ (‘Hear, young men, an adventure . . .’), but these are relatively rare in the *lygisögur* and perhaps only a literary topos (like the ‘Come all ye’ of even the most literary of ballads). On the other hand, individual texts in the manuscripts sometimes close with an explicit or colophon offering thanks or blessings to those who read and those who listened, and asking for a blessing for those who copied; these can vary from one manuscript to another – and are not necessarily included in printed editions – and tell us a great deal about actual practice (Glauser 1983: 78–100).

When attempting an assessment of the *lygisögur* it is worth bearing their ‘half-oral’ nature in mind – not that many do. Even as the key to the humour in many a good joke lies in its telling, much of the ‘entertainment value’ of the *lygisögur* will have been in their performance, and it is not hard to imagine how a good saga-man might have been able to make even the most formulaic and tasteless battle scene come alive. Sadly, we can only imagine; we can never know, for this is part of the world we have lost.

See also CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; CONTINUITY; EDDIC POETRY; GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL; HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PSEUDO-HISTORY; LATE SECULAR POETRY; ORALITY AND LITERACY; ROMANCE; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; SAGAS OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY; SAGAS OF ICELANDIC PREHISTORY; WOMEN IN OLD NORSE POETRY AND SAGAS.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Andrews, A. LeRoy (1914–15). ‘The Lygisögur.’ *Publications of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies* 2, 255–63.
- Driscoll, Matthew James (1990) ‘Þögnin mikla: hugleiðingar um riddarasögur og stöðu þeirra í íslenskum bókmenntum.’ *Skáldskaparmál* 1, 157–68.
- Driscoll, Matthew James (ed.) (1992) *Sigurðar saga þögla: The Shorter Redaction*. Reykjavík.
- Driscoll, Matthew James (1997a) *The Unwashed Children of Eve: The Production, Dissemination and Reception of Popular Literature in Post-Reformation Iceland*. London.
- Driscoll, Matthew James (1997b) ‘In Praise of Strong Women.’ In Berglót S. Kristjánsdóttir and Peter Springborg (eds.) *Frejas psalter: En psalter i 40 afdelinger til brug for Jonna Louis-Jensen*. Copenhagen, pp. 29–33.

- Einarsson, Stefán (1957) *History of Icelandic Literature*. Baltimore, MD.
- Glauser, Jürg (1983) *Isländische Märchensagas: Studien zur Prosaliteratur im spätmittelalterlichen Island*. Basel and Frankfurt.
- Halvorsen, Eyvind Fjeld (1969) 'Riddersagaer.' *Kulturbistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder* 14, 175–83.
- Helgason, Jón (1934) *Norrøn litteraturhistorie*. Copenhagen.
- Jónsson, Finnur (1923–4) *Den oldnorske og oldislandske Litteraturs Historie*, vols. I–III. Copenhagen.
- Kalinke, Marianne E. (1981) *King Arthur, Northby-Northwest: The Matière de Bretagne in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances* (Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana XXXVII). Copenhagen.
- Kalinke, Marianne E. (1985). 'Norse Romance Riddarasögur.' In Carol J. Clover and John Lindow (eds.) *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide* (Islandica XLV). Ithaca, NY, pp. 316–63.
- Kalinke, Marianne E. (1986) 'The Misogamous Maiden Kings of Icelandic Romance.' *Scripta Islandica* 37, 47–71.
- Kalinke, Marianne E. and Mitchell, P. M. (1985) *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances* (Islandica XLIV). Ithaca, NY.
- Ker, William Paton (1908) *Epic and Romance: Essays on Medieval Literature*. 2nd edn., rpt. New York.
- Lagerholm, Åke (ed.) (1927) *Drei Lygisögur* (Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek XVII). Halle.
- Leach, Henry Goddard (1921) *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*. Cambridge, MA.
- Loth, Agnete (ed.) (1962–5) *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, vols. I–V (Editiones Arnamagnæanæ B XX–XXIV). Copenhagen.
- Nordal, Sigurður (1924) 'Samhengið í íslenskum bókmentum.' In Sigurður Nordal (ed.) *Íslensk lestrarbók 1400–1900*. Reykjavík, pp. ix–xxxii.
- Nordal, Sigurður (1953) 'Sagalitteraturen.' In Sigurður Nordal (ed.) *Litteraturhistorie: Norge og Island* (Nordisk kultur VIII B). Copenhagen, pp. 180–273.
- Ólason, Páll Eggert et al. (eds.) (1918–96) *Skerá um handritasöfn Landsbókasafnsins*. Reykjavík.
- Pálsson, Hermann (1962) *Sagnaskemmtun Íslendinga*. Reykjavík.
- Pálsson, Hermann (1979) 'Towards a Definition of fornaldarsögur.' In *Fourth International Saga Conference: München, July 30th–August 4th, 1979*. Munich.
- Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul (1971) *Legendary Fiction in Medieval Iceland* (Studia Islandica 30). Reykjavík.
- Rafn, Carl Christian (ed.) (1829–30) *Fornaldar Sögur Norðrlanda*. Copenhagen.
- Sanders, Christopher (2000) *Tales of Knights: Perg. fol. nr 7 in the Royal Library, Stockholm* (Manuscripta Nordica I). Copenhagen.
- Schier, Kurt (1970) *Sagaliteratur*. Stuttgart.
- Schlauch, Margaret (1934) *Romance in Iceland*. New York.
- Seelow, Hubert (1989) *Die isländischen Übersetzungen der deutschen Volksbücher: Handschriftenstudien zur Rezeption und Überlieferung ausländischer unterhaltender Literatur in Island in der Zeit zwischen Reformation und Aufklärung*. Reykjavík.
- Sigmundsson, Finnur (1966) *Rímmatal*, vols. I–II. Reykjavík.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur (1964) 'Viktors saga ok Blávus: sources and characteristics.' In Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.) *Viktors saga ok Blávus*. Reykjavík, pp. cix–ccix.
- Tulinius, Torfi (1993) 'Kynjasögur úr fortíð og framandi löndum.' In Böðvar Guðmundsson et al. (eds.) *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, vol. II. Reykjavík, pp. 165–245.
- Þórolfsson, Björn Karel (1934) *Rímur fyrir 1600* (Safn Fræðafelagsins um Ísland og Íslendinga IX). Copenhagen.
- van Nahl, Astrid (1981) *Originale Riddarasögur als Teil altnordischer Sagaliteratur*. Frankfurt.
- Wahlgren, Eric (1938) *The Maiden King in Iceland*. Chicago.
- Wolf, Kirsten (1990) 'Some Comments on Melkólfs saga ok Salomons konungs.' *Maal og minne*, 1–9.

Late Secular Poetry

Shaun Hughes

Icelandic secular poetry (and prose) of the late Middle Ages has long had a dubious reputation, stemming from the literary-critical, political and even religious assumptions that privileged the literature produced before 1300. After this time it is assumed that not only did Iceland lose its political independence, but it also lost the capacity to produce literature of any memorable quality, an ability it was not to regain until the nineteenth century. The fact that much of the poetry of the period remains unpublished or inadequately edited is only part of the problem. Much of the verse of the period is produced in accordance with aesthetic principles that privilege form as much as or even more than content, thus running counter to the prevailing poetic aesthetic in the west as it has developed since the Enlightenment. This negative reaction is finally being reassessed, in a way that reveals the secular poetry of this period to be remarkable both for its innovation and for its diversity of forms and genres.

There is general agreement that the late Middle Ages (Icelandic *miðöld*, but more recently *síðmiðöld*) begin in the fourteenth century, but there is less consistency in dating when they end. Some opt for 1550 and the victory of the Reformation in Iceland. Others prefer 1600, when Lutheran sensibilities have become well established. However, here the time span will be extended to 1700 for the following reasons. Texts originating in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries begin to be written down only in the seventeenth century, at a time when the genres being collected are still productive. Literary taste, especially popular literary taste, remains very conservative, even though the work produced in the seventeenth century bears the marks of the literary fashions of its time (Eggertsdóttir 1996). Furthermore, some genres having their roots in late medieval European literary traditions first appear in Icelandic after 1550. Finally, there are other genres recorded in the literature from before 1300 but which disappear from sight for nearly three centuries only to reappear in the seventeenth century, bearing witness to a continued existence through the centuries of recorded oblivion.

This survey is divided into three sections. The first will consider the *rímur*, an indigenous genre which has its beginnings in the fourteenth century. There are 226 *rímur* surviving from before 1700 (of which 78 are dated to before 1600), a few of them short, but most of considerable length, making the *rímur* the dominant literary genre of the period. The second section will deal with *sagnadansar* and the *vikivaki*. Both were introduced into Iceland from Europe in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries, and had their heyday 1550–1700. The third section will cover a variety of minor genres.

The *rímur*

The single most important phenomenon characterizing late Icelandic secular poetry is the development of stanzaic narrative poetry ('metrical romances'), called *rímur* if in multiple fitts or *ríma* if there is only one. The origins of the *rímur* are shrouded in mystery and controversy, because the earliest surviving example, *Ólafs ríma Haraldssonar*, a poetic account of the battle of Stiklastaðir written by lawman Einarr Gilsson (*fl.* 1339–69), and preserved in the codex *Flateyjarbók* (Gl. kgl. sml. 1010 fol., c.1390), already shows the new genre being used with skill and sophistication. This suggests that the *rímur* have their origins in the early part of the fourteenth century, making the nature of this origin problematic, because if the earliest surviving *rímur* had been only those preserved in *Kollsbók* (Cod. Guelf. 42. 7. Aug. 4to, c.1480–90) or *Staðarbólsbók* (AM 604 4to, c.1550), then the old argument that the *rímur* were derived from the European ballad might still have something to recommend it (Þórólfsson 1950). But research has shown that the ballads are too late a phenomenon to have contributed to the development of the *rímur* (Ólason 1982), and much of the speculation over their origin has revolved around the degree to which they are an indigenous development or the result of influences from overseas, especially from English and German literature, in which the Hanseatic port of Bergen seems to have played a pivotal role (Erlingsson 1987, 1989; Hughes 1987; Ólason 1976, 1978, 1993).

On balance the *rímur* are best regarded as an indigenous development, an Icelandic response to parallel developments elsewhere in Europe. The concept of presenting narrative in stanzaic verse had a precedent in the mythological and heroic poems of the Poetic Edda. Narrative poetry in other languages was also something familiar, as translations of French *romans* and *lais* into Old Norse prose had begun in the early thirteenth century. One can only speculate what lay behind the innovation in the early fourteenth century of beginning to write narrative poems in stanzaic form, although it has been suggested that a need was perceived for a 'poetic epic' to address a gap that the 'prose epic' of the sagas was unable to fill (Erlingsson 1989). The primary metre prior to the thirteenth century, *dróttkvætt*, had proved singularly unsuccessful when applied to narrative, for even though attempts had been made in this direction, they never seemed to have garnered much popularity (Nordal 2001). Certainly once

the *rímur* had been invented they proved the reality of the perceived need, and developed into a genre sufficiently flexible and durable to dominate the Icelandic literary scene for nearly 600 years.¹

The word *ríma* appears to be a loan-word from Middle English. As early as c.1250 an English poet uses the collocation, that is, the kenning, *rimes-ren* ('course [renna] of rhyme'), to refer to poetry (*Genesis and Exodus* 1), perhaps here specifically poetry in rhymed, more-or-less octosyllabic, couplets. Around c.1300 another poet also uses *rým* to refer to a poem in the same metre (*Havelok the Dane*, 21, 23). But these poems are not stanzaic in form. The B-Text of *Piers Plowman* (c.1376–9) reports the existence of *rymes* (one early MS *romances*) of Robin Hood and Randulf, earl of Chester (V: 395), none of which has survived, unless the late fifteenth-century *Geste of Robyn Hode* is to be considered one such example. It has frequently been remarked that this poem in eight fitts and 456 four-line stanzas, many rhyming abab, has similarities to the *rímur* that are hard to pass off as mere coincidence.

What then about the stanza forms that became the hallmark of the *rímur*? There seems little doubt that these have their origins in the common European heritage of Latin ecclesiastical poetry, where composition in quatrains with varying rhyme schemes (abab, aabb, aaaa) was well established and widespread by the twelfth century. As a consequence it is not surprising to find poets experimenting with such metres in the different vernaculars. Nor is Iceland an exception. A copy of a Latin church service, *Þorlákstíðir*, celebrating Þorlákr Þórhallsson (1133–93), bishop of Skálholt, canonized by the Althing soon after his death, survives in an early fourteenth-century manuscript (AM 231a fol.). In it are found quatrains with all the rhyme schemes mentioned above, one of which, rhyming abab with alternating 7- and 6-syllable lines, has decidedly non-Latin alliteration in its second half.

By the nineteenth century the classification and nomenclature of the *rímur* metres and their variants had developed into a science of profound complexity (Helgi Sigurðsson 1891). However, the basic principles of *rímur* metrics had been laid down by 1500. Stanzas could have four, three or two lines. Since one of the signal features of *dróttkvætt* and the eddic metres is alliteration, it is not surprising that this was the first innovation the Icelandic poets added to their Latin or vernacular models. Stanzas are also distinguished by a complex patterning of stress and unstress which can be conveniently referred to as the number of 'syllables' (*samstöfur* or *atkvæði*) in each line. Even though the Icelandic language underwent a shift in syllable quantity in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and most *rímur* poets count syllables according to the new realities of the language, some are composing their works using the old system of syllable structure familiar from the classical *dróttkvæði* even as late as the middle of the seventeenth century (Þórólfsson 1950; Karlsson 1964).

The most common metre used by the *rímur*-poets is *ferskeytt* (squared metre), based on a common Latin hymn metre (Ólason 1976). Similar stanza forms are found in numerous vernaculars, but this does not mean that the development of *ferskeytt* is to be attributed to overseas models, none of which, for example, uses alliteration. It is a quatrain having seven syllables in the first and third lines, six in the second and

fourth, rhyming abab. *Ólafs ríma Haraldssonar* is composed in this metre, as are all six fitts of the fourteenth-century *Völsungs rímur*. It became the custom that the first fitt (*ríma*) of a poem should always be in *ferskeytt* and then each following fitt in a metre different from the one previous to it.

Two other types of four-line stanza have their origin in Latin prosody. Both have seven syllables in each line. *Stafbent* rhymes aacc while *sambent* rhymes aaaa. Somewhat different is the four-line stanza *skábent* or *frábent*, rhyming xbyb, but with aa rhyme on the third and seventh syllables of the first line and cc rhyme at the same places in the third line. This rhyme scheme, which is found in some of the earliest *rímur*, is probably adapted from non-Icelandic sources, since quatrains with similar internal rhyme are found in twelfth-century Provençal verse and are also encountered in German and English poetry.

Three other four-line metres developed early either under foreign influence or as the result of indigenous experimentation. *Úrkast* has eight syllables in the first and third lines and four in the second and third, rhyming abab. *Gagraljóð*, apparently invented by Magnús Jónsson prúði ('the Courteous', c.1525–91), has seven syllables in each line with alternating masculine and feminine rhymes, abab; *stikluvík*, first used by Þórður Magnússon á Strjúgi (*fl.* 1574–91), has seven syllables in the first, third and fourth lines and six in the second, rhyming axaa.

The three-line metre is called *bragbent*. There are 12 syllables in the first line and eight in the second and third. The stanza is *baksneidd* if the first rhyme is imperfect with second and third (...*tala* ...*súla* ...*múla*), and *frárímuð* or *stuðlufall* if the rhyme is xbb. The two-line stanza is *afbending*, with 12 syllables in the first line and eight in the second. These two metres are not as widely used as the others, although *bragbent* appears in the early *Grettis rímur* while *afbending* is first preserved in the *Vilmundar rímur viðutan*, attributed to Ormur Loftsson (d. c.1446).

Because metrical complexity was a feature of poetry in *dróttkvætt* metres, the *rímur* poets in imitation rapidly developed ways to make their verse forms more elaborate as well as to invent new metres. By 1700 the *rímur* can be said to have surpassed the *dróttkvæði* in the number of self-identified stanza types, and there were still metres and variations waiting to be discovered.

But the *rímur* owe more to the *dróttkvæði* than a penchant for metrical complexity. They also took over the formal poetic language of the court poetry, its *beiti* and kennings, single- and multi-word metaphors for which the *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson is the primary source, especially the information contained in the *pulur* or taxonomical poems found at the end of *Skáldskaparmál*. The *beiti* exist in extraordinary numbers, and individual poets are usually prepared to exert their utmost ingenuity in order to make their kennings even more striking than those of their predecessors. Þórólfsson (1934) spends nearly a quarter of his study briefly discussing kennings and *beiti* under 50 head words (by no means an exhaustive list), such as 'earth', 'forest', 'stone, cliff, mountain', 'cave', 'ocean', 'wave' and so on. For example, the *beiti* for a woman are words such as *brúður*, *drós*, *feima* and many others. Kennings for 'woman' are constructed of genitive phrases in which the governing or head word may be chosen

from a wide variety of categories such as the name of a goddess, or valkyrie, a *beiti* for the earth, a feminine noun for tree (or word or *beiti* for stick or pole and so on), words which indicate that something rests on something, such as *brú* or *þilja*, or carries something, such as *vagn*; and the list goes on. Among the things that the word in the genitive may be associated with are gold or silver (*auðar eik* ‘oak of riches’ or *seima ey* ‘island of valuables’) and ornaments (*menja Hrund* ‘Goddess of brooches’, *kransa selja* ‘willow of chaplets’), to mention just two of the most common. Three-part kennings are quite rare in the *rímur*, although perhaps more common with kennings for women than any other variety, especially if the genitive phrase involves a kenning for gold: *báru glóða brík* (‘the wooden screen of the embers of the wave [> gold]’) or *Dags blýra eik* (‘oak of the brother of Dagur [=Auður, pun on *auður*, wealth > gold]’). Related to three-part kennings are half-kennings where one of the genitive referents is omitted: *baddar Gná* (‘Goddess of hair [> woman]’) for *Sifjar baddar Gná* (‘Goddess of the golden hair of Sif [> gold]’).

New kennings were subsequently invented, such as *kinmarbein kaeru Gauts* (‘the cheekbone of the dear one of Óðinn [> Jörð; bone of the earth = stone]’); however, the majority of the new kennings that appear are as a result of decreased familiarity with the *dróttkvæði* and the information contained in Snorri’s *Edda* (Tómasson 1996a). Gold becomes *tár Friggjar* instead of *tár Freyju*, or coat of mail becomes *tjald Týs* where the genitive should indicate Óðinn or a valkyrie. Eventually even quite preposterous kennings became common, such as *óðals smíð* (‘the making of the alodium [> poetry; the word *óðal* has been confused with *óður* “mind”]’) or *baunir nöðru* (‘beans of the adder [> gold]’). Kennings also became ‘overloaded’, as when the head word of the kenning and the genitive phrase overlap: *fley brannar* (‘fly-boat of the wave [> ship]’) or *nökki keipa Bomnirs* (‘cock-boat of the rowlocks of Bomnir [> ship (by metonymy) of Bomnir (invented dwarf name); ship of the dwarf > poetry; ship of poetry = poetry]’).

One of the principal differences between the uses of kennings in the *rímur* and in the *dróttkvæði* is that the *rímur* poets do not distribute the parts of a kenning throughout the stanza; they keep the elements of the kenning together so that the meaning remains transparent and easily accessible, an important feature for poetry that is primarily narrative in nature. Longer kennings are extremely rare and have sometimes suffered in transmission, as in *Mævils besta mistin[s] ljóma jörð* (‘land of light of the land of the horses of Mævill [sea-king] [> ships; land of the ships > sea; light of the sea > gold; land of gold > woman]’). The poet who used this kenning seems to have been aware of its complexity and reinforced its meaning by including, as an appositional phrase in the same stanza, *bauga Njörð* (‘Goddess of arm-rings [> woman]’).

Pórolfsson (1934) identified a particular type of kenning used in the *rímur* from the earliest period which he called ‘nominal augmentations’ (*nafnorðsaukingar*), and which he condemned because the whole kenning means no more than the word in the genitive alone: *elsku grein* (‘branch of love [> love]’) or *glæðinnar krans* (‘chaplet of delight [> delight]’). However, Erlingsson (1974) showed that these kennings, also found in late medieval Icelandic religious poetry, are rather to be analyzed as ‘genitive

paraphrases' (*eignarfallsúmrítanir*), as this rhetorical technique (*Genitivumschreibung*) was a feature of the florid style (*der geblümete Stil*) practised in German poetry during the period 1250–1400. The phrases are seen as ornamental, for even though the head word of the compound loses its meaning, it still has an aesthetic effectiveness as a rhetorical flourish. In the *rímur* genitive paraphrases are used to describe abstract concepts involving human emotions and extended to a few additional concepts such as hell, death, word and poetry.

The debt of the *rímur* to medieval German poetry is not just limited to metrical forms and rhetorical figures. It has long been recognized that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the *rímur*, the so-called *mansöngur* or 'love song', an address to the audience by the poet, has its origins in the German *Minne* lyrics. Some of the earliest *rímur* such as *Ólafs ríma Haraldssonar* are without these introductory poems, while in other early *rímur* they are sometimes very short. These early *mansöngvar* usually focus on women and love. It is popular for the poet to complain that women do not love him and of the grief that this causes him. The poet may refer to the more successful hero of the poem or make reference to famous lovers in other stories, while on other occasions women may be praised for their beauty and accomplishments. Not all the *mansöngvar* deal with love, and as the genre develops the topics appropriate for these introductory poems become more varied. They are still an address to the audience, but they may refer to the coming narrative, complain about old age or the state of society, and increasingly they dwell on the delights and difficulties of composing poetry, and in particular how awful their own efforts have turned out to be (Kuhn 1990–2).

The *rímur* poets rarely invented their own subject matter. They preferred to take an already existing prose narrative and versify it, remaining faithful to the storyline (Kuhn 2000). All through the late medieval period the narratives of the *fornaldarsögur* and the *riddarasögur* (see chapters 25 and 21 respectively) were by far the most popular source material for the *rímur*, if one adds the number of surviving copies to the number of titles surviving. There is not a huge variety in the number of plots available to individual authors, but there seems to have been an insatiable appetite for whatever changes could be rung on them. Nevertheless, the popularity of these narratives was not just another symptom of the general intellectual decline of Icelandic society, as is often argued. For while the classical *Íslendingasögur* (see chapter 6) were still being read and copied, they seem no longer to have been as culturally relevant as they once were. In particular it appears as if the cultural imaginary for experience outside Iceland was satisfied through engagement with the fantasy worlds of the *riddarasögur* and the *fornaldarsögur*, while the imaginary for experience inside Iceland was no longer satisfied through the *Íslendingasögur*, but through those stories now classified as *ævintýri* and *þjóðsögur*, that is, folktales.

The hostility of the Reformed church to the *rímur* is perhaps most forcibly expressed in the writings of Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson (c.1542–1627). When his best efforts to curb their popularity failed, he commissioned in response a number of *rímur* based on the Bible. There was considerable early enthusiasm for religious *rímur* on the part of a small number of clergymen, as 27 surviving *Biblúrímur* attest,

but there was little or no interest in them on the part of the populace at large. The only kind of religious *rímur* to have had any popularity were short poems offering varying kinds of counsel (*beilvæðarímur*).

Only a few short *rímur* have been translated into English. Homan (1975) translated *Skíða ríma*, a satirical poem based on no known source, involving the visit of a vagabond to Valhöll (that is, Valhalla), and traditionally considered to be from the early fifteenth century. Tómasson (2000) makes an intriguing case for seeing the piece as much later and as a *Narrenspiel* or Shrove Tide play written for some of the powerful chieftains in the west of Iceland in the first half of the sixteenth century. The three fitts of the mid-fifteenth-century *Skikkjurímur* have been recently translated by Driscoll (1999), who has also (1997b; cf. 1991) addressed the monumental difficulties facing anyone who wishes to establish a scholarly text of even such a relatively short poem as these particular *rímur* constitute. The plot of *Skikkjurímur* is essentially that of the twelfth-century Arthurian romance *Lai du cort mantel* or *Le Mantel mautaillié*, a story very much in the mode of a fabliau in which a cloak that reveals the fidelity or otherwise of the wearer causes havoc in Arthur's court. This *lai* was translated into Norse as *Mottuls saga* in the thirteenth century, and the saga subsequently became the basis for the poem.

There are 14 *rímur* which preserve saga narratives whose original prose versions have not survived to the present. But the relationship between poetry and prose is not just a question of one genre preserving the content of the other. The *rímur* themselves could be turned into prose, creating a new saga – which itself could then be a candidate for later on being made into *rímur* as well as giving rise to hybrid texts which would combine elements from the old and the 'new' prose versions (Jorgensen 1990; cf. also Driscoll 1997a: 12–13). Add to this the fact that some copies of both *rímur* and saga could be the result of scribes basing their texts on memory rather than other texts, and one is soon encountering editorial problems of the magnitude faced by the editors of *Piers Plowman*.

Those who composed *rímur* came from all classes of society, secular and religious, both those who had gone to university in Europe and those whose learning was largely self-acquired. Many of the earlier *rímur* are anonymous, but we know the names if not the patronymics of some authors because of a practice of encoding names in the final stanzas of the poems (Þórólfsson 1915), especially by binding a name in runes, using the kennings and *beiti* appropriate for each letter as described in the fifteenth-century Icelandic Rune-Poem (Page 1999) and the later expanded versions (Bauer 2003). All the self-identified poets are men, although Louis-Jensen (1992) has argued, in a careful examination of previously misunderstood parts of the *mansöngvar* of the anonymous sixteenth-century *Landrés rímur*, that the difficulties are resolved if it is accepted that the poet is a woman. There is also an eighteenth-century tradition that Rannveig Þórðardóttir Magnússonar á Strjúgi composed the sixteenth fitt of her father's *Rollants rímur* (Kristjánisdóttir 1998), but the first woman who is known to have written *rímur* is Steinunn Finnsdóttir (c.1641–1710?). Her *Hyndlu rímur* and *Snækóngs rímur* are based not on prose texts but on poetic *Märchen* (folktales) or

sagnakvæði (poems in *fornyrðislag* on folktale subjects; see ‘Minor Genres’ below), and they have both been subjected to a detailed analysis of their style and presentation (Kristjánsdóttir 1996).

The *rímur* were written to be performed out loud, although very little is known about their early presentation. In the wealthiest households it appears that special times were set aside for entertainment. The mysterious Einar fóstri who was credited in the seventeenth century with being the author of *Skíða ríma* was supposed to entertain his patron Björn Einarsson Jórslafari (‘Jerusalem-farer’, d. 1415) every Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday (Tómasson 2000), but no indication is given of the manner in which this was to be carried out. Given the conservative nature of Icelandic rural society it must be assumed that the situation was not so very different from that in later centuries, when the principal opportunity for the performance of *rímur* was the evening work period known as the *kvöldvaka*, as well as during slack periods at the fishing stations (*verbúðir*). In fact *rímur* were welcome entertainment any time people had occasion to come together for work or pleasure. Gíslason (1977) is a detailed study of *kvöldvaka* during its last decades of social importance, emphasizing the distinctive role played by the *rímur* as entertainment during these winter work periods. Different households had different customs. Not all were hospitable to the *rímur*, but a *kvæðamaður*, someone, male or female, who had a repertoire of *rímur* and was adept at delivering them, would not have to travel far in the countryside to find a ready welcome for these skills.

The *sagnadansar* and the *vikivaki*

The *rímur* were not the only kind of narrative poetry introduced into Iceland in the late Middle Ages in an attempt to address the perceived need for ‘poetic epic’. Some time before 1500 the first of the international ballads came to Iceland from Norway through contacts with the archiepiscopal see at Trondheim or from the Hanseatic port of Bergen, an important conduit for influences from the rest of Scandinavia, Germany and England. Continued interaction with the culture and people of the Faeroe Islands also played a role in the transmission of ballads from Europe to Iceland. Ballads were extremely popular on the continent and while in Iceland they may have been no less enjoyed, they were never fully assimilated into the Icelandic literary tradition. The traditional name for the ballad is *fornkvæði* (‘old poem’) but modern usage prefers the term *sagnadans* (‘narrative dance’), for they were poems to be sung and to be danced to.

The *sagnadansar* are of two kinds. The first consists of the Icelandic representatives of the international ballad tradition, that is, the Icelandic ballads proper. These were given the designation *Íslenskr fornkvæði* (ÍF) and initially 66 poems were so recognized. When Jón Helgason published his monumental eight-volume scholarly edition of the complete Icelandic ballads (Jón Helgason 1962–81), he retained this earlier numbering and added to it 44 additional texts for a total of 110 ballads. This system is not without its problems: for example, ÍF 101–5 are not traditional ballads at all but

versified *exempla* translated from the 1625 Danish translation of a 1560 edition of Johannes Pauli's *Schimpf und Ernst*, first published in 1522 (Ólason 1975).

The second category comprises ballads translated from Anders Sørensen Vedel's *It Hundrede vduaalde Danske Viser* (Ribe, 1591) and the supplement of 1643. Ten of these translations were done by Jón Ólafsson Indíafari (1593–1679) after his return to Iceland from India in 1626. All of the translations from Vedel along with a small number of ballads translated from other sources are also included in Jón Helgason's edition, but so far as can be judged their influence, if any, seems to have been negligible, and in most studies they are largely ignored.

In addition to the long introduction to Ólason (1979), there are more surveys in Ólason (1989a, 1993), which draw upon the most recent research.² Ólason (1979) classifies the ballads by subject matter, not ÍF number, dividing them into three main headings: 'Knights and Ladies', 'Heroes and Holy Men' and 'Jocular Ballads'. The majority of the Icelandic ballads belong to the first category, while the West Norse heroic ballad (Norwegian *kjempeviser*) is very poorly represented, probably because the *rímur* had a monopoly on this kind of subject matter. There seems to have been a predisposition to compose poems depicting the conflicts between lovers and their families, and it is this emphasis on human interaction that may have saved the ballads for posterity. When the male collectors of the ballads mention their sources, they are almost invariably women. There is some evidence that hints at a gender divide in the response to Icelandic popular literature, with men appreciating the violence and derring-do of subject matter drawn from the *ridðarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* and women being more partial to sentimental themes, but although this division is of interest it is by no means hard and fast and is difficult to substantiate in any meaningful way (Ólason 1982, 1989a).

Apart from a few fragments, the earliest preserved ballad is the fifteenth-century *Óláf's vísur* (about Óláfr Haraldsson; ÍF 50), surviving in a transcript from the early seventeenth century (Jón Helgason 1962–81: vol. 4) and not appearing in any of the later ballad collections. Its chance survival suggests a vigorous tradition of ballad composition in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. However, the bulk of the surviving ballads owe their preservation to the interest of one family who set about both collecting these poems and producing new translations of Vedel's ballads. In 1665 the Rev. Gissur Sveinsson (1604–83) copied a collection of poetry apparently as a gift for his cousin thrice removed, the Rev. Jón Arason (1606–73) (*Kvæðabók* 1960). This volume must have made quite an impression, because three of Jón Arason's sons, Magnús (1637–1702), Oddur (1648–1711) and Guðbrandur (1641–90), all have connections with important manuscript collections of ballads. These collections, plus others from the seventeenth century (including six ballads collected by Árni Magnússon from Guðrún Hákonardóttir [1659–1745]), account for 74 of the 110 ÍF types. As Ólason (1982) points out, the West Fjords did not have a monopoly on the production and enjoyment of ballads, for in the nineteenth century it was the eastern part of the country that by then seemed to have preserved them most assiduously. But had it not been for the enthusiasm of the collectors in the west,

inspired perhaps by the praise that Sofie from Mecklenburg, the Danish queen mother, had lavished on the ballads in her foreword to the 1591 edition of Vedel, seeming to permit the recording of literature that was entertaining as opposed to morally uplifting, a significant segment of Iceland's late medieval poetry would have disappeared without trace or have been only imperfectly recorded.

Metrically, the Icelandic ballads are little different from the ballads found in the rest of Europe. The older form of the stanza is a quatrain without alliteration: lines 1 and 3 with seven syllables and four stresses each, rhyming aa and carrying the narrative, and lines 3 and 4 rhyming cc and constituting the refrain (*stefið*) to be repeated with each stanza. The number of syllables and stresses in the refrain varies and it may contain three or more lines. The younger stanza form is a quatrain also without alliteration. The lines usually have four stresses each and rhyme xaya or xcyc, or sometimes have three syllables and two stresses in lines 2 and 4. In all cases assonance may be used instead of rhyme, a practice that is otherwise alien to Icelandic metrical practice. Furthermore, in addition to the refrain a number of ballads have an introductory stanza (*viðlag* or *stefstofn*), from which the refrain is extracted, a feature also found in continental examples.

While no precise dating of any ballad is possible, three at least can be dated, on grounds of language and subject matter, to the period before 1500, while another 38 can safely be placed in the first half of the sixteenth century. In contrast to the *rímur* the diction of the ballads is often clumsy and grammatically irregular. Sometimes this is the result of the calquing of Danish syntax directly onto Icelandic, in addition to the use of incorrect inflectional forms, violation of grammatical concord and incorrect case assignment after prepositions. The longer a poem survives in the tradition, the more likely these grammatical irregularities are to be normalized.

The ballads differ greatly from the *rímur* in their handling of narrative. The number of individuals in a ballad plot is limited, there is very little given in the way of background information or description of any kind, and rarely is the action accorded any complexity. The ballad world is a vague, generalized one of lords and ladies living in a society animated by courtesy and obligation, in which heroes move through a landscape made familiar by the *fornaldarsögur* and the *riðdarasögur*. Only in the jocular ballads does the action take place in a world familiar to the audience. Ballad diction is characterized by the reliance on formulaic phrases made familiar by their use in different poems and by the use of incremental repetition (lines from one stanza being used with slight variation in the next). The contrast between the narrative styles of the *rímur* and the ballads has been demonstrated by Hughes (1978), who contrasts passages from *Völsungs rímur* and the Faeroese *Sjúrdur kvæði*; and by Kuhn (2000), who investigates the handling of a section from *Vilmundar saga víðutan* by Icelandic and Faeroese poets.

Vikivakavæði (poems for the *vikivaki*: see below) developed in Iceland at the same time as the ballads and also shared the same social space, for they, too, were poems to be danced to (for introductions to the genre see *ÍGVSP*; Samsonarson 1964; Ólason 1989b, 1993). *Vikivaki* is a name that comes into use at the end of the sixteenth

century, very possibly entering the language from Middle Dutch *wieckewake* ('to-ing and fro-ing') via Middle Low German, as has been plausibly argued (Chesnutt 1978). The term coexists alongside the older *gleði*, *danz* and *danzleikur* to describe something that had earlier been called a *vökunótt* or vigil, initially religious, but soon developing into a more general and very popular public entertainment with dances, games and other merriment. These *gleðir* or *vikivakar* were always vehemently opposed by the clergy, who, after nearly a century of struggle, were finally successful in getting them banned once and for all by the early eighteenth century. Particularly associated with the Christmas season (*jólagleði*), they not only provided the occasion for singing and dancing to ballads and *vikivakakvæði*, but also for other types of performed entertainment or *leikir*.³ As Gunnell (1995) has shown, some of these games are related to similar phenomena elsewhere in Scandinavia, and there is evidence for the existence of *leikir* of some kind in medieval Iceland. Nevertheless it is hard to escape the conclusion that these *leikir* took on a new lease of life in the late Middle Ages with the development of the *vökunatur*. The catalyst may very well have been the contact with foreign examples, whether in ports like Bergen or, more directly, by way of foreign fishermen, from the fifteenth century onwards in particular (Strömbäck 1953; Samsonarson 1964). For example, wooing games such as 'Þórhildarleikur', 'Hindaleikur' and 'Giftingahjal' may owe as much to the 'Wooing Ceremony' plays of the English mumming tradition as to the Scandinavian 'mock-marriage' tradition (Gunnell 1995). It has also been argued that the 'Hestleikur' and 'Háu-Þórleikur' share more than coincidental similarities with Basque folk-plays (Strömbäck 1948, 1953; Samsonarson 1964), an observation with firm historical foundation, as witness the well-documented presence of Basque whaling ships off Iceland especially in the early seventeenth century.

When the ballads came to Iceland from Scandinavia, they brought with them both their metres and their subject matter. The *vikivakakvæði* must have come to Iceland in the fifteenth century, for they took as their model the late Middle English *carole*, even though the earliest surviving poems are from the end of the sixteenth century. This supports the contention that some of the *leikir* in the *vikivaki* owe something of their surviving form to influences from the English folk-plays. The fifteenth century was very much the 'English century' in Icelandic history, particularly because of burgeoning trade contacts connected with the fishing industry. Individual sailors are recorded as having overwintered from as early as 1410, and from 1426 to 1435 the bishop of Hólar was an Englishman, John Craxton (Jón Vilhjálmsón), as was his successor, John Bloxwich, although he seems never to have taken up residence in Iceland. The Icelandic poets took the form of the *carole*, retaining the refrain and frequently adding introductory stanzas, but applying their own metrical rules, providing their own content, and permitting the use of the full range of *beiti* and kennings available to the *rímur*-poets (Ólason 1989b).

The *vikivakakvæði* stanza was extremely flexible and capable of producing poems of the utmost metrical complexity, especially when adorned with a dazzling array of *beiti* and kennings. Its popularity led to it becoming the vehicle for poems on a wide range

of topics and with no connection to the dance poetry of the *gleði*. The stanza had two parts. The first, consisting of two lines (= A), could be expanded by adding lines with the same (aaaa) or alternating (abab) rhyme. The second part was repeatable (= R), with the first line always rhyming with the line preceding it, followed by two lines rhyming cc, dd, ee, ff, etc., the second of which was always the refrain. Adherence to strict rules of alliteration and syllable count was also expected.

The *vikivakavæði* are primarily lyrical poems, but the range of subject matter is extremely broad. Poems about matters of love figure prominently, the subject being handled either seriously or satirically, and such *vikivakavæði* are in many ways similar in tone to the *mansöngvar* in the *rímur*. Poems that were composed to be performed at the *gleði* are usually self-consciously so.

It is clear from the surviving descriptions of the *gleði* that the poetry associated with the ballads, *vikivakavæði* and the verses accompanying the *leikir* were all sung. Very little of the music has survived, and most of what has is from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴

Minor Genres

The poetry that remains to be considered is not easy to classify succinctly and has been very unevenly studied. A considerable portion of it represents the continuation of genres from the classical period, while there is both innovation and adaptation to influences from overseas, particularly Denmark and Germany (Eggertsdóttir 1996).⁵

Even though *dróttkvæði* rapidly lost out to poems in *rímur* metres, poets continued to write poems which displayed their knowledge of the different courtly metres. The best known of these are the two *háttalyklar* (metrical keys) attributed to Loftur ríki Guttormsson (c.1375–1432). As published, the ‘Háttarlykill hinn skemmri’ (‘The Shorter Metrical Key’), a love poem to his mistress Kristína Oddsdóttir, is a metrical tour de force showcasing 90 different metres in as many stanzas. But in the oldest surviving manuscript the poem has only 28 stanzas, which suggests that it accumulated additional verses with subsequent copying. The 14 stanzas of the ‘Háttarlykill hinn meiri’ (‘The Greater Metrical Key’), now considered too late to be by Loftur, are less a key to metres than a collection of independent love poems. *Háttalyklar* were also composed by the priest Jón Pálsson Maríuskáld (d. 1471) and by Þórður Magnússon á Strjúgi, among others. Hallur Magnússon (d. 1601) wrote the first *háttalykill* to showcase *rímur* metres; it contains 75 stanzas illustrating nearly as many different metres (Þorkelsson 1888).

Haukur Valdísarson (*fl.* twelfth century) lists 27 famous Icelanders in the *dróttkvætt* stanzas of his ‘Íslendingadrápa’, and verses listing and praising saga-heroes continue to be popular. ‘Allra kappa kvæði’, from around 1500, lists 80 heroes in 13 stanzas (Cederschiöld 1883). The metre is not strictly *dróttkvætt*, as each stanza has 10 lines with an elaborate rhyme scheme also found (using slightly different rhymes) in the contemporary 13-stanza ‘Tólf postula kvæði’, on the 12 apostles. Þórður á Strjúgi

composed a *kappakvæði* (poem of champions) in 35 *dróttkvætt* stanzas enumerating 35 heroes, while Bergsteinn Þorvaldsson blindi ('the Blind', d. 1635) has 28 stanzas naming 22 individuals (Þorkelsson 1886–8). In his anti-*kappakvæði*, 'Fjósaríma', Þórður celebrates 27 saga-heroes who never conducted a fight in a cowshed. Saga-heroes could have single poems dedicated to them, as the three examples in Jón Helgason (1979) show.

By 1650 it had become commonplace to compose *kappakvæði* in *vikivakakvæði* metres. The *kappakvæði* of Guðmundur Bergþórsson (c.1657–1705), written in 1680, has 14 stanzas of 19 lines each (that is, an introductory quatrain and five R-segments) covering some 100 saga-heroes; none of them is Icelandic, and in the final stanza the poet issues a challenge to others to rectify this. Among those who responded was Steinunn Finnsdóttir (Jón Helgason 1962–81: vol. 8; Kristjánsdóttir 1998). Not only does she list 33 characters from the *Íslendingasögur* by name (including two women), but she outdoes Guðmundur in the metrical complexity of her poem, with its 21 stanzas of 26 lines each (that is, an introductory quatrain and six R-segments), ending with four lines rhyming aaxx (the xx rhymes being the same in all stanzas). Steinunn may have created a precedent by mentioning two women, but the 'Sprundahrós', attributed to the Rev. Jón Jónsson að Kvíabekk (1739–85), is the first Icelandic poem dedicated to the praise of famous women.

The eddic metre, *fornyrðislag* (or *ljúflingslag*, 'elven'-metre, as it had come to be known), lived on in narrative poems based on folklore (Hughes 2002) or *sagnakvæði*. The eight surviving examples and their many variants are published in *ÍGSVP*. The earliest of these was long considered to be 'Kötludraumur', supposedly from 1500–25, but it is now argued (Gísli Sigurdsson 1995) that the poem is much later and a response to the *Stóridómur*, the harsh moral code enacted by the Althing in 1564. Although the poem was popular with the public at large, not all those in authority were so smitten by it. Bailiff (*sýslumaður*) Benedikt Magnússon Bech (1674–1719) attacked the poem in the 79 stanzas of his 'Ljúflingur, eður Censura yfir Kötludraum', apparently without effect. Most of the other *sagnakvæði* are stepmother stories and poems involving a binding spell or injunction (Icel. *álag/álög*, Irish *geis/geasa*), such as 'Vambarljóð', 'Snjáskvæði' and 'Hyndluljóð' (this last not to be confused with the poem of the same name found in *Flateyjarbók*).

Among other poems in *fornyrðislag* are 'Skaufhalabálkur', a comic narrative about the unsuccessful hunt of an old fox, and attributed to Einar fóstri, the author of *Skíðaríma*; 'Ljúflingsdilla', or 'Ljúflingsmál', supposedly an elven lullaby for human infants; and the autobiographical 'Fjölmóður' composed in 1647 by Jón Guðmundsson lærði ('the Learned', 1574–1658), an autobiographical poem in 322 stanzas plus a 72-stanza coda. There are numerous poems, albeit not in *fornyrðislag*, stressing the infirmities and vicissitudes of old age as contrasted with the carefree time of youth, the best known of which is the 'Ellikvæði' of Jón Hallsson (d. 1538).

Halldórsson (1960) has shown that parts of the severely mutilated version of 'Grettisfærsla' (see *Grettis saga*, ch. 52) are related to 'Ljúflingsmál', and that 'Grettisfærsla' itself was not a poem in *fornyrðislag*, as was originally supposed, but a

rigamarole or *pula*, a non-stanzaic, loosely structured poem having short lines with two stresses each, rhymed but without alliteration. The subject matter of the *pulur* is diverse, including the taxonomic poems in *Snorra Edda*; the ‘Allra flagða þula’ (‘complete test of ogresses’) of *Vilbjálms saga sjóðs*; folklore material as in the poems about such supernatural beings as Grýla and the *jólasveinar*; as well as *ástarþulur* and *dansþulur* (rigmaroles of love and dance), children’s verses and nonsense verses. There is a substantial collection of these poems in *ÍGSVP*.⁶

Spells and incantations survive sporadically from before 1300, but a considerable body of similar material was composed 1300–1700 in diverse poetical forms. Some of these incantations or *brynjubænir* are short and in form reminiscent of the *pulur*. But when Jón Guðmundsson lærði made an unsuccessful attempt to quell the ghost (*draugur*) at Staður on Snæfellsnes with his poem ‘Fjandafæla’, it took 173 *ferskeytt* verses.⁷

There is a considerable body of humorous poetry, the best-known being poems like *Skíðaríma*, ‘Skaufhalabálkur’, *Fjósaríma*, *Grobbeansrímur* and translations from Pauli’s *Schimpf und Ernst* in ballad and non-ballad metres (Jón Helgason 1979). Foreign literary models may also lie behind a satirical piece like Þórður á Strjúgi’s ‘Mæðgnasenna’, in which the poet eavesdrops on a mother and daughter boasting of their amorous exploits. *Öfugmælavísur* or ‘topsy-turvey’ verses (Eiríksson 1974) are associated with Bjarni Jónsson Borgfirðingaskáld (c.1575/80–1655/60), and Þorbjörn Þórðarson (Æri-Tobbi) (d. c.1660/70) satirized the *rímur* with their elaborate and high-sounding kennings in his nonsense verses.

Late in the fifteenth century an otherwise unknown poet, Skáld-Sveinn, wrote a satire called ‘Heimsósómi’ on the greed and irresponsibility of the Icelandic ruling classes. This poem inspired many others to write similar works, including the ‘Aldarháttur’ of the Rev. Hallgrímur Pétursson (c.1614–74). But not all the poetry about Iceland was negative. Other poets wrote praising Iceland and its natural beauty, in works such as ‘Um Íslands gæði’ by the Rev. Einar Sigurðsson (1538–1626) (Eggertsdóttir 2002).

In the sagas, when characters composed verses on the spot they did so in *dróttkvætt* or eddic metres. By 1500 stanzas in *rímur* metres became the preferred medium for extemporaneous composition (*lausavísur* or *stökur*).⁸ It was not just that both men and women (Hughes 2002) composed these verses at will; they also committed enormous numbers of them to memory. Popular pastimes developed which made this activity not only socially acceptable but also socially desirable. The existence of these pastimes is responsible for popular *rímur*-stanzas detaching themselves in such a way as to assume a separate existence as independent *lausavísur* (Sveinsson 1952).

There are numerous other genres surviving from the period: verses on horses (*bestavísur*) (Samsonarson 1986), letters in verse (*ljóðabréf*), lullabies (Samsonarson 2002b), memorial verses (*erfiljóð*), poetry purporting to have been composed in dreams, political poetry, love songs, lyrical poetry of various kinds, riddles, poetry from the fishing stations, poems on the joys of tobacco; and the list goes on. Some of this is subsumed under the heading ‘popular poetry’ (*alþjóðukeðskapur*).⁹

Conclusion

Far from being a time of literary decline, the period 1300–1700 was one of literary vigour and innovation. Its poetic output matched and indeed surpassed that of prior and even succeeding centuries. Poets were creative in expanding and exploring the limits of the genres in which they chose to write, and this work deserves to be far better known. Late medieval secular poetry remains an area in which most of the primary research still remains to be done in such basic areas as the preparation of editions, dictionaries, handbooks and the like. Only when we know as much about the literature of this period as we do about that from before 1300 or from the nineteenth century will we be in a position to judge its strengths and weaknesses effectively.

See also CHRISTIAN POETRY; CONTINUITY; EDDIC POETRY; FAMILY SAGAS; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; LANGUAGE; LATE PROSE FICTION; METRE AND METRICS; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; ROMANCE; SAGAS OF ICELANDIC PREHISTORY; SKALDIC POETRY; WOMEN IN OLD NORSE POETRY AND SAGAS.

NOTES

- 1 There is a thorough introduction to the early *rímur* in Þórólfsson (1934), general introductions to the genre as a whole in Þorkelsson (1888), Hughes (1987), Erlingsson (1989) and Ólason (1993), and surveys of *rímur* scholarship in Einarsson (1955) and Hughes (1980).
- 2 Ólason (1982) remains the most thorough examination of the Icelandic ballads to date, containing a detailed discussion of each of the 110 poems with ÍF numbers.
- 3 For descriptions of these games and the verses associated with them see *ÍGVSP*; Samsonarson (1964).
- 4 A selection is given in Steingrímsson (1979).
- 5 The best survey of this material is still Þorkelsson (1888), while there is a briefer discussion in Guðmundsson (1993).
- 6 They are surveyed in Ögmundur Helgason (1989b).
- 7 The great variety of this material is surveyed in Almqvist (1961), Pétursson (1989) and Samsonarson (2002d).
- 8 There is a general introduction in Ögmundur Helgason (1989a), and Sveinsson's two-part collection (1947–61) contains numerous individual stanzas from before 1700.
- 9 Samsonarson (2002a) is an attempt to approach this enormous and diverse body of material.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Editions and Translations

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>Árnason, Helgi (ed.) (1928) <i>Hundrað og áttatíu öfugmælavísur</i>. Reykjavík.</p> <p>Bergþórsson, Guðmundur (ed.) (1944) 'Kappkvæði.' <i>Hafurskinna</i> 1, 5–14.</p> <p>Cederschiöld, Gustav (ed.) (1883) 'Allra kappkvæði.' <i>Arkiv för nordisk filologi</i> 1, 62–80.</p> | <p>Craigie, Sir William A. (ed.) (1938) <i>Early Icelandic rímur</i>. Copenhagen.</p> <p>Driscoll, Matthew James (ed. and transl.) (1999) 'Skikkjurímur.' In Marianne E. Kalinke (ed.) <i>Norse Romance</i>. 3 vols. Cambridge, vol. 2, pp. 267–325, 328–9.</p> <p>Finnsdóttir, Steinunn (1950) <i>Hyndlu rímur og Snæköngs rímur</i>, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson. Reykjavík.</p> |
|--|--|

- Halldórsson, Ólafur (ed.) (1968) *Kollsbók*. Reykjavík.
- Halldórsson, Ólafur (ed.) (1973) *Áns rímur bog sveigis*. Reykjavík.
- Helgason, Jón (ed.) (1962–81) *Íslensk fornkvæði. Íslandske folkeviser*. 8 vols. Copenhagen.
- Helgason, Jón (ed.) (1979) *Gamall kveðskapur*. Copenhagen.
- Homan, Theo (ed. and transl.) (1975) *Skíðaríma*. Amsterdam.
- ÍGSVÐ = Jón Árnason and Ólafur Davíðsson (eds.) (1887–1903) *Íslenskar gátur, skemtanir, vikivakar og þulur*. 4 vols. Copenhagen. Rpt in 2 vols. Reykjavík, 1964.
- Jónsson, Finnur (ed.) (1905–22) *Rímnasafn*. 2 vols. Copenhagen.
- Kvæðabók* (1955) = Jón Helgason (ed.) *Kvæðabók úr Vigur*, AM 148, 8^{vo}. 2 vols.: A. *Ljósprentaður texti*. B. *Inngangur*. Copenhagen
- Kvæðabók* (1960) = Jón Helgason (ed.) *Kvæðabók séra Gissurar Sveinssonar*, AM 147, 8^{vo}. 2 vols.: A. *Ljósprentaður texti*. B. *Inngangur*. Copenhagen.
- Ólason, Vésteinn (ed.) (1979) *Sagnadansar*. Reykjavík.
- Page, R. I. (ed.) (1999) *The Icelandic Rune-Poem*. London. First pub. *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 42 (1998), 1–37.
- Samsonarson, Jón (ed.) (1964) *Kvæði og dansleikir*. 2 vols. Reykjavík.
- Sveinsson, Jóhann (ed.) (1947–61) *Vísnaðsafnið I: Ég skal kveða þig vel* and *Vísnaðsafnið II: Höldum gleði bátt á loft*. Reykjavík.
- Þorkelsson, Jón (ed.) (1886–8) 'Íslensk kappkvæði [I–III].' *Arkiv for nordisk filologi* 3, 366–84; 4, 251–83, 370–84.
- Secondary Literature*
- Almqvist, Bo (1961) 'Um ákvæðaskáld.' *Skírnir* 135, 72–98.
- Bauer, Alessia (2003) 'Die jüngere Fassung des *isl. Runenedichtes* und die Tradition der Runennamensschreibungen.' In Wilhelm Heizmann et al. (eds.) *Runica-Germanica-Mediaevalia*. Berlin, pp. 43–60.
- Chesnutt, Michael (1978) 'On the Origins of the Icelandic *vikivaki*.' *Arv* 34, 142–51.
- Conroy, Patricia (ed.) (1978) *Ballads and Ballad Research*. Seattle.
- Driscoll, Matthew James (1991) 'The Cloak of Fidelity: *Skíkkjurímur*, A Late-Medieval Icelandic Version of *Le Mantel Mautaillié*.' *Arthurian Yearbook* I, 107–33.
- Driscoll, Matthew James (1997a) *The Unwashed Children of Eve: The Production, Dissemination and Reception of Popular Literature in Post-Reformation Iceland*. London.
- Driscoll, Matthew James (1997b) 'Words, Words, Words: Textual Variation in *Skíkkjurímur*.' *Skáldskaparmál* 4, 226–37.
- Eggertsdóttir, Margrét (1996) 'Eddulist og barokk í íslenskum kveðskap á 17. öld.' In Sverrir Tómasson (ed.) *Guðamjóður og arnarleir*. Reykjavík., pp. 91–116.
- Eggertsdóttir, Margrét (2002) 'Um landsins gagn og gróður: Íslensk landlýsingarkvæði.' *Skírnir* 176, 269–91.
- Einarsson, Stefán (1955) 'Report on Rímur.' *JEGP* 54, 255–61.
- Eiríksson, Hallfreður Örn (1974) 'Öfugmæli.' *Skírnir* 148, 90–104.
- Erlingsson, Davíð (1974) 'Blómað mál í rímum.' *Studia Islandica* 33, 7–98.
- Erlingsson, Davíð (1987) 'Prose and Verse in Icelandic Legendary Fiction.' In Bo Almqvist et al. (eds.) *The Heroic Process*. Dun Laoghaire, pp. 371–93.
- Erlingsson, Davíð (1989) 'Rímur.' *Íslensk þjóðmenning* VI, 330–55.
- Gíslason, Magnús (1977) *Kvallsvaka*. Uppsala.
- Guðmundsson, Böðvar (1993) 'Nyir siðir og nyir lærdómar – bókmenntir 1550–1750... 4. Veraldlegar kveðskapur; 5. Þjóðkvæði...' *Íslensk bókmenntasaga* II, 436–87.
- Gunnell, Terry (1995) *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*. Cambridge.
- Halldórsson, Ólafur (1960) 'Grettisfærsla.' *Opuscula* I, 49–77. Rpt with afterword in *Grettisfærsla* (1990). Reykjavík, pp. 19–50.
- Helgason, Ögmundur (1989a) 'Lausavísur.' *Íslensk þjóðmenning* VI, 356–71.
- Helgason, Ögmundur (1989b) 'Þulur.' *Íslensk þjóðmenning* VI, 401–9.
- Hughes, Shaun F. D. (1978) "'Völsung[s] rímur" and "Sjúrdar kvæði": Romance and Ballad, Ballad and Dance.' In Patricia Conroy (ed.) *Ballads and Ballad Research*. Seattle, pp. 37–45.

- Hughes, Shaun F. D. (1980) 'Report on *Rímur* 1980.' *JEGP* 79, 477–98.
- Hughes, Shaun F. D. (1987) 'Rímur.' In *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (1982–9). New York, vol. 10, pp. 401–7.
- Hughes, Shaun F. D. (2002) 'The Re-emergence of Women's Voices in Icelandic Literature, 1500–1800.' In Sarah M. Anderson (ed.) *Cold Counsel*. New York, pp. 93–128.
- Jóhannsson, Frosti F. (ed.) (1989) *Íslensk þjóðmenning*, vol. VI. Reykjavík.
- Jorgensen, Peter (1990) 'The Neglected Genre of Rímur-Derived Prose and Post-Reformation *Jónatas saga*.' *Gripla* 7, 187–201.
- Karlsón, Stefán (1964) 'Gömul hljóðdvöl í ungum rímum.' *Íslensk tunga* 5, 7–29.
- Kristjánsdóttir, Bergljót Soffía (1996) '“Gunnlöð ekki gaf mér neitt af geymsludrykknum forðum...”: Um Steinunni Finnsdóttur, Hyndlurímur og Snækóngrímur.' In Sverrir Tómasson (ed.) *Guðamjöður og arnarleir*. Reykjavík, pp. 165–218.
- Kristjánsdóttir, Bergljót Soffía (1998) '“Egill lít nam skilja...”: Um kappakvæði Steinunnar Finnsdóttur.' *Skírnir* 172, 59–88.
- Kuhn, Hans (1990–2) 'The Rímur Poet and his Audience.' *Saga-Book* 23, 454–68.
- Kuhn, Hans (2000) 'Vom Prosa zu Versgesang: *Vilmundur viðútan* in Saga, Rímur und Kvæði.' In Robert Nedoma et al. (eds.) *Erzählen im mittelalterlichen Skandinavien*. Vienna, pp. 47–74.
- Louis-Jensen, Jonna (1992) 'Om Ólíf og Landrés, vers og prosa samt kvinder og poeter.' In Finn Hødnebo et al. (eds.) *Eyvindarbók*. Oslo, pp. 217–30.
- Nordal, Guðrún (2001) 'Samhengið í íslenskum fornþekningum.' In Ásdís Egilsdóttir et al. (eds.) *Sagnabeimur*. Vienna, pp. 91–106.
- Ólason, Vésteinn (1975) 'Alvara í gamni og íslensk fornkvæði.' *Opuscula* V, 278–90.
- Ólason, Vésteinn (1976) 'Nymæli í íslenskum bókmenntum á miðöld.' *Skírnir* 150, 68–87.
- Ólason, Vésteinn (1978) 'Ballad and Romance in Medieval Iceland.' In Patricia Conroy (ed.) *Ballads and Ballad Research*. Seattle, pp. 26–36.
- Ólason, Vésteinn (1982) *Traditional Ballads of Iceland: Historical Studies*. Reykjavík.
- Ólason, Vésteinn (1989a) 'Sagnadansar.' *Íslensk þjóðmenning* VI, 372–89.
- Ólason, Vésteinn (1989b) 'Vikivakvæði.' *Íslensk þjóðmenning* VI, 390–400.
- Ólason, Vésteinn (1993) 'Kveðskapur frá síðmiðöldum: ... 2. Rímur; 3. Þjóðkvæði...; 4. Veraleg kvæði...' *Íslensk bókmenntasaga* II, pp. 323–78.
- Pétursson, Einar G. (1989) 'Særingar.' *Íslensk þjóðmenning* VI, 410–21.
- Samsonarson, Jón (1986) 'The Icelandic Horse Epigram.' In Rudolf Simek et al. (eds.) *Sagnaskemmtun*. Vienna, pp. 213–27. [Icelandic version: 'Hestavísan íslenskan.' In Einar G. Pétursson et al. (eds.) *Ljóðmál: fornir þjóðlífsþættir*. Reykjavík, pp. 213–27.]
- Samsonarson, Jón (2002a) 'Alþýðukveðskapur.' In Einar G. Pétursson et al. (eds.) *Ljóðmál: fornir þjóðlífsþættir*. Reykjavík, pp. 150–91.
- Samsonarson, Jón (2002b) 'Barnagælur.' In Einar G. Pétursson et al. (eds.) *Ljóðmál: fornir þjóðlífsþættir*. Reykjavík, pp. 75–149.
- Samsonarson, Jón (2002c) *Ljóðmál: fornir þjóðlífsþættir*, eds. Einar G. Pétursson et al. Reykjavík.
- Samsonarson, Jón (2002d) 'Særingar og forneskjubænar.' In *Ljóðmál: fornir þjóðlífsþættir*, eds. Einar G. Pétursson et al. Reykjavík, pp. 21–74.
- Sigurðsson, Gísli (1995) 'Kötludraumur: Flökkuminni eða þjóðfélagsumræða?' *Gripla* 9, 189–217.
- Sigurðsson, Helgi (1891) *Safn til bragfræði íslenzkra rímna*. Reykjavík.
- Steingrímsson, Hreinn (1979) 'Lög við íslenska sagnadansa.' In Vésteinn Ólason (ed.) *Sagnadansar*. Reykjavík, pp. 395–435.
- Strömbäck, Dag (1948) 'Cult Remnants in Icelandic Dramatic Dances.' *Arv* 4, 132–45.
- Strömbäck, Dag (1953) 'Um íslenska vikivakaleiki og uppruna þeirra.' *Skírnir* 127, 70–80.
- Sveinsson, Jón (1952) 'Perlu úr festi: Húsgangar úr rímum og vísnaflökkum.' *Skírnir* 126, 94–113.
- Tómasson, Sverrir (1996a) 'Nysköpun eða endurtekning? Íslensk skáldmennt og Snorra Edda fram til 1609.' In Sverrir Tómasson (ed.) *Guðamjöður og arnarleir*. Reykjavík, pp. 1–64.
- Tómasson, Sverrir (ed.) (1996b) *Guðamjöður og arnarleir*. Reykjavík.

-
- Tómasson, Sverrir (2000) ‘“Strákligr líz mér Skíði”’: Skíðaríma – Íslenskur föstuleikur?’ *Skírnir* 174, 305–20.
- Porkelsson, Jón (1888) *Om Digtningen på Island i det 15. og 16. århundrede*. Copenhagen.
- Dórólfsson, Björn K. (1915) ‘Fólgín nöfn í rímum.’ *Skírnir* 87, 118–32.
- Dórólfsson, Björn K. (1934) *Rímur fyrir 1600*. Copenhagen.
- Dórólfsson, Björn K. (1950) ‘Dróttkvæði og rímur.’ *Skírnir* 124, 175–209.

13

Laws

Gudmund Sandvik and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson

The English word *law* is of Nordic origin. It stems from the noun *lög*, plural of *lag* (n., 'layer'), notional cognate accusative object of the verb *leggja* 'lay down'. So the short but sufficient etymology of *lög* is 'layers'. *Lög* has survived (as *lög*) in Icelandic, while modern Danish and Norwegian have *lov*, Swedish *lag*, Faeroese *lóg*. They all mean 'binding rule(s), [now] statutes made by national assemblies'.

Lög also had a territorial sense: a region bound by rules. *Gulapingslög* was the name which covered the west coast and interior of Norway, *Frostubingslög* covered the Trondheimsfjord region (modern Trøndelag). Icelanders wrote about 'our law' (*vár lög*), meaning all Iceland. Around the year 1000 the Danelaw denoted the region in middle and eastern England where 'Danes' law' (Old English *Dena lagu*) more or less applied. This was the source of the loan in English.

The origin of the noun *law* has been long forgotten. But in English-speaking countries people are well aware that the common law consists of legal 'layers', binding precedents from judges in royal courts from the twelfth century onwards. This chapter aims to show how on the other side of the North Sea legal 'layers' were transformed, from the thirteenth century onward, into region-wide and even realm-wide law-books ('codes'). In European legal history these codes are the distinguishing features of the northern countries.

We may begin with the old Icelandic laws of the *Grágás*, usefully translated into English by Peter Foote et al.: *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás I–II* (Winnipeg: 1980–2000), and continue with the 1281 *Jónsbók* code, not yet translated into English. It will be obvious that study of early and later Icelandic as well as of the continental Scandinavian languages is a necessary requisite for any deeper consideration of early Nordic law. The contribution of advanced students familiar with the Latin of civil and canon law would be most welcome in considering the transfer of legal and religious ideas and terminology into the Nordic languages, a field of study begging for cultivation. And students from abroad may be encouraged to bring their outsiders' view to bear on what is characteristic and peculiar in the Nordic laws and what is

common to them – a view seldom within the scope of Scandinavian scholars inevitably engrossed by their national sources.

To be recommended as suitable for students junior or senior are, for instance, the prefaces to the *Jyske lov* 1241, the *Landslog* 1274 and the *Jónsbók* 1281 of Magnús the Lawmender, and Birger Magnusson's *Upplandslag* 1296. Texts should be read with maps and dictionaries to hand. Special mention may be made of *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog/A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, in course of publication by the Arnamagnæan Commission in Copenhagen, with a wealth of citation and glosses in Danish and English; two volumes have been so far published and the third is expected in 2004.

General histories to accompany study of Nordic laws should include Lucien Musset, *Les Peuples scandinaves au Moyen Age* (Paris: 1951), Birgit and Peter Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation, circa 800–1500* (Minneapolis: 1993), and the forthcoming *Cambridge Medieval Scandinavian History*, ed. Knut Helle. Recommended works of reference are the one-volume *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, eds. Phillip Pulsiano, Paul Acker and Kirsten Wolf (New York: 1993), the 22-volume *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder (KLN)* (Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm: 1956–78), and the five-volume *Handwörterbuch zur deutschen Rechtsgeschichte* (Berlin: 1971–98), which has many articles on Nordic subjects and good bibliographies.

Sten Gagnér's brilliant *Studien zur Idéengeschichte der Gesetzgebung* (Uppsala: 1960) redirected research in European legal history towards the late Middle Ages. The first general report on this novel field was given by Armin Wolf in his *Gesetzgebung in Europa 1100–1500: Zur Entstehung der Territorialstaaten* (Munich: 1996).

Finally, there are several papers on European legislation and codification in the thirteenth century, 'the juridical century', as it has been called, in '*... colendo iustitiam et iura condendo...*': *Federico II Legislatore del Regno di Sicilia nell'Europa del Duecento: Per una storia comparata delle codificazioni europee*, ed. Andrea Romano (Rome: 1997); contributions there on the northern countries are by Gudmund Sandvik (pp. 427–54), Páll Sigurðsson (pp. 455–70) and Ditlev Tamm (pp. 471–83).

Iceland

According to Ari fróði's *Íslendingabók*, written c.1125, a Norwegian named Úlfljótr brought the first law to Iceland from Norway, the so-called Úlfljótr's Law, modelled on the *Gulapingslog* of the time. Afterwards Úlfljótr and his foster-brother explored Iceland to find the best site for the new Althing. Ari thereby emphasizes that these new nationwide laws were created before the 'Free State' period (an alternative term for the Commonwealth period, as indicated in chapter 8 above) society was itself established at the Althing c.930. Ari's chief focus is on important laws: regulation of the calendar, the division of the country into quarters c.965, the acceptance of Christianity, the foundation of a supreme court, the so-called Fifth Court c.1005,

the introduction of the tithe c.1097. He finally records that a start was made on writing the laws down in the winter of 1117–18.

Íslendingabók can thus be counted a catalogue of the most important laws that were introduced from the foundation of the Free State to c.1120. Ari bases his native chronology on the terms of office of the law-speakers (*logsögumenn*), and in that way stresses the importance of the law. He gives the impression that Icelanders' lives and the Free State society as a whole were firmly based on laws. It is an attitude confirmed by Adam of Bremen, who in his *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (c.1070) said that the Icelanders had no king, only law.

Very little is preserved of any twelfth-century law records, just two leaves (Ólafur Lárússon, *Lög og saga*, Reykjavík: 1958). The Free State laws, in modern times given the collective title *Grágás*, are preserved in two chief codices, *Konungsbók*, written after the mid-thirteenth century, and *Staðarbólsbók*, written c.1270. There are big differences between them. *Konungsbók* contains sections on constitutional matters not found in *Staðarbólsbók* (*Þingskapapáttur*, *Lögrettupáttur*, *Lögsögumannspáttur*, *Baugatal*). Karlsson (1992) has argued that their absence is due to the fact that *Staðarbólsbók* was written after Iceland had become tributary to Norway in 1262–4 and received a new constitution with the introduction of the 1271 code called *Járnsíða*. On the other hand, *Staðarbólsbók* has articles not found in *Konungsbók* and is generally more detailed. There are further differences in the formulation of articles found in both codices, as well as differences of arrangement in sections and paragraphs. Scholars have generally concluded that the two works are not directly connected but were derived from some remoter archetype; further, that they represent not an official collection but either a private, individual collection of Law Council enactments or a collection of 'rights' and legal provisions which did not all necessarily depend on Law Council decisions (Konrad Maurer, *Vorlesungen über altnordische Rechtsgeschichte*, vols. I–V, Osnabrück, 1907–10; *KLNM*: V, s.v. *Grágás*).

The number of sections differs in the two codices. In the 1992 Reykjavík edition Gunnar Karlsson lists 12:

- *Kristinna laga þáttur* ('Christian Laws Section');
- *Erfðapáttur* ('Inheritance Section');
- *Ómagabálkur* ('Dependents Section');
- *Festaþáttur* ('Betrothals Section');
- *Um fjárleigur* ('On Hire of Property');
- *Vígslóði* ('Treatment of Homicide');
- *Landabrigðisþáttur* ('Land Claims Section');
- *Þingskapapáttur* ('Assembly Procedures Section');
- *Baugatal* ('The Wergild Ring List');
- *Lögsögumannspáttur* ('Lawspeaker's Section');
- *Lögrettupáttur* ('Law Council Section');
- *Rannsóknapáttur* ('Searches Section').

It has long been thought that a strong oral tradition lay behind the written *Grágás* laws, but recent studies have shown that there are elements in them that owe much to the influence of twelfth- and thirteenth-century European law (Rafnsson 1977, 1990; Foote 1984: 155–64).

There appear to have been a good many manuscripts (*skrár*) containing recorded law available in the Free State society, so many that it was necessary to establish a hierarchy. The Law Council Section lays it down that, if such sources proved contradictory, the copies held by the bishops should be regarded as authoritative. If these too differed, the one which treated the matter at issue in greater detail should be accepted; if they were equally detailed but differed in formulation, the *skrá* of the Skálholt bishop should be followed (Foote 1984: 155–64).

Scholars believe that most laws were made in the Law Council, where, according to *Grágás*, 48 chieftains (*goðar*) sat, each with two assembly men (*þingmenn*) to advise him. Their number thus amounted to 144, and with the addition of the law-speaker and later the country's two bishops (of Skálholt from 1056, of Hólar from 1106), the total reached 147, though only the 48 chieftains had the right to vote.

The main tasks of the Law Council were:

- to 'make right' the laws – that is, to decide the correct interpretation of laws over which dispute had arisen. This was probably the Council's original function. Decisions depended on a majority vote; the law-speaker had a casting vote in case of a tie;
- to grant various kinds of exemption from the law's application;
- to make new laws (*nymæli*, Latin *novellae*);
- to elect the law-speaker, supervise the proclamation of laws, and decide when the judicial courts of the General Assembly should meet (Ólafur Lárusson, *Yfirlit yfir íslenska rjettarsögu*, Reykjavík, 1932; Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga I*, Reykjavík, 1956).

Various uncertainties remain concerning the functions of the Law Council. The principal one relates to the number of chieftains and chieftaincies (*goðorð*). The traditional view, based on *Grágás*, is that there were 36 chieftaincies when the Althing was established c.930, a number that was then increased to 39 when the country was divided into quarters c.965. By that arrangement the northern quarter got three new chieftaincies, making 12 in all, while to maintain balance at the Althing the other quarters were allowed three 'extra' chieftains selected by the existing nine chieftains in each. This produced 48 chieftains with seats in the Law Council at the Althing, but the number of local chieftaincies remained 39.

The sagas of Icelanders and the so-called 'contemporary' sagas give a different picture. The sagas of Icelanders indicate that the number of chieftains and chieftaincies was much higher than *Grágás* reckons with, while the 'contemporary' sagas suggest that there were significantly fewer than the *Grágás* number (Sigurðsson

1999). The political development of the Free State and the information culled from *Grágás* are not easily reconciled.

Although it is generally agreed that the Law Council was the ultimate legislative authority, some important innovations, like the Tithe Law of 1096–7, were decided by all the members of the General Assembly (Líndal 1984, 1992).

According to *Grágás*, disputes were to be settled through an elaborate system of courts, but the sagas of Icelanders and ‘contemporary’ sagas again offer a different picture. These speak of cases prepared for court hearings but seldom refer to actual court proceedings, and there is little doubt that most disputes were settled by arbitration or direct negotiation (Andreas Heusler, *Das Strafrecht der Isländersagas*, Leipzig, 1911; Lúðvík Ingvarsson, *Refsingar á Íslandi á þjóðveldistímanum*, Reykjavík, 1970; Sigurðsson 1999).

The court system was fundamentally ineffective in dispute resolution because there was no central executive able to enforce a sentence. That was left to the plaintiff with what help he could muster and very possibly against a strong coalition of the offender’s kinsmen and friends – and the situation would be worse if two chieftains were drawn into contention. Negotiation and arbitration were thus the best way to settle conflicts.

Chieftains seem usually to have had a good knowledge of the laws, and they used them in their struggles for power in Free State Iceland. It was important for them to be able to control circumstances in dispute resolution, not neglecting to manipulate law to their own advantage when possible. In spite of differences in legal interpretation and scant respect for court rulings, the laws remained significant in the life of Free State society (Líndal 1984). They defined people’s rights even if penalties for transgression were matters to be negotiated.

The Althing had its advantages and it survived. Friends and allies could foregather there and greater pressure could be put on disputants than could be brought to bear in their home districts. Men of prestige could be involved in settlements and add weight to arbitration and negotiation. It was primarily a forum where political alliances were forged and tested.

Iceland became subject to the Norwegian crown in 1262–4 but the real breach with the Free State period was marked by new law-books, *Járnsíða* introduced in 1271 and *Jónsbók* in 1281. *Járnsíða*, probably compiled by Sturla Þórðarson, was based on *Gulapingslög* and *Frostupingslög* (*Norges gamle Love* [NgL] I, Christiania: 1846, pp. 259–300). The code was not popular and took two years to receive ratification, but it introduced some major constitutional changes: *gøðorð* and the Fifth Court were abolished, the Law Council became a court of appeal like its Norwegian counterparts, and crown dues (*þegnildir*) – fines payable to the king for homicide and for violation of regal rights – were introduced.

Jónsbók, named after *logmaðr* (lawman) Jón Einarsson, who brought the book to Iceland and was probably its chief compiler, was accepted in Iceland in 1281. This rapid substitution was most probably due to Icelandic dissatisfaction with *Járnsíða* because of its remoteness from the Icelandic legal tradition. A major difference

between the two codes is that *Jónsbók* made extensive use of *Grágás* provisions. Of its 215 sections 196 were drawn with small alteration from the Norwegian national law and municipal law (*Landslög, Bæjarlög*: see below) of 1274–6, while *Grágás* was the source of over 100 sections, along with some supplementary material from *Járnsíða*. The structure of *Jónsbók* was modelled on the Norwegian national law, though with two large deviations: a section on royal taxation replaced the latter's section on defence and the *Farmannalög* was derived from the municipal law (Ólafur Lárusson, *Grágás og lögbækurnar*, Reykjavík, 1923 [supplement to *Árbók Háskóla Íslands*, Reykjavík, 1922]; Lárusson, *Lög og saga*, 1958; Páll Sigurðsson in Romano 1977: 455–70; Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 Years: History of a Marginal Society*, London: 2000).

Jónsbók contains ten sections:

- *Pingfararbalkr* is on assembly procedures.
- *Kristins dóms balkr* ('The Christian Law Section') is the title of the second section, but it concerns only the rules for royal succession and the oaths to be sworn to a new king.
- *Konungs þegnaskylda* is a short section on the position of the king as God's delegate on earth and on the conduct of sheriffs (*sýslumenn*) in their office.
- *Mannbelgi* deals with penal law.
- *Erfðafáttr* concerns inheritance.
- *Landsbrigðabalkr* concerns property claims.
- *Landsleigubalkr* is on buying and renting land.
- *Kaupabalkr* deals with commercial transactions.
- *Farmannalög* regulates ships, cargoes, average, and the obligations of a ship's captain.
- *Þjófabalkr* is on the treatment of thieves and accusations of theft.

(A thorough comparison of *Jónsbók* and the *Landslög* is in NgL IV (Christiania: 1885), 185–340, 353.)

Jónsbók was the principal source of law for Icelanders for the best part of five centuries. It is preserved in c.300 manuscripts; the name *Jónsbók* was attached to it early, first found in a manuscript written in 1363.

Editions

Grágás: Islændernes Lovbog i Fristatens tid. Ed. Vilhjálmur Finsen. Copenhagen, 1852–70.

Grágás, efter det Arnamagnæanske Haandskrift Nr. 334 fol. Skálholtsbók. Ed. Vilhjálmur Finsen. Copenhagen, 1879.

Grágás: Stykker, som findes i det Arnamagnæanske Haandskrift Nr. 351 fol. Skálholtsbók og en Række andre Haandskrifter. Ed. Vilhjálmur Finsen. Copenhagen, 1883.

Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins. Eds. Gunnar Karlsson et al. Reykjavík, 1992.

Jónsbók: Kong Magnus Hakonssons lovbog for Island vedtaget paa Altinget 1281; Réttarbætr: de for Island givne Retterbøder af 1294, 1305 og 1314. Ed. Ólafur Halldórsson. Copenhagen, 1904. Rpt Odense, 1970.

Denmark

The kingdom of Denmark, ‘unified’ towards 850 by Haraldr blátǫnn (‘Blacktooth’), comprised three regions: Skåne (annexed by Sweden in 1658), Sjælland and smaller islands, and Jutland with Fyn. The southern border was the River Eider. The Danes also had satellites or claims to rule in southeast Norway (down to about 1200), in southeast England (until 1066), in the Baltic – Bornholm, Gotland, Tallin (from about 1100 to 1500) – and farther south on the mainland, especially in Slesvig and Holsten (until 1864). Productive land and its key position between the North Sea and the Baltic made Denmark in the Middle Ages the most powerful of the Nordic countries.

Sources of particular value for the early history of Denmark, and of the north as a whole, are Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*; Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae Pontificum*; and Rimbart, *Vita Anskarii* (all available in English: see Sawyer and Sawyer 1993; Fenger, ‘Laws, Denmark’, in Pulsiano, Acker and Wolf 1993).

Danish laws had an oral existence long before they were recorded. Nothing certain can be said about them in that stage, and the earliest manuscripts date only from c.1250. Relative studies suggest that these descend from first recordings made c.1200–15.

Editions

J. L. A. Rosenvinge first edited Old Danish law texts, *Kong Eriks Sjællandske Lov*, in a volume numbered two in 1821, and in a volume numbered three in 1837, *Kong Valdemar den Andens Jydske Lov*. His planned volume one, *Skaanske Lov*, did not appear, and this code was not published until Schlyter’s edition of 1859 (see the section on Sweden, below). Rosenvinge’s editions were furnished with introductions, commentary and partial translations.

The following comparatively recent works provide an admirable introduction to the study of early Danish laws.

The eight-volume *Danmarks gamle Landskabslove* [DgL] (Copenhagen: 1933–51) contains:

- I, 1 *Skånske Lov* (Text 1 [the *Codex Runicus*] – 3); followed in the same year by I, 2 *Anders Sunesøns Parafraze af Skånske Lov med oversættelse* (Danish translation from the Latin by Jørgen Olrik) and *Skånske Kirkelov*, 1933;
- II–IV *Jyske Lov* (Text 1–6), 1945–51;

- V–VI *Eriks Sjællandske Lov* (Text 1–5), 1936–7;
- VII–VIII *Valdemars Sjællandske Lov* (Text 1–3, Arvebog og orbodemål, 1942; Ældre og yngre Redaktion samt Sjællandske Kirkelov, 1941).

In 1941, while Denmark was under German occupation, some important articles on Danish legal history, with *Jyske lov* as a starting point, especially essays by Poul Johs. Jørgensen and Niels Knud Andersen, were published in a Copenhagen volume, *Med Lov skal Land Bygges*, ed. Erik Reitzel-Nielsen (pp. 315–61, 84–120). They are recommended reading, along with *Danmarks gamle Love paa Nutidsdansk* by Erik Kroman and Stig Iuul (Copenhagen: 1945–8), containing:

- I *Skaanske Lov: Valdemars sjællandske Lov*. The introduction discusses medieval Danish laws in general, backed by reference to Poul Johs. Jørgensen's important *Dansk Retshistorie* (Copenhagen, 1941).
- II *Eriks sjællandske Lov, Jyske Lov, Skaanske og sjællandske Kirkelov*.
- III *Retshistorisk Indledning: Kommentar: Sageregister*. All this apparatus is informative and to the point, useful for comparative studies, synchronic and diachronic.

There were numerous townships in Denmark, most of them small. Municipal laws have been edited in five volumes in *Danmarks gamle Købstadlovgivning* (Copenhagen: 1951–61), the first volume eds. Erik Krohn and Peter Jørgensen, the remainder ed. Erik Kroman.

The laws

Skaanske Lov has two special claims on our interest. First, it exists in a manuscript written in runes, Codex Runicus (Det Arnamagnæanske Haandskrift N:o 28, 8:vo, published in facsimile, Copenhagen 1877; ed. in transcription in DgL I, 2, 1933). Second, we have a Latin paraphrase of the laws made between 1206 and 1215 by Anders Sunesøn, archbishop of Lund and metropolitan of all Scandinavia 1201–23, who was as versed in his native laws as in the civil and canon law of his time.

The Sjælland Law of Erik and the Sjælland Law of Valdemar are edited in earlier and later redactions. The latter has rules on serious crimes which could not be settled by private atonement (*bodemål*) but only by payment of dues to the crown on top of indemnity to the victim or his heirs. Comparative studies of these *Orbodemål* (Norwegian *úbótaverk*, Swedish *högmål*) in relation to the king's peace are a desideratum.

Successful integration of canon and even civil law into domestic legislation is seen in the Jutland Law, authorized in 1241, a classic piece of early Danish prose and, in places, of refined legal thinking. It was only seven years earlier that Pope Gregory IX issued the first official book of canon law, the *Liber Extra*, containing the most important decretals from 1150 to 1230, arranged chronologically but not otherwise systematically. The chief author of the Jutland Law was probably Bishop Gunner of Viborg (1152–1251; consecrated 1222), a man learned in canon and Roman law and

also knowledgeable about his native laws – he had served as a judge in cases where the church was concerned at the provincial assembly of Jutland.

After a prologue the Jutland Law contains three ‘books’. The first deals with marriage, inheritance and land-leasing; the second with procedure, delicts and larceny; the third, less well organized than the first two, with maritime defence (*leding*), fines, the most serious crimes and numerous other topics. The provisions fit Danish life and landscape, but the ideas of canonists and civilians have their influence. *Jyske lov* was held in such esteem that it was used to fill gaps in the laws of the other Danish provinces. A version in more modern Danish, authorized by Christian IV, was printed in 1590, and this explains why it became ‘the law’ even outside Jutland and Fyn, so much so that the new Supreme Court could in 1672 dub it ‘the national law’ (*Landsloven*). Within the kingdom it was superseded in 1683 by *Christian den Femtes Danske Lov*, but it remained a source of law in South Jutland (Slesvig) until the German *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* replaced it in 1900.

Norway

Most settlers in Iceland from about 870 to 930 came from west Norway and they brought with them the language and customs of their homeland. We hear of two sites on that west coast which developed into especially notable meeting places. One was Gulen, sheltered harbourage at the mouth of Sognefjord. The other was the Frosta peninsula in Trondheimsfjord. According to Snorri Sturluson’s *Heimskringla*, Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri, son of Haraldr hárfagri, established an assembly (*setti þing*) at Gulen and made use of the *Gulapþing* in organizing the *leiðangr* defence system against internal and external enemies; and he did the same at Frosta. These dispositions would have been made about 930. As time went on, the local functions of these *þing* expanded to embrace other regions, and the manuscripts of *Gulapþingslög* and *Frostuþingslög* that we have from the first half of the thirteenth century cover these enlarged law-provinces (Rolf Danielsen et al., *Norway: A History from the Vikings to Our Own Times*, Oslo: 1995).

Editions

The first three volumes of *Norges gamle Love indtil 1378* were published by Rudolf Keyser and Peter Andreas Munch (Christiania: 1846, 1848, 1849); the texts are not reproduced in fully diplomatic fashion.

Vol. I contains:

- *Gulapþingslög* (or *Gulapþingsbók*), based on a manuscript from the first half of the thirteenth century;
- *Frostuþingslög* (or *Frostuþingsbók*), based on various sources, some older than 1260 (for details see Jan Ragnar Hagland and Jørn Sandnes, *Frostatingslovi*, Oslo: 1994);

- *Borgarþings kristinn réttir* (three texts);
- *Eiðsivapings kristinn réttir* (two redactions);
- *Bjarkeyjar réttir*.

Copies of *Járnsíða*, called *Hákonarbók* because it was mistakenly attributed to King Hákon Hákonarson (d. 1263), and of a *kristinn réttir* (church law, ecclesiastical law) wrongly ascribed to King Sverrir (d. 1202) are also in this volume.

Gulapingslög has since been published in a diplomatic edition by Bjørn Eithun, Magnus Rindal and Tor Ulset, *Den eldre Gulatingslova* (Oslo: 1994). It is available in New Norwegian translation, with commentary, by Knut Robberstad, *Gulatingslovi* (Oslo: 1969). Knut Helle has published an exhaustive monograph on the subject, *Gulatinget og Gulatingslova* (Leikanger: 2001).

Hagland and Sandnes have together published critical editions and translations of not only *Frostupingslög* but also *Bjarkeyjar réttir* (*Bjarkøyretten. Nidaros eldste byrett*, Oslo: 1997). English versions of *Gulapingslög* and *Frostupingslög* are in Laurence M. Larson, *The Earliest Norwegian Laws* (New York: 1935).

Vol. II covers the period 1263–80 and contains:

- King Magnús Hákonarson's national law (*Landsbók, Landslög*);
- the same king's *Bæjarbók* (also called *Bæjarlög*), municipal law for the major townships of Bergen, Trondheim, Tønsberg and Oslo;
- his new *kristinn réttir* for the Gulaping and another for the Borgarþing;
- the *kristinn réttir* of Jón, archbishop of Niðaróss 1268–82;
- King Magnús's *Hirðlög* (*Hirðskrá*), regulations for the officials and retainers of the royal court;
- various legislative amendments (*réttarbættir*), concordats between king and archbishop, and a definition of the frontier (*endamerki*) between Norway and Sweden.

The national law was translated by Absalon Taranger, *Magnus Lagabøters Landslov* (4th edn., Oslo: 1970), and the municipal law by Knut Robberstad, *Magnus Lagabøters Bylov* (Christiania: 1923). A diplomatic edition of the *Hirðlög*, with translation and commentary, has been recently published by Steinar Imsen, *Hirdloven til Norges konge og hans håndgangne menn* (Oslo: 2000).

Vol. III contains legislative amendments and decrees made by kings of Norway from 1280 to 1387 and the statutes of archbishops of Niðaróss/Trondheim from 1280 to 1351.

Vol. IV of NgL was published by Gustav Storm in 1885. It includes supplements to the earlier volumes, papal decrees, the new Icelandic law-book (*Jónsbók*), various legislative amendments for Iceland, the Faeroes and different parts of Norway, followed by a detailed description of all the manuscripts made use of by the NgL editors.

Vol. V, published in 1896, completed the series. The first part, edited by Storm, contains the *kristinn réttir* of Árne Þorláksson, bishop of Skálholt 1269–8, which was

approved by the Althing in 1275. The second part consists of Ebbe Hertzberg's admirable *Glossarium* to vols. I–III. In his Anhang III he gives a valuable survey of parallel rules in earlier and later laws, particularly useful for the analysis of *Járnsíða* and *Jónsbók*.

The second series of NgL, *Norges gamle Love: Anden Række 1388–1604*, was planned to bring the material down to 1604, when *Kong Christian den Fjerdes Norske Lovbog* was printed (eds. Fr. Hallager and Fr. Brandt, Christiania 1855, rpt Oslo: 1981). The 1604 code was a revision of the 1274 national law converted into Danish (cf. the printed edition of *Jyske Lov*, 1590). This second series is not yet finished. The following is a bare sketch of what is available:

- Vol. 1 (Christiania: 1912) covers the period 1388–1447. Part A contains state legislation, church legislation and by-laws. Part B consists of indexes of names and words and a glossed index of subjects.
- Vol. 2 (Oslo: 1934) covers the period 1448–81, with texts arranged as in vol. 1 and with an index.
- Vol. 3, part I (Oslo: 1966) is on state legislation. Part II is on church legislation, and part III on by-laws (both Oslo: 1976).
- Vol. 4, part I (Oslo: 1995) is on state legislation. The later parts are yet to appear.

The first volume of *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* was published in Christiania, 1849; its last, vol. XXII, in Oslo, 1990. It is a collection of records from Norwegian sources and of foreign documents that pertain to Norwegian affairs. In each volume the records are printed, though not diplomatically, in their chronological order from the earliest times to the 1550s. This overlapping means that an essential tool for the study of a given period is the *Regesta Norvegica*, I–VII (Oslo: 1978–97), with annotated abstracts of all the material in the *Diplomatarium* year by year from 822 to 1390.

A useful reference book is Steinar Imsen and Harald Winge, *Norsk historisk leksikon: kultur og samfunn ca. 1500–ca. 1800* (2nd edn., Oslo: 1999).

Written provincial laws and the national codes that succeeded them

Nordic provincial laws were committed to writing only a few decades before the National Codes were compiled (Sawyer and Sawyer 1993: 20). That is as true of the Norwegian situation as that of Denmark and Sweden. This has a bearing on comparative studies. Discussion may begin by simply asking *why* they were written.

Hertzberg (*Grundtrækkene i den ældste norske proces*, Christiania: 1874) pointed out that in two of the Norwegian provincial laws reference is made to the *dómr* as an instrument of local justice. The two parties in a dispute could, instead of summoning an assembly, appoint a 'court' of 6 or 12 men, half nominated by each side. In 'civil' disputes individual rights – say to a salmon river – were determined by a *skiladómr*; other offences, wilful damage or injury for instance, could come before a *dómr*, or a *sættarstefna* could be held with a view to achieving a settlement. If the loser in such a

case failed to meet the obligations imposed, the winner could call all the men of legal age in the district to attend a *þing*, on the grounds that he had been robbed of his rights (the term used is *rán*). The assembly acted as a court and passed judgement. If the loser was still recalcitrant, the assembly men could lawfully make an *atfor* against him, going to his home with a show of force and confiscating all his property (see NgL V, 82, for references, including one to *Jónsbók*; Imsen and Winge, *Norsk historisk leksikon*, s.v. 'Atferd').

In the latter half of the twelfth century the authority of kings and bishops grew stronger, especially after the metropolitan see of Niðaróss was established in 1153 with all the dioceses in Norway and the Atlantic islands under the archbishop's control. Kings and bishops had local stewards (*ármenn*) who could bring royal and episcopal demands directly before the local assemblies. Orally preserved and unstable customary law could not meet their needs: a uniform valid law was required. The written provincial laws came into being after experienced appointed representatives (*nefndarmenn*) had deliberated on them at the regional assemblies, certainly with the aid of clerics. We are told that Archbishop Eysteinn (1161–88) himself ordered the compilation of the code called 'Gold Feather' (*Gullfjörðr*). By the 1160s Gratian's *Decretum* was known in Niðaróss and doubtless proved an inspiration. It is thought that sections II and III of the *kristinn réttir* in the older *Frostuþingslög* largely represent the contents of the 'Gold Feather' book.

Royal legislation is prominent in the provincial laws, especially in *Gulapingslög*. Its first part refers to laws given by Óláfr (St Óláfr Haraldsson, d. 1030) and confirmed by Magnús (King Magnús Erlingsson, d. 1184). In *Heimskringla* Snorri says that King Magnús Ólafsson (d. 1047) 'had that law-book written which is still in Trondheim and is called Grágás'. Snorri may have seen the book for himself on his visit to Norway in 1218–20. *Gulapingslög* (G 22, 32) also contains Magnús Erlingsson's new laws (*nymæli*), chiefly relating to serious offences called *úbótaverk*, with heavy penalties (*sektir*) payable to the king and compensation (*bót*, pl. *bætr*) to the injured party.

Gulapingslög (G 2) has *nymæli* from 1163 of great constitutional importance. They concern hereditary succession to the crown 'adopted after consultation among King Magnús Erlingsson, Archbishop Eysteinn, Erlingr jarl and the wisest men of Norway'. The bishops were accorded the right to have the last word on the qualifications of an heir to the throne, but it was never exercised after 1163. The hereditary principle nevertheless remained a feature of the Norwegian monarchy, unlike the elective systems of Denmark and Sweden.

Agreements between the king and local assembly men are embodied in the regulations (*Útgerðarbólkr*) in *Gulapingslög* and *Frostuþingslög* concerning the levy of men and ships for coastal defence (*leiðangr*). At the end of G 314 the pronoun *vér*, 'we', is used, and Atli named as the spokesman of the assembly men. Most provisions in the provincial laws concern everyday affairs, with rules that may well be derived from the customs associated with the *skiladómur* and *sættargerðir* forms of dispute resolution.

Lawmen (*lögmennt*) may have been appointed in the 1160s, though their first mention is in Sturla Þórðarson's *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, where he reports that

nine such took part in a meeting of the realm in 1223. At that time it was a lawman's duty to deliver an *órskurðr*, literally a 'decision', in cases brought before an assembly. The introduction to the *Frostuþingslög* says that in 1260 King Hákon decreed (*setti*) new laws for the whole country, and in 1:16 of this law-book he laid down fines for anyone who failed to obey a lawman's summons to an assembly or to abide by his *órskurðr*. It is thus possible that lawmen appeared on the scene when the provincial laws were first written; a century later they were official judges, selected and salaried by the king.

Kings, bishops and codes, 1263–81

Comparative studies of the relations between church and state in all the northern countries may find a paradigm in the Norwegian and Icelandic codification experience. We have extensive sources from these countries and some knowledge too of the personalities who were the driving force behind the political and legal developments.

Magnús Hákonarson first set out to *revise* the provincial laws. The only extant outcome of this work is a revised *kristinn réttur* for the Borgarþing and another for the Guláþing. They show a balance between clerical and lay authority, even if there are signs in the Guláþing book of the king's high aspirations (cf. the previous subsection). In 1269 King Magnús and the new archbishop, Jón, nicknamed 'the Red', met at the Frostuþing: 'Then King Magnús got the agreement of the Frostuþing men to arrange the Frostuþing's book in all matters pertaining to secular affairs and the kingdom's weal as he thought best' (Storm 1888: 138). In other words, 'Let the king keep his hands off church law!'

Mere revision of provincial laws would not be enough. Archbishop Jón, called 'the Adamant' (*hinna staðfasti*) by Icelanders, was staunch in defence of church claims, and after 1269 archbishop and king both embarked on their own projects.

King Magnús's father, Hákon, had promised the Icelanders in 1262 that they should have the benefit of Icelandic law (NgL I, 460–1), and perhaps in performance of this promise Magnús despatched the *Járnsíða* law-book with Sturla Þórðarson to Iceland in 1271 – as noted earlier, it proved disastrously unpopular. King Magnús had better luck with the Faeroes, writing to the inhabitants in 1273 that such law as was found in the whole Guláþingslög should apply to them, with the exception of the *Búnaðarbólker*, which should 'stand as your book already testifies' (NgL IV, 353–4). A detailed amendment to that section of the laws, the *Sauðabréf* ('Sheep Letter'), drafted in the Faeroes, was issued by Magnús's son, Duke Hákon, in 1298 (NgL III, 33–40; IV, 495, 666 ff.); it contained strict rules relating to sheep-breeding, pasturage and whaling. A copy of the national law in its late thirteenth-century Guláþing version went with the office of lawman in the Faeroes; it contained the authentic text of the 'Sheep Letter'.

At a council of state in Bergen in 1273 King Magnús presented his *Hirðlög*, while Archbishop Jón presented an ambitious *kristinn réttur*, designed to apply over the whole country (NgL II, 339 ff.). After what amounted to a formal *disputatio*, a concordat was

concluded between king and archbishop for which papal approval was to be sought (NgL II, 455 ff.).

Pope Clement IV, who had been twice visited by Archbishop Jón, died in 1268. After a three-year interregnum Theobald Visconti was elected, but *in absentia* in Acre, the last crusader stronghold in the Holy Land. He chose the name of Gregory X. His own experience led him first to institute the conclave for the conduct of papal elections. His other main aim was to reunite the eastern and western churches, and to achieve this he had first to bring order into his own widespread flock. All western archbishops were summoned to a council in Lyons, starting on 1 May 1274. It was this summons, issued in 1272, which led to the Bergen council described above. After that meeting was over, Archbishop Jón left for Lyons and probably had with him both a copy of his concordat with Magnús and a Latin translation of his new *kristinn réttir*. The pope confirmed the concordat on 24 July but only on condition that the king received his crown and kingdom in fief from the archbishop and the church of Niðaróss (NgL II, 461–2). *Nulli ergo nostre confirmationis etc.* ('So much then for the validity of our *confirmatio* and the rest') was the final, laconic comment of the Holy Father's secretary, a realist.

King Magnús and his counsellors had meanwhile made the most of the archbishop's absence (Helle 1986: 576–81, 583–4, 632). On Midsummer's Day 1274 the Gula þing version of the national law was presented to the assembly at Gulen by the king himself; it was promptly adopted as law. Late that autumn Archbishop Jón returned to Bergen; he had suffered shipwreck and brought no papal confirmation of the concordat. He had to bow to the precedent set and could do nothing when Magnús went on to get his Frostuþing version of the national law approved in 1275, and his versions for Borgarþing and Eiðsiváþing in 1276. The same year probably saw the adoption of the Bergen municipal law (*Biörgyniar bæjarlög*). Similar municipal laws were drafted for Oslo, Trondheim and Tønsberg; they often appear as additional chapters in manuscripts of the *Landslög*.

Archbishop Jón's *kristinn réttir* was never put before any law-assembly, but it was sometimes appended to fourteenth-century *Landslög* manuscripts. In Iceland Bishop Árni Þorláksson's *kristinn réttir* was adopted as valid law in the Skálholt diocese by the Althing of 1275; acceptance of it in the northern diocese of Hólar did not come until 1354. King Magnús was not pleased with the Icelanders' complaisance, even though Árni was far less bold than Jón in claiming church rights.

The national law is a remarkable document. It opens with a personal prologue by the king, rehearsing the reasons for the legislation in its sections. He says *inter alia* that 'Now, as before, the Assembly Attendance Section (*þingfavarbolkr*) is written at the outset, before the book proper begins'; then goes on, 'The first part of the book is the Christian Laws Section.' As we shall see, there is no contradiction in this opening – rather it betrays a learned distinction of some subtlety.

Articles 4 and especially 11 of the Assembly Attendance Section give full judicial authority to the lawman on all matters in the law-book. If members of a judicial panel (*lögretta*) found that a lawman's *órskurð* was not lawful, they should not disregard it but write to the king: 'for no man can revoke a decision given by a lawman unless the

king sees that our law-book attests against it, or the king himself, with the approval of wise men, sees another outcome closer to the truth, for he is set over the law (*skipaðr yfir lög*).’ This is no echo of *princeps legibus solutus* – on the contrary. (The emperor Augustus [63 BC–AD 14] had claimed that as a *princeps* he was ‘legibus solutus’, ‘released from the laws’.)

We may now see *why*. The Christian Laws Section begins with injunctions based on the Creed. It is followed by article 2, *Um yfirboð konungs ok byskups*, ‘On the authority of king and bishop’, in which the central part says: ‘The king has from God temporal power in temporal matters and the bishop spiritual power in spiritual matters, and each has to strengthen the authority of the other in just and lawful cases and recognize that they have power and authority from God Himself and not from their own persons.’ This was indeed the firmest possible legitimization of the king’s position – even vis-à-vis the mighty Holy See itself – based as it was on the fifth-century Gelasian doctrine of the high and *equal* authority of pope and emperor. King Magnús had cherished these ideas for some time; they can be seen for instance in the abortive Guláping *kristinn rétt*, article 7, in *Járnsíða*, articles 7–8, and later in the *Jónsbók* Christian laws, articles 1–2. The rest of the national law’s *kristinn rétt* does not concern church matters but succession to the throne and the oaths to be sworn on the accession of a new king (NgL II, 307 ff.; I, 261 ff.). The king himself should swear *lög at halda ok um at bæta við þegna sína*, which may be paraphrased ‘to abide by the laws in his relations with his subjects and to see to their amendment’. So it was only right that the Christian laws should come first in the king’s code.

The ‘learned distinction’ referred to above was a practice as old as the emperor Justinian’s *Digest*, made in the Eastern Roman Empire in Constantinople in 529–33, and containing systematically ordered extracts from the writings (in Latin) of the learned Roman jurists. It was never much used in the Greek east, but by 1100 two distinct collections of manuscripts of the *Digest* had come to be seriously studied in the west, in church schools in Bologna, where the teacher Irnerius (c.1050–c.1130) and his clerical colleagues, recognizing the value of the ancient Roman legal texts, glossed important words and concepts from them in medieval Latin. The work of the twelfth-century ‘glossators’ was continued in the thirteenth century and later by the ‘conciliators’ (that is, combiners or reconcilers of legal texts of varied origin), in such a way that Bologna became the centre of medieval jurisprudence. The conciliators followed the practice of the *Digest* in beginning each chapter and subchapter with an unnumbered *principium*, that is, an especially valuable and important quotation from the legal literature, and by following this with a series (*sectio*) of numbered quotations relevant to it. The Bologna glossators and conciliators added to each number the paragraph mark § (a double S signifying *Signum Sectionis*). The compilers of the national law followed the same practice, though without the use of §, to confront the pretensions of Archbishop Jón.

Some important matters in the *Landslög* (L) and the *Bæjarlög* (B) deserve mention. (For the provenance of articles in these codes see the footnotes in NgL II and Anhang III in NgL V.)

- The *Pingfararbólkr*, addressed to the four provincial law-assemblies, gave the procedural rules to be followed by them. The corresponding section in B defined municipal procedures, with Bergen chiefly in mind.
- The Christian Laws Section was more or less the same in L and B.
- The *Landvarnarbólkr* ('Defence Section') began with a statement of allegiance to Jesus Christ, in whose name the king should see to the defence of the realm 'by law and not by un-law'. Regulations concerned ships, personal weapons, and coastal and township levies (*leiðangr*, now a form of taxation).
- The *Mannbelgarbólkr* in L and B concerned personal rights, with the good term *mannbelg* ('personal inviolability') used for a human being's personal immunity and integrity. The old distinction between killing (*víg, dráp*), publicly announced, and murder (*morð*), unacknowledged killing, is maintained. The notion of accident (*váði*) is also introduced (article 13).
- The Inheritance law (*Arvebölkr* in L, *Erfðatal* in B) gave daughters half as much as sons. Sons got equal shares in inherited land but the eldest had the chief estate (*hofuðból*). If there was no male heir, a single daughter inherited everything.
- *Landabrigði* (L) concerned the recovery of allodial property, that is, property owned absolutely and without obligation.
- *Bæjarskipan*, only in B, regulates municipal life.
- *Landsleigubólkr*, only in L, is concerned with all matters to do with land-holding and land use, whether farms were freehold or held by tenants or crofters. (Note that the Defence Section, article 6, rules that payment of the *leiðangr* tax depended on the land *owned* freehold or *had in use* by a tenant – even by a tenant on land owned by the church.)
- *Kaupabólkr*, L and B, fundamentally concerns contract law and in terms of legal history is perhaps the most advanced of all the sections of the national law. It agrees with civil and canon law that *Pacta sunt servanda* 'agreements must be honoured', or, as is said in a notably 'modern' way in article 6 of B: *Nú skulu baldazt handsöluð mál þau er baldazt mega at lögum* – 'Agreements made with a handshake are to be kept, those which may be kept in accordance with law.'
- Harsh penalties are prescribed in the *Þjófabólkr*, the 'Thieves Section'. It also contains the oaths by which an accused person might be cleared, from the '12-man oath' (*tylftareidri*), sworn by him with 11 co-swearers, down to the 'personal oath' (*einseiði*), sworn by him alone. Perjury (*meineiðri*) cost a man both life and property.
- The 'Merchants' Section' (*Farmannabólkr*) is found in the municipal laws of Bergen, Oslo, Tønsberg and Sarpsborg and in King Magnús's general *Bæjarlög* (see NgL I, 181 ff.). It regulates ships and shipping and other matters, not least *Um kast ef menn hitta í storma* 'on the jettison of cargo in bad weather'; cf. the *Lex Rhodia de iactu* and similar rules in *Grágás* and *Jónsbók* and the Swedish *Stadslag*.

After some amendments conceded by the king, the national law ends with a passage in which it is said, *inter alia*, that King Magnús had 'this book written on skin and went in person to the law-assembly [sc. of each province] and had it read out there and gave

it to the assembly men, along with that amendment, which is not of least import, that this book shall henceforth apply over all Norway’.

King and church

The national law, the municipal law and the *Jónsbók*, all from the years 1274–81, should be seen as a regal demarcation of the rights of the king and the monarchy. Given this policy, King Magnús could not possibly accept the condition of enfeoffment to the church insisted on by Pope Gregory X in 1274. On the other hand, the king was now free to pursue further negotiations with Archbishop Jón. The outcome was an agreement made in Tønsberg in August 1277; this *Compositio* or *Sættargerð* (NgL II, 462–80) was almost identical to the 1273 concordat. It did, however, contain a most significant supplement: the king was still entitled to penalties, some in accordance with provisions of the old *kristinn rétt*, if they were due in accordance with ‘tried custom or the law of the land’ – *ex consuetudine approbata vel legibus regni/af vel prófáðri venju eðr lands lögum* (pp. 464, 471). For a further introduction to the important and complex problem of the *Sættargerð* see *KLNM XXI*, s.v. ‘Sættargjerden i Tønsberg’.

The national law in later times

No new statutes or codes were promulgated for Norway until 1604, when *Christian den Fjerdes Norske Lovbog* was published. There were, however, numerous items of importance that found record – amendments, judgements, treaties and the like – and these are collected in NgL III (1281–1387) and the four volumes of NgL, *Anden række*. They were often appended to copies of the national law (see Storm’s manuscript descriptions in NgL IV).

We have evidence of at least 80 vellum copies of the national law from the fourteenth century and of 25 copies of the municipal law, these mostly included in national law manuscripts. The laws were thus the items of secular literature most widely read in medieval Norway. The books belonged to laymen as well as lawmen – if the need was felt, the art of reading was readily mastered. Close reading of the national law and of *Jónsbók* too will show us that commonplace civil suits might still be settled locally by a *dómr*, and were often expected to be, with or without the assistance of a lawman, whose *órskurðr* could add weight. In the sixteenth century local *dómar* became courts of first instance in the court hierarchy; and from 1596 recorders (*sorenskrivere*) led their proceedings, so that lawmen became judges of second instance in the hierarchy, which in 1661 came to be crowned by a *høiesteret* (supreme court). After 1611 the *tingbøker* – that is, the minutes of local first-instance courts – have numerous references to *Norges lov*, readily explained by the many sixteenth-century paper copies of the national law and of course the printed *Norske Lovbog* of 1604.

Magnús Hákonarson’s *Landsløg* was superseded by *Christian den femtes Norske Lov* of 1687, in fact a Norwegian version of this king’s *Danske Lov* of 1683. Several elements

of the old national law were retained in the Norwegian version, particularly some relating to first-instance courts and to rural affairs such as treatment of land held in common.

Icelanders referred to Magnús the Lawmender as *hinn mildi Magnús konungr* ('mild king Magnús'). His legislation proves that he was *suaviter in modo et fortiter in re* ('mild in manner, strong in action').

Sweden

Sweden was unified in the twelfth century but the provinces (*land*, *lagsagor* and later *landsagor*) kept their own laws until the latter part of the fourteenth. Nothing certain is known about the provincial laws (*landskapslagar*) in their pre-literate stage. Presumably they represented regulations and decrees agreed or adopted at provincial assemblies (*landsping*).

Editions and codification

Laws preserved orally were committed to writing in the course of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.

The *Landskapslagar* were brilliantly edited by D. C. J. Schlyter, each in diplomatic form and accompanied by a glossary: *Wästgöta-Lagen*, Lund, 1827; *Östgöta-L.*, 1830; *Uplands-L.*, 1834; *Södermanna-L.*, 1838; *Westmanna-L.*, 1841; *Helsing-L.*, *Kristni-Balken af Smålands-Lagen och Bjarköa-Rätten*, 1844; *Gotlands-L.*, 1852; *Wisby Stadslag och Sjørätt*, 1853; *Skåne-L., med Ärkebiskopen i Lund Andreas Sunessons latinske Bearbetning, Skånske Kyrkrätten och Stadsrätten*, 1859; *Konung Magnús Erikssons Landslag*, 1862; K. M. E. *Stadslag*, 1865; *Konung Christoffers Landslag*, 1869. He completed his labours of half a century with a glossary covering all the texts, *Ordbok till Samlingen af Sveriges Gamla Lagar*, 1877.

These editions have been translated into modern Swedish by Åke Holmbäck and Elias Wessén, who also provide thorough commentaries:

- I *Östgötalagen och Upplandsl.* (Stockholm: 1935);
- II *Dalal. och Västmannal* (Stockholm: 1936);
- III *Södermannal. och Hälsingel.* (including the Swedish-speaking parts of Finland) (Stockholm: 1940);
- IV *Skånel. och Gutal.* (Stockholm: 1943);
- V *Äldre Västgötal., Yngre Västgötal., Smålandslagens Kyrkobalk och Bjarköarätten* (Stockholm: 1946).

It may be noted that they follow Schlyter in introducing the paragraph mark, §, in enumerating articles; cf. the subsection on 'Kings, bishops and codes, 1263–81', above.

Committing provincial laws to writing, especially the *Upplandslag* recorded in 1296, and the written form of royal decrees (*stadgar*) in the 1330s and 1340s, led to the creation of a National Code (*Landslag*). A royal commission undertook the work, which was probably completed in 1350. King Magnus Eriksson presented the code to the provincial assemblies, but it was only gradually adopted, and not everywhere at the same rate, in the course of the next 50 years. In 1442 King Christoffer confirmed a slightly revised version prepared two years earlier, and it was finally printed as *Sveriges Rikes Landslag* in 1608.

Towards 1350 a separate royal commission worked on a municipal law (*Stadslag*). It was never completed, but in the latter part of the century Swedish townships adopted the laws that applied in Stockholm. Magnus Eriksson's *Landslag* and *Stadslag* are also in Swedish by Holmbäck and Wessén, published in Uppsala in 1962 and 1966.

These early comprehensive codes remained in force until 1734 when Sweden (with Finland) decided to introduce a new code (*Sveriges Rikes Lag*). A number of regulations from the older sources were incorporated in it and, with some revision, they still apply in the *Sveriges Lagar* of today.

Administration of justice and studies of Swedish law

The role of the lawman (*lagman*) is reflected in the term *lagsaga* (law-saying), which could also be used of a whole law-province (cf. the territorial sense of *log*, noted at the beginning of this chapter). He had to rehearse the laws at the assembly (*lag telja*) and determine which were applicable in cases brought there (*lag skilja*). Pleading for or against a suit was supported by compurgation, that is, collective swearing by witnesses (later known as *edgård*). In the fourteenth century this system was replaced by a crown-appointed jury (*nämnd*) of 12 men in each hundred (that is, in each jurisdictional district, or *härad*) under the *häradshövding*, or district judge. The jury decided the case on its merits and judgement was given by the *häradshövding*. Local administration of justice was supervised by a crown-appointed lawman in each province.

A student embarking on the study of Swedish law obviously needs a reading knowledge of modern Swedish and will be well advised to have some preliminary knowledge of both the Icelandic and the Norwegian law-texts. The volumes by Holmbäck and Wessén are excellent guides and their introductions should be read with care. There is much to be learnt from Schlyter's glossaries (they are often valuable for the consideration of terminology and interpretation in other Nordic laws), and the Swedish material in general allows interesting comparisons to be made between thirteenth- and fourteenth-century legal vocabulary and concepts.

The main contents of Magnus Eriksson's *Landslag* (L) and his *Stadslag* (St) are briefly these (the titles are in the conventional Swedish form):

- *Konungabalk* in L deals with the Swedish realm and its constitution; in St it deals with municipal affairs.

- *Giftermålsbalk*, relating to marriage, is not much different in the two codes.
- *Ärvdabalk*, inheritance rules which in L give two-thirds to sons, in St give sons and daughters equal shares. The latter principle was confirmed in 1734 and again in the Inheritance Statute of 1845.
- *Jordabalk*, on landed property, in L explains allodial rights (*bördsrätt*); the St provisions show a more ‘modern’ approach.
- *Byggningsbalk*, on rural matters, in L is informative on village organization; in St its provisions cover everyday town life.
- *Köpmålabalk* is a short section in L dealing with commercial transactions; in St it is more detailed and conveys interesting information about Sweden’s international relations.
- *Skeppsmålabbalk* in St is on shipping matters. It has rules for averaging based on the *Lex Rhodia de iactu* and the maritime Rules of Oléron.
- *Rättegångsbalk* in L deals with legal procedures, mostly in criminal cases; the *Rådstugabalk* of St concerns first-instance procedures in townships.

The following sections are parallel in L and St; they mainly concern penal law:

- *Edsöresbalk* contains the oaths to be sworn by a new king and his officers to maintain peace in the kingdom.
- *Högmålsbalk* deals with the most serious crimes and their penalties.
- *Dråpamålsbalk* and *Såråmålsbalk* concern homicide and wounding, with a distinction drawn between intent and accident.
- *Tjuvamålsbalk*, on theft, imposes harsh penalties on offenders. In St this is followed by a short *Dobblarebalk* (‘Gambler Section’) on gambling.

L and St have no sections devoted to church matters, but copies of earlier *Kyrkobalkar*, usually derived from the *Upplandslag*, are often included in their manuscripts.

Nordic Laws: A Summary

Why was there legislation and then codification in the Nordic countries in medieval times?

Northern people cannot be credited with a special gift for these activities, but they needed social organization at local and regional level and, as far as that goes, were as much ‘political animals’ as citizens of Athens in Aristotle’s day.

Northerners early created their own political means of social organization in the *þing* institution. These assemblies were only relatively ‘democratic’ – there were men and groups important enough to ‘lay down’ the rules which, when they fulfilled their function and met social needs, then by custom became binding laws. Powerful parties made use of the assemblies to organize society at provincial and finally national levels. This happened in the north between 900 and 1200. Western Christianity came to the

north in that period, and between 1050 and 1300 the church became a consolidated force in public affairs. The popes succeeded in governing a mighty international organization. The arts of state rule were learned by secular leaders from the church: how to form an effective government, how to create a civil service, how to promulgate laws and enforce them.

The proud tag *at lögum skal land vårt byggja*, ‘by law shall our land be built up’, is repeated all over the north (*Jyske lov* 1, *Frostupingslög* I 6, *Járnsíða* 3, *Njáls saga*, the *Upplandslag* and the *principium* of the *Byalag*). The injunction may be a calque on *civitas fundaretur legibus* (‘the state should be founded on laws’), the words of Pomponius quoted at the beginning of Justinian’s *Digest* (I, 2, 2, 4), a work well known in Bologna in the thirteenth century, as shown in the section on ‘Norway’, above. In the early period the Nordic states had been pupils of the Roman church. After 1300 they stood on their own feet, had made their own laws and could do without the Janus-faced *kristinn réttur*. On their side, the bishops could rule their sees in accordance with canon law and its confessional discipline, to which all human beings were subject. By and large this evolution in the north was a peaceful process.

Some 20 years later open conflict over the claims of the church broke out in continental Europe, above all between Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1303) and King Philip the Fair of France (1285–1314). The result was the near 7-year ‘Babylonian captivity’ of pope and curia at Avignon, 1309–77. Clerical claims to secular authority on the scale envisaged by Boniface VIII were never made again. The western monarchies had learned from the church how to rule their states by laws and in time, like their northern counterparts, they moved towards their codification.

See also ARCHAEOLOGY; CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; FAMILY SAGAS; GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PSEUDO-HISTORY; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; RUNES; SAGAS OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY; SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS.

REFERENCES

- (NB: since the present chapter consists to a large extent of descriptive bibliography, giving many references for further reading in its various sections, only those items to which specific reference is made by page number, or by close paraphrase, are listed below.)
- Foote, P. (1984) *Aurvandilstá: Norse Studies*. Odense.
- Helle, Knut (1986) *Konge og gode menn i norsk riksstyring*. Bergen.
- Karlsson, Gunnar (1992) ‘Ritunartími Staðarhólsbókar.’ In *Sólbvarfasumbl samanborið banda Þorleifi Haukssyni fimmtugum 21. desember 1991*. Reykjavík, pp. 40–2.
- KLNM = *Kulturbistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder* (1956–78) 22 vols. Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm.
- Líndal, Sigurður (1984) ‘Lög og lagasetning í íslenska þjóðveldinu.’ *Skírnir* 158, 121–58.
- Líndal, Sigurður (1992) ‘Löggjafarvald og dómsvald í íslenska þjóðveldinu.’ *Skírnir* 166, 171–8.
- Pulsiano, Phillip, Acker, Paul and Wolf, Kirsten (eds.) (1993) *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*. New York.
- Rafnsson, Sveinbjörn (1977) ‘Grágás og Digesta Iustiniani.’ In *Sjöttú ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni*. Reykjavík, pp. 720–32.

- Rafnsson, Sveinbjörn (1990) 'Forn hrossalög og heimildir þeirra: Drög til greiningar réttarheimilda Grágásar.' *Saga* 28, 131–48.
- Reitzel-Nielsen, Erik (ed.) (1941) *Med Lov skal Land Bygges*. Copenhagen.
- Romano, Andrea (ed.) (1997) '*... colendo iustitiam et iura condendo...*': *Federico II Legislatore del Regno di Sicilia nell'Europa del Duecento: Per una storia comparata delle codificazioni europee*. Rome.
- Sawyer, Birgit and Sawyer, Peter (1993) *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation, circa 800–1500*. Minneapolis.
- Sigurðsson, Jón Viðar (1999) *Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth*. Odense.
- Storm, Gustav (ed.) (1888) *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578*. Christiania. Rpt Oslo: 1977.

Manuscripts and Palaeography

Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson

This chapter contains an account of Norse medieval manuscripts, the beginning of manuscript production in the Nordic linguistic area and the development of script to the end of the Middle Ages. The term ‘manuscript’ is used to refer to hand-written texts, irrespective of whether they are complete or fragmentary, on vellum or paper. The treatment of Icelandic manuscripts and script covers the period down to the Reformation in the mid-sixteenth century; the section on Norwegian manuscripts covers the period down to about 1370, after which the production of Norwegian manuscripts went into a substantial decline and few were written in Old Norse. The main focus will be on manuscripts and documents in Old Norse (the term ‘document’ referring here to writings of a relatively official or legal character). These are written in a modified form of the Latin alphabet. From the point of view of palaeography *per se*, it makes no difference whether they are in Old Norse or Latin; nevertheless the language is a consideration in the present discussion because we can be fairly sure that manuscripts in Old Norse were written by native speakers, while manuscripts in Latin could have been imported from England or other countries.

The Earliest Writings in the Latin Alphabet

Nordic people came into contact with the Latin alphabet before it was adopted in their countries. A coin inscribed with Old Norse names was struck in York before the middle of the tenth century. Furthermore, alphabetic script was well known at this time in Scandinavia, as runes had been in use there for many centuries.

Iceland adopted Christianity in the year 999 or 1000 (ÍF I: 17), at about the same time as Norway, and literacy was introduced along with the new faith. The Christian missionaries active in Norway and Iceland in the closing decades of the tenth century must have had books written in Latin with them.

The Norwegian bishops active during the reign of King Óláfr Haraldsson (d. 1030) had learnt to read and write in England (Haugen 2002: 824). Furthermore, sources refer to missionary bishops in Iceland in the eleventh century (ÍF I: 18), some of whom certainly would have taught trainees for the priesthood. The first Bishoprics (including Skálholt in Iceland) were established in the eleventh century and a few monasteries were also established in about 1100.

Ísleifr Gizurarson (d. 1080), the first Icelander to be consecrated a bishop (in 1056), sat at Skálholt, where he ran a school. It is therefore almost certain that both liturgical works and educational books existed in the bishopric as early as the eleventh century, and in other bishoprics as well. Some fragments of liturgical works have survived, dating from the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries, the oldest of which originated outside the Nordic countries (Gjerløw 1980). Whether these fragments represent any of the books once used in the bishoprics cannot be determined.

Íslendingabók states that it was decided at the Althing in summer 1117 to record Iceland's laws, and that the writing of the laws was begun at Breiðabólstaðr in northern Iceland during the winter of 1117–18 (ÍF I: 23). This decision could scarcely have been taken without some previous experience in Iceland of using the Latin alphabet for writing in the vernacular. It is probable, for example, even though this is not recorded, that the tithe laws were written down when they were introduced in 1096. In Norway, the writing of laws may have begun towards the end of the eleventh century (Seip 1954: 2–3).

Manuscripts

Norwegian manuscripts

Norway can boast a considerable number of manuscripts written in the vernacular before 1370; more than Denmark and Sweden, though far fewer than Iceland, and practically all Norwegian manuscripts in the vernacular date from before 1400. There was a marked decline in book production in Norway in about 1370. Seip (1955: 224–5) attributed this sharp break at least in part to the arrival of the Black Death in Norway in 1349–50: two decades after that, a new generation began to take over from those who had survived the plague. Part of the explanation may also lie in the increased use of paper in the later fourteenth century: paper manuscripts probably did not last as well as vellum (Seip 1954: 112). There was no decline in the writing of documents, however, so that in a purely palaeographical context the year 1370 marks no great change; nevertheless, because of the paucity of books produced after 1370, it is convenient to use this date as a cut-off point (Haugen 2002: 825).

A large proportion of Norwegian manuscripts were written in Latin; in the vast majority of cases only fragments of them have survived. The oldest fragments date from about 1000; these probably originated in England and were brought to Norway by English missionaries. Latin manuscripts must have been copied later in Norway,

but it is difficult to decide whether individual extant fragments are of Norwegian or foreign origin, because of their poor state of preservation (Haugen 2002: 825).

To begin with, documents in the Nordic countries were written in Latin, and Latin continued to be used side by side with the vernacular throughout the Middle Ages. The oldest Norwegian documents are no longer extant, but there are records of document writing as early as the first half of the eleventh century (Seip 1954: 2). The oldest extant Norwegian document in Old Norse dates from about 1210 (Haugen 2002: 825; Rindal 2002: 803), while the oldest Norwegian document in Latin is somewhat younger. Most surviving documents are originals; this is hardly ever the case with other texts. Of the oldest documents, only a few contain dates and state where they were written, but it became customary in Norway after 1290 to date and state the place of origin (Rindal 2002: 803). About 1,650 original Norwegian documents written in Old Norse prior to 1370 are now extant, of which only about 80 are from the thirteenth century.

Sometimes it cannot be established with certainty whether individual leaves originally belonged to larger manuscripts, and partly for this reason the numbers of manuscripts cannot be stated in exact figures. In addition, it is not clear in all cases whether they are Norwegian or Icelandic. About 130 Norwegian manuscripts in Old Norse survive from before 1370, many of them in fragments only. Of this number, eight date from the twelfth century or c.1200, about 50 from the thirteenth century or c.1300, and about 65 from the first half of the fourteenth century. The vast majority of these manuscripts contain laws, both the older regional laws (those of Gulaping, Frostuping, etc.) and the national law code of King Magnús Hákonarson the Lawmender of 1274, which is preserved in about 70 copies, whole and fragmentary, from before 1370. Besides these law manuscripts there are about 25 other Norwegian manuscripts, most of them complete or nearly so, which contain texts of other types: sagas, chivalric literature, religious material, saints' lives, etc.

Only in exceptional cases do medieval manuscripts contain their own dates. Part of AM 309 fol. contains the national law of King Magnús the Lawmender; at the end of the text (f. 57r) is the statement that it was written in 1325 (Rindal 2002: 802). The dating of manuscripts is normally based on palaeographical evidence, linguistic features, the contents of the text and the known history of the manuscript itself.¹

The oldest extant Norwegian manuscript fragments contain saints' lives. AM 655 IX 4to, which dates from the second half of the twelfth century, contains Old Norse translations from Latin of the lives of St Matthew and Saints Blaise and Placidus. Religious literature, and also liturgical books of various types, which were in Latin, were written throughout the Middle Ages. Many saints' lives – of both men and women – exist in Norwegian and Icelandic manuscripts.

There are no Norwegian paper manuscripts or documents from before 1370: the oldest extant Norwegian paper document is from 1371. A paper document is mentioned, on the other hand, in a document from 1365 (Seip 1954: 112).

Manuscripts were lost, became worn out by use and came loose from their bindings, and individual leaves became detached and separated from the works to which they

belonged. Many manuscripts must have been lost in these ways, and in addition, manuscripts were destroyed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. After the publication of the *Missale Nidrosiense* and *Breviarium Nidrosiense* (the missal and breviary of Niðaróss) in 1519 – and also after the Reformation in 1537 – many Latin religious manuscripts were cut up and used in book bindings. In the nineteenth century it was discovered that the spines of many of the regional administrative accounts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the Norwegian State Archives in Oslo had been strengthened with strips of parchment that had been cut from medieval manuscripts (Eken 1963: xiii). The archives possess about 5,000 fragments of Latin manuscripts, most of them of a religious nature. It is estimated that they come from about 1,200 original books. Vernacular manuscripts did not meet with quite such a drastic fate, partly because the law codices continued to be used throughout the sixteenth century, even though fewer and fewer people could understand properly the language in which they were written. But after Norway's national laws were published in print in 1604, many vernacular manuscripts were treated in the same way as the old Latin manuscripts. The Norwegian State Archives possess about 500 fragments of manuscripts in Old Norse; these are estimated as having originated in about 100 manuscripts, two-thirds of which were law-books (Haugen 2002: 825).

Karlsson (2000: 192–4) has established that 54 manuscripts now preserved, which contain material other than laws, were in Norway during the Middle Ages and many of them were imported from Iceland. Halvorsen (1982: 140) stressed that more medieval manuscripts were lost in Norway than in Iceland. He surmises that this was mainly due to the different paths that linguistic development followed in the two countries at the end of the medieval period: by the end of the Middle Ages, Norwegian had changed so much that people in Norway had difficulty in understanding their medieval texts. As documents tended to be important to their owners on account of their legal value, they were generally preserved with more care than were other manuscripts.

Almost without exception, the scribes of the oldest manuscripts are anonymous. The earliest Norwegian scribe known by name was Eiríkr Þrónardarson, who wrote part of Sth. perg. 34 4to (hand *f*) in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. The names of a few manuscript scribes from the period after 1300 are known, particularly those who copied law texts, such as Þorgeirr Hákonarson, who copied several manuscripts (for example, AM 302 fol.), and Páll Styrkársson, who probably copied King Sverrir's *Ræða gegn biskupum* ('Speech against the Bishops') in AM 114 a 4to (from c.1315–40) in addition to documents (Haugen 2002: 831).

The scribes of documents are better known, particularly those who wrote in the service of the king. During the period 1280–1345, royal scribes normally added the words 'N.N. klerkr/notarius ritaði', 'Written by the scribe N.N.'. Vågslid (1989) identified over 800 scribes by name in the period prior to 1400. Most medieval Norwegian scribes were probably members of the clergy, though many laymen were also capable of copying manuscripts (Rindal 2002: 804).

Faeroese manuscripts

It cannot be said with certainty that any manuscripts or documents now extant are Faeroese, that is, that they were written by Faeroese people. There is, however, an important legal reform concerning sheep in the Faeroes (known as *Sauðabréfið*) from 1298 (*Kónsbókin*, Sth. perg. 33 4to, bl. 72–5). A very small number of documents written in the Faeroes have been preserved, among them the Húsavík documents, which are preserved in a transcript dating from 1407 (AM dipl. norv. fasc. C 1 a).

Icelandic manuscripts

Many of the medieval Icelandic manuscripts that have survived are incomplete, and in many cases all that survives is a few leaves or even a single leaf or part of a leaf.

Most Icelandic manuscripts containing Latin texts met the same fate as their Norwegian counterparts. Nearly all the surviving remains of Latin manuscripts in Iceland are single leaves that were preserved in the bindings of later books, and in the case of the earliest ones it is scarcely possible to say whether they were written in Iceland or elsewhere, though in a very few cases the hand that wrote a Latin manuscript has been identified as that of an Icelandic text (see Louis-Jensen 1977: 19–20; Karlsson 1982; 2000: 274–8, 366–7). No statistics are available on the number of these manuscript fragments, but they certainly run to hundreds and therefore represent the remains of some dozens of manuscripts. Documents were written mostly in Old Norse in Iceland.

The oldest Icelandic manuscript, an Easter table (AM 732 a VII 4to), consists of a single leaf, and is believed to date from the first half of the twelfth century. As it contains only individual Latin letters, it is solely of palaeographic interest.

The oldest extant Icelandic manuscript containing text in the vernacular, AM 237 a fol. (see figure 14.1), is believed to date from the middle of the twelfth century. Eleven manuscripts have survived from the twelfth century or c.1200 and about 100 from the thirteenth century or c.1300. About 300 manuscripts are dated to the fourteenth century or c.1400, 230 to the fifteenth century or c.1500, and about 100 to the first half of the sixteenth century. Altogether, about 750 manuscripts are thought to date from before the mid-sixteenth century. About 315 Icelandic manuscripts are dated to before c.1370 (compared with about 130 in Norway).

Very few medieval Icelandic texts, other than documents, exist in original copies. No documents in the vernacular from before 1300 have survived, and only 20–5 from the first half of the fourteenth century, after which their numbers increase rapidly. Altogether, about 1,500 documents in the vernacular exist from before 1540, including about 700 from the second half of the fifteenth century. Fewer than 50 documents pre-date 1370; as is stated above, there exist about 1,650 Norwegian documents in Old Norse from before 1370.

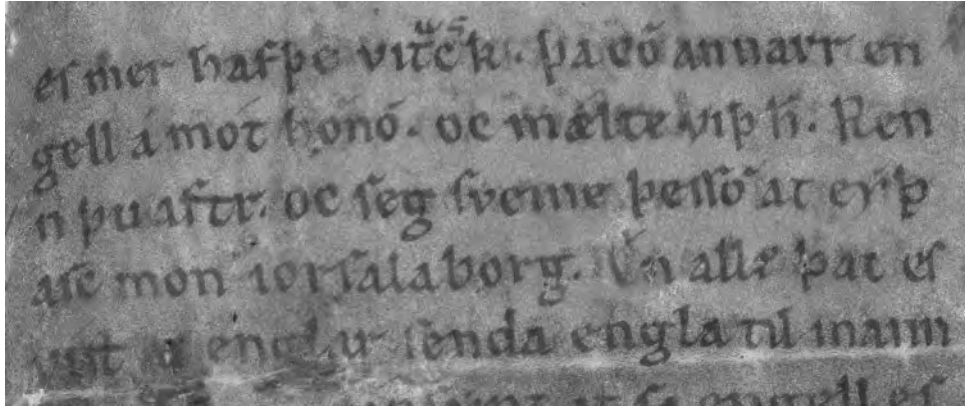


Figure 14.1 AM 237 a fol., c. 1150–75. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi. Fol. 2ra, lines 1–5. Photo: Jóhanna Ólafsdóttir, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi.

ef mer hafpe vitrac^sk. þa com annarr en / -gell á mót hōnom. oc málte við hann. Ren / -n þu aftr. oc seg sveme þessō at eyþ / -afc mon iorðalaborg. En allz þat ef / vift at englar fenda engla til manm.
(From a fragment of an Icelandic translation of Gregory the Great's gospel homily [no. 34] describing the nine choirs of angels.)

Very few Icelandic manuscripts can be dated to the year with complete certainty. Óláfr Ormsson wrote AM 194 8vo at Geirrøðarreyri (now Narfeyri) in western Iceland in 1387. AM 80 b 8vo bears the date 1473; AM 309 4to was written in 1498 and AM 43 8vo in 1507. Leaf 149r of the *Skarðsbók* manuscript of the *Jónsbók* law code (AM 350 fol.) contains the statement that it was written in 1363. Leaf 4rb of *Flateyjarbók* (GKS 1005 fol.) states that it was written in 1387. This is probably the date when work on it was to begin; at the end of the manuscript there is an annal that ends in the year 1394. Few other Icelandic manuscripts can be dated with such accuracy.

When the scribe's name is established and it is known when he lived, it becomes possible to set probable limits to the period in which the manuscript was written. Others can be dated with some certainty if the same hand, or a very similar one, is found in a document that bears a date: most documents are dated by the year, many of them also by the day. A problem with this method consists in the fact that the script used in documents in the fourteenth century was different from that used by the same scribes when copying other manuscripts, which makes comparison difficult (see figures 14.2 and 14.3). Most Icelandic manuscripts have been assigned dates by scholars on the basis of their script and spelling, but these criteria generally only make it possible to date them to within the nearest half century (Karlsson 1982: 322; 2002: 833).

While some impressive law code manuscripts from the thirteenth century have been preserved, it was the fourteenth century that was the Golden Age of manuscript production in Iceland, and also a time when a lot of manuscripts were exported to Norway (Karlsson 2000: 188–205).

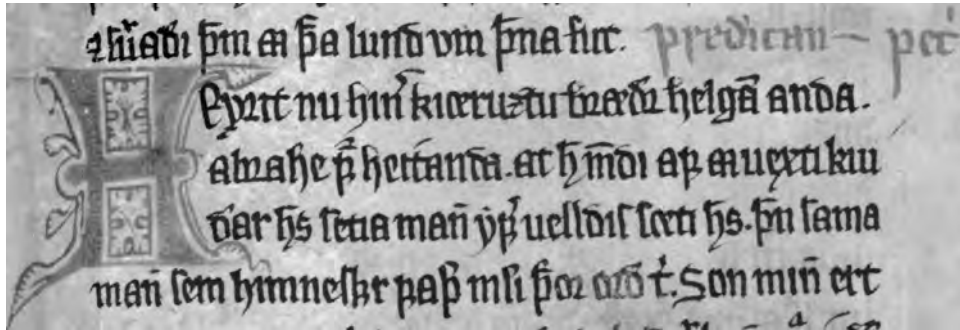


Figure 14.2 SÁM 1, c. 1350–75. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi. Fol. 20ra, lines 7–11. Photo: Jóhanna Ólafsdóttir, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi.

ok fuaarði þeim aa þeſſa lund vm þenna lut. – predican petri / Heytt nu hiner kærustu bræðr helgan anda. / abrahe fyrir heitanda. at hann mundi aþ auexti kui- / dar hans setia man yþer uellōif læti hans. þann sama / mann sem himnelkr þær mælti þeſſo ord til. Son minn ert
(From the life of St Peter in the *postola sögur* [‘apostles’ sagas’] preserved in *Skarðsbók postulasagna* [Codex Scardensis].)

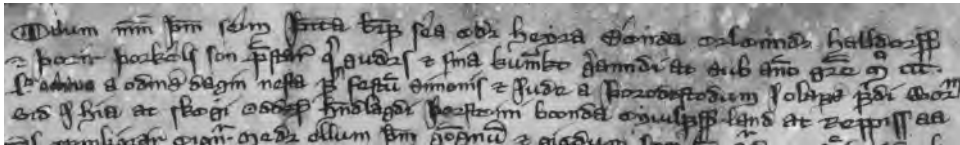


Figure 14.3 AM dipl isl fasc II 8, 1358.

Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi. Lines 1–4. Photo: Jóhanna Ólafsdóttir, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi.

Ollum monnum þeim sem þetta bræf seá eða heyrja Sennda eilennð: hallðoſſon / ok þóir þórkelf son pſtar q(uediu) guðs ok fína kunnikt gerannði at sub anno gracie m° ccc(°). / 1°. octavo a odins dagin neſta þýrei feſtum símonis et Jude a þozozſtodem J olaps þurdi wozum / vid J hía at ſkeggi oððzlon handlagði þóſſteíni boonda eyulþſſyni land at reppiff aa
(From a letter written at Kvíabekkur in Ólafsfjörður [in Eyjafjarðarsýsla, northern Iceland] on 24 October 1358.)

A document on paper is mentioned in a document dated 1423. The oldest extant document on paper is from 1437 and the next oldest from 1528. The oldest extant book on paper is the *bréfabók* (containing notes and copies of letters) of Gissur Einarsson, bishop of Skálholt 1542–8 (AM 232 8vo), during whose life the first Icelandic printed books were published. There are some examples of vellum manuscripts from the seventeenth century, such as the saga collection in GKS 1002–03 fol., dating from 1667–70.

A collection of translated *exempla* mentions a *ritklefi* (‘scriptorium’); the fact that a term existed indicates that such places were known in Iceland (Tómasson 2002: 795). *Guðmundar saga biskups* mentions a *ritstofa* (‘scriptorium’) at Hólar, though it is not certain that this word was in the original version of the saga. Guðmundr Arason was bishop of Hólar 1203–37. A *skrifstofa* (‘scriptorium’) in Vatnsfjörður is mentioned in a

document dated 1468, and the word also appears in a marginal note in AM 433 a 12mo, from c.1500 (Halldórsson 1989: 86).

The provenance of the vast majority of Icelandic manuscripts is not known. Scholars have considered it likely that most of them were written in monasteries or on large manor farms, and also in the bishoprics, and have associated some groups of manuscripts with such centres, for example the monasteries of Helgafell and Þingeyrar (Halldórsson 1966; Johansson 1997: 66–80; Karlsson 1999: 148, 152–4; 2000: 237–9; Tómasson 2002: 797–9); if these attributions are correct, then productive scriptoria must have been in operation at these places, at least for some length of time.

Only a very small number of Icelandic scribes have been identified by name. Most of them were priests or men who had taken minor orders, though they also include some laymen. Thus, writing was not only practised in the monasteries and other church institutions, even though there is no doubt that this is where a high proportion of Icelandic manuscripts originated (Karlsson 1999: 149–54; 2000: 239, 319–27).

Jóns saga belga names a priest, Þorgeirr, at Hólar and describes a shock he experienced while engaged in writing. This is supposed to have happened in about 1200. His hand has not been identified. *Lárentíus saga biskups* mentions a maker of books, Þórarinn kaggi ('Keg') Egilsson (d. 1283) at Vellir in Svarfaðardalur, who ran a school there (Halldórsson 1989: 86; Tómasson 2002: 797). Karlsson (2000: 266–71) has put forward the hypothesis that this Þórarinn was the scribe of the *Kringla* manuscript of *Heimskringla* (Lbs. frg. 82). The same hand is found in the larger part of the Codex Regius manuscript of *Grágás* (GKS 1157 fol., hand B) and the *Staðarbólsbók* manuscript of *Grágás* (AM 334 fol., hand A). Fourteenth-century sources mention a maker of books, Þorsteinn Illugason (*Íslandske Annaler*: 272), Þórarinn pentr Eiríksson, who knew how to *penta og skrifa* ('paint and write'), and one Dálkr bóndi ('farmer') who is recorded as having made a book (Halldórsson 1989: 86). No works written by these men have been identified.

Another fourteenth-century scribe whose name is known is Haukr Erlendsson, who held the office of *lögmaðr* ('lawman', a senior government official) in Norway (d. 1334). He was the scribe of a large part of the manuscript compendium *Hauksbók*, which contained material of a varied nature (Karlsson 2000: 303–8). *Hauksbók* is believed to have contained the manuscripts AM 371 4to, AM 544 4to and AM 675 4to. Haukr also had other scribes in his service who wrote about two-fifths of the material, and *Hauksbók* contains 15 hands in all (Helgason 1960: ix–x).

Some manuscripts that can be originals contain annals, or at least those entries in them that were made almost contemporaneously with the events they record. *Logmannsannáll* (AM 420 b 4to) is the oldest original manuscript the identity of whose scribe is known. It was written by Einarr Hafliðason (1307–93), priest and *officialis* (administrator) at Breiðabólstaður (Halldórsson 1989: 85).

The manuscripts AM 194 8vo and *Flateyjarbók* (GKS 1005 fol.) were mentioned above. The former was written by Óláfr Ormsson together with Brynjólfur Steinraðar-

son in 1387; Óláfr was a priest but Brynjólfr was a layman (Halldórsson 1989: 85). It is stated in *Flateyjarbók* (f. 1v) that Magnús Þórhallsson and Jón Þórðarson wrote the manuscript, for Jón Hákonarson (1350 to before 1416) of Víðidalstunga, and that Magnús illuminated it. Jón Hákonarson owned another famous manuscript, *Vatnsbyrna*, which contained several sagas of Icelanders and which Magnús Þórhallsson probably wrote. *Vatnsbyrna* was destroyed in the fire of Copenhagen in 1728 (Karlsson 2000: 336, 354).

Attempts have been made to identify other scribes who were at work in the fourteenth century. It has been surmised that Björn Brynjólfsson wrote as many as 11 extant manuscripts, including AM 62 fol., and one document (Karlsson 2000: 316–19).

A few scribes active in the fifteenth century and the first part of the sixteenth have been identified, mainly by comparing the hands in documents and manuscripts. They include the half-brothers Ólafur Loftsson, scribe of AM 557 4to, and Ormur Loftsson hirðstjóri ('royal governor'), scribe of *Benediktus saga* and other sagas in Sth. perg. 2 fol., and the identically named brothers Jón Þorláksson and Jón Þorláksson, one of whom wrote AM 80 b 8vo in 1473; fragments of many religious manuscripts in their hands are extant. Mention may also be made of Jón kollur ('pate') Oddsson, the scribe of *Bæjarbók í Flóa* (AM 309 4to) and one of the scribes of *Kollsbók* (WolfAug 42 7); the half-brothers Björn Þorleifsson, scribe of *Reykjabólubók* (Sth. perg. 3 fol.), and Þorsteinn Þorleifsson, scribe of half of AM 152 fol.; Þorbjörn Jónsson, scribe of AM 551 a 4to; the abbot Jón Þorvaldsson, scribe of most of AM 624 4to; and the priest Ari Jónsson and his sons Jón and Tómas in the sixteenth century, scribes of the *rímur* manuscript AM 604 4to and many other manuscripts (Halldórsson 1989: 85; Karlsson 1999: 141–8; 2000: 232–8, 324–7).²

Script

The development of script

Seip (1954) divided the history of Icelandic-Norwegian script into three periods. The first extended down to 1225, the second from 1225 to 1300, and the third from 1300 onwards. Svensson (1974: 169–70, 201–4; 1993: 492, 495) gave these three periods names: he divided Icelandic script into Caroline (Carolingian), Caroline insular and Gothic script, while he divided Norwegian script into older Caroline insular period, younger Caroline insular period and Gothic. The term 'Caroline insular' is not particularly apt, since even though Norwegian and Icelandic scribes adopted some letters from Anglo-Saxon insular script, their script never bore the other characteristics of insular script. It should also be mentioned that some palaeographers now use the term 'Protogothic' to refer to an independent type of script (see, for example, Brown 1990: 72–3), where formerly the terms 'Late Caroline' or 'Early Gothic' were used.

The script of the oldest Icelandic and Norwegian manuscripts is Caroline (see figure 14.1). The letters are not joined and are characterized by gentle curves. Down to the thirteenth century, no distinction seems to have been made between the script styles used for manuscripts and documents (Haugen 2002: 826).

Protogothic script was dominant throughout most of the thirteenth century and into the fourteenth in Norway and in Iceland (see figure 14.4), which can be seen in the growing Gothic influence in the thirteenth century. This first becomes evident in the angles to the curves on the letters 'h', 'm' and 'n' (Karlsson 2002: 836).

Protogothic cursive appeared in Norwegian documents after about 1280 and soon became dominant. It was characterized by joined letters, loops on the ascenders and ornamental strokes (Haugen 2002: 826).

For a time, formal book hand, used in manuscripts, existed side by side with cursive, which was used in documents. In the second half of the thirteenth century a gradual change took place: the script became denser, the letters became more compressed, ascenders and descenders became shorter, openings in letters tended to be closed off, and the letters became more angular. By about 1300, both script styles had become fully Gothic: book hand was strictly formal (*textualis*), while documentary script became simpler, more rounded and quicker in execution (Haugen 2002: 826).

Gothic semi-cursive (hybrid) script came into being in the fourteenth century, and is found in many Norwegian manuscripts. It could be written more quickly than book hand, and may have been regarded as more legible than cursive. The result was that three script styles were in more or less simultaneous use in Norway in the fourteenth century: formal book hand, which was used in books down to about 1370; semi-cursive script, which was used increasingly in books and largely replaced book hand after about 1370; and cursive, which was used in documents (Haugen 2002: 826).

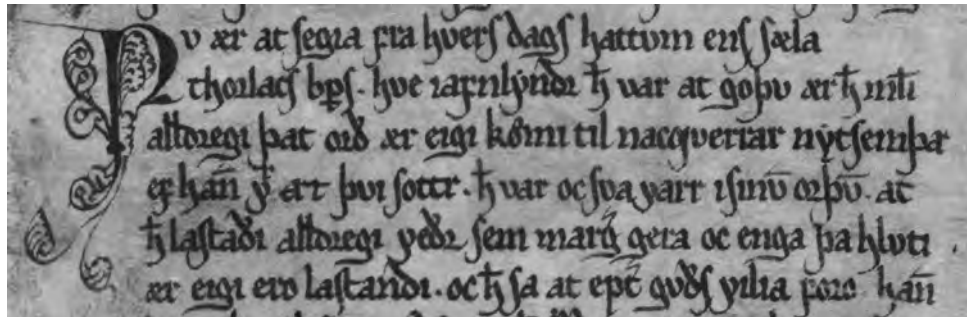


Figure 14.4 AM 383 I 4to, c. 1250. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi. Fol. 2r, lines 16–21. Photo: Jóhanna Ólafsdóttir, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi.

Nv ær at segja þra hverf dagf hattvm enf sæla / thoulaç byskupf. hve iapnlýndi hann var at goþv ær hann mælti / allðegi þat oð ær eigi kðmi til nacqverrar nytsemþar / ef hann þar at þvi fottr. hann var oc þva þarr ifinvm oþvm. at / hann laftaði allðegi þeð sem marger gera oc enga þa hlvti / ær eigi ero laftandi. oc hann þa at eptē goðs yllia þoio. hann

(From Þorláks saga helga [‘The Saga of St Þorlákr’].)

Fourteenth-century Icelandic documents are generally in cursive, which was very similar to that used in Norwegian documents, while book hand was used for books (see figures 14.2 and 14.3). Hybrid script did not make its appearance in Iceland until about 1400, but continued in use until after the middle of the sixteenth century (see figure 14.5).

As from about 1400, there is little or no difference between the script styles used in books and in documents in Iceland: most manuscripts and the vast majority of documents were written using semi-cursive script. Only very slight changes took place in script up to the Reformation, when German influence began to make itself felt via Denmark.

Anglo-Saxon influence

While script spread directly to Sweden and Denmark from the European mainland, it is believed to have reached Norway and Iceland via England. The use of some insular letters in the oldest Norwegian manuscripts strongly indicate an English influence. Nevertheless, some continental influence must have reached Norwegian and Icelandic script, for example via the archbishoprics of Hamburg/Bremen (until 1103/4), Lund (1103/4–1152/3), and Niðaróss (from 1152/3). In fact there is a distinct difference between Icelandic and Norwegian script in the oldest period: there is little insular influence in Icelandic script, while in Norway it was probably evident right from the beginning of the use of the Latin alphabet for writing in the vernacular. There appears not to have been much direct English influence on Icelandic script. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that Caroline script was also used in England in Latin texts in the tenth and eleventh centuries (Proto Gothic script became dominant during the twelfth century), while Anglo-Saxon insular script was used in vernacular writing down to the middle of the twelfth century (Brown 1990: 59, 67, 73). Thus, insular letters appear to have been adopted in Norwegian writing from English manuscripts written in the vernacular in the period c.950–1150. Insular influence was probably carried to Iceland after the establishment of the archbishopric in Niðaróss.

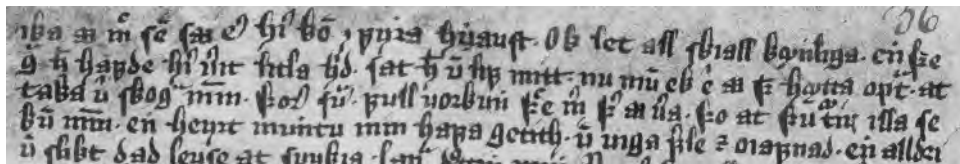


Figure 14.5 AM 556 a 4to, c. 1475–1500. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi. Fol. 46r, lines 1–4. Photo: Jóhanna Ólafsdóttir, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi.

íka a mik sem fá e: hiet kom j þyza haufi. Ok let all fkiall kænliga. enn þe / gar hann harpe hiet uerð
 lirla hüd. fat hann um lip mitt. nu mun ek eigi a þat hættu optar. at / taka uü fkgar monnum. þor
 fuar(ar). þull uokunn þike me þe a uera. þo at þu tær illa fe / kum monnum. enn heyt munntu mín harpa
 getíth. um uiga þele ok oiapnad. enn allðr

(From *Grettis saga*.)

The Anglo-Saxons added two letters to the Latin alphabet to represent the dental fricatives, voiced and unvoiced: ‘ð’ (*eth*, with its capital form ‘Ð’) and ‘þ’ (*thorn*), which were derived from the Anglo-Saxon runic alphabet. Although the letter þ existed in the Scandinavian runic alphabet, it was probably under English influence that it was adopted into the Latin alphabet as used in the Nordic countries; this is indicated by the name of the letter in Modern Icelandic, which is *þorn*, as in Old English, not *þurs*, the name associated with the letter in the Scandinavian runic alphabet. The letter ‘þ’ was in use in Icelandic and Norwegian script from the beginning, though ‘th’ is also found for þ in Icelandic words in the oldest manuscripts.

Some letters in insular script had undergone greater transformations than others in the course of independent development in the British Isles. In particular, ‘f’, ‘g’, ‘r’, ‘s’ and ‘v’ and insular *a* differed from their counterparts in the script of the same period on the continent, and from the later Caroline script. There are no traces of insular *a*, *g* or *s* in Old Norse manuscripts; the other letters in the group listed above are used in Old Norse manuscripts, though to differing extents. The adoption of ‘ð’, ‘f’ and ‘þ’ in Icelandic script (see figure 14.4) was doubtless due more to Norwegian than to English influence, just as the disappearance of ‘p’ and ‘ð’ was doubtless due to Norwegian influence.

Norwegian script

More Anglo-Saxon influence can be seen in the script of manuscripts written in the twelfth century and about 1200 in Niðaróss than in Bergen. It can be seen most clearly in AM 655 IX 4to, in which ‘r’, ‘p’, ‘ð’, ‘f’ and ‘Ð’ are used. The dental fricative is represented by þ in initial position and by ð in medial and final position, as was done in England at the same time. ‘r’ is also found in NRA norr. frg. 73. ‘p’ was used a great deal down to 1300; ‘ð’ continued in use into the fourteenth century (being replaced increasingly by ‘d’ at the end of the thirteenth century in many manuscripts, especially in documents); and ‘f’ continued in use until after 1400. ‘Ð’ was replaced by ‘D’ in the thirteenth century. The influence of insular script is not as conspicuous in manuscripts other than the ones named above.

A closed two-storey *a* first appeared in about 1250, but the open-necked *a* continued in use for some decades. ‘i’ also became more common at this time, being used following ‘o’ and other rounded letters, such as ‘b’ and ‘ð’. The arms of the letter ‘f’ sometimes became two dots, or else the upper arm was curved. The tall *s*, ‘f’, is the most common form; it almost never goes below the line.

From about 1300, script became constantly more and more Gothic. As it was sometimes difficult to distinguish the boundaries of letters such as *m*, *i*, *n* and *u*, which were composed of identical minims, an accent was placed above ‘i’ to distinguish it. A two-storey *a* became the most common form of the letter *a*. ‘f’ continued to be used a great deal, possibly because it was so easy to place a superscript abbreviation above it. ‘s’ resembled the numeral ‘8’. ‘w’ made its appearance, and

long vowels were frequently represented by ligatures, for example 'aa'. There was also a tendency for rounded letters, such as 'o' and 'c', etc., to become joined.

Generally speaking, the letters had a simpler form in cursive, with loops on the ascenders and descenders, as on *b*, *h*, *b* and *k*, and in true cursive the letters were also joined. *ð* acquired a loop on the ascender that extended all the way down to the base line. *a* was two-storey, later being replaced by a simpler (single-storey) form that was easily confused with 'o'. *f* extended down below the line and both the arms of *f* became curved: 'þ'. *j* was used for the preposition *í* and for capital *i*. Accents and decorative strokes were curved to form semi-circles. This script gives an impression of speed, fluency and elegance.

In contrast to Gothic cursive, few letters in semi-cursive were actually joined, but many have loops on the uprights, such as *b*, *l*, *h* and *k*. *a* was two-storey, but rapidly evolved into a single-storey *a*. *f* went down below the line; the same applies to the second minim of *b* and the last of *m*.³

Icelandic script

The First Grammatical Treatise

The Latin alphabet was not sufficient, without modifications and augmentations, to write texts in Old Icelandic. The *First Grammatical Treatise* was written in Iceland and is dated to about the middle of the twelfth century (*FGT*: 31–3). The aim of the 'First Grammarian', as the author is known, was to create 'an alphabet for us Icelanders' (*FGT*: 208); that is, to adapt the Latin alphabet to the demands of the Icelandic language.

The First Grammarian said that it was necessary to augment the Latin vowels 'a', 'e', 'i', 'o' and 'u' with the symbols 'ǫ', 'ǣ', 'ø' and 'y', that is, symbols for mutated vowels. He proposed distinguishing long vowels from short vowels by the use of accents (*FGT*: 218–19).

The First Grammarian saw some of the Latin consonants as being unnecessary for writing Icelandic: for *k* he proposed using 'c' in all positions instead of 'k' and 'q', and instead of 'x' and 'z' he proposed writing 'cs' and 'ds'. On the other hand, he added 'þ' and a special symbol for *ng*. As a means of indicating long (geminate) consonants, the First Grammarian proposed, instead of writing double consonants, using small capitals, such as 'N' and 'G'; as the small capital 'c' looks almost like the minuscule 'c', he employed the medieval Greek *kappa* symbol, 'ϰ', to represent *kk* (*FGT*: 232–47).

Orthography

The rules set out in the *First Grammatical Treatise* are not applied systematically in any extant manuscript. Nevertheless, their influence can be detected in many manuscripts down to the fourteenth century, though practically no scribe is self-consistent in spelling.

Some scribes seldom or never distinguish between long and short vowels; when the distinction was made, it was done exclusively by means of a single accent down to about 1300; accents were also used to indicate short vowels, particularly 'i' to distinguish it from the minims of 'u', 'n' and 'm'. The use of the single accent to indicate long vowels declined gradually during the fourteenth century. Under Norwegian influence, the doubling of vowels to indicate length gradually replaced the use of the accent, where length was indicated at all, during the fourteenth century: *í* was then indicated by 'íj', and as the fourteenth century progressed, 'æ' (or 'áá') was written instead of 'aa', and *ú* was written as 'w'.

Ligatures of two (or three) letters are frequent in Icelandic and Norwegian script. A ligature can stand for a single sound, such as 'æ' and 'w', but letters can also retain their individual values, as in 'f' + 't' and 'c' + 't' standing side by side, and 'þ' + 'f' in abbreviated words with a bar through the ascender, where 'f' is just seen as a little hook bending to the right on the top of the ascender of the ligature (see 'þe/f'a' in figure 14.2, line 1); other ligatures of this type include 'h' + 'f' and 'k' + 'f'. Frequently used ligatures are 'æ', 'æ', 'ø' and 'a'. There were also used letters which were developed from ligatures, namely 'ǣ' (<'æ'), 'ǫ' (<'ø') and 'ð' (<'œ'), and the First Grammarian interpreted 'ø' as a ligature of 'e' + 'o' (*FGT*: 210–11). Several other combinations occur, namely 'a' + 'r', 'a' + 'n'.

ǣ was generally represented by 'ǣ' or 'æ'; 'e' was also used. 'ǣ' was the more common symbol for much of the thirteenth century, but 'æ' became considerably more common during the latter part of the century and was the dominant form in the fourteenth century.

Special symbols were used for *ø* and *ø* in a few of the very earliest manuscripts, before *ø* merged with *ø* and *ø* with *ǣ*. These were 'eo' and 'ø'.

During the thirteenth century and later, for as long as scribes distinguished, or attempted to distinguish, between *ø* and *ǣ*, the former sound was represented by various letters and letter variants, the most common being 'ø' and 'ø'. In about the middle of the thirteenth century even 'ð' began to be used; it lasted the longest in this role.

As early as 1200, *ø* had merged with *á* and was being written in the same way; in the oldest manuscripts it was indicated by the symbols used for the sound *ø*. In the oldest manuscripts, the sound *ø* is represented by 'æ', 'ø' or 'o'; but later other symbols were adopted for *ø*, the sound produced by the merger of *ø* and *ø*; the most common were 'au', 'a' and 'ø'. In the second half of the thirteenth century 'ð' was added to the symbols for *ø*; in the fourteenth century it gained ground and became one of the most commonly used symbols for *ø*, together with 'o' and 'au'.

After 1300 there was a marked increase in the use of 'j' in initial position and for the preposition *í*, especially in documents. Often the capital form, 'J', was used.

The letters 'u' and 'v' were used to represent the sounds *u*, *ú* and *v*; 'p' made its appearance in about 1200 and was used by many scribes, especially or exclusively in initial position, until 1300. 'w' was little used until the second half of the fourteenth century. It is most commonly found in initial position, representing *v*, and in the

fourteenth century also representing *u*, and representing *ú* in all positions. Use of the letters 'u' and 'v' varies from period to period and from scribe to scribe. With many scribes, one of the two is used predominantly or even almost exclusively, without regard to the sound being represented; in the fourteenth century the general rule with many scribes was to use 'v' in initial positions and 'u' in medial and final positions.

The First Grammarian did not succeed in eliminating the Latin consonants that he considered otiose in Icelandic. Most thirteenth-century scribes used 'qu' (or 'qv') to represent the sound *kv*. In the fourteenth century it became most common to write 'ku' (or 'kv'). For the sound *k*, virtually every single scribe used both 'k' and 'c', but the use of 'c' declined during the thirteenth century.

'd' is dominant or even exclusive in the very oldest manuscripts, but 'ð' (uncial *d*) appears as early as 1200. 'ð' was dominant or exclusively used in most thirteenth-century manuscripts, and had become exclusive by about 1300.

'ð' was adopted in Icelandic script at the beginning of the thirteenth century and was used down to the late fourteenth. (Its use was revived in the nineteenth century.) 'ð' was adopted instead of 'ð', and had become the dominant form by the mid-fourteenth century, and 'ð' was not used after 1400.

'f' is used exclusively in the oldest manuscripts, but 'ƒ' begins to appear in the first half of the thirteenth century, becoming the dominant form by the middle of the century and practically the exclusive form by its end. 'ƒ' continued in use until the seventeenth century.

A considerable number of scribes used a special symbol, 'ŋ', as a sort of ligature of 'n' and 'g', in the first half of the thirteenth century.

'r', which originated in the right-hand part of the ligature of 'o' + 'r', was sometimes used from the earliest period after 'o' in nearly all Icelandic manuscripts, and is almost always found following 'o' as the thirteenth century progresses. It began to be used following 'ð' and 'ð' in about the middle of the thirteenth century, and this soon became the rule; it was also used, though not as regularly, following 'þ', 'g', 'p' and 'b'. It became a general rule with most fourteenth-century scribes to use 'r' following these letters; after 'g' the straight form was also used. In and after the middle of the century, 'r' could be used following more letters, including at least 'a', 'y', 'v' and 'h'. In the fifteenth century, particularly in the second half, 'r' is frequently found following any letter, but it is not found in initial position until after about 1500.

Two types of 's' are found, one tall, 'ſ', the other rounded, 's'. The former was used almost exclusively down to 1300 to represent the sound *s*; but 's' was used more generally in the fourteenth century, especially in final and initial positions, though 'ſ' remained far more common.

'z' was generally used down to the sixteenth century to represent a dental stop + *s*.

'þ' was used in the oldest manuscripts to represent the dental fricative in all positions; before the middle of the thirteenth century, 'ð' began to appear in this role in medial and final positions.

Three methods were used to distinguish between long and short consonants, where this was done:

- Consonants were repeated. This method was used from the outset, but only in a very small number of the oldest manuscripts was it the only method. *kk* was often written as ‘cc’ in the early period; later as ‘kk’ or ‘ck’, with ‘ck’ by far the most common form after 1300.
- The methods proposed by the First Grammarian were applied by many scribes, but to varying extents and with varying consistency from one letter to another, as the small capitals were not all clearly distinct from the small forms of the letters. ‘*lc*’ appears for *kk* in a few thirteenth-century manuscripts; more scribes in the same century used ‘*l*’ for *ll*; this is more likely to be a small capital than a ligature of ‘*ll*’ (Benediktsson 1965: 47). The small capitals most commonly met with indicating geminate consonants, and those that were in use the longest in this function, were ‘*N*’, ‘*R*’, ‘*G*’ and ‘*S*’. They were used by some scribes until fairly late in the fourteenth century. The last of these symbols was the least well established in this role, however, since ‘*s*’ was sometimes – and increasingly as time went on – used for *s*.
- The third method of indicating geminate consonants in writing, namely placing a dot above a small letter, was a characteristic of Icelandic script, as was the use of small capitals as described above. Examples of dots above ‘*t*’, ‘*r*’, ‘*g*’ and ‘*p*’ are found as early as the first half of the thirteenth century. These dotted letters were used down to at least the sixteenth century; the same applies to ‘*n*’, though a more common way of indicating *nm* was to place a ‘nasal stroke’ above the vowel preceding ‘*n*’ or above the ‘*n*’ itself. The same method was used to indicate *mm*.⁴

Forms of individual letters

Open-necked ‘*a*’ is the dominant form in the thirteenth century (see figure 14.4), the relative sizes of the belly and the curve differing widely. In the second half of the century the two-storey ‘*a*’ makes its appearance, becoming the dominant form in the fourteenth century (see figure 14.2), in addition to which a single-storey ‘*a*’ appears, first in documents, before the middle of the fourteenth century, later to be used in semi-cursive to some extent.

It became common in the first half of the fourteenth century, particularly in cursive script, to draw a hairline from the upper end of the ascender of ‘*ð*’ down to the right-hand side of the belly (see figure 14.3).

The descender of ‘*f*’ almost always extends below the base-line (see figure 14.4); the shapes of the arms vary. In some early fourteenth-century manuscripts the upper arm has become a large loop closing against the stem (see figure 14.2), and in documents the lower arm also takes this form (see figure 14.3). This double-looped ‘*p*’ became dominant in all Icelandic writing in the second half of the fourteenth century, and continued in use to a significant extent down to the seventeenth century (see figure 14.5).

In some of the oldest manuscripts, the right-hand stroke of 'h' scarcely extends below the line (see figure 14.1). As early as the beginning of the thirteenth century, however, it becomes the rule for it to extend below the line (see figure 14.4). When the arch of the 'h' became sharply angular, the right-hand stroke generally ran straight down below the base-line, frequently curving to the left underneath the line. This form of 'h' became dominant in the fourteenth century (see figures 14.2 and 14.3).

The upper diagonal stroke of 'k' is curved, the lower drawn diagonally down towards the base-line (see figure 14.4). In the fourteenth century a variant of 'k' became more common in which the lower stroke and the foot on the right of the stem were joined, or nearly so, with the result that the letter became almost double-bellied (see figures 14.3 and 14.5).

A few thirteenth-century scribes made the stem of 'r' extend below the base-line. This variant of 'r' became more common in about 1300, becoming rare again by the mid-fourteenth century. During the fourteenth century, beginning in documents, scribes sometimes drew a line up from the lower end of the stem up to form the hook, with the result that the letter resembled 'v'.

From about the middle of the thirteenth century, some scribes made 'f' extend below the base-line (see figure 14.4), and in the fourteenth century this variant of 'f' became dominant (see figures 14.3 and 14.5) except in highly formal script (see figure 14.2). There were several variants of 's', particularly in cursive script: the curves are frequently closed, so that the letter resembles the numeral '8' (see figure 14.3).

In some of the earliest manuscripts, 'y' is written with the left-hand stroke extending below the base-line with a very slight curve to the left (see figure 14.1). A feature in common with other variants of 'y' in the thirteenth century, and on into the fourteenth, is that the upper part of the letter is 'v'-shaped and the right-hand stroke is curved (see figure 14.4). There is generally a dot above all variants of 'y'. When the left-hand stroke of 'y' extends below the line, curving slightly to the left, the letter may resemble 'p', in which case the superscript dot serves to distinguish it from 'p'. From just before the middle of the fourteenth century, both strokes are sometimes more or less vertical above the line, the right-hand one extending below the line; when this is so, it is sometimes only the superscript dot that distinguishes 'y' from 'ij'.

'z' generally has no transverse stroke in the earliest manuscripts. The variant with a stroke becomes more common as the thirteenth century progresses, and even more so during the fourteenth century.⁵

Abbreviations

Abbreviations were used freely, though much less in Norwegian than in Icelandic manuscripts. The following abbreviation methods were used:

- *suspension*, that is, omission of one or more letters at the end of a word, the abbreviation being marked by a point or by a stroke over or under the word;

- *contraction*, that is, omission of one or more letters in the middle of the word, the abbreviation being marked by a stroke over the word;
- *superscript* or *interlinear letters*, the omitted letter(s) being written above the word or between the lines;
- *special abbreviation signs*, known as Tironian notes.

The most common abbreviation was a simple horizontal stroke, used mainly to represent *m* and *n* and consequently referred to as the ‘nasal stroke’, as in ‘honō’ = *honom*; it was also used in suspensions and contractions. Two superscript abbreviations were the most common: the tittle, representing a front vowel + *r*, and any superscript vowel to represent *r* or *v* + the vowel; superscript *a* was generally written in the open form not unlike *u* or *w*. Abbreviations written on the base-line include the standard Tironian notes for *oc* (‘and’), *us*, *per* and *pro*. The semi-colon is commonly used for *eð*. The *m*-rune, ‘Ÿ’, was sometimes used for *maðr* (‘man’). Common words, and words repeated frequently in the same passage, including names, tended to be abbreviated by suspensions, as in ‘O.’ = *Olaf*r, or by contractions with a bar over the word or through the ascender of a tall letter, as in ‘kgr.’ = *konongr* (Benediktsson 1965: 85–94).⁶

See also CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PSEUDO-HISTORY; LANGUAGE; LAWS; PROSE OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION; ROMANCE; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS.

NOTES

- 1 The latest datings of medieval Norwegian and Icelandic manuscripts are found in *ONP*.
- 2 More general information about Norwegian and Icelandic manuscripts is given in Helgason (1958); Halldórsson (1989); Holm-Olsen (1990); Kristjánsson (1993); Karlsson (1999; 2000: 225–41); Rindal (2002); Tómasson (2002); Jørgensen (2004).
- 3 The discussion in this section is based on Haugen (2002: 829–30).
- 4 The discussion in this section is based on Karlsson (2002: 834–8).
- 5 The discussion in this section is based on Karlsson (2002: 834–8).
- 6 For further reading on Norwegian and Icelandic script, see *Palæografisk Atlas*; Spehr (1929); Þórolfsson (1950); Seip (1954); Benediktsson (1965), *FGT*: 108–15; Svansson (1974; 1993); Karlsson (2000: 46–60; 2002); Haugen (2002; 2004); Gunnlaugsson (2002).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Editions and Illustrated Handbooks*
- Benediktsson, Hreinn (1965) *Early Icelandic Script as Illustrated in Vernacular Texts from the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Íslenzk handrit: Icelandic Manuscripts, Series in Folio II). Reykjavík.
- Eken, Thorsten (ed.) (1963) *Gammalnorske membranfragment i Riksarkivet*, vol. I (1–12 lovtekster). Oslo.
- FGT* = *The First Grammatical Treatise: Introduction, Text, Notes, Translation, Vocabulary, Facsimiles*, ed. Hreinn Benediktsson (University of Iceland. Publications in Linguistics 1). Reykjavík: 1972.

- Gjerløw, Lilli (ed.) (1980) *Liturgica Islandica*, vol. I: *Text* (Bibliotheca Arnarnagnæana XXXV). Copenhagen.
- Helgason, Jón (ed.) (1960) *Hauksbók: The Arnarnagnæan Manuscripts 371, 4to, 544, 4to, and 675, 4to* (Manuscripta Islandica V). Copenhagen.
- ÍF I = *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson (Íslenzk fornrit I). Reykjavík: 1968.
- Íslandske Annaler indtil 1578*, ed. Gustav Storm. Christiania: 1888.
- Palæografisk Atlas: Oldnorsk-islandsk afdeling*. Copenhagen and Christiania, 1905.
- Palæografisk Atlas*, n.s.: *Oldnorsk-islandsk skriftprøver*. Copenhagen: 1907.
- Seip, Didrik Arup (1954) 'Palæografi. B: Norge og Island.' *Nordisk kultur* XXVIII: B, ed. Johannes Brøndum-Nielsen.
- Svensson, Lars (1974) *Nordisk paleografi: Handbok med transkriberade och kommenterade skriftprov* (Lundastudier i nordisk språkvetenskap A 28). Lund.
- Languages*, vol. I. Berlin and New York, pp. 824–32.
- Haugen, Odd Einar (forthcoming) 'Paleografi.' In Odd Einar Haugen (ed.) *Handbok i norrøn filologi* (Landslaget for norskundervisning: Skriftserien). Bergen.
- Helgason, Jón (1958) *Handritaspjall*. Reykjavík.
- Holm-Olsen, Ludvig (1990) *Med fjærpenn og pergament: Vår skriftkultur i middelalderen*. Oslo.
- Johansson, Karl G. (1997) *Studier i Codex Wormianus: Skriftradition och avskriftsverksambet vid ett isländskt skriptorium under 1300-talet* (Nordistica Gothoburgensia 20). Göteborg.
- Jørgensen, Jon Gunnar (forthcoming) 'Håndskrift- og arkivkunnskap.' In Odd Einar Haugen (ed.) *Handbok i norrøn filologi* (Landslaget for norskundervisning: Skriftserien). Bergen.
- Karlsson, Stefán (1982) 'Saltarabrot í Svíþjóð með Stjórnarhendi.' *Gripla* V: 320–2.
- Karlsson, Stefán (1999) 'The Localisation and Dating of Medieval Icelandic Manuscripts.' *Saga-Book* 15.2: 138–58.
- Karlsson, Stefán (2000) *Staferókar: Safn ritgerða eftir Stefán Karlsson gefið út í tilefni af sjötugsafmæli hans 2. desember 1998*, ed. Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 49). Reykjavík.
- Karlsson, Stefán (2002) 'The Development of Latin Script II: In Iceland.' In Oskar Bandle et al. (eds.) *The Nordic Languages: An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages*, vol. I. Berlin and New York, pp. 832–40.
- Kristjánsson, Jónas (1993) *Icelandic Manuscripts: Sagas, History and Art*, transl. Jeffrey Cosser. Reykjavík. (*Handritaspegill*. Reykjavík: 1993.)
- Louis-Jensen, Jonna (1977) *Kongesagastudier: Kompilationen Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* (Bibliotheca Arnarnagnæana XXXII). Copenhagen.
- ONP = *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog: A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose. Register. Indices*. Copenhagen: 1989.
- Rindal, Magnus (2002) 'The History of Old Nordic Manuscripts II: Old Norwegian (incl. Faroese).' In Oskar Bandle et al. (eds.) *The Nordic Languages: An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages*, vol. I. Berlin and New York, pp. 801–8.
- Seip, Didrik Arup (1955) *Norsk språkhistorie til omkring 1370*. 2nd edn. Oslo.

Secondary Literature

- Bandle, Oskar et al. (eds.) (2002) *The Nordic Languages: An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages*, vol. I. Berlin and New York.
- Brown, Michelle P. (1990) *A Guide to Western Historical Scripts from Antiquity to 1600*. London.
- Gunnlaugsson, Guðvarður Már (2002) *Skrift: Handritin: Ritgerðir um íslensk miðaldabandrit, sögu þeirra og ábrif*, bls. 62–71, eds. Gísli Sigurðsson and Vésteinn Ólason (Ritröð Þjóðmenningarhúss 2). Reykjavík.
- Halldórsson, Ólafur (1966) *Helgafellsbækur fornar* (Studia Islandica: Íslenzk fræði 24). Reykjavík.
- Halldórsson, Ólafur (1989) *Skrifaðar bækur: Íslensk þjóðmenning VI: Munnmenntir og bókmenntir. Bóka-gerð*, bls. 57–89, ed. Frosti F. Jóhannsson. Reykjavík.
- Halvorsen, Eyvind Fjeld (1982) 'Ble det lest litteratur i Norge i middelalderen?' *Saga och Sed* 128–40.
- Haugen, Odd Einar (2002) 'The Development of Latin Script I: In Norway.' In Oskar Bandle et al. (eds.) *The Nordic Languages: An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic*

- Spehr, Harald (1929) *Der ursprung der isländischen schrift und ihre weiterbildung bis zur mitte des 13. jahrhunderts*. Halle, Saale.
- Svensson, Lars (1993) 'Palaeography.' In Phillip Pulsiano, Paul Acker and Kirsten Wolf (eds.) *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*. New York, pp. 491–6.
- Tómasson, Sverrir (2002) 'The History of Old Nordic Manuscripts I: Old Icelandic.' In Oskar Bandle et al. (eds.) *The Nordic Languages: An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages*, vol. I. Berlin and New York, pp. 793–801.
- Þórólfsson, Björn K. (1950) 'Nokkur orð um íslenskt skrifletur.' *Landsbókasafn Íslands. Árbók 1948–9*: 116–52.
- Vågslid, Eivind (1989) *Norske skrivarar i millomalderen*. Oslo.

Metre and Metrics

Russell Poole

Just as Old Icelandic literature is copious in its genres, its settings, its prosopography, and the historical eras it relates to, so too is it rich and various in its metres and stanza forms. To a far greater degree than in West Germanic poetry, metre and stanza form go together to create highly distinctive units of expression, in a tradition noted for its cultivation of the finely crafted single stanza. I shall start with the smallest stanza units and build towards the largest, with a warning in advance that the survey is not exhaustive and that many forms will go unmentioned. Also, I shall first offer a strictly synchronic and taxonomic consideration of the material and proceed to a diachronic analysis, before closing with a brief discussion of medieval poetology and the light it may shed upon metrical practice. This discussion will be conducted using a mixture of the native Icelandic terminology and terms from modern prosody. For a fuller sense of the linguistic foundation for metrics, for instance the weighing of syllables, I refer the reader to the references and further reading list appended to this chapter.

Synchronic and Taxonomic Aspects

Fornyrðislag

To begin, then, with a stanza form called *fornyrðislag* ('old story metre'): much of the verse in the so-called Poetic Edda is in this format, and so too verses spoken by personages in the *fornaldarsögur* (see chapter 25). Perhaps with some such legendary associations in mind, Gunnlaugr Leifsson (d. 1218/19) used it in his notable poetic translation *Merlínússpá* ('The Prophecy of Merlin'). Although occasionally associated with praise-poems, notably *Darráðarljóð* ('Dørruðr's Lay', preserved in *Njáls saga* and dated to the eleventh century), the form more commonly lends itself to lampoons and insults (*kviðlingar* and *níð*). It may have been considered beneath the dignity of magnates, since its comparatively simple format would not have greatly taxed the

poet. Here is an instance from the eddic poem *Oddrúnargrátr* (st. 33, cited from Neckel and Kuhn 1962: 239, with normalized spelling):

Opt undrumk þat, hví ek eptir mák,
Ínvengis Bil, lífi halda,
er ek ógnhvötum unna þóttumk,
sverða deili, sem sjálfri mér.

[Often I wondered why I could sustain life afterwards, woman [goddess of the linen pillow], when it seemed to me I loved the courageous giver of swords as [I loved] myself.]

As is clear from the citation, each line of this *fornyrðislag* stanza, as printed, breaks up into two half-lines, the metrical caesura being conventionally shown by a gap consisting of three spaces. These constituent half-lines were classified, like other Germanic alliterative and accentual verse, by Eduard Sievers (1893) into five types. His system operates with three grades of syllable accentuation, those with primary stress, conveniently notated as /, those with secondary stress (^), and those with minimal stress (x). Using this notation the Sievers types can be summed up as follows: type A scans /x/x; B as x/x/; C as x //x or x/\x; D as //x or //x\; E as /\x/. Only a small residuum of *fornyrðislag* half-lines, such as 'Freyju at kvæn' (*Þrymskviða* st. 8), refuse to fit into the five-types schema.

In the stanza cited above the half-lines can accordingly be analysed as follows:

//x\ xx/x/ DB
 /\x/ /x/x EA
 xx/\x /x/x CA
 /x/x x/x/ AB

The half-lines are joined by alliteration. This feature is structural, not – as say in Shakespearean verse – ornamental: probably it facilitated both the composition and the memorization of fixed-text poems. In the citation above the alliterating syllables are indicated by italics. The single initial consonant in a stressed syllable suffices for the purposes of alliteration, except in the case of *sp*, *st* and *sk*, where the entire consonant cluster is required. Initial vowels in stressed syllables alliterate with each other and with *j*. Unstressed syllables do not enter into the schema, meaning that the initial vowels of *ek* in line 1 and *er* and *ek* in line 3 have no structural role. The first half-line can have either one alliterating syllable (as in lines 2 to 4) or two (as in line 1): if the primary stresses are both on nouns or adjectives, it is the first primary stress that must carry the alliteration, thus in line 2 'Ínvengis Bil', not *'Bil Ínvengis' (similarly in line 4 'sverða deili', not *'deili sverða'; the asterisks signify that the half-line forms so marked are not attested). The second half-line is always limited to a single alliteration, which must coincide with the first strongly stressed syllable. In identifying the alliterating syllables it helps to bear in mind that verbs do not necessarily carry primary stress, however graphic their import.

Kviðuháttir

If poetry in *fornyrðislag* is relatively parsimonious in its tally of syllables, still more is this the case with *kviðuháttir* ('lay form'). This form is used in some celebrated and apparently early works, such as Þjóðólfr of Hvinir's *Ynglingatal*, Egill Skalla-Grímsson's *Sonatorrek* and *Arinbjarnarkviða*, and Eyvindr skáldaspillir's *Háleygjatal*. Later imitations include *Nóregskonungatal*, Sturla Þórðarson's *Hákonarkviða*, and various verses in *Grettis saga*. Our sample verse here is from a sequence of *kviðuháttir* stanzas in that saga (st. 40; Skj BI: 287, st. 5) (bold letters signal instances of internal half-rhyme, to be explained below):

Sögðu mér,
þau's Sigarr veitti,
mægða laun
margin hœfa,
unz lofgróinn
laufi sœmðar
reynirunn
rekkar fundu.

[Many said that the reward of in-laws paid by Sigarr would benefit me [i.e. hanging], until men encountered the rowan bush, laudably grown with foliage of honour [Þorbjörg].]

The distinguishing feature of *kviðuháttir* is its three-syllable odd half-lines, which are counterpointed with four-syllable even half-lines. In contrast to *fornyrðislag*, the syllables of the *kviðuháttir* half-lines appear to have been counted and weighed strictly. The result is that rules governing syllables that probably applied to only a minority of *fornyrðislag* poems become much more tangible and documentable in *kviðuháttir*. According to these rules, syllables may be weighed as long or short. A long syllable contains a long vowel or a diphthong followed by one or more consonants, as in *mér* and the first syllable of *sœmðar* and *reyni-*. A syllable is also long if it has a short vowel followed by a consonant group or by a double consonant, as in the first syllable of *margin* and *rekkar*. A syllable is short if it has a short vowel followed by a single consonant, as in the first syllable in *Sigarr*. Syllables are also counted short if they contain a long vowel followed by another vowel without intervening consonant, as in the second syllable of *lofgróinn* (this applies regardless of the following double consonant).

But to arrive at our tally of four syllables in line 2 and three syllables in line 5 of the sample verse, we also need to take into account the workings of resolution and neutralization (Árnason 1991: 33–3–4, 47). In resolution a pair of syllables, of which the first must be short and the second may be so, counts as metrically equivalent to a long syllable. Thus in line 2 'þau's Sigarr veitti' is equivalent to *'þau's Bergt veitti'.

In neutralization an enclitic, such as *es* (later *er*), the relative pronoun, or *ek* 'I', becomes non-syllabic by dropping its vowel. Thus, in the same line, *þau es* becomes *þau's*, though that must be inferred editorially from *þau (er)* of the manuscripts. Such inferences should be made with circumspection, however, and in particular with verses like our sample one, which probably date closer to the thirteenth century than to the early eleventh.¹

A non-structural but characteristic feature of *kviðubáttr* is the carrying of internal half-rhymes across the metrical caesura, as an additional (and optional) poetic adornment (Gade 1995: 237–8). Thus we have *soq:Sig, lof:lauf* in lines 1 and 2 and 5 and 6 respectively.

Málaháttr

If *kviðubáttr* is more sparing of syllables than *fornyrðislag*, *málabáttr* ('speeches form') is more generous. Though not commonly attested, the latter form appears sporadically within some largely *fornyrðislag* poems and makes a notable solo appearance in the eddic work *Atlamál in grænlenzku*, from which our sample verse comes (st. 76; Neckel and Kuhn 1962: 258, with normalization):

Lokit því létu, lagat var drykkju;
 sú var samkunda við svörfun of mikla;
 ströng var stórhuguð, stríddi hon ætt Buðla,
 vildi hon ver sínum vinna ofrhefndir.

[They left it at that, the drink was brewed; that gathering ended in great destruction.
 The strong woman was brave, she caused pain to the family of Buðli, she wished to wreak full vengeance on her husband.]

The norm is at least five syllables per half-line and often the count exceeds that number, as in three half-lines here – though an older generation of editors might have felt tempted to delete the pronoun *hon* on its two occurrences. A-types with anacrusis, that is to say an extra unstressed initial syllable (as in line 2b, half-lines being numbered a and b, from left to right), are frequent. Perhaps because of the greater syllable count, the preference was for first half-lines to contain two alliterating syllables, as in the sample stanza. Among them this verse supplies an example of alliteration on *st*, as in line 3, in contrast with isolated initial *s*, as in line 2. The prevalence of finite verbs and infinitives, virtually one per half-line, adds to the impression that each half-line contains more matter, very commonly a complete clause, than its counterpart in *fornyrðislag*.

Ljóðaháttr and galdralag

Ljóðaháttr ('song-form') occurs in some important poems, often alternating with *fornyrðislag*, as in the eddic *Grímnismál* and *Hávamál*, and indeed the shifts between

metres in poems like those could constitute a study in its own right. Among praise-poems are the anonymous *Eiríksmál*, Þorbjörn hornklofi's *Haraldskvæði* and Eyvindr skáldaspillir's *Hákonarmál*. Later emulations include *Hugsvinnsmál*. A striking variant of *Ljóðabáttr* is *galdralag*. Both are illustrated in the following sample stanza from *Vafþrúðnismál* (st. 42; Neckel and Kuhn 1962: 53, with normalization)

Segðu þat íþ tólfta, hví þú tíva røk
 ǫll, Vafþrúðnir, vitir;
 frá jǫtna rúnom ok allra goða
 segir þú íþ sannasta,
 inn alsvinni jǫtunn.

[Say this twelfth thing, why you know the entire destiny of the gods, Vafþrúðnir. All-wise giant, you give the truest account concerning the secrets of the giants and of all the gods.]

Ljóðabáttr differs from all other Old Icelandic metres in that it has a three-part rather than a two-part structure. First come two alliterating half-lines resembling those of *fornyrðislag*, except that the first of them in particular may be compressed to as few as two syllables. These are followed by a 'full line' with no metrically dictated caesura; it contains two or even three fully stressed syllables along with, typically, a secondary stress, as in the examples above. *Galdralag* ('incantation metre') runs to a four-part structure, in which, after the two half-lines, the full line is immediately followed by a second full line, as in lines 4 and 5 above. In both verse forms, the alliteration in the full line is normally independent of that in the two half-lines that precede. Equally, in *galdralag*, the second full line is normally independent of the first. This sample verse exemplifies the general rule, already noted, that vowels alliterate not merely with other vowels but also with initial *j*, hence *al(l)-:jǫt-* in lines 3 and 5.

Dróttkvætt

With *dróttkvætt* we arrive at the most distinctive, prestigious, and arguably splendid of all Old Icelandic metres. Regularly used in both panegyrics and *lausavísur* (see chapter 27), it forms the metre of some five-sixths of the skaldic corpus. The metre derives its name from *drótt* 'the following of the king or warlord' and *kvæða* 'to recite', connoting a style appropriate for compositions recited in the presence of the *comitatus* ('warrior-band'). It seems to have been practised and appreciated to some extent among all the Scandinavians of the Viking Age, but attestations come almost exclusively from Norway, Orkney and Iceland. Around 21,000 lines of *dróttkvætt* verse survive, attributed to poets who lived between about 850 and 1400 (Foote [1976] 1984: 237). Here are two sample verses from Haukr Valdísarson's *Íslendinga-drápa* (Skj BI: 542, sts 12 and 13, with slight modifications):

Hitt vas satt, at sótti
 – seggr döglinga tveggja
 austr fekk bald et bæsta –
 Hallfreðr konung snjallan;
 bvardyggva lét þoggva
 þann armviðu fannar –
 sverðs fráক él at yrði
 allhǫrð – í gras þǫrðum.

Æsti ungr með fóstura
 Aðalsteins dunu fleina –
 þá rauð þegn í dreyra –
 Þóralfr – Hnikars þjalfa.
 Skolms fráক bart með þilmi
 þvǫtum nórcenna skatna
 Yggjar báls í éli
 erfingja frammingu.

[It was true that Hallfreðr sought out the brave king. In the east [that is, in Norway], the man received the highest level of support from two princes. He made valiant trees of the arm-snow [men, wearers of silver arm-rings] strike the turf with their beards. I heard that the blizzard of the sword [battle] became severe.

Þóralfr when young intensified the din of javelins [battle] together with Athelstan's foster-son. Then the fighter reddened his pelt of Hnikarr [mailshirt] in blood. I have heard that Skolmr's heir fiercely pressed onwards with the keen leader of the Norwegian warriors in the blizzard of Óðinn's pyre [battle].]

The *dróttkvætt* equivalent of the half-line is much more substantial than those of the metres we have so far discussed, having either three primary stresses or two primary stresses supplemented by a secondary stress. For this reason, typographically and terminologically it is treated as a line in its own right. The rules regarding syllable weight and distribution are strict, as we can see if we start at the end of the line, where a final trochee (/x) is compulsory. This cadence always consists of a long root syllable followed by a short enclitic inflectional or derivational ending. Prohibited, by definition, are words with a short stem (such as *bafa*); words with a short stem followed by a long derivational suffix (*konungr*); and hiatus words with a long vowel plus a short, enclitic ending with vocalic onset (*búa*), which in this respect are treated as short stems (Gade 1995: 29). Earlier in the line, by contrast, stress on a short syllable is possible, indeed sometimes mandatory. In accordance with Craigie's law, which decrees that a monosyllabic noun or adjective standing immediately before the final trochee must be syllabically short (Craigie 1900), verse 12, line 8, 'allhǫrð – í gras þǫrðum', could not be altered to *'allhǫrð – í fold þǫrðum' or similar.

Sievers showed that the portion of *dróttkvætt* lines that preceded the cadence conformed to his typology (Sievers 1893: 31–6, 98–105), the A-type, which yields a trochaic rhythm, being especially prevalent. Straightforward examples are lines 1 and

3 in both stanzas. With neutralization of *frá ek* to *frák*, verse 12, line 7, and verse 13, line 5, also emerge as belonging to this type. A sub-group, termed A2k, comprises lines on the pattern of verse 13, line 4, ‘Þóralfr – Hnikars bjalfa’. Analogy with the other metres might lead one to suppose that the short initial syllable of ‘Hnikars’ would be resolved with the long second syllable to form the metrical equivalent of one long syllable, but such is not the case. Instead it scans as /x. The compensatory factor for the lack of length in *Hnik-* is the extra length in the preceding syllable *-alfr*. Operative here is the general rule that resolution (explained in connection with *kviðubátttr*, above), while moderately frequent at the onset of the *dróttkvætt* line, is avoided thereafter and outright proscribed in the cadence: hence in verse 13, line 2, ‘Aðalsteins dunu fleina’, the handling of the two sets of short dissyllables (*Aðal-* and *dunu*) is different, the first being resolved and the second not (cf. Russom 2002: 314). Another type of syllable reduction, not illustrated in our sample stanzas, is elision, which occurs sporadically in *dróttkvætt* (Gade 1995: 66–7).

B and C types are rare in classical *dróttkvætt* and do not occur in our sample verses. Two different D-types are recognizable. In the first the pattern of stresses is //\x, as in verse 12, lines 2 and 6, the latter, like the A2k lines, with two short syllables (*-viðu*) unresolved. In the second the pattern is //x\, that is, with the positions of the secondary and the weak stress reversed, as in verse 13, line 6. Here resolution applies to the first two syllables (*hvotum*), since they stand at the onset of the line. Finally we have the E-type, exemplified in verse 12, lines 5 and 8, and verse 13, line 8.

This said, it has to be admitted that the relative stress of words in the *dróttkvætt* line is not always crystal clear. In some lines putatively normal enunciation would yield only two primary stresses, not three. Sometimes in these instances the alliteration shows that the poet has achieved the third primary stress by throwing it on to a word that would seem not to warrant it, such as ‘hann’ in verse 12, line 6, or ‘þá’ in verse 13, line 3. It may be that, in a loose analogy to late Shakespearean flexibility in scansion of the iambic pentameter, a counterpoint existed between the stresses presupposed by the Sievers types and actual enunciation.

Dróttkvætt lines behave like the half-line of *fornyrðislag* in that they are joined in pairs by alliteration. Two alliterations occur in the odd line of the pair and one on the first strongly stressed syllable of the even line. Each line also has a form of internal rhyming, with the first rhyme preferably sustained by one of the first three syllables and the repeat placed compulsorily on the cadence lift (Foote [1976] 1984: 237–8). In odd lines, such internal rhymes, termed *skotbendingar* ‘inserted rhymes’ (von See 1968), are strictly speaking half-rhymes like those we saw in *kviðubátttr*, consisting as they do of one or more identical consonants preceded by different vowels, as in verse 13, line 1, *æst-:fóstr-* or line 7, *báls:él-*. By contrast, the rhymes in even lines, termed *aðalbendingar* ‘main rhymes’, have identical vowels as well as one or more identical consonants, as in verse 13, line 2, *stein:flein-* or line 4, *-alfr:bjalf-*. The odd line occasionally contains an *aðalbending* instead of a *skotbending*; equally it may not contain either form of rhyme.

Rhyming could get more ambitious, with inflections, notably nominative *-r*, entering into its ambit. It might even straddle lexical boundaries, a point illustrated in verse 13, line 3, *þá rauð þegn í dreyra*, where the *skothending* is apparently *þá r-: dreyr-*, absorbing the initial consonant of *rauð*. This possibility pertained only when the two words involved were part of a single syntactic unit. In verse 13, line 6, we see that the reflex of *u* -umlaut of *a*, namely *o*, rhymed with its non-mutated counterpart: *hvot-:skat-*, a practice that stayed current until the early thirteenth century.

The sheer length of the *dróttkvætt* line has prompted discussion as to whether and where a syntactic caesura might have existed. According to Kuhn (1983: 132–3), all *dróttkvætt* lines exhibit a caesura, and certainly in some cases syntax and metrics combine happily to mark one. Thus in verse 12, line 1, the caesura coincides with the opening of the subordinate clause, shown in modern Scandinavian punctuation conventions (though not in English). The same applies to line 7. In lines 5 and 6, by contrast, it would be more difficult to posit a caesura of other than the lightest kind, within what appears to be a tight syntactic sequence. Citing Old Icelandic prose usage as well as analyses of numerous *dróttkvætt* lines, Gade has challenged the notion of a compulsory caesura (1995: 55; cf. Whaley 1998: 84). It appears that skalds working in *dróttkvætt* felt free to build up long, uninterrupted metrico-syntactic units.

In further evidence of a tendency to continuity in *dróttkvætt*, and as verse 12, lines 5 and 6, also show, enjambment was a standard feature, particularly in connecting odd lines with even ones. Other examples are verse 12, lines 7 and 8 (maybe also 2 and 3, depending on how we construe *austr*), and verse 13, lines 1 and 2 and 5 and 6. The maximal syntactic unit, as in the latter example, consists of either the first or the second four lines of the stanza – in other words, each stanza of eight lines breaks into two ‘halves’ or *belmingar* (sg. *belmingr*). Normally the second *belmingr* completes or supplements in some way what has been said in the first. Although the two are quite often connected by a conjunction, such as *þá*, their comparative autonomy, as in our sample stanzas, is underscored by the fact that many *belmingar* are preserved in isolation and may even have been composed as freestanding units.

Stanzas are independent syntactic units, but even so an impulse towards continuity can be seen. Repetition of alliteration across the stanza boundary occurs in our sample verses (lines 7 and 8 of verse 12 and lines 1 and 2 and 7 and 8 of verse 13). Here the alliteration is on vowels. A similar pattern on the consonant *b* can be seen in lines 5 and 6 of each stanza, plus lines 3 and 4 of verse 12. More elaborate patterns of concatenation have been posited but, partly because of the fragmentary nature of the corpus, are difficult to demonstrate (Mackenzie 1981).

Although little can definitely be stated about the recitation of *dróttkvætt*, we should note that, as pointed out by Peter Foote ([1976] 1984: 239), the effect of the regular rhyme in which the penultimate syllable always participated was to reinforce the stability of the trochaic cadence, which functioned as ‘a kind of rock in the eddy of lifts and lighter syllables’. The strict definition of the third alliterating syllable as the lift at the opening of the even line lent additional strength to the immediately preceding cadence, and vice versa. Delivery was most likely characterized by loud,

clear recitation (Kuhn 1983: 245) and probably by pauses and differences in pitch that delineated the syntax and set off syntactic breaks (Gade 1995: 224–6). Specific Sievers types sometimes seem to yield particular mimetic effects; the trochaic rhythm of a series of A-types, for instance, might suggest rapid action (Whaley 1998: 84–5).

The basic *dróttkvætt* schema gave rise to a number of variations that seem to have been actively practised. One fertile source of new forms was variation in quantity, quality and placing of *bendingar*, yielding *albent*, *háttlausá*, *munnvörp*, *fleinshátt* and other variants. In *dunbent*, to which I shall return presently, the last word of each odd line is echoed in the first of each even line, so that the line-pair is united by rhyme as well as by alliteration.

Hrynhenda

After Arnórr Þórðarson, an outstanding practitioner of *brynhenda* ('flowing rhyme'), this form was used for encomia such as Markús Skeggjason's *Eiriksdrápa* and for *drápur* by Óláfr hvítaskáld and Sturla Þórðarson. It became a favourite medium for religious poems. I illustrate it with a stanza from Arnórr's *Hrynhenda* (for the text see Whaley 1998: 115, st. 10):

Ljótu dreif á lypting útan
 lauðri – bifðisk goll et rauða;
 fastligr hneigði fúru geystri
 fýris garmr – ok skeiðar stýri.
 Stirðum helzt umb Stafangr norðan
 stálum – bifðusk fyrir álar;
 uppi glóðu élmars typpi
 eldi glík – í Danaveldi.

[Ugly surf drove against the stern and the vessel's helm – the red gold trembled – the persistent foe of the fir [wind] tipped the scudding fir-wood [ship] sideways. You steered robust prows from the north by Stavanger – the leather ropes trembled; the forelocks [fore-stem parts = *kylfur*?] of the blizzard-steed [ship] glowed like fire.]

As can be seen from this stanza, *brynhenda* has a norm of eight syllables and four primary stresses per line compared with six syllables and three primary stresses in the *dróttkvætt* line. The first four syllables fall into one or other of the Sievers types, as in *dróttkvætt*, and the final two syllables are trochaic, also as in *dróttkvætt*. The additional element is the third syllable-pair, which always has the stress pattern /x. Lifts increasingly fall on short syllables, especially the fifth, as in lines 5, 6 and 8 of the sample stanza, with the adverb *fyrir* as an especially striking example. In the first half of the line, B-, C- and even D-types disappear and the E-type is rare. Also absent are A-types with irregular rhythms, such as A2k. Characteristically, the sample stanza consists exclusively of A-types. Presumably the name for this verse form, from the verb *brynja*, 'fall headlong, rush down', was prompted by the dominantly trochaic

movement. The caesura within the line becomes more marked than in *dróttkvætt*, as in most of the lines here (Foote [1982] 1984: 252). Although the sample stanza shows prominent enjambment and a choppy rhythm, perhaps in keeping with its nautical subject matter, the trend in *brynbenda* is towards end-stopping (Faulkes 1999: 83). The patterns of alliteration and internal rhyme remain the same as in *dróttkvætt*. The effect of *brynbenda* has been described as sonorous, verging on ponderous, but at its best musical, supple and solemn (Foote [1982] 1984: 253).

Runhent

Distinctive of *runhent* ('end-rhymed') is precisely that normally quite unskaldic feature, end-rhyme. Verse forms of most sorts already discussed, regardless of their line length, can qualify as *runhent* with the addition of this kind of rhyme. In Egill Skalla-Grímsson's *Höfuðlausn*, the earliest example, the rhyming patterns are still palpably in a state of flux. Rhymes are sometimes masculine, sometimes feminine, sometimes in pairs, sometimes encompassing four lines. The rhyme *staðar.darraðar* (st. 4) indicates some wrenching of natural stress, unless we explain it as an Irish rhyme. Most rhymes are full, corresponding to *aðalbendingar*, but a few are partial, corresponding to *skothbendingar*. Modelled on *Höfuðlausn* seem to be Gunnlaugr ormstunga's *Sigtryggsdrápa* and Einarr Skúlason's *Runbenda* (Faulkes 1999: 86–7).

Dróttkvætt could also be end-rhymed. Stanzas in this form are attributed, not necessarily reliably, to Gísli Súrsson and other personages in the sagas of Icelanders, as also in the contemporary sagas. Of recognized skalds Rognvaldr jarl composed a *lausavísa* in this form.

As an instance of *runhent* form in perhaps its most virtuosic handling, we can cite a stanza in *brynbenda* from Eysteinn Ásgrímsson's *Lilja* (Skj BII: 416, st. 98):

Sá, er óðinn skal vandan velja,
velr svá mǫrg í kvæði at selja
hulin fornyrðin, at trautt má telja,
tel ek þenna svá skilning dvelja;
vel því at hér má skýr orð skilja,
skili þjóðir minn ljósan vilja,
tal óbreytiligt veitt af vilja,
vil ek at kvæðit heiti Lilja.

[He who must present an elaborate composition chooses to supply so many obscure old idioms in his poem that it can scarcely be recited; I say that he thereby impedes comprehension. Because the transparent words here can well be understood, let people comprehend my clear wish, ordinary speech offered with goodwill; I wish that the poem be called 'Lilja'.]

This stanza, as analysed by Peter Foote ([1982] 1984: 266), has end-rhymes $A^1A^1A^1A^1A^2A^2A^2A^2$, where A^1 and A^2 are themselves half-rhymes. In addition it

is in *dunbent* format, where the lift in the cadence of the odd line is echoed by a rhyme in the first syllable of the even line (thus *vel-:vel-* between lines 1 and 2). *Hrynbenda* norms are observed in the *skot-* and *aðalbendingar* but these compulsory features are supplemented by an internal rhyme sequence in lines 4 and 5 (*tel, skil-, dvel-, vel, skil-*), with the result that in spite of the regular syntactic break between them the two *belmingar* are intimately linked. The last line-pair is ornamented with an extra half-rhyme and full rhyme (*-breyt-, veit-, beit-*) as well as the compulsory *bendingar* (*tal, vil-, vil, Lil-*).

Diachronic Aspects

Most if not all of the verse forms we have been surveying are fairly obviously derived from common Germanic metre, which employs pairs of ‘half-lines’ joined into complete lines by alliteration. This ancient metrical tradition was also inherited by Old English, Old Saxon and Old High German poets. Outside Scandinavia, alliterative poetry of the traditional Germanic type survived almost exclusively in a single metre. In the hands of early Scandinavian poets that basic form became a veritable *officina metrorum*, a ‘workshop of metres’.

Fornyrðislag

The authors of most eddic poems in *fornyrðislag* evidently did not engage in a strict counting or weighing of syllables. The form appears to have required merely that the incidence of primary, secondary and weak stresses broadly fitted with patterns codified in the Sievers types. The following example from *Hamðismál* (st. 6, lines 1–2) will serve to illustrate:

Hitt kvaðð þá Hamðir, inn hugomstóri:
 ‘Lítt myndir þú þá, Guðrún, leyfa dáð Hogni . . .’

{Then Hamðir, the stout-hearted, said this: ‘Guðrún, little would you praise Hogni’s deed then.’}

In both initial half-lines, weakly stressed words are ‘tucked in’ after the first primary stress in quite the manner of West Germanic verse. It would only be by drastic emendation that we could prune them out (though cf. Sievers 1878). Such lines fit well with our model of *málabátttr*. But conversely we find instances where the number of syllables in a line falls as low as three. *Hamðismál* st. 2, for example, contains the line ‘Vara þat nú né í gær’, and parallel examples could be adduced from other eddic poetry. The inference is that two different grades of half-line, one sparse and the other crammed (or perhaps ‘light’ versus ‘heavy’), coexisted in early Scandinavian poems, as in

West Germanic, but later in the history of Icelandic poetry were specialized into what came to be termed *fornyrðislag* on the one hand and *málabáttir* on the other.

Kviðuháttir

Similarly, *kviðubáttir* appears to have evolved from the same older type of half-line, with the odd half-lines reduced to three syllables and the even ones to four. Significant here is the Rök stanza (datable to c.850), which shows clear correspondences in metre and subject matter with *Ynglingatal* but still contains some odd lines with four syllables. It must be either a hybrid or more likely an evolutionary step between the older type of half-line and syllable-counting *kviðubáttir*. The inference is that the tendency towards syllable counting had announced itself in Scandinavia by the ninth century. *Kviðubáttir* probably represents the end-product of a process that started early that century and developed indigenously, in a regularization of tendencies that had already manifested themselves (cf. Gade 1995: 234–6).

Ljóðaháttir

The origins of *ljóðabáttir* are obscure, though it too, like *kviðubáttir*, could conceivably represent some kind of compression and stylization of earlier metrical materials. In this case the process would have operated on not the half-line but the Germanic long line to yield the characteristic ‘full line’ of *ljóðabáttir*. Whether that happened solely in Scandinavia is less clear, since a form of *ljóðabáttir* appears to be attested in a few Old English poems. Very reminiscent of the Old Icelandic texts are the following lines from *Wulf and Eadwacer*:

Gehyrest þu Eadwacer?	Uncerne earne hwelp
bireð wulf to wuda.	
Þæt mon eaþe tosliteð	þætte næfre gesomnad wæs,
uncer giedd geador.	

[Do you hear, Eadwacer? A wolf carries our craven whelp to the woods. One readily tears apart what was never combined, our song together.]

Ljóðabáttir may therefore have originated either in common Germanic verse-making or during a period of mutual artistic influences between Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians.

Dróttkvætt

The apparently earliest attestations of *dróttkvætt* are linked with Bragi Boddason, dating putatively to the early ninth century. Yet strangely enough the language of the Bragi ascriptions looks considerably less conservative than that of the Rök inscription,

consistently showing the reflexes of apocope, syncope, and *i-* and *u-*mutation, a fact which might rather suggest a date of c.1000. Even so, considerations of metrical taxonomy make the ninth-century dating reasonably secure. While some have romantically supposed that Bragi himself was *fons et origo* for the form, that would be as misguided as a literal interpretation of tributes to Chaucer as ‘father’ of English poesy, since the metre of *Ragnarsdrápa* looks to be highly evolved. The question is where and how the evolution occurred.

One proposal has been influence from metres used in the liturgy. Although Latin-language prayers and hymns undeniably shaped European vernacular verse forms throughout the Middle Ages, how they could have impinged on Scandinavia in the relevant era is harder to determine. Another much canvassed proposal has been the so-called ‘Irish hypothesis’. It happens that ninth-century Irish poetry exhibits some key features that distinguish *dróttkvætt* from the older Germanic line: stanzaic format, fixed syllable count, rhyming cadence, internal rhyme and alliteration. And yet *dróttkvætt* typically lacks end-rhyme, which is such a classic feature of Irish poetry. Moreover, Irish rhymes are based on classes of consonants (for instance, the voiced plosives *b*, *d*, *g*) rather than absolute identity of consonants; where identity does matter is with the vowels. In these respects the Irish and Scandinavian systems work in precisely opposite directions. Different too is the nature of the cadence, in which Irish verse forms, unlike *dróttkvætt*, used a variety of syllable combinations and weights. Irish–Scandinavian contacts were to the best of our knowledge too tenuous to have produced a hybrid form.

Partly because of these difficulties over contact and chronology, there has also been a strong impulse among scholars to postulate more home-grown origins. One suggestion involves independent descent from Indo-European origins, pointing to such putatively inherited features as isosyllabism, relatively free stress in the first half of the line, caesura, and final fixed-stress cadence (cf. Frank 1978: 34). Another, more prevalent, theory is that the metre somehow evolved by means of an elongation and stylization of the common Germanic half-line. Immanent forces associated with changes in proto-Scandinavian phonology may have favoured the evolution of syllable-counting metres. Internal rhyming could also perfectly well be of local origin, as it evidently is in *kviðubáttr*. Gade has recently refined the theory with the notable proposal that the strong tendency to enjambment attested in Bragi ascriptions was a key formative impulse (1995: 226–33). She sees tetrasyllabic alliterative lines with enjambment as providing a model for hexasyllabic *dróttkvætt*.

Where this theory falls short is in its failure to explain the fixed rhythm of the cadence. A different theory might take as its base the possibility that hypermetric half-lines of the kind so richly attested for Old English and Old Saxon, typically containing three primary stresses rather than the normal two, have an ancestral basis in the Germanic half-line and continued in currency in early Scandinavia as well. Some of the longer half-lines in *Atlakviða*, *Hamðismál* and *Hárbarðsljóð* look like the compressed counterpart of these prolonged West Germanic half-lines. Examples are the second half-lines in the following:

Völl létsk ykkir ok mundu gefa víðrar Gnitahaiðar (*Atlakviða*, st. 5)
 Hristisk ǫll Húnmǫrk, þar er harðmóðgir fóru (*Atlakviða*, st. 13)
 Lítt myndir þú þá, Guðrún, leyfa dáð Hognna (*Hamðismál*, st. 6)
 Fram lágu brautir, fundu vástígu (*Hamðismál*, st. 17)
 Mega tveir menn einir tíu hundruð Gotna (*Hamðismál*, st. 22)
 Ráð mun ek þér nú ráða: ró þú hingat bátinum (*Hárbarðsljóð*, st. 53)

It will be noted that virtually all these second half-lines and some of the first ones terminate on a trochee, which also happens to be the cadence of preference in Old English hypermetric half-lines. The alliteration of the even half-line is contained in the first lift, as in the *dróttkvætt* line (another feature that occurs sporadically in Old English hypermetric verses, such as ‘*strang ond stiðmod, gestah he on gealgan heanne*’: *The Dream of the Rood*, line 40). A few Icelandic instances even contain internal rhyming, which, while certainly casual, closely resembles the formalized *bendingar* of *dróttkvætt*:

Brœðr hennar báðir, bjóri var hon lítt drukkin (*Atlakviða*, st. 15)
 Satt hygg ek mik segja, seinn ertu at for þinni (*Hárbarðsljóð*, st. 50)
 Launa mun ek þér farsynjun, ef vit finnumk í sinn annat (*Hárbarðsljóð*, st. 59)

On this hypothesis the development of *kviðubáttir* and *dróttkvætt* could be explained symmetrically. While on the one hand contracted half-lines are regularized into *kviðubáttir*, on the other hand originally hypermetric half-lines are regularized into *dróttkvætt*. Internal rhyming shows a modest growth in *kviðubáttir* and a positive hypertrophy in *dróttkvætt*. The present suggestion is of course purely a conjecture (dismissed without thorough exploration by Sievers 1893: 240) and one that has yet to be tested against the full range of evidence, in particular that of Old English and Old Saxon poetry.

The systematization of rules for the incidence of alliteration and internal rhyme in the *dróttkvætt* stanza is undoubtedly indigenous. In *Ragnarsdrápa* some lines (particularly the odd ones) lack internal rhyme altogether, while some even lines contain half-rhyme rather than full rhyme. Sometimes too the second of the rhyme-pairs was postponed, appearing in the following line, or alternatively was advanced ahead of the cadence lift. As to the placing of alliteration, B- and C-types were at this stage still possible in even lines, meaning that an unstressed syllable might precede the alliterating lift, something extremely rare and perhaps actively proscribed in later composition. The different markers of internal rhyme, trochaic cadence, and initial position of alliteration in even lines appear to have come together gradually to emphasize the line boundary (J. Turville-Petre 1969: 335). Some aspects of rhyme and alliteration were not fully crystallized until the eleventh century.

Dróttkvætt form proved remarkably durable, so that it was not until the late thirteenth century that phonological changes, such as the development of final *-r* to *-ur*, coinciding with massive shifts in poetic fashion, perturbed its finely adjusted

system of weights and balances and led to uncertainty as to what sorts of syllables qualified for primary stress. In the circumstances, *brynbent* and other new metres must have appealed as more congenial and natural. The evidence is that similar processes had occurred among the Danes, in a linguistically much less conservative community, as early as the twelfth century.

Hrynhenda

By contrast with *dróttkvætt*, the development of *brynhenda* constitutes a clear – and most fascinating – case of cultural hybridism. On the exotic side it seems to show the influence of the Latin trochaic tetrameter, especially forms with a continuous cadence comparable to that of *dróttkvætt*:

Salve, meum salutare.
Salve, salve, Iesu care.

[Hail, my salvation. Hail, hail, dear Jesus.]

Admittedly, further work needs to be done on the exact chronology of the relevant Latin texts, which have been somewhat vaguely invoked in the scholarly literature as familiar ecclesiastical fare. On the more homely side, *dróttkvætt* must have contributed not merely its internal rhymes and alliterative rules but also its choppy and enjambed character. It is at the very least a curious circumstance that the alleged earliest occurrence of the form, like our sample stanza from Arnórr's eponymous poem, should contain subject matter relating to ships and stormy seas. One suggested cultural milieu for the development of *brynhenda* is the general area of the Hebrides and Orkney (Foote [1982] 1984: 252–3). In the continuing history of *brynhenda* after Arnórr's time the trochaic element becomes somewhat less dominant (Whaley 1998: 93), suggesting ongoing influence from the native *dróttkvætt*.

Runhent

The standard view of the origins of *runbent* is that Egill Skalla-Grímsson devised the new metre in England. Given that *runbent*, with its consistent end-rhyming, marked a bold break with established skaldic norms, this innovation too does indeed look most likely to have resulted from foreign influence, though whether Egill in person or some predecessor carried the new form across into the Scandinavian vernacular is another matter. Also uncertain is whether the innovator did so under the influence of Latin church poetry or English rhyming poetry (the latter a form that is even rarer than *runbent*). The rise of *runbent* is a particularly interesting phenomenon in the context of speculations about other shared poetic impulses in the mixed Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian cultural milieu. While certain Irish metres also present striking parallels to *runbent*, a plausible scenario for contact is harder to come up with. Moreover,

Latin poetry being the ultimate model for all the vernacular forms, some parallelism in development would be virtually inevitable.

Longer lines of the *runbent* form may possibly have developed as a mix of the foregoing and an extension of *dunbenda*. In other words, a feature seen sporadically in earlier *dróttkvætt*, where a rhyme in the odd line is carried over into the even line, so producing an effect very close to end-rhyme, becomes stylized and made uniform throughout the stanza.

Poetology

In considering the history of reflection on poetic metres and stanza-forms, we are powerfully assisted by the presence of Snorri's *Edda*, with its examples and observations on these topics. As we shall see, Snorri's *Háttatal* followed in the footsteps of Rognvaldr Kali's and Hallr Þórarinnsson's *Háttalykill* in developing new fully individuated forms out of mere casual variations or *jeux d'esprit* within older poems. But it is important to recognize that in this process our three skaldic cognoscenti had predecessors and precursors, probably from time immemorial, who had channelled and stylized variants in just the same creative fashion, though without the written record to enable us to reconstruct their procedures. It is on such principles as these that we might account for the split of the old half-line into the sharply distinct forms that we see in syllable-counting *fornyrðislag*, *kviðuhátt* and *málabátt*. Likewise there is some evidence that *dróttkvætt* variants were already being channelled into special effects, if not fully individuated forms, by the tenth century (Kuhn 1983: 285).

Such a process may also be reflected in an anecdote relayed by Snorri in *Háttatal*. He tells that the metre *skjálfbent* was invented by the skald Veili, when stranded in cold weather after a shipwreck. In fact *skjálfbent* lines occur sporadically from the earliest poetry onward and are especially prominent in the poems of the Icelander Kormákr Ögmundarson (c.930–70), the main character of the family saga *Kormáks saga*- (Gade 1995: 57–8). It is possible, then, that what we have here is an old aetiological anecdote designed to account for this variant, which with its very prominent placement of alliteration and *bendingar* might have evoked the impression of chattering teeth.

As precursors to the formally constituted *claves metricae* (see below), we find scattered comments made by the poets themselves in verses and remarks on poetic topics in the sagas, though how far the latter are authentic or antedate the *claves metricae* is another matter. To take an example, an episode in *Morkinskinna* offers evidence that the skalds consciously tried to create rhymes of equal phonetic quantity and quality (Gade 1995: 6). Þjóðólfr Arnórsson is upbraided by Haraldr harðráði, himself reportedly a poet of some accomplishment, for having used the rhyme *gróm: skóm*. The blemish, according to Haraldr, is that the *bendingar* are not 'jafnhátt', 'equally high', meaning perhaps equally prominent. Since, to judge from the

surviving corpus of skaldic poetry, such rhymes are reasonably common, possibly the king is here depicted as somewhat of a hypercritic.

In a later set of verses a conservative poet single-handedly resists the phonological merger of *æ* and *œ*, with about as much success as meets other attempts to defeat mergers. His composition insists on the traditional distinction by displaying these diphthongs in *bendingar* (Helgason 1970):

Ást er nær at næra
nú vær konan færi.

[Now is the blithe woman the fewer nearby to nourish love.]

Pronounce correctly, our pedagogue seems to be warning, or you will ruin the rhyme! In the context of professional skaldic discussions like these, it is less than utterly astounding, though still impressive, that before the end of the twelfth century the anonymous author of the *First Grammatical Treatise* had developed the phonological concept of minimal pairs² (Frank 1978: 37). Such a concept would have been useful if not essential in teaching the alternation of *skotbendingar* and *aðalbendingar*.

Háttalykill

Háttalykill ('Clavis metrica' or 'Key to Metres'), the first extant metrical treatise, was written around 1142 by Rognvaldr Kali in collaboration with Hallr Þórarinsson. Entirely in verse form, *Háttalykill* consists of 41 pairs of stanzas, each illustrating one or other aspect of versification, such as syllable count and rules for rhyming. Rognvaldr, himself, like Haraldr harðráði, a magnate with decided poetic accomplishments, also commanded some Latin literacy. He was well travelled, having ventured from the Norway of his birth and Orkney, where he ruled, to England, Provence and the Middle East. The choice of the title *Háttalykill*, a vernacular counterpart of 'clavis metrica', suggests that he was acquainted with Latin models (Helgason and Holtsmark 1941: 120–4; Foote [1982] 1984: 253–4). As noted already, the collaborators played a creative as well as a prescriptive role: of the metres represented in *Háttalykill*, only nine clearly have precedents in the skaldic tradition (Helgason and Holtsmark 1941: 120–1).

Háttatal

Included in the *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson, compiled c.1220, is a second vernacular *clavis metrica*, entitled *Háttatal* ('List of Verse-forms'). This work consists of a poem of 102 stanzas exemplifying 100 varieties of skaldic composition (not all strictly relevant to metre as such). It is accompanied by a prose commentary which is probably also by Snorri himself and offers sometimes rather cryptic indications as to how verses were analysed by contemporaries (Foote [1982] 1984: 257).

The idea of composing a poem and commentary to exemplify approximately 100 verse forms very likely derives from knowledge, even if at second hand, of Latin-language precursors, notably Servius' *De centum metris* (Faulkes 1999: xiv). A debt to Priscian and Donatus, perhaps even Quintilian, may also be posited. At the same time Snorri's work drew skilfully on native tradition. Both the metrical variations and the names for the different metres in *Háttatal* correspond to a great extent to those given in *Háttalykill*, and Snorri was undoubtedly familiar with Rognvaldr's work.

How much did Snorri understand in terms that would correspond, however approximately, to modern metrical analysis? According to Gade (1995: 29) he was aware of syllable count, alliteration, internal rhyme, syllable length, and 'hard or soft syllables' (probably referring to differences between primary and weaker grades of stress) as constitutive features of *dróttkvætt*.

The extent of his understanding of historical process is less clear. He does appear to have realized that variation in the arrangement of *bendingar* was characteristic of the earliest skaldic verse, even if the precise variations he attributes to Torf-Einarr and other individual poets do not fully match extant verses attributed to them (Faulkes 1999: xxiv). Linguistic awareness, on the other hand, was perhaps beyond his capabilities. In a well-known instance, Snorri allows the possibility of a five-syllable line where there are *seinar samstofur*, 'slow syllables' (Faulkes 1999: 7), but does not clarify that three of his illustrative lines contain a monosyllable contracted from an older disyllable, such as *ár* from older *áur*, and introduces a fourth example, *blés*, that cannot be explained on these principles. Similar observations could be made about his nephew Óláfr hvítaskáld's handling of what we now would recognize as linguistic relicts from an older era.

Snorri continued both the traditional and the innovatory tendencies of *Háttalykill*. Many of the metres he exemplifies had never been routinely used in skaldic tradition. Only in just over 30 cases out of the 100 can clear precedents be located in older Icelandic poetry for the verse forms he illustrates. Special features, such as elision, contraction and resolution, unusual dispositions of *bendingar* and alliteration, or special rhythmical patterns, certainly may be found in individual lines of earlier verse, but before Snorri they are not used consistently throughout a stanza or poem (Faulkes 1999: xviii). Snorri often distinguishes verse forms found in *Háttalykill* into several sub-categories, as for instance in the cases of *brynhenda* and *tøglag* ('journey-metre'). The truncated or catalectic forms termed *stúfar* he represents with three variants where *Háttalykill* had only one (Faulkes 1999: xvi). As a form possibly 'manufactured' wholesale by Snorri we could cite *bálkarlag* ('Bálkr's metre'), which he likens to *dróttkvætt* minus the cadence (Gade 1995: 233–4).

Snorri's treatise gained authority, to the point where the word *edda* in phrases like *edduлист* 'Edda craft' and *eddureglur* 'Edda rules' became standard (Foote [1982] 1984: 257). It may have inspired some unusual metres in verses quoted in *Sturlunga saga*. Snorri's nephew Sturla Þórðarson also clearly chose metres for his poems from those exemplified in *Háttatal* (Faulkes 1999: xx). Meanwhile, in the *Third Grammatical*

Treatise Óláfr hvítaskáld continued his uncle Snorri's advocacy of the native tradition by showing that the principles of native versification conformed to classical rules. Thus *aðalbending* and alliteration are treated, respectively, as forms of paronomasia and paromoeon, both classical figures of speech.

In sum, the practice of and discourse concerning metre and metrics in early Scandinavia are revealed as astonishingly diverse, inventive and self-aware. All the greater our sense of loss that more of the magnificent poems composed in these forms did not survive down to our own era. All the greater our gratitude to Snorri Sturluson who did so much as collector and codifier to safeguard the tradition.

See also CHRISTIAN POETRY; CONTINUITY; EDDIC POETRY; FAMILY SAGAS; GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; LANGUAGE; LATE SECULAR POETRY; RHETORIC AND STYLE; SAGAS OF ICELANDIC PREHISTORY; SKALDIC POETRY.

NOTES

- 1 For the manuscript attestations see Skj AI: 310, st. 5; cf. Fidjestøl (1985: 78).
- 2 In a minimal pair, only a single phonological contrast exists to distinguish one word from another. For instance, *Ægir* ('god of the sea') is distinguishable from *ægir* ('intimidator') only in virtue of the *æ:œ* contrast. To satisfy the rules of *dróttkvætt*, a poet had to know that the syllables *Æg*; *æg* contained different vowel sounds and therefore could be acceptably collocated in *skotbending*, which required consonance, but not in *aðalbending*, which required full rhyme.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

The following reading list is of design highly selective. In particular there are significant works by such scholars as Kristján Árnason, Martin Chase, Anthony Faulkes, Peter Foote, Roberta Frank, Kari Ellen Gade, Andreas Heusler, Lee M. Hollander, Finnur Jónsson, E. A. Kock, Hans Kuhn, Guðrún Nordal, Richard Perkins, Geoffrey Russom, Eduard Sievers, Stephen Tranter, Klaus von See and Diana Whaley which I am unable to cite here but to which I acknowledge my indebtedness in preparing this chapter.

Edition

Skj = Finnur Jónsson (ed.) (1912–15) *Den norske-islandske skjaldedigtning*, vols. A.1–2: *Tekst efter håndskrifterne*, vols. B.1–2: *Rettet tekst*. Copenhagen.

Secondary Literature

- Árnason, Kristján (1991). *The Rhythms of Dróttkvætt and Other Old Icelandic Metres*. Reykjavík.
- Craigie, William A. (1900) 'On Some Points in Skaldic Metre.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 16, 341–84.
- Faulkes, Anthony (ed.) (1999) *Snorri Sturluson: Edda, Háttatal*. London.
- Fidjestøl, Bjame (1985) 'Skaldestudiar: Eit forskingsoversyn.' *Maal og minne*, 53–81.
- Foote, Peter (1976) 'Beginnings and Endings: Some Notes on the Study of Scaldic Poetry.' In Régis Boyer (ed.) *Les Vikings et leur civilisation* ... (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Bibliothèque Arctique et Antarctique 5). Paris, pp. 179–90. Rpt in Michael Barnes et al. (eds.) (1984) *Aurvandilstá: Norse Studies* (Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization 2). Odense, pp. 236–48.

- Foote, Peter (1982) 'Latin Rhetoric and Icelandic Poetry: Some Contacts.' *Saga och sed*, 107–27. Rpt in Michael Barnes et al. (eds.) (1984) *Aurvandilstá: Norse Studies* (Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization 2). Odense, pp. 249–70.
- Frank, Roberta (1978) *Old Norse Court Poetry: The 'Dróttkvætt' Stanza* (Islandica 42). Ithaca, NY.
- Gade, Kari Ellen (1995) *The Structure of Old Norse Dróttkvætt Poetry* (Islandica 49). Ithaca, NY.
- Helgason, Jón (1970) 'Þriðji íhaldskarl.' *Fróðskaparrit* 18: 206–26.
- Helgason, Jón and Holtmark, Anne (eds.) (1941) *Háttalykill enn forni* (Bibliotheca Arnarnæana 1). Copenhagen.
- Kuhn, Hans (1969) 'Die Dróttkvættverse des Typs "brestr erfíði Austra".' In Jakob Benediktsson et al. (eds) *Afmælisrit Jóns Helgasonar 30. júní 1969*. Reykjavík, pp. 403–17.
- Kuhn, Hans (1983) *Das Dróttkvætt*. Heidelberg.
- Lehmann, Winfred P. (1956) *The Development of Germanic Verse Form*. Austin, TX.
- Mackenzie, Bridget Gordon (1981) 'On the Relation of Norse Skaldic Verse to Irish Syllabic Poetry.' In Ursula Dronke et al. (eds.) *Speculum Norrænnum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*. Odense, pp. 337–56.
- Neckel, Gustav and Kuhn, Hans (eds.) (1962) *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*. Heidelberg.
- Quinn, Judy (1994) 'Eddu list: The Emergence of Skaldic Pedagogy in Medieval Iceland.' *Alvissmál* 4, 69–72.
- Russom, Geoffrey (2002) 'A Bard's-Eye View of the Germanic Syllable.' *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 101: 305–28.
- Sievers, Eduard (1878) 'Beiträge zur Skaldenmetrik.' *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 5, 449–518.
- Sievers, Eduard (1893) *Altgermanische Metrik* (Sammlung kurzer Grammatiken germanischer Dialekte. Ergänzungsreihe 2). Halle.
- Turville-Petre, E. O. G. (1976) *Scaldic Poetry*. Oxford.
- Turville-Petre, Joan (1969) 'The Metre of Icelandic Court Poetry.' *Saga-Book* 17: 326–51.
- von See, Klaus (1967) *Germanische Verskunst*. Stuttgart.
- von See, Klaus (1968) 'Skothending: Bemerkungen zur Frühgeschichte des skaldischen Binnenreims.' *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* (Tübingen) 90, 217–22.
- Whaley, Diana (1998) *The Poetry of Arnórr jarla-skáld: An Edition and Study* (Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, London). Turnhout.

Orality and Literacy in the Sagas of Icelanders

Gísli Sigurðsson

The study of medieval Icelandic texts from a literary and historical perspective has come a long way since the pioneering efforts of seventeenth-century scholars, who tended to place great faith in the veracity of early written texts and to believe that sagas were reliable sources about actual events in the real world of the Viking Age. The work of these scholars had yet to meet the challenge of the important developments in philology, source-criticism and the literary treatment of saga texts that took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Malm 1996).

The nature of textual transmission in manuscript form came to occupy the attention of Árni Magnússon around 1700, and historians have since recognized the importance of the detailed codicological and textual examination of any work before plausible conclusions can be drawn as to that work's relationship with the reality it purports to describe. Early scholarship placed great trust in the reliability of oral tradition, and believed that the role of a scribe writing down a text for the first time was merely that of a recorder. An early written text created in this way was thus regarded as the most reliable and authoritative of all potentially available sources. The problem of understanding exactly how an oral text could be captured in writing had not yet been appreciated or explored.

In the wake of nineteenth-century advances in philological scholarship, studies in classical epic from Homer onwards generated two contrasting kinds of approach. For some scholars such works were the creation of individual poets; for others they were patchworks derived from a variety of sources that it was the responsibility of scholars to identify. J. R. R. Tolkien's celebrated 1936 lecture, '*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics', gives a good description of this latter approach. Similarly contrasting views also developed in Old Icelandic studies; Andreas Heusler defined them as the *Freiprosa* ('free-prose') and *Buchprosa* ('book-prose') theories. Some scholars emphasized the role of traditional oral narrative in the creation of sagas, while others stressed rather the contribution of the individual writer. The book-prose theory emphasized the importance of literary intertextuality, borrowings from particular

authors, and the potential influence of European Latin culture; whereas the free-prose theory, and more recently formalism, laid greater stress on the role of oral tradition in accounting for apparently related passages in different sagas (Andersson 1964; Byock 1984; Clover 1985).

Nationalistic Ideology and Scholarship

Ideology and nationalism also contributed to the development of theories about the role of orality in the creation of sagas. We might note, for example, that the early free-prose advocates were mainly Swedes and Norwegians who argued that eddic poetry, myths, legendary sagas and kings' sagas were in fact Swedish and Norwegian literary creations, rather than texts created in Iceland in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The argument was that such works had been transmitted orally in mainland Scandinavia before the settlement of Iceland, and that Icelanders had done little more than write down these memorized texts during long winter nights spent on their lonely and isolated North Atlantic island. Popular thinking in Iceland lay comfortably along the grain of the free-prose theory, because it embodied the belief that oral tradition had reliably preserved texts word for word from generation to generation. The natural conclusions were, first, that orally derived texts could be regarded as historically true; and, second, that this also applied to the family sagas, a literary genre which had to be Icelandic (as opposed to having been brought over from Scandinavia), because it tells of Icelanders during the settlement period in their country. Modern Icelanders could thus claim that the saga representations of their colourful ancestors should be accepted as essentially true.

In contrast, the Golden Age of the book-prose theory, even though its origins can be traced to the work of the mid-nineteenth-century German scholar Konrad Maurer, may be explained in terms of the growing awareness among Icelanders that they had to demonstrate to the Danes and the rest of the world that Icelandic medieval literature was the product of a learned culture which had risen and flourished in Iceland before the country and its people became subjects of the Norwegian king around 1262. Accordingly, the sagas were cited in support of nineteenth-century Icelandic claims for independence from Denmark. The sagas, it was claimed, confirmed that the Icelandic nation was, and always had been, culturally independent, and had preserved its native linguistic and literary heritage. After the establishment of the University of Iceland in 1911, Icelandic scholars from Björn M. Ólsen onwards sought to highlight how learned, literate and creative their forefathers had been in the period up to 1262, and that Icelandic medieval literature was in essence the product of high-achieving Icelandic authors rather than of passive scribes merely recording oral tradition imported from Scandinavia. The results of this twentieth-century scholarly mission can be examined in the *Íslenzk fornrit* text series, first published in the 1930s, still going strong, and forming the nucleus of the so-called Icelandic school of saga scholarship (Hughes 1980; Byock 1994).

The idea of oral tradition was always kept alive among scholars of the book-prose-oriented Icelandic school, but it tended to be used to account for those parts of sagas for which specific literary sources and evidence of authorial creativity could not be identified. The implications of proposing an oral tradition behind literary texts were never investigated. Oral tradition was used to counter the growing tendency of scholars from outside Iceland, along with a younger generation of native Icelandic scholars, to point to ideological links between the Latin Middle Ages and Icelandic literature, via the identification of motifs, themes and structural influences deriving from European hagiographical and courtly literature and from Latin chronicles. At times such revelations have been regarded as a challenge to the supposed originality of Icelandic saga authors, but the nationalistic or nativist answer has been that the literary tradition in Iceland was always strong enough to ensure creative rather than slavish use of (reluctantly admitted) foreign literary influences (Clover 1982).

The debate has thus consistently revolved around the relative importance of oral and written elements in any given text. The written elements have often been associated with Latin learning, individual artistry and authorial intent, whereas orality has been seen as formless, artless and transmitting raw historical data rather than as artistically shaped narratives. Book-prose scholars, like Walter Baetke in the 1950s and many others, have even argued that if a certain episode can be shown to be historically unreliable, this can serve as confirmation that the episode in question must have been created by a writer consciously engaged in creating a work of art rather than recording an oral tale. However, subsequent studies of oral cultures have shown that this argument is unsustainable, even though it has been the theoretical basis for many book-prose-oriented studies right up to the present day. An anonymous oral tale can be just as creative, artistic and historically unreliable as a piece of written fiction by a named author. If book-prose people could not deploy the argument of doubtful historicity they would stress instead the unlikelihood of any tale having survived in oral tradition for centuries on end – for instance, from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries. Such an assumption is equally unsupportable, as we now know that social memory can extend back for up to 300 years, and that the same types of oral folktales can survive in a culture for a much longer period, even though they may not always involve the same named individual characters (Mitchell 1991; Fentress and Wickham 1992; Tristram 1994).

The study of sources, however, has not always proved very rewarding from a literary point of view, as Tolkien pointed out in his 1936 *Beowulf* lecture. Under the influence of post-war New Criticism many saga scholars have abandoned all hope of solving the oral–literary debate, and have concentrated instead on the saga texts as they have been preserved, analysing them with the variety of methodological approaches generated by contemporary literary theory, in the belief that these are as applicable to medieval texts as to modern fiction. Some scholars have also tried to apply medieval notions of narrative structure and meaning to the Icelandic sagas, often arriving at fanciful and debatable conclusions, because such sagas rarely contain the necessary clues which can

trigger plausible allegorical interpretation. So it is that some contemporary scholars exercise their creativity rather freely at the saga writers' expense (Pálsson 1990). But these studies, even though they never discuss issues of saga origins, are greatly influenced by the particular scholar's position in the oral–literary debate. When modern scholars claim merely to be in the business of literary analysis, they clearly assume that a saga text was created by an author and can thus be analysed in much the same way as contemporary creative writing, whether that analysis embraces structuralism, feminism, post-structuralism, Freudianism, deconstructionism, or any other newly fashionable line of thought on display at scholarly conferences in the 'Small World' of international literary studies. The only justification for such an approach may lie within the area of reception theory, where we can concentrate on the life and reception of any given text in our own – or any other – age. If the aim is to study the life and reception of a medieval text at the time of its first written incarnation, such critical methodologies and theories are of limited applicability.

Older Theories and Methods

It is clear, therefore, that awareness of the debate about the origins of medieval texts such as the Icelandic sagas is an essential prerequisite for saga criticism. Scholarly work in relation to so many aspects of saga narratives is always informed by some theory of origin. Many book-prose analysts, and more recently literary ones, have been bold (and, indeed, heedless) enough to call their approach a method, claiming that their conclusions are scientifically arrived at, and leaving all theoretical speculations to the oralists. They argue that they are examining preserved written texts, and that oral tradition (if indeed it ever existed in relation to a particular text) can no longer be heard and therefore cannot be studied (Sveinsson 1958). Such claims are built on shaky theoretical ground because in dealing with medieval texts scholars are always influenced (whether or not they realize it) by their preferred theory of textual origins. It is therefore foolhardy to claim that the question of origins is no longer of interest or importance. Every scholar in the field needs to address these issues before his or her work can proceed effectively.

But how true is it that medieval oral tradition can no longer be studied since we only have access to written documents and are, of course, without tape-recordings from that period? Are there any approaches which can enable us to examine the operation of oral tradition in medieval Iceland?

It used to be fashionable to gather up references in the written texts to oral storytelling and the recitation of poetry and present them to the world in such a way as to imply, if not claim, 'There is oral tradition for you! The early Icelanders told stories and recited poetry to each other all the time!' There is a famous chapter, quoted relentlessly in such discussions in support of the oral case, in a late twelfth-/early thirteenth-century written text in the *Sturlunga saga* collection, describing a wedding at a chieftain's farm at Reykjahólar in the early twelfth century. At this ceremony the

entertainment is said to have included stories of the legendary saga type told by a priest (Foote 1984; Meulengracht Sørensen 1993). From around 1300 there is a reference to the prominent Icelandic poet, writer and law-speaker Sturla Þórðarson (a nephew of Snorri Sturluson) telling a story, some decades earlier, to some followers of the Norwegian king on a ship off the coast of Norway. The saga states that Sturla told his tale better than other tellers, but it is possible that it might have been in written form as the queen requests him to meet her and bring the saga with him. From around the same time a more clearly literary text has survived, *Nornagests þáttur*, set at the Norwegian court around the year 1000, in which a traveller, Nornagestr, probably the god Óðinn in disguise, comes to the great missionary king Óláfr Tryggvason and recites old pagan poetry touching on much the same subject matter as do the heroic poems of the Edda. He is then baptized and put to rest in a bed where he dies when the candle which he has brought with him finally burns down (Lönnroth 1971; Harris and Hill 1989). It may also be mentioned that the late twelfth-century Scandinavian chroniclers, Theodoricus in Norway and Saxo Grammaticus in Denmark, both refer to Icelanders as great tellers of old stories and poetry, which lends support to the idea that people were perfectly capable of telling each other stories and reciting poetry without the aid of the written word.

These references were sufficient to convince earlier generations of scholars that Icelanders had told artistic stories to each other in Iceland as well as in the royal courts of Scandinavia where they earned their living as court poets and historians. The saga of King Óláfr Tryggvason could be used as evidence that the eddic poems were recited orally (Holtmark 1966). A further argument for the orality of the family sagas is a reference in *Droplaugarsona saga* where a descendant of an important character is said to have told this saga. In general the sagas are written as if they sought to reflect an oral tradition that lay behind them. They are full of fixed formulae such as: 'it is said that ...', 'some say that ... but others say that ...', 'he himself [referring to a character in the saga] later said that ...' and so on, and the point of view is always limited to what could theoretically have been seen and told to others (Andersson 1966). Along with references to skaldic poetry being composed and recited orally, these formulae could be used to create an impression of a strong oral culture before the development of a written culture.

It was not difficult for sceptics to challenge this line of argument. They could say that all such references had been filtered through writers who wanted to convince their readers that oral storytelling and poetry recitation had flourished in earlier times, and who liked to include formulaic references to oral sources in order to make their own text seem more authentic. In other words, these texts could be seen not as historical documents describing oral tradition as it really was, but rather as creative fiction in which oral tradition serves an authorial purpose and references to it represent a stylistic device. References in the literature to oral tradition can therefore be used either way in the argument.

We might add that even if these references were taken at face value they would be of limited use to the modern scholar. They offer no clue as to whether the texts had

been subject to constant change – as most oral texts are believed to be, except when serving a sacred and/or ritualistic function, for which verbatim recitation might be required (Finnegan 1988). They say nothing of how the oral texts were committed to writing, how widespread they were in their oral form, when and where they were told or recited, by whom, and to whom, how they were preserved from generation to generation and so on. These direct references are therefore particularly useless in addressing the questions that need to be asked about oral tradition. The search for a reliable methodology with which to study orality in medieval Iceland must be continued elsewhere.

The Comparative Method and Historical Development

Historically the scholarly debate more or less ran into the sand at this point; the book-prose theory with its questions and methodology became dominant and notions of oral tradition were suppressed. When western scholars became aware of Vladimir Propp's discoveries in Russia and the Parry–Lord systematic presentation of oral theory, the idea caught on that fixed forms, whether individual formulae or longer episodes – and even whole sagas – could represent evidence of textual orality. Several studies appeared highlighting the presence of formulae and common structures in the sagas (Andersson 1967; Lönnroth 1976). Some scholars tried to distinguish oral and written elements in texts, and to determine the exact point at which these elements intersected. But, once again, the argument could work both ways, just as it could with the direct references to oral tradition. While it was accepted that traditional oral poetry and stories made use of fixed formulae and fitted into pre-structured themes, it was also recognized that elements such as these could equally well be deployed by writers who were not performing in front of a live audience. Their artistic strategy could thus involve the use of formulaic elements long after the introduction of the written medium. In the early stages of literacy, writers were still trying to capture the attention of their reading audience. They had not yet discovered more modern ways of writing, which involved setting one's thoughts down on the page without paying attention to the problem of how – or even if – the text might eventually be received. This was inconceivable within oral tradition.

Gradually it became clear that oral tradition could not be recorded satisfactorily without the aid of modern technology. An oral performer would hardly use the same words when reciting his or her repertoire to a scribe as he or she would in a real-life setting. In that sense it was technically impossible to talk about oral texts from the Middle Ages; even the folktales which were enthusiastically written down by romantic collectors in the nineteenth century were often recorded in a markedly literary style. The oral was transformed into the written, to be enjoyed in private by silent reading. If the romantic collectors of folktales had published verbatim transcripts of oral tales, as has been possible via the tape-recorder in the last few decades, the folktale collections might well not have enjoyed the success they did as literature,

simply because the oral way of storytelling does not read as well as it sounds in performance.

The conclusion must be that it is impossible to distinguish the oral from the written in saga texts because they are all eventually written down in a literary style. But rather than abandoning the investigation it may instead be worthwhile to rethink the fundamental question about orality and literacy in relation to these texts. Perhaps it was the problem as to where the oral and the written intersect in a written text that led the scholarship astray.

More than 40 years after the appearance of Albert B. Lord's *The Singer of Tales*, and following a good deal of fieldwork and theoretical speculation, we may now be in a position to assess the contribution of theories of oral tradition to our understanding of those medieval texts for which an oral background is hypothesized. Little progress has been made in devising tests which can convincingly distinguish the oral from the written, though we have come a long way from early notions of the function of the oral formula, which is now seen as serving a primarily artistic rather than merely line-filling purpose. It is now important that we develop a more secure understanding of how oral tradition can work, whether in telling stories, reciting poetry, or preserving legal texts and ancient lore. We have learnt enough to realize that knowledge can be transmitted orally (albeit not necessarily accurately) with sufficient success to ensure that those brought up within an oral cultural environment are not immediately impressed by the assumed advantages of writing. Such individuals and societies do not necessarily embrace, explore and exploit this new resource; they do not share our sense of the self-evident advantages of writing, notably its capacity to generate fixed texts which can, for example, minimize the likelihood of legal disputes. We have also learnt enough to question the widespread notion that the technique of writing must have represented welcome relief to the overburdened memories of unfortunate souls who had to memorize all the law texts. The most important achievement of recent research into oral tradition has thus involved comparing data from different societies, rather than formula counting. It is true that some comparative studies have left themselves open to criticism by seeking to compare societies and literary genres that cannot be compared in any plausible way. Care is always needed when adopting a comparative approach. We must be actively aware of the differences between societies, and avoid slavishly projecting one society's situation onto another (Foley 1991). We need rather to use the information from the detailed study of any one society to help us formulate new questions about our limited number of sources.

As we review the history of research into oral tradition, the first and perhaps most important point to acknowledge is that many of the basic assumptions which academics once made about the nature of orality were simply wrong. There was no reason to believe that oral tradition necessarily preserves information accurately over centuries; or to equate orality with historicity; or to claim that oral origins and literary artistry were incompatible; or to state that stories could not survive for two or three hundred years among people and families living in the same location. And if all these assumptions were wrong we are surely entitled to conclude that all notions

based on them require urgent revision. We must in other words start again to work our way through the sources, searching for elements of residual orality in medieval Iceland in order to determine whether and how that orality might affect our interpretation of historical events and individual texts.

A good start is to focus on the earliest attempts to express tradition in written form, notably the writing down of Icelandic laws in the early twelfth century. Many modern scholars have assumed that it must have been a relief for the law-speaker to be able to commit his knowledge to writing. They have regarded it as self-evident that the techniques of writing introduced by the church must have enjoyed a widespread welcome. By using a comparative literary-cultural approach it becomes clear that such an assumption is not necessarily justified. Perhaps the law-speakers were unimpressed by or suspicious of a new technique that might well have seemed a challenge to their prestige and power, derived as these were from their oral knowledge. Orality allowed powerful individuals to appoint a group of friends and colleagues to decide on questions of law, with no one else privy to their discussions or able to question their decisions. Recording the law in written form, and deciding that whenever particular law-books contradicted each other the volume kept by the bishop in Skálholt would be decisive, removed power from the orally trained law-speaker and orally learned lawmen, and relocated it with the bishop and his book. In such circumstances, why should the law-speaker, at this time a learned layman elected to his influential and much respected position for a period of three years, feel inclined to offer an enthusiastic welcome to the technique of writing (Sigurðsson 2002)?

The Literary Aesthetics of Orally Derived Texts

But what can the comparative method tell us about texts of literary value? As mentioned earlier, the question of the origins of individual episodes and sections has not attracted the attention of literary scholars in recent decades. Instead these scholars have been preoccupied with the aesthetics of the individual text as a whole, applying interpretative models designed for authored modern fiction to medieval texts of uncertain origin. Foley (1991) has argued vigorously against such approaches in his book *Immanent Art*, borrowing the term 'immanent' from an important 1986 article by Clover on 'The Long Prose Form'. Clover speaks of the immanent saga in oral cultures – that is, the overall saga as understood by the audience and other members of a traditional culture even though they may never have heard more than fragments or episodes from it at any given session. Foley tries to define the aesthetics of the oral form, in which formulae and themes play an important role in building up the meaning of the text, and do not serve simply as mnemonic devices which help the singer or teller of tales to complete the recitation without hesitation or deviation. These devices serve to develop a series of connections with other similar characters and events, which help the audience to understand elements which may, from the perspective of a modern reader, be only hinted at vaguely. Thus a feature that

would be regarded as a compositional flaw in a written work may represent a deftly deployed artistic device in an oral work, a noteworthy feature of its *immanent art*. Foley also indicates that medieval texts should not be regarded as oral even though they may tell of characters and events prominent in oral tradition at the time of their writing. He prefers to talk about *orally derived texts*.

This overall approach can be applied to our *orally derived* saga material, in such a way as to increase our understanding of a cluster of sagas in which the same characters, families and events are described. The book-prose school always explained such contacts in terms of intertextual borrowing, with one saga having used another as a source even though the only link between the texts might be the name of just a single individual.

In order to address this problem several sagas whose events take place in the east of Iceland, the *Austfirðingasögur*, can be taken as an example in which to look for clues as to whether, where and how they may be referring to and relying on an audience's pre-existing knowledge of people, places and events. In these sagas we have the same chieftains appearing constantly, and several events are described or referred to in more than one saga (Sigurðsson 2002). The most prominent characters are also mentioned in sagas from other areas; in these works such figures often play a role in national politics at the Althing.

Moreover, the chieftains often appear in the sagas with little introduction, and it seems reasonable to assume that at the mention of their names the audience is supposed to know who they are and what their significance is. Even a basic family connection between brothers can go unmentioned, even though it may be the primary reason for the characters' behaviour, as can be determined from other texts which otherwise show no sign of having served as a source. Genealogies are not always included and more often than not contradict each other from text to text. They are not included as the inert materials of a slavishly learned tradition, however, but as functional elements within the saga. They can serve, for example, to valorize a particular character, or to identify an underlying connection between characters who would not necessarily feel obliged to act as they do were it not for this genealogical link.

Þorkell Geitisson appears in many unrelated sagas but is never fully developed as a character in any of them. However, his various appearances can be put into chronological order, based on the chronologies of the individual sagas. Thus, he grows up with his brother Þiðrandi in Krossavík (*Fljótsdæla saga*), and as a teenager at home he teaches his cousin law before setting out to travel abroad (*Droplaugarsona saga*, *Vápnfirðinga saga*). After his father has been killed he returns home and becomes a prominent chieftain (*Vápnfirðinga saga*). He demands revenge (*Íslendinga drápa*) and/or justice, and makes a name for himself in various legal cases until he reaches his early twenties (*Vápnfirðinga saga*). During these years he takes a girl from the next farm as his wife (*Landnámabók*, *Vápnfirðinga saga*), and the men in her family help Þorkell in his regional dealings. The wife eventually disappears from his life and Þorkell marries a chieftain's daughter from the north, as a part of his struggle for more broadly based

political influence (*Ljósvetninga saga*, version C). At this stage he makes peace with his father's killers and is also sufficiently powerful and influential to offer hospitality to outlaws at his farm (*Droplaugarsona saga*). Around the same time he heads south to help his friend Flosi (*Droplaugarsona saga*), who is the main opponent of Njáll and his sons in *Njáls saga*. In his late thirties Þorkell tries (unsuccessfully) to avenge his brother who had been accidentally killed by a Norwegian merchant (*Laxdæla saga*, *Gunnars þáttur Þiðrandabana*, *Fljótsdæla saga*). Þorkell appears as a respected figure at the Althing when he arranges with other chieftains to arrest his brother's killer, wherever he can be captured. In his early forties he is consulted as a learned lawyer at the Althing after his friend Flosi has burnt down Njáll's farm (*Njáls saga*). By this time, or shortly afterwards, he has formed an alliance with all the most powerful chieftains in the country, who are linked to him by ties of friendship and kinship (*Qlkofra saga*). He features in political negotiations at the time (*Ljósvetninga saga*, version A), and reappears finally in his late eighties at the Althing, refusing to help someone against the son of a chieftain, Guðmundr ríki, with whom Þorkell, in his day, had often crossed swords in legal cases (*Ljósvetninga saga*, version C). Other sources confirm that he lived to a ripe old age (*Ljósvetninga saga*, version C; *Vápnfirðinga saga*), so it need not surprise us that he should still be attending the Althing at this point.

It might be tempting to view this evidence from different sources as confirmation of the historical validity of the sagas: that the development of Þorkell's character as described in the saga was based on knowledge of a real person. But if we want to be strictly historical it is easy to point to examples which cannot be regarded as true in any sense, as when sources contradict each other regarding chronology or other matters. These instances could, however, be explained in terms of the existence of an oral tradition in which stories were told about the same events as those narrated in the written sagas. And we may assume that participants in that tradition knew of the origins and career of Þorkell Geitisson, even though his saga was never written down as a separate work. In our sources we see that there is enough material to generate such a saga – the audience could have been familiar with what might be called 'The Immanent Saga of Þorkell Geitisson'.

Landnámabók seems not to have been generally used as a source for saga writing in the east of Iceland. Nor did it use as sources those sagas now available to us in written form – with the exception of verbal links between *Brand-Krossa þáttur* and *Droplaugarsona saga* (through an unknown written source). The written sagas introduce unknown figures into their narratives, often the noble relatives of chieftains whom we know from other sources. Written sagas also refer to events which listeners would have been unable to understand without having prior knowledge of them. Examples of this include, first, the battle in Bøðvarsdalr (referred to in *Vápnfirðinga saga* and *Qlkofra saga*); second, the brothers from Búastaðir (in this latter instance the *Vápnfirðinga saga* author seems to assume that listeners realize that the brothers are the sons of Glíru-Halli); and, third, Brodd-Helgi's insinuations against the chieftains in *Qlkofra saga*. In this way the meaning of the sagas turns on an audience's knowledge of

narrative tradition – the assumption is that they will be able to supplement the written text from their own orally derived knowledge of characters and events.

In this way *Fljótsdæla saga* can be distinguished from the other sagas discussed here. It nearly always provides just the information that is often lacking from the other texts and explains clearly the relationships of characters and other information about events. This narrative approach brings the saga relatively close to forms of modern literature in which, to a much greater extent than in sagas, meaning derives from the written text alone. The apparently special status of *Fljótsdæla saga* can be explained in terms of its having been composed for listeners less familiar with the narrative material than the original audiences of the other sagas. Though the *Fljótsdæla saga* author's understanding of the narrative, as revealed in the text, can hardly have been unique among his contemporaries, he clearly recognized that he was writing for people whose understanding was less developed than his own – perhaps they lived in other parts of Iceland. There is no particular reason to believe that he drew on written sources in 'composing' his saga, as has often been argued, for though most chapters in the saga contain narrative elements for which parallels can be found in other sagas, there is no evidence of verbal borrowing – except perhaps from *Laxdæla saga*.

The picture set out here of the internal links between written saga texts and the oral traditions from which they may derive differs strikingly from ideas as to the age and associations of sagas which still find expression in recent publications. The evidence confirms the need for a re-examination of all our ideas regarding both the overall development of the genre, and our interpretative methodologies in respect of individual texts. Current methodologies, too dependent on a modern literary-theoretical mindset, underestimate the extent to which meaning in sagas developed from their creative interplay with the oral tradition, in which the audience played an integral role.

Approaching the sagas as orally derived texts can, therefore, prove helpful in highlighting artistic qualities which might otherwise either be overlooked completely or be dismissed as compositional flaws. By combining oral theory, comparative approaches, and new ways of thinking about the oral origins of the medieval sagas, we can generate an entirely new sense of the way that the artistry of these works might have been perceived by their original audiences.

The Sagas and Historicity

The issue of orality and historicity in the sagas can also be examined in the light of this new approach, particularly in relation to the two Vínland sagas. These works contain the oldest written accounts of the North American continent and tell the story of several transatlantic voyages undertaken by people from Iceland and Greenland around the year 1000: the first such authentically documented voyages describing pioneering encounters between Europeans and native Americans. There is earlier documentary evidence to suggest that the Vínland voyages were well known in

Iceland and on the continent of Europe before these two sagas were first written down. There has been no shortage of contradictory theories relating to the Vínland voyages, many of them drawing heavily on the evidence of the two sagas. These contradictions, however, can largely be explained in terms of the different methodologies used by different generations of scholars. If we understand the basic problems behind the different answers and take into account the progress made in Vínland studies in recent decades, whether in archaeology, philology or oral narrative tradition, we are in a position to revisit the old problem of the whereabouts of Vínland (Sigurðsson 2002).

The Vínland sagas are, of course, written accounts deriving from oral tradition rather than from eyewitness testimony, and they contain stories and information about remarkable voyages undertaken more than 200 years earlier. Thus the stories about these voyages were changed and reshaped in oral tradition. They may have been kept alive not only by descendants of the original voyagers but also by others – not least seafarers who told each other stories and exchanged information about how to reach and recognize faraway lands and locations.

Even though the Vínland sagas are literary products, they are based on the oral memory of people in Iceland. They are not spun out of thin air and they are certainly not to be viewed as myths and legends. There is no doubt that the Vínland sagas contain memories about actual characters who lived, and actual events which took place, around the year 1000. But it is unlikely that the saga accounts of such characters and events reflect historical reality in every respect. They disagree over particular details and contain material that we would now classify as fanciful and supernatural, for all that this constituted an integral part of the ‘real world’ to the medieval mind. All in all, the sagas represent our best evidence that the people of Greenland and Iceland undertook several voyages to the North American continent at about the time indicated in the sagas. We do not need archaeological finds, rune stones or the Vínland Map to prove that basic fact.

The Vínland sagas used to be interpreted in terms of a philological methodology that sought to explain all (vaguely) similar occurrences in medieval texts as examples of literary borrowings. This method led Jón Jóhannesson to conclude, shortly before his death in 1957 (see Jóhannesson 1962), that *Grœnlendinga saga* was older and more reliable than *Eiríks saga rauða*, which he claimed had used the former work as a source. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars either preferred *Eiríks saga rauða* or used both works. After scrutinizing all this evidence, Halldórsson (1978) has now come to the conclusion that the nature of the verbal similarities between the texts does not permit us to talk in terms of literary borrowings or written links between the sagas. He confirms that they were written down independently of one another, drawing on the same or similar traditional material that was circulating in oral tradition at the time. In this particular case, then, we can say that the traditional philological methodology, together with mistaken assumptions about the nature of the oral tradition, led to incorrect conclusions about the textual relationship between the two Vínland sagas.

When Anne and Helge Ingstad discovered L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland in the early 1960s and identified it somewhat speculatively as Leifr Eiríksson's Vínland, Helge Ingstad (1985) operated on the theory that *Eiríks saga rauða* represented a rewriting of *Grœnlendinga saga* – a notion which is now no longer sustainable. It is clear from the L'Anse aux Meadows findings that this location was used as a staging post for exploring the lands further south. The explorers would have repaired their ships there and gathered strength before and after the crossing from Greenland. The northern tip of Newfoundland in L'Anse aux Meadows is hardly the sort of location that would create and sustain positive saga memories about Vínland, the land of wine and grapes.

The new conclusion about the textual independence of the two sagas allows us to resume the debate as to the whereabouts of Vínland. Now that we can read the two sagas as independent accounts deriving from oral tradition we can examine them from a broader perspective, taking into account the mutable nature of oral tradition as well as the specific knowledge derived from the L'Anse aux Meadows site. We can now concentrate on what the sagas have to tell us as real sources. In doing so we must never forget that no one would ever have dreamed of going to North America to look for remains of Viking-Age explorers from Greenland and Iceland had not the sagas told us explicitly that such voyages had once been undertaken. It is, however, highly unlikely that the sagas tell the complete and unvarnished truth. They are a collection of memories of bygone times, assembled, organized coherently, and written down for the first time in the thirteenth century. That said, it is obvious that in the sagas we are dealing with a mixture of fact and fiction, a set of memories kept alive orally for several generations before being committed to parchment. We have to accept both the limitations and advantages which accompany this general perception.

The descriptions of the qualities of the land, the vegetation and the type of fish encountered by the saga characters have been used to narrow down the likely geographical location of Vínland. Assuming that the grapes mentioned in the sagas are meant to be wild grapes (*Vitis riparia*) and not just some generic berry, their northern distribution limits lie through the southern regions of the Gulf of St Lawrence. In the southern Gulf wild grapes were so prominent when Europeans arrived there in the sixteenth century that the French explorer Jacques Cartier (1491–1557) assigned the name *Île de Bacchus* (Isle of Bacchus) to a location near the city of Quebec, at the mouth of the St Lawrence river. Settlers in Miramichi Bay in New Brunswick also named a local area *Baie de Vin* (Wine Bay). It is hardly possible to come closer to Leifr's impression of the same land more than 500 years earlier when he gave it the name *Vínland*. The self-sown wheat of *Eiríks saga rauða* (chs 5, 10) may refer to wild rye (*Elymus virginicus*) which occurs in roughly the same area – and this location also represents the northern distribution limit for the butternut (*Juglans cinerea*). A butternut burl (cf. the *mqsurr* of *Grœnlendinga saga*, ch. 9, and *Eiríks saga*, ch. 5) was found in L'Anse aux Meadows. It had been cut with a metal tool and was in all likelihood brought there by the Norsemen, a very good indication of how far south they travelled. In the place they named Vínland, Leifr's men found salmon which were

both larger and more numerous than they had seen before. In this context we should note that the Canadian archaeologist Catherine Carlson (1996) has shown that in the eleventh century there were no salmon in Maine or further south, due to the warmer climate at that time. The rivers in the southern regions of the Gulf of St Lawrence, however, were full of salmon, which bred there after two years at sea rather than just one, the norm for salmon in Newfoundland. As a result the fish were relatively large. This seems to narrow down the likely location of Leifr's Vínland to that general area. Other natural resources mentioned in the two sagas support this conclusion (Bergþórsson 2000; Sigurðsson 2002; Wallace 2000).

When we try to interpret the saga texts we must not assume that every detail needs to match what is now known of L'Anse aux Meadows. Nor must we pay undue attention to what is likely to have developed into a regular sailing route for people from Greenland and Iceland to North America, with full use made of all available Viking-Age navigational resources and techniques. Before these people had identified the most convenient route and the places that could be safely frequented without running the risk of encountering too many hostile natives, they could theoretically have journeyed anywhere and everywhere, because the sagas tell us that they spent several years on each voyage. And if they had a whole summer to sail south from the northernmost tip of Newfoundland, their curiosity can surely not have been satisfied after just one day's sailing along the east and west coasts of Newfoundland and the south coast of Labrador.

We know that Eiríkr the Red spent three years exploring Greenland from south to north and combed it so thoroughly within that time that he was able to choose the very best farming area in that vast country. Accounts of early explorations in Iceland as recorded in *Landnámabók* offer a similar picture. First, several people circumnavigated the country (Iceland is about 300 km wide and 500 km long – roughly the same length as Newfoundland from north to south, or Nova Scotia from north to south), and it was only after several such voyages that the first settler, Ingólfr Arnarson, arrived. He spent three years exploring some 200 km of the coast before eventually settling in Reykjavík – again an ideal location from his perspective, relative to the entire region through which he had travelled. This suggests that Viking-Age travellers seem to have thought nothing of building temporary winter camps and then spending several years exploring new territories before deciding finally where to settle.

We can assume, then, that the tellers of these tales were skilled and professional seafarers and that it was vital for them to be able to give, receive and report to others information as to the best sailing routes from A to B – directions, timings and landmarks. Such details are likely to have been passed down via oral tradition, preferably as an integral part of a story, because traditional cultures often make use of stories as a way of preserving information of this kind. If we read the two Vínland sagas with all this in mind and take them seriously as sources, analysing their detailed descriptions, favouring the fuller account over the sketchier one, an immanent or mental map begins to emerge, as follows.

Bjarni Herjólfsson first sees three territories south and west of Greenland. The two more southerly ones are both forested but the third offers only rocks and glaciers. Leifr Eiríksson then retraces his path and comes to what was his Vínland on or near an island that lies north of a shallow strait, two days' sailing across open water southwest from Markland. Markland was the second territory encountered when sailing south along the coast from the Arctic, the first being Helluland. Leifr can sail into or through the strait and enter a sea lagoon with large salmon and wild grapes. A base camp is described in connection with a later voyage by Þorvaldr Eiríksson, at a location featuring shallow waters and islands to the west, a more dangerous coastline to the east, and a potentially treacherous peninsula further south. In the voyage of Þorfinnr karlsefni and Guðríðr it is possible to sail south and around that peninsula on the eastern side, passing fjords and eventually reaching a stream-rich fjord (called *Straumfjörðr* in *Eiríks saga*) with an island at its mouth. Further south from that fjord a flat peninsula stretches out, beyond which there is a river flowing into a sea lagoon that can be entered by ship. We also know that it is from the south and east that Þorfinnr karlsefni and his crew round the potentially treacherous peninsula to the north of the stream-filled fjord, so that they sail west towards Leifr's Vínland. A journey in that direction ultimately takes them to a place from where they can view the same mountains from behind as are visible from the other side, that is from the river which they had entered south of the stream-rich fjord and the flat peninsula.

All this makes good sense in terms of real-world landscapes if Leifr's Vínland is situated in the southern Gulf of St Lawrence, in and around Prince Edward Island and the Miramichi Bay. Þorvaldr's base camp ought logically to be located in L'Anse aux Meadows, and the treacherous peninsula would be on Cape Breton, leading us down to the Bay of Fundy – that is, to the streamy fjord of Þorfinnr karlsefni and Guðríðr. We can suggest Cape Cod as the low peninsula stretching out on the route further south, on the way to the river, possibly the Hudson river. The ultimate destination after rounding Cape Breton in search of Leifr's Vínland would then be in the St Lawrence estuary near the city of Quebec, on the other side of the Appalachian Mountains. In this way the Vínland sagas can be shown to present us with a coherent, immanent or mental map of the lands west and south of Greenland.

To put it differently: where do Viking-Age travellers go if they are in L'Anse aux Meadows with a Viking ship in the spring of the year 1000, and with a whole summer to explore new lands and gather goods to take back home to Greenland and Iceland? The answer must surely be: southwards and into the Gulf of St Lawrence. It was an opportunity to seek out the fruits and plants that Greenland lacked; it might even have been a chance to attempt to settle in some places before discovering that the land was already crowded with native inhabitants. In the end the intrepid traveller returns home and spends the rest of his life boasting of heroic voyages across the seven seas, and of having discovered new and previously unknown lands – just as the Icelandic sagas tell us.

The most interesting new direction in saga studies and orality comes when we move away from the old argument about whether and if the texts were based on an

oral tradition, and simply accept the need to read them as the product and reflection of such a tradition. This enables us to utilize all the knowledge gained from the fieldwork and theoretical discussion about the oral tradition of our own time, practically applying it to the world of these early texts. By using such an approach, we can reach a better understanding of the historical development from the oral stage to that of the written culture (something that was taking place at the same time as our early texts came into being). Indeed, we gain a fuller appreciation of the literary aesthetics of the sagas when reading them as orally derived texts. At the same time we gain a better comprehension of how they can be used by us as a reflection of the social reality and historical past of which both the tradition and the later written texts formed a living part.

See also ARCHAEOLOGY; CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; CONTINUITY; EDDIC POETRY; FAMILY SAGAS; GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PSEUDO-HISTORY; LATE PROSE FICTION; LAWS; MANUSCRIPTS AND PALAEOGRAPHY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; POSTMEDIEVAL RECEPTION; RHETORIC AND STYLE; ROMANCE; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; SAGAS OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY; SAGAS OF ICELANDIC PREHISTORY; SHORT PROSE NARRATIVE; SKALDIC POETRY; SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS.

NOTE

For a fuller treatment of the questions discussed here, see Sigurðsson (2002).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Andersson, Theodore M. (1964) *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins: A Historical Survey*. Yale.
- Andersson, Theodore M. (1966) 'The Textual Evidence for an Oral Family Saga.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 81, 1–23.
- Andersson, Theodore M. (1967) *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading*. Cambridge, MA.
- Baetke, Walter (1956) *Über die Entstehung der Isländersagas* (Berichte über die Verhandlung der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig [Phil.-historische Klasse] 102/5). Berlin.
- Bergþórsson, Páll (2000) *The Wineland Millennium: Saga and Evidence*, transl. Anna Yates. Reykjavík.
- Byock, Jesse L. (1984) 'Saga Form, Oral Prehistory, and the Icelandic Social Context.' *New Literary History* 16, 153–73.
- Byock, Jesse L. (1994) 'Modern Nationalism and the Medieval Sagas.' In Andrew Wawn (ed.) *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga*. Enfield Lock, pp. 163–87.
- Carlson, Catherine (1996) 'The (In)significance of the Atlantic Salmon.' *Federal Archaeology* 8.3–4, 22–30.
- Clover, Carol (1982) *The Medieval Saga*. Ithaca, NY, and London.
- Clover, Carol J. (1985) 'Icelandic Family Sagas (Íslendingasögur).' In Carol J. Clover and John Lindow (eds.) *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide* (Islandica 45). Ithaca, NY, and London, pp. 239–315.
- Clover, Carol J. (1986) 'The Long Prose Form.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 101, 10–39.

- Fentress, James and Wickham, Chris (1992) *Social Memory* (New Perspectives on the Past). Oxford and Cambridge, MA.
- Finnegan, Ruth (1988) *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication*. Oxford and New York.
- Foley, John Miles (1991) *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic*. Bloomington and Indianapolis.
- Foote, Peter (1984) 'Sagnaskemmtan: Reykjahólar 1119.' In Michael Barnes et al. (eds.) *Aurvandilstá: Norse Studies* (Viking Collection). Odense, vol. 2, pp. 65–83.
- Halldórsson, Ólafur (1978) *Grænland í miðaldarritum*. Reykjavík.
- Harris, Joseph and Hill, Thomas D. (1989) 'Gestr's Prime Sign: Source and Signification in *Norma-Gests þátr.*' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 104, 103–22.
- Holtmark, Anne (1966) 'Heroic Poetry and Legendary Sagas.' In *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Studies 1965*. Copenhagen, pp. 9–21.
- Hughes, S. F. D. (1980) 'Óskar Halldórsson: Uppruni og þema Hrafnkels sögu, Rannsóknastofnun í bókmenntafræði við Háskóla Íslands, Fræðirit, 3. Reykjavík 1976. Pp. 84.' [review] *Scandinavian Studies* 52.3, 300–8.
- Ingstad, Helge (1985) *The Norse Discovery of America*, vol. 2. Oslo.
- Jóhannesson, Jón (1962) 'The Date of the Saga of the Greenlanders', transl. Tryggvi J. Oleson. *Saga-Book* 16, 54–66. First published in Icelandic in *Nordala*, the Festschrift for Sigurður Nordal on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, Reykjavík: 1956, pp. 151–7.
- Lord, Albert B. (1960). *The Singer of Tales* (Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 24). Harvard.
- Lönnroth, Lars (1971) 'Hjálmar's Death-Song and the Delivery of Eddic Poetry.' *Speculum* 46.1, 1–20.
- Lönnroth, Lars (1976) *Njáls Saga: A Critical Introduction*. Berkeley and Los Angeles.
- Malm, Mats (1996) *Minervas äpple: Om diktsyn, tolkning och bildspråk inom nordisk göticism*. Stockholm.
- Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben (1993) *Fortælling og ære: Studier i islændingesagaerne*. Aarhus.
- Mitchell, Stephen A. (1991) *Heroic Sagas and Ballads*. Ithaca, NY, and London.
- Pálsson, Einar (1990) *Egils saga og úlfar tveir* (Rætur íslenzkrar menningar ÍS). Reykjavík.
- Sigurðsson, Gísli (2002) *Tálkun Íslendingasagna í ljósi munnlegrar hefðar: Tilgáta um aðferð* (Rit 56). Reykjavík (in English as no. 2 in the Parry Collection's monograph Series at Harvard University Press, 2004.)
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur (1958) *Dating the Icelandic Sagas: An Essay in Method* (Viking Society for Northern Research. Text series 3). London.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. (1936) 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics.' *Proceedings of the British Academy* 22, 245–95.
- Tristram, Hildegard L. C. (ed.) (1994) *Text und Zeittiefe* (ScriptOralia 58). Tübingen.
- Wallace, Birgitta (2000) 'An Archaeologist's Interpretation of the Vinland Sagas.' In William W. Fitzhugh and Elisabeth I. Ward. (eds.) *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*. Washington and London, pp. 225–31.

Pagan Myth and Religion

Peter Orton

The Conversion of Scandinavia

The official adoption of the Christian religion in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Iceland took place at various times between the mid-tenth century AD and the end of the eleventh. Although we possess no detailed contemporary, or even near-contemporary, accounts of the processes of conversion in any part of Scandinavia, it is clear that in no case should we envisage a sudden, national or complete reorientation of religious thought and activity. Before the period I have defined, individual Scandinavians came into contact with Christianity and its adherents as they travelled and traded in Europe and beyond, and some of them changed their religion as a result; but when more determined and systematic attempts were made to convert whole peoples, the pagan Scandinavians were often reluctant to abandon the gods and goddesses to whom they and their forebears had devoted themselves for centuries past. Although our written evidence is very limited, and often of uncertain direct value because of the Christian perspective it inevitably reflects, it is reasonably clear that paganism nowhere simply collapsed at the first touch of Christian doctrine.

Much of what we know about the conversion of Iceland is drawn largely from the account written by the priest and historian Ari Þorgilsson in the first half of the twelfth century (Benediktsson 1968: 14–18; see also Strömbäck 1975: 13–26). Óláfr Tryggvason, who became king of Norway in 995 and had already attempted to impose Christianity in his own country, is identified by Ari as the prime mover in Iceland's conversion. There had been Christians in Iceland right from the time of the settlement of the country, and others had converted since; but it was not until AD 1000, according to Ari, that the Althing was persuaded by a delegation sent by King Óláfr that the country should adopt Christianity as its official religion. Conversion was by no means a foregone conclusion: the assembly was divided on the issue, and in the end the decision devolved upon the law-speaker, Þorgeirr, a pagan. Fearing for the political unity of the country if no agreement could be reached about which law,

Christian or pagan, everyone should follow, Þorgeirr first persuaded the assembly to accept the idea of a compromise, and then plumped for Christianity, though allowing the continuation of some pagan observances (the exposure of unwanted children and the eating of horsemeat), and even pagan sacrifice, provided it was practised away from public view.

If this seems a somewhat untidy way of deciding an issue of this magnitude, we should bear in mind not only the conflicting pressures to which Þorgeirr was subject, but also the tolerance implied by the Icelanders' prior adherence to a polytheistic religion.¹ To pagan Icelanders, the Christian God might well have appeared, initially at least, as a potentially valuable addition to the existing range of pagan deities – a way of thinking that has been called 'adhesion' (see Nock 1933: 15–16). No missionary would have neglected the point that the recognition of the Christian God involves the rejection of all others; but there is some evidence from different parts of the Germanic world that the force of this condition was not always appreciated immediately.²

Pagan Religious Practices

How were the pagan deities worshipped in Scandinavia? The Icelandic prose sagas, dating mostly from the thirteenth century or later, contain several retrospective accounts of heathen cults and practices, among the best-known being the description in *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* of Hrafnkell's devotion to Freyr and his joint ownership with the god of a horse called Freyfaxi (Jóhannesson 1950: 100–5; Turville-Petre 1964: 17–21). Such saga literature, however, post-dates the conversion by several centuries; and although independent evidence can sometimes corroborate the details it gives of historical paganism, we plainly cannot depend on it too heavily. On the other hand, a more reliable idea of what paganism was really like is difficult to reconstruct out of the very amorphous body of evidence, of varied nature, date and provenance, available to us. Here I can do no more than indicate the nature and quality of this evidence, and illustrate the kinds of parallel and connection that scholars have used in their attempts to arrange it into a coherent picture.³

Scholarly discussion of Germanic pagan beliefs and practices can scarcely neglect the *Germania* of the Roman historian Tacitus, written in the final years of the first century AD (Much 1967). Some of Tacitus' information relates to the more northerly German tribes whose religion probably had much in common with that of the peoples from which the various Scandinavian nation-states emerged. His most detailed account of a pagan ritual comes in chapter 40 (Much 1967: 441), where he describes the cult of the goddess Nerthus, venerated by a group of Germanic peoples (including the Anglii, the ancestors of the English Angles) living around the Baltic Sea. Nerthus was believed by her devotees to inhabit a sacred grove on a Danish island, though she was not always there; only the priest (*sacerdos*) who attended her in her grove could tell when she was present. The goddess was periodically drawn in state through the

countryside in a cart pulled by oxen. Peace, and a general laying-aside of all weapons, accompanied her progress. At the end of her tour, Nerthus was restored to her grove (though Tacitus here uses the word *templum*, 'temple', on the implications of which see below), and was washed, along with everything connected with her, in a lake by slaves who were then deliberately drowned.

Tacitus glosses the Latinized name *Nerthus* as *terra mater*, 'mother earth';⁴ but scholars have also been struck by the etymological identity of her name with that of the Norse pagan god Njörðr, whose name and character we know only from Icelandic literary sources dating from over 1,000 years later. The difference of sex between Nerthus and Njörðr is probably less of a barrier to the identification than it might appear at first sight; for according to the mythology, Njörðr's son and daughter, Freyr and Freyja, who also have names that are closely related etymologically, were twins, so it is not inconceivable that Njörðr and Nerthus represent twin sibling deities too.

Other aspects of Nerthus' ritual, most notably her travels in a cart, are associated in later Icelandic traditions with the cult of other members of the divine family (the Vanir) of which Njörðr was a member, particularly his children Freyr and Freyja. Nerthus's oxen-drawn cart has been linked by scholars with the chariot of the goddess Freyja, Njörðr's daughter, though this was pulled by a pair of cats according to our only source of information on the matter (Faulkes 1987: 24; 1988: 25). Several other literary references to ritual carts have been invoked in connection with Nerthus', as well as actual carts excavated by archaeologists in Scandinavia, the nature of which suggests a ritual rather than practical function. The best-known example is from the ninth-century burial at Oseberg in southern Norway (see Davidson 1982: 74, 78, 118). Of the various literary parallels in Icelandic, easily the most striking is in *Gunnars þáttur helminga*, preserved in the fourteenth-century Icelandic manuscript known as *Flateyjarbók* (Vigfússon and Unger 1860–8: 337–9). Gunnarr, a Norwegian, suspected (wrongly, as it happens) of murder, flees to Sweden, where there was a vigorous cult of Freyr. He ingratiates himself with a young woman (perhaps a priestess) who is locally regarded as the god's wife. Towards the end of each year Freyr, in the form of a wooden effigy, accompanied by his 'wife', was drawn by servants in a cart through the Swedish countryside to promote fertility, a custom which closely matches the perambulations of Nerthus in Tacitus' story. Gunnarr joins Freyr's tour, but their progress is slowed by blizzards and Gunnarr antagonizes the god by resting in his cart. Freyr attacks him; but Gunnarr remembers the Christian God worshipped by King Oláfr back in Norway and manages to defeat Freyr, who departs, leaving behind his effigy, which Gunnarr destroys.

The rest of the story need not concern us much, though the information it provides that Freyr normally expected human sacrifices reminds us of the drowning of the slaves at the end of Nerthus' tour. There are other parallels with Tacitus' story, for example the defeat (rather than the destruction) of Freyr, and his eviction from the effigy into which he has entered, which suggests a notion of the god as an independently mobile spirit, like Nerthus, who was not always present in her grove. But

despite such parallels, the lateness of *Flateyjarbók* as a source warns us against placing too much reliance on its evidence, even when it seems to confirm some aspects of an older and more trustworthy tradition. The case illustrates the general problem of historical interpretation that arises in other cases of reference to pagan cult in saga literature written long after the conversion, such as the account of Freyr's worship in *Hrafnkels saga*: the positive evidence of parallels between two sources might be regarded as effectively cancelled out by the lateness and relative untrustworthiness of one of them.

The theme of human sacrifice to pagan gods forms a link with a third text which is also regarded as important for our knowledge of Scandinavian pagan practices and ideas. This is the Latin description by Adam of Bremen, a German monk writing (on the basis of an informant's report) in the late eleventh century, of a pagan temple at Uppsala in Sweden, and the religious practices that were followed there (Schmeidler 1917: 257–60; Tschan 1959: 207–8; Turville-Petre 1964: 244–6). The temple itself, an impressive structure trimmed with gold, contained idols of Þórr, Wodan (that is, Óðinn) and 'Fricco', the last of whom is usually identified as either Freyr or a closely related god. One of the most remarkable aspects of Adam's account is the detail it gives of the various functions of these three gods. Thus Þórr, whose image was positioned centrally and carried a 'sceptre' – probably a misidentification of the hammer Mjöllnir that the god wields so effectively against his enemies the giants in the mythology – governed the weather, and was propitiated when disease or famine threatened; Wodan, depicted as armed, supported warriors and was appealed to when war loomed; and Fricco, associated with peace and pleasure (his effigy is described as possessing an enormous phallus), had the power to bless marriages. Every nine years a communal feast was held at the temple, at which nine male specimens of every living creature, including human beings, were sacrificed and their bodies hung from the branches of trees forming a grove beside the temple. Incantations were sung, though Adam, who as a Christian is naturally repelled by all this, explicitly declines to give any details. A note added to the account describes a great evergreen tree of unknown species standing near the temple, and a well into which human victims were sometimes thrown.

Literary accounts of paganism in action are sometimes confusing or contradictory in their references to its material adjuncts, particularly temples and idols. In chapter 9 of the *Germania* (Much 1967: 171), Tacitus tells us that the German pagans of his day did not build temples for their gods, or represent them in human shape in the form of idols or pictures: their deities were conceived as spiritual presences, and their only temples were the natural groves of forest and field. In chapter 39 (Much 1967: 432), Tacitus describes the periodic assembly of a tribe called the Semnones in a sacred wood that was held to be the place where they had originated, and in which an omnipotent god was believed to dwell. Here again, human sacrifice is mentioned. Nerthus too lived in a grove, though as we saw earlier, Tacitus also mentions her *templum* at one point in his account. Adam of Bremen gives a quite detailed description of the temple-building at Uppsala, though he also mentions a grove adjacent to it on which the bodies of sacrificial victims were hung.

The extent to which such references to ‘temples’ point to actual buildings is difficult to say, particularly when we are dealing with sources from times when building techniques among the Germanic peoples were relatively primitive; each case has to be judged on its merits (Turville-Petre 1964: 236–47; Olsen 1966: 277–88). Similar uncertainties may also attach to references to ‘idols’, especially in the work of Christian clerics such as Adam of Bremen, whose exposure to accounts of paganism in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms (95.5, 113.12–16) and Isaiah (44.15–20, 46.7), might well have predisposed them to see all pagan religion as automatically idolatrous. The problem is further complicated by a somewhat weakly differentiated set of terms for the material objects of paganism (idols, altars, temples, groves) in the Old Germanic languages generally (Turville-Petre 1964: 236), and also by the probability that external observers have distorted their accounts of Germanic paganism simply by introducing conceptions and terminology based upon their experience of other religions. There is, it should be said, rather plentiful additional evidence, particularly in the form of Scandinavian settlement names, for the kind of open-air rituals indicated in the accounts we have glanced at here; not only woodland groves, but also wells, rocks, piles of stones and meadows are often linked in place names with the names of gods, presumably the ones who were venerated there.

Mythology: Sources

We turn now to the mythology associated with Norse pagan religion, beginning with a brief survey of the primary sources of information.

Mention may first be made of archaeological evidence. From the Bronze Age (1500–500 BC) onwards, the Scandinavian peoples and their ancestors produced a quantity of artefacts in (among other materials) wood, metal or stone, including several carved or moulded figures of human shape, or inscribed pictures showing similar beings, or animals, engaged in various activities. The models for the figures are not usually self-evident, though some of them have been interpreted as portraits of Scandinavian pagan deities. Perhaps the best-known example is the small bronze seated figure holding what looks like a large hammer, discovered in Iceland and plausibly identified as a representation of the god Þórr (Davidson 1982: 68). Some of the inscribed pictures illustrate mythological incidents or characters known from the literary sources (for examples, see the plates between pp. 208 and 209 in McKinnell 1994). These representations are, of course, secondary evidence because the measure of their mythological relevance lies in their resemblance to some literary narrative known from elsewhere, but they provide valuable evidence of familiarity with aspects of the mythology in particular places and times. An example is the carved representation of Þórr fishing from a boat for the *Miðgarðr* serpent that appears on both the tenth- or eleventh-century Gosforth Fishing Stone in Cumbria, England, and the eleventh-century Altuna stone in Sweden (McKinnell 1994: plates 6 and 7; for the Altuna stone, see also p. 419 below).

The literary sources for Old Norse mythology consist mainly of Icelandic texts in either prose or verse. The only important exception is the Latin *Gesta Danorum*, a history of the Danes in 16 books by the Dane Saxo Grammaticus, born about AD 1150. The last seven books of this work, which seem to have been written first, trace the history of Denmark from the mid-tenth century up to Saxo's own time and seem to be based on wholly Danish sources; but the first nine books, completed probably by c.1215, contain much pagan mythological lore (see Davidson and Fisher 1996). Their sources appear to have included Icelandic oral traditions, though it is not easy to distinguish Icelandic-based from Danish-based material in Saxo's work, which makes any evaluation of his evidence difficult. Like the Icelander Snorri Sturluson, who wrote at much the same time, Saxo's view is that the Norse pagan gods were not really gods at all, but human beings from the east who had managed to pass themselves off as divine.

The literary sources in Icelandic include skaldic poetry, a term usually applied to the works of named poets (skalds) during the Viking Age, often composed in praise of historical kings or other powerful persons, and much of it preserved as quotations in Icelandic prose works of various kinds, including the sagas. The earliest skalds whose names we know were ninth-century Norwegians, but much of the extant skaldic poetry is by Icelanders. The metrical form of skaldic verse is especially complex; but the main difficulty for the modern reader lies in its elaborately figurative diction, much of which would be quite opaque now were it not for our knowledge (based largely on other, primary literary sources) of the myths to which it alludes. This special diction is thus (like the archaeological evidence mentioned earlier) basically secondary evidence of pagan myth (see Clunies Ross 1994–8: 28, who calls such terms 'mythic precipitates'), though when skaldic poems actually recount mythological stories, as some of them do (for example, *Ragnarsdrápa*, *Haustlög*, *Pórsdrápa* and *Húsdrápa*; see McKinnell 1994: 16), they must be counted among our primary sources.

'Eddic poetry' refers to a corpus of Icelandic verse, some of it mythological in subject matter, that scholars call 'the Poetic Edda' (or 'the Elder Edda', a designation now largely abandoned as carrying questionable historical implications). About 35 eddic poems survive, all of them in Icelandic manuscripts, the most important of which is the Codex Regius, written towards the end of the thirteenth century and probably copied wholesale from a somewhat earlier exemplar (see Neckel 1962; Dronke 1969–97; Larrington 1996). Its contents are ordered according to subject matter. First comes an unbroken series of mythological poems containing information about the history and future of the universe and the activities and adventures of the pagan gods and goddesses, as well as other types of supernatural being, especially giants; then we have a series of heroic poems, many of them dealing with the lives of various generations of the European dynasty of legendary kings and heroes known as the Völsungar. Stories of the Völsungar are also extant in German versions from the Middle Ages, notably the *Nibelungenlied*. Some of the heroic poems also contain mythological narratives or references, so these need to be included among our primary mythological sources.

The first mythological poem in the Codex Regius is *Voluspá* ('The Prophecy of the Seeress'), which gives an outline of the entire history of the universe from its creation to its eventual destruction and rebirth. The seeress of the title is a preternaturally aged woman who can see over all time, past, present and future. The poet tells us that the god Óðinn, always eager for knowledge, induced her to reveal her extraordinary memories of the past and vision of the future. The other mythological poems, listed here in the order in which they appear in the Codex Regius, are *Hávamál*, *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Grímnismál*, *Skírnismál*, *Hárbarðsljóð*, *Hymiskviða*, *Lokasenna*, *Prymskviða*, *Völundarkviða* and *Alvíssmál*. Other manuscripts provide other texts of some of these poems, as well as texts of additional mythological poems, notably *Baldrs draumar*, *Rígsþula* and *Hynndluljóð* (see chapter 5 above).

Although the eddic poems contribute greatly to our knowledge of Scandinavian pagan mythology, they survive in manuscripts written long after the conversion of Iceland, and contain very little clear indication of their age and origins. Some of them show the influence of Christian mythology. Scholars have long assumed that these poems represent transcriptions of oral compositions which are older than the manuscripts in which they survive, and some still believe that a few of them were actually composed in pagan times. It is, of course, possible that some of the stories preserved in these poems are largely unchanged from much older versions, but there is no reliable procedure for identifying features of the narrative that have been grafted on during either oral or written transmission. Perhaps all we can be certain of is that any story involving pagan deities has its roots in pre-Christian times, though we shall see later that some of the specialized techniques that have been developed for interpreting mythological narratives can occasionally suggest something of the antiquity of the stories told in the eddic poems.

The writings of the Icelander Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241) are of major importance for our knowledge of Scandinavian pagan mythology. Snorri was a leading political figure of the time: twice Iceland's law-speaker (1215–19 and 1222–31), and involved, between these two periods, in an early, failed attempt to bring Iceland under Norwegian rule. Snorri was a skald and some of his poems survive. He is also credited by modern scholars (with varying degrees of confidence) with the composition of a number of the Icelandic prose sagas, including *Egils saga* and the series of sagas about the early Scandinavian kings known as *Heimskringla*. The first part of the latter work, *Ynglinga saga*, must be regarded as a primary source for pagan mythology. It contains much information about several of the gods (Óðinn, Njǫrðr, Freyr), though here they are regarded euhemeristically as historical figures who ruled Sweden in the earliest times.⁵

This euhemeristic conception of the gods is also found (though presented in a less straightforward way) in Snorri's prose *Edda*, the most important of all our literary sources. The work survives in a number of medieval manuscripts, the earliest dating from the early part of the fourteenth century (Faulkes 1988: xxix–xxxiii).⁶ It consists of a prologue (suspected by some to be the work of a different, later author) and three separate sections: *Gylfaginning* ('The Tricking of Gylfi'), *Skáldskaparmál* ('Poetic

Diction') and *Háttatal* ('List of Verse Forms'). We do not know in what order these four parts of the work were written. *Háttatal*, the least important from our point of view, consists of a single poem of 102 stanzas by Snorri, with commentary, intended to illustrate the variety of metrical and stylistic forms available to skaldic poets. *Skáldskaparmál* contains lists of kennings and *heiti* (special words used only in poetry), each list assembled under the heading of the common noun that poets may, if they wish, displace with any of its items. There are also numerous illustrations, taken directly from older skaldic poems, of good style and expression. *Skáldskaparmál* also includes some mythological narratives in prose to explain the stories behind some of the kennings listed, and these constitute important primary sources for the mythology.

The content of *Skáldskaparmál* is presented within a framing narrative involving a question-and-answer conversation between one Ægir, a magician who visits Ásgarðr, home of the gods, and Bragi, god of poetry; but the framing story is sustained only intermittently, and Snorri eventually abandons it altogether. In *Gylfaginning*, on the other hand, which is by far the richest source of mythological information among the four parts of the prose *Edda*, a framing narrative of similar type is maintained from beginning to end. This frame describes an adventure of Gylfi, a legendary Swedish king in the distant past. We learn from the prologue how, during his reign, a noble tribe from the east calling themselves the Æsir arrive in Sweden intending to settle there. Later, in *Gylfaginning* itself, the Æsir intimate to Gylfi that they are descendants of the gods and goddesses who eventually come to be worshipped (partly, Snorri implies, as a consequence of Gylfi's dealings with the human Æsir) in Scandinavia. The city of Troy, from which the wandering Æsir claim to have come, was the original terrestrial home of these deities.

Gylfaginning begins with the story of Gefjun, a woman of the Æsir who visits Gylfi in disguise and tricks him out of a large piece of his territory, which she hauls away eastwards into the middle of the sea with a plough drawn by giant oxen. Gylfi, more impressed by this feat than resentful of it, decides to visit Ásgarðr, the city established by the Æsir in Sweden, to find out more about their magical powers. When he arrives there he is confronted (though presumably he does not realize this at the time) by all manner of visual illusions created by Æsir wizardry. Three men present themselves to him, and Gylfi asks to speak to someone learned. In reply, the three propose a game, the terms of which are not described very clearly, though it appears that Gylfi may ask as many questions as he likes, but will lose the game (and perhaps his life) if he runs out of questions before his three informants run out of things to tell him. Gylfi submits his questions, and elicits a mass of information and stories about the history of the world, the pagan gods, other supernatural beings such as the giants and the dwarfs, and mythical objects and places. The sources for many of these mythological narratives in *Gylfaginning* are to be found among the mythological poems of the Poetic Edda, some of which are quoted directly by Snorri. Finally, the three Æsir dismiss Gylfi from their presence because he has exhausted their store of knowledge (presumably Gylfi has won the game); the hall in which his interview with the Æsir

has taken place disappears; and Gylfi instantly finds himself alone in an open, deserted plain. He returns to his own country and tells his people the stories he has heard.

But this is not the end of the framing story. After Gylfi's departure, the Æsir conduct an extensive programme of renaming in Scandinavia: persons and places there are given the names of the persons (including the gods) and mythical places that the Æsir have mentioned in their replies to Gylfi's questions. The aim is to befuddle later generations of Scandinavians who, knowing the stories passed on by Gylfi, will not be able, in retrospect, to distinguish (for example) a human 'Þórr', created by the renaming programme, from the divine Þórr in the myths originally related by Gylfi after his return from Ásgarðr. The confusion will, presumably, have the effect of apotheosizing the Æsir (or perhaps the persons they have renamed; it is not clear if any distinction between these and the Æsir themselves is implied) in Scandinavian eyes.

This represents a somewhat tidied-up summary of the narrative structure of *Gylfaginning*; there are problems of detail which are not easily resolved. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the prologue and *Gylfaginning* represent, in tandem, a remarkably sophisticated piece of historical euhemerism. The Æsir, worshipped as gods and goddesses in Iceland prior to the conversion, were originally the historical Trojans of Homeric tradition, who deliberately distorted their accounts of their own exploits in such a way as to create an impression of their divinity. Their human descendants, as a result, came to think of them in this light, so that when they arrive in Scandinavia, the stories they tell Gylfi are not of Trojan forebears living in a terrestrial world, but of divine ancestors whose sphere of action is an entire cosmography. The immigrant Æsir, it seems, have themselves been duped. Gylfi, not surprisingly, fails to see what has happened (which is no doubt the main reason why this part of the prose *Edda* is called 'The Tricking of Gylfi'), and passes on this whole mythology, by implication only an elaborate fantasy, to the Swedes, who (we are probably to understand) now begin to venerate the gods and goddesses in the myths, as if they were genuinely divine. The renaming programme imposed by the Æsir results in the creation of traditions according to which some members of the Scandinavian peoples could claim descent from the same gods and goddesses they had worshipped until the conversion. Snorri takes it upon himself to show them how wrong they are in this: like Gylfi, they too have been tricked, for these 'divine' ancestors they claim are only ordinary human beings who have been misleadingly renamed by the human Æsir.

It would be easy to conclude from this summary that Snorri's main purpose in *Gylfaginning* was simply to undermine the notion of the reality of pagan divinities ('reality', that is, in the sense of the kind of genuineness that committed Christians attribute to God), and so lay to rest whatever traces of pagan belief and practice might have lingered on in thirteenth-century Iceland; but his aims must have been a good deal more complicated than this. When we consider the prose *Edda* as a whole, one of the images of Snorri that emerges is of a cultural conservator: he wanted to record in writing, and so preserve, pagan mythological traditions. Ostensibly, his motive was

the value he placed on Icelandic poetic activity, which could not continue along traditional lines unless young poets acquired a knowledge of the basis in mythological narrative of much of the style of this poetry. From this perspective, the narrative framework in *Gylfaginning* is most obviously interpreted as Snorri's way of covering himself from the charge of encouraging any belief in the old gods, rather than as an explanation of paganism itself. Even so, although it is impossible to view the story of Gylfi's visit to Ásgarðr as anything other than a fiction, it might nevertheless represent the kind of process of historical error and confusion that Snorri, as a Christian, actually believed accounted for the error (as he saw it) of paganism.

Snorri's explanatory and historical prologue (if it is indeed his work), and his use of a framing narrative in *Gylfaginning* raise some difficult questions for modern readers about the propriety of lifting the myths he records out of the context in which he presents them. Snorri's modern readers tend to bypass his framework and treat the myths not primarily as sources of information about traditions relating to the Trojan war circulating in Iceland in Snorri's day, as the prologue and the narrative framework of *Gylfaginning* might encourage us to do, but as manifestations of a *genuine* pagan mythology with organic or structural relations to social and religious realities in the period of their development and popularity. The framing narrative is implicitly regarded as nothing more than Snorri's way of excusing his own preservation of what are in fact genuinely old pagan traditions. It may be, of course, that we are meant to read the framing story in this way; but we should remember that to do so involves uncheckable assumptions about Snorri's motives and intentions.⁷

The Interpretation of Old Norse Pagan Myths

An attempt will now be made to describe and illustrate some of the interpretative procedures that scholars have applied to Old Norse mythology. The term 'mythology' has been used so far in this chapter to denote the whole surviving corpus of Norse pagan myths; but what exactly is a myth? The question can be approached from several different angles. Most would agree that a myth is a narrative, or the basic story underlying some particular narrative rendering of it; but this is too broad for a definition of myth in particular. One way of narrowing it is to use contrastive generic criteria, as folklorists do when they place myth in relation to two other genres, legend and folktale (see Bascom 1984: 3–20). According to this widely used scheme, folktale is essentially fictional, set in the past but not usually in any particular time or place, and often having a conspicuous moral implication and purpose. Legends are distinguished from folktale by their basis, however obscure, in history, and are regarded as true by the societies that preserve them. They typically show named characters living in a recognizable world of human beings, though (as in the case of folktales) often in a period remote from the present of the storyteller. Myths, finally, are also considered to be true by the societies that preserve them, though their action typically takes place in an almost unimaginably remote past, and their

characters are often animals, culture-heroes, or deities operating not primarily in the terrestrial world of everyday experience, but in a cosmography where the ordinary rules of nature do not apply.

This way of defining myth has its value as a means of isolating a mythological corpus for study; but its limitations become apparent as soon as we realize that mythologies are often related in some way to practical religion (as is obviously the case with Old Norse mythology), or (less obviously) to other social and historical factors in the societies that produce and preserve them. A daunting body of theoretical work has already accumulated on the definition, function and history of myth, and its relationship both to religion and to the structure and workings of myth-making societies. A good introduction to this whole field is Kirk (1970). Here we can do no more than glance very briefly at some of the approaches to the study of myth (from social, historical and religious angles) that have been proposed, and try to suggest their value and limitations for our understanding and appreciation of Old Norse pagan mythology in particular.

Mircea Eliade

An example of a general theory of myth which draws very emphatic lines of connection between myth, religion and social action is that of the historian of religions Mircea Eliade (see Eliade 1971: *passim*, or 1976: 18–31). In Eliade's view, all religions and their supporting mythologies involve a differentiation between 'sacred' and 'profane' spheres of action and experience. The key to the distinction is mythical precedent. Thus (for example) the only part of the spatial world that is significant for religious man is the part of it that he has 'made' – occupied, and given form and shape to, in other words. Whatever lies beyond this made world is profane – empty and formless. The crucial decision in the construction of sacred space is the initial identification of a particular place as the centre of the world. Once identified, this spot becomes the axis of all future orientation from which movement outwards may be initiated and to which return is made, but also from which movement upwards to the world of the gods, or downwards to the world of the dead, is possible. Here, at the world's perceived centre, traditional, religious man establishes his home, settlement or city; and in so doing he repeats the cosmogony, the original work of the gods in creating the universe. According to such principles, any house or settlement is also a temple, a place of worship, and its inhabitants images of their gods. The temple is a microcosm of the universe.

This connection between myth and ritual is not confined to the level of choosing and 'making' the spatial world; according to Eliade, no action is meaningful unless it repeats the archetypal action of a god or gods in the mythical past. Thus Eliade's theory involves the very broadest definition of ritual: *any* meaningful action, from waging war to procuring food and drink, is a sacred ritual with a divine precedent in the mythical past. For religious man, 'nothing can begin, nothing can be *done*' (Eliade 1976: 22) without a precedent of this sort.

The highly intellectual character of Eliade's theory does, of course, make it vulnerable to criticism from the angle of specific mythologies and religions; and no reader of Eliade can fail to notice the implicit idealization, never far below the surface of his writing, of traditional cultures as more fully integrated and happier than they become once they have been infected with the modern, western conception of time and history as a continuum rather than an eternally repeated pattern. However, the explanatory potential of Eliade's theory is considerable: it explains why any human character or group should be depicted as behaving in a way that mirrors the actions of a god or gods as represented in a mythology.

Using as examples some of the texts that we have already referred to, we might relate the goddess Freyja's possession, in Snorri's account of Old Norse mythology, of a chariot (Faulkes 1988: 25), combined with her reputation for extensive travels (Faulkes 1988: 29), to the perambulations of the goddess Nerthus (perhaps Freyja's mother, perhaps even identical with her to all intents and purposes) in her cart, as described by Tacitus in the *Germania*: the myth underpins the ritual. Or we might explain the reference, in the marginal addition to Adam of Bremen's account of pagan Uppsala, to a great evergreen tree and a well in which human sacrifices are offered in terms of Snorri's matching account of the vast mythical ash-tree Yggdrasill (Faulkes 1988: 17), the greatest of trees whose branches extend over the whole of creation, and at whose foot the gods congregate every day. Associated with this tree, furthermore, is a well, Mimir's well, at one of its roots, in which the god Óðinn sacrificed one of his eyes in return for a drink of its wisdom-giving waters. The layout of the holy place at Uppsala reflects quite closely the conception of the shape of the universe we find in Snorri and the eddic poem *Völuspá*, and thus provides an excellent demonstration of Eliade's principle that all temples are organized according to a mythical model. Finally, in connection with Eliade's theory of the universal centre, we may point to the comment by one of the Æsir in Snorri's *Gylfaginning* that Ásgarðr, the gods' first dwelling, now known as Troy, was sited *í miðjum heimi*, 'in the middle of the world' (Faulkes 1988: 13).

Georges Dumézil

Eliade was influenced by some of the early publications of George Dumézil, though the 'tripartite functionalism' which is Dumézil's main contribution to the study of Old Norse pagan mythology was developed in his later works (see Dumézil 1973). Dumézil saw the various deities in the mythology as divisible into three groups according to their embodiment of one of three principles: sovereignty and the sacred; force; and fecundity. Óðinn, Þórr and Freyr are respectively the most important representatives of these three classes of god. But Dumézil does not see this division as confined to Scandinavian, or even Germanic, myth and religion; it reflects, in his view, a much older, underlying Indo-European ideology. Comparative evidence in support of his argument is provided by similar functional divisions among the gods and goddesses of other cultures within the Indo-European family; for example, the

three functions in Roman culture are represented by Jupiter, Mars and Quirinus. Furthermore, according to Dumézil, most peoples of Indo-European origin were once divided into three classes along the same lines. The cults of particular gods and goddesses were therefore probably organized according to social class. Thus (for example) the priestly class in the Scandinavian pagan world would have been devoted to Óðinn, the warrior class to Þórr, and the farming class to Freyr. The structure of the mythology, and the religious practices with which it is linked, are therefore to be related ultimately to the social organization of Indo-European society. A cornerstone of Dumézil's theory is that no other family of cultures except the Indo-European exemplifies any truly comparable form of tripartite functionalism, though other, non-Indo-European societies founded on tripartite ideologies do exist.

Several objections have been (or might be) made to Dumézil's theory. One point that has been made against him is that there is little in the way of independent (that is, archaeological) evidence to show that Indo-European society, prior to its geographical and linguistic disintegration, was organized in the way that Dumézil's theory assumes (see Clunies Ross 1994–8: 16 note). The problem is linked with another, even more fundamental objection. Dumézil's theory (and Eliade's theory is open to a similar line of criticism) encourages procedures that are likely to lead to self-validating results. A supposedly ancient and primitive ideology is distilled from a range of texts from various parts of the Indo-European dispersal area; but the varied date and broad distribution of the same texts then provide more or less automatic confirmation of the antiquity and durability of this ideology.

Claude Lévi-Strauss

The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss escapes this charge by basing his method of interpretation on reading myths against the background of the societies that preserve them. To Lévi-Strauss, a myth is not a fossilized remnant of some archaic mode of social or religious existence, but a strictly contemporary witness to social conditions at the time of its preservation. His theory is a difficult one, impossible to do full justice to in a brief sketch, though that is all that can be attempted here. The interested reader is strongly advised to read Lévi-Strauss in his own words (see Lévi-Strauss 1955, 1984).

At the heart of Lévi-Strauss's theory is the idea that a myth is always an attempt on the part of the society that uses it to 'mediate' (that is, reduce or resolve on rational grounds) contradictions or paradoxes in the world as it is perceived. Myths are made up of 'oppositions' – binary sets of opposing ideas (for example, life and death, heaven and earth, human and animal, order and chaos, peace and war). Various sets of oppositions may be present within an individual myth, and the mediation of a particular opposition by some element in the story may result in the creation of a new opposition at a deeper level, with the original mediator representing one of its opposing members. But all the oppositions will ultimately boil down to the one fundamental opposition which the myth is designed to mediate.

Both the value and the limitations of Lévi-Strauss's theory for students of Old Norse pagan mythology are very well demonstrated by McKinnell in his recent application of it to the god Loki (in his 'trickster' capacity) in the mythology (McKinnell 1994: 34–8). McKinnell begins with the basic opposition in the mythology generally between civilization and chaos, embodied respectively by the gods and the monsters of Ragnarøk, or final doom. The mediators of this opposition are the giants, 'representatives of natural forces which are neither civilised nor chaotic', but nearer to the chaotic end of the spectrum than the civilized because, as mediators, they replace the monsters of the original opposition in a new, secondary opposition between the gods and the giants as traditional enemies. In this secondary opposition, the gods' symbolic representative is Þórr, whose main role in the mythology is to kill giants. The giants, on the other hand, have no constant symbolic representative in this opposition, because conflict with Þórr always results in their death; different, named giants appear from myth to myth, all in their turn to be killed by Þórr. At this level, the mediator between gods and giants is Loki, regarded as a god in most contexts, but a giant by heredity and the ally of the giants against the gods at Ragnarøk. According to this Lévi-Straussian analysis, therefore, Loki seems to operate, structurally speaking, to reconcile us to the coexistence of civilization and chaos in the world.

McKinnell is not, however, satisfied with the results of his own application of the theory, mainly because it implies sharper distinctions between categories than are actually made in the mythology: for example, there is too much overlap between giants and monsters for the giants to emerge as credible mediators of the primary opposition between gods and monsters; and the gods, far from representing a constant level of peaceful civilization, have actually fought an intertribal war in the past (cf. p. 84 above). McKinnell prefers to emphasize Loki's conflicting roles as a destabilizing influence in the universe on the one hand, but on the other as its saviour on occasion, as, for example, in the 'giant builder' myth in *Gylfaginning* (see Faulkes 1987: 35–6; 1988: 34–6), where Loki intervenes to prevent the catastrophic loss of light and reproductive powers from the world, symbolized by the threatened surrender to the builder of the sun, the moon and the goddess Freyja as reward for his work on the Æsir's fortifications. Loki's character and actions suggest, for McKinnell, 'a general sense that order and chaos, good and evil, may be opposite aspects of the same things, precariously balanced' (McKinnell 1994: 37) – a much subtler and more disturbing conclusion than that to which his Lévi-Straussian analysis leads.

For McKinnell, the Lévi-Straussian procedure seems to function not as a satisfactory analysis in itself, but as part of the route to one. Generally speaking, the chief appeal of Lévi-Strauss's theory is that it offers an apparently systematic and analytical approach to the meaning of mythical texts, even though the theory itself depends on assumptions about the function of myths in general that have not been, and probably can never be, tested very thoroughly. Furthermore, the identification of significant oppositions, and of mediating elements or agents, will no doubt always be a rather subjective business. On the other hand, there is no doubt that structural analysis along Lévi-Straussian lines is one way of bringing to the surface whatever contrasts,

analogies or other patterns may be present in a myth – things which the interpreter cannot afford to ignore.

Margaret Clunies Ross

Lévi-Strauss provides part of the foundation for Margaret Clunies Ross's approach to Old Norse pagan mythology, notably in his insistence on treating myths as documents relevant to social conditions prevailing at the time when they are preserved. Looking back at earlier critical work, Clunies Ross notices 'a strong and persistent tendency... to value the supposedly "original" form and meaning of a myth' more highly than the meanings it had for those (such as Snorri Sturluson, Saxo and the compiler of the Poetic Edda) who preserved it in writing in the Middle Ages (Clunies Ross 1994–8: 16). Clunies Ross gives full attention to the historical context in which the mythology was preserved, but also concentrates on the entire 'Old Norse mythic world', rather than simply on individual myths, her aim being to identify the 'major conceptual fields of early Scandinavian thought' (Clunies Ross 1994–8: 34), and examine the way the mythic world 'encodes' them (Clunies Ross 1994–8: 33).

Clunies Ross, conscious as she is of redressing an imbalance in previous scholarship, recognizes that her own interpretative project, like the earlier ones it is intended to complement, carries its own burden of ideological assumptions, and her conclusions are always expressed very circumspectly. For example, the fact that the mythological texts that survive are not new compositions, but more or less radical adaptations of earlier oral traditions, might make us wonder if it is safe to assume that the preservation by writers in a Christian society of a body of mythology ultimately rooted in paganism *necessarily* testifies to a sense of its relevance to strictly contemporary social conditions. Was nothing that was regarded as socially outmoded preserved for its own sake? Another effect of this approach is to postpone questions about whatever original connections might have existed between the mythology and pagan religion.

In spite of such reservations, Clunies Ross's approach yields a whole range of convincing interpretations and explanations. Her commentary on the eddic poem *Skírnismál* and the prose version derived from it in Snorri's *Gylfaginning* may be used to illustrate her methods (Clunies Ross 1994–8: 131–43). She begins with the observation, already established in an earlier chapter, that of all the male gods, only the Vanir (Njörðr and Freyr) marry giant wives (Skaði and Gerðr respectively). The Vanir, it appears, had little choice in the matter: the Æsir would not supply them with marriageable women because they saw themselves as being of higher status than the Vanir. On the other hand, the Vanir custom of incestuous marriage ceased when they were amalgamated with the Æsir, who forbade it (Clunies Ross 1994–8: 97). Thus only the giants were left to supply the Vanir with wives, though the Vanir would not reciprocate because they perceived the giants as being of lower status than themselves. Freyr's use of a go-between, Skírnir, in his wooing (to guard against loss of face if Gerðr refused him), and the gods' concern in the mythology generally to

protect Freyja from the giants' clutches, both support this analysis. Clunies Ross relates the operation of these constraints on exogamous unions by reference to parallels in early Icelandic society, where the conventions seem designed to ensure that girls marry 'upwards or hypergamously' (Clunies Ross 1994–8: 92). Similarly, Gerðr's initial hostility to Freyr's suit, followed by the surprisingly sudden collapse of her resistance, reflect 'a combination of two basically incompatible ideals in early Scandinavian society, the self-assertion admired in individuals of either sex, and the dominance of males over females'. Women are admired for asserting their wishes as individuals; but they 'must not . . . declare themselves non-players in the marriage game' (Clunies Ross 1994–8: 136).

Students of Old Norse mythology should not despair at the sheer range of possible approaches to its interpretation. The fact that some myths seem naturally to repel certain approaches and invite others does not undermine or favour the validity of any particular approach; it is only a function of the breadth of our current ideas about what constitutes myth. Even within a single, reasonably coherent mythology such as the Old Norse corpus, individual myths vary considerably in terms of their form, emphasis, function and history, so it is not surprising that no one theory can deal with all of them. Kirk, writing of Lévi-Strauss's theory and its application, concluded that it is 'always worth adopting *among other approaches*' (Kirk 1970: 78); but the remark is true of any interpretative model.

See also ARCHAEOLOGY; EDDIC POETRY; FAMILY SAGAS; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PSEUDO-HISTORY; LANGUAGE; LAWS; METRE AND METRICS; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PROSE OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION; RHETORIC AND STYLE; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; SAGAS OF ICELANDIC PREHISTORY; SKALDIC POETRY; SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS; WOMEN IN OLD NORSE POETRY AND SAGAS.

NOTES

The topic of this chapter is, of course, vast, and the treatment of it here is consequently rather superficial. For a more expansive treatment, see Lindow (2001).

- 1 On the mentality of polytheistic pagans generally, see Halbertal and Margalit (1992: 8). Monotheism involves 'an uncompromising attitude towards the unity of God', whereas polytheism 'has room for different viewpoints and beliefs and therefore is pluralistic. This pluralism is not just the product of compromise but is in fact an ontological pluralism that constitutes a deeper basis for tolerance.'
- 2 Cf. the case of the Anglo-Saxon king Rædwald of East Anglia in the seventh century, converted in Kent but then, according to Bede's

Historia Ecclesiastica, corrupted, on his return to his own kingdom, by his wife and his counsellors, so that his temple contained both a Christian altar and also a pagan one for sacrifices to 'devils' (*...in eodem fano et altare haberet ad sacrificium Christi et arulam ad uictimas daemoniorum*, HE, ii, 15; Colgrave and Mynors 1969: 190–1). An example of an Icelander in the same semi-converted condition is Helgi the Lean, who was 'very mixed in belief' (*blandinn mjök í trú*), believing in Christ but praying to Þórr on voyages, or when he was in trouble (McKinnell 1994: 21; Benediktsson 1968: 250).

- 3 A detailed account of Germanic pagan cults and the evidence for them is given in Turville-Petre (1964: 236–62).

- 4 Cf. North (1997: 19–25). Noting the almost certainly masculine ending *-us* of the name *Nerthus*, North concludes from this and other evidence that Tacitus was mistaken about the sex of Nerthus: he was male, like Njörðr, and ‘Mother Earth’ was his bride.
- 5 Euhemerism is a doctrine associated with Euhemerus of Messene (c.300 BC), according to which the deities of a mythology are explained as the apotheosized ancestors of their devotees; see Simek (1993: 75–6, s.v. ‘Euhemerism’).
- 6 These manuscripts contain various versions of the prose *Edda* and there is no general agreement about which is the most authoritative. The version in the R manuscript (the Codex Regius), written probably during the first quarter of the fourteenth century, is the basis of Faulkes’s edition and translation (Faulkes 1987, 1988, 1998).
- 7 Even the mythological eddic poems that Snorri evidently knew might be regarded as covered by his all-embracing theory of a fraud perpetrated by the Trojans: they could be understood as composed by the Swedes on the basis of the mythological lore and stories communicated to them by Gylfi.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Bascom, William (1984) ‘The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives.’ In Alan Dundes (ed.) *Sacred Narratives: Readings in the Theory of Myth*. Berkeley, pp. 5–29. Rpt from *Journal of American Folklore* 78 (1965): 3–20.
- Benediktsson, Jakob (ed.) (1968) *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók* (Íslenzk fornrit I). Reykjavík.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret (1994–8) *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*. 2 vols. Odense.
- Colgrave, Bertram and Mynors, R. A. B. (eds.) (1969) *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Oxford. (= *HE*).
- Davidson, Hilda Ellis (1982) *Scandinavian Mythology*. Feltham.
- Davidson, Hilda Ellis and Fisher, Peter (ed. and transl.) (1996) *Saxo Grammaticus: The History of the Danes, Books I–IX*. Cambridge. First pub. as 2 vols., 1979, 1980.
- Dronke, Ursula (ed. and transl.) (1969–97) *The Poetic Edda*, vol. I: *Heroic Poems: Atlakviða, Atlamál, Guðrúnarvǫg, Hamðismál*, vol. II: *Mythological Poems: Vǫluspá, Rígsþula, Vǫlundarkviða, Lokasenna, Skírnismál*. Oxford.
- Dumézil, Georges (1973) *Gods of the Ancient Northmen*, ed. Einar Haugen (Publications of the UCLA Center for the Study of Comparative Folklore and Mythology 3). Berkeley.
- Dundes, Alan (ed.) (1984) *Sacred Narratives: Readings in the Theory of Myth*. Berkeley.
- Eliade, Mircea (1971) *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Bollingen Series 46). Princeton, NJ.
- Eliade, Mircea (1976) *Occultism, Witchcraft, and Cultural Fashions: Essays in Comparative Religions*. Chicago.
- Faulkes, Anthony (transl.) (1987) *Snorri Sturluson: Edda*. London.
- Faulkes, Anthony (ed.) (1988) *Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*. London.
- Faulkes, Anthony (ed.) (1991) *Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Háttatal*. Oxford.
- Faulkes, Anthony (ed.) (1998) *Snorri: Edda: Skáldskaparmál*. 2 vols. London.
- Halbertal, Moshe and Margalit, Avishai (1992) *Idolatry*, transl. Naomi Goldblum. Cambridge, MA, and London.
- Jóhannesson, Jón (ed.) (1950) *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* (Íslenzk fornrit XI). Reykjavík.
- Kirk, Geoffrey S. (1970) *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures* (Sather Classical Lectures 40). Cambridge.
- Larrington, Carolyne (transl.) (1996) *The Poetic Edda*. Oxford.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude (1955) ‘The Structural Study of Myth.’ In T. A. Sebeok (ed.) *Myth: A Symposium*. Bloomington, IN, pp. 81–106.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude (1984) ‘The Story of Asdwal.’ In Alan Dundes (ed.) *Sacred Narratives: Readings in the Theory of Myth*. Berkeley, pp. 295–314.
- Lindow, John (2001) *Handbook of Norse Mythology*. Santa Barbara.
- McKinnell, John (1994) *Both One and Many: Essays on Change and Variety in Late Norse Heathenism* (Philologia 1). Rome.

- Much, Rudolf (ed.) (1967) *Die Germania des Tacitus*, rev. Herbert Jankuhn and Wolfgang Lange. Heidelberg.
- Neckel, Gustav (ed.) (1962) *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, vol. I (text). Heidelberg.
- Nock, E. (1933) *Conversion*. Oxford.
- North, Richard (1997) *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature* (Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 22). Cambridge.
- Olsen, Olaf (1966) *Hørg, Hov og Kirke* (Historiske og arkæologiske Vikingetidsstudier). Copenhagen. English summary, pp. 277–88.
- Schmeidler, Bernhard (ed.) (1917) *Adam von Bremen, Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*. 3rd edn. Hanover and Leipzig.
- Sebeok, T. A. (ed.) (1955) *Myth: A Symposium*. Bloomington, IN.
- Simek, Rudolf (1993) *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, transl. Angela Hall. Woodbridge.
- Strömbäck, Dag (1975) *The Conversion of Iceland: A Survey*, transl. Peter Foote. London.
- Tschan, Francis J. (transl.) (1959) *Adam of Bremen: History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*. New York.
- Turville-Petre, E. O. G. (1964) *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*. London.
- Vigfússon, Gudbrand and Unger, Carl Richard (eds.) (1860–8) *Flateyjarbók*. 3 vols. Oslo.

The Post-Medieval Reception of Old Norse and Old Icelandic Literature

Andrew Wawn

Undrast enn
Europear
Frodir visindi
Fedra vorra.

(Finnur Magnússon 1811)¹

Först den nye kamp; så de gamle kæmpeviser.
(Sven Grundtvig 1848)²

‘Ex Vetustis Codicibus et Monumentis Hactenus Ineditis Congesti’³

The reception of old northern literature in post-medieval Europe could not begin in earnest until there were published texts to receive and react to; and such volumes were not available in significant numbers until the second half of the seventeenth century. A sixteenth-century trickle of editions and translations grew into a seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century canon-forming and subject-defining stream, accompanied by discursive works of cultural contextualization and philological reference. These volumes helped to determine which texts were accessed, by whom, and in what way; in turn, their content and even their appearance were determined to a significant extent by aesthetic and political priorities at the time of publication. The process whereby old northern texts moved from script to more widely accessible print often had a political dimension. Diplomatic tensions between Denmark and Sweden encouraged exploration of the literary links that each country could establish with an heroic Gothic past. Visiting Icelandic scholars often assisted in this work by the collection

and transcription of early manuscripts. The influence of the published volumes was not confined to the region or age in which they were published. Many enjoyed a shelf life of several centuries in institutional and private libraries throughout Europe, as other communities and countries developed their own old northern consciousness.

Among the principal 1500–1750 primary text editions and translations to which frequent reference will be made in this chapter are the following:

- 1514 *Danorum regum beroumque Historiae* [Saxo Grammaticus], ed. Christiern Pedersen. Paris.
- 1575 *Den danske krønike* [Saxo Grammaticus], transl. Anders Vedel. Copenhagen.
- 1594 *Norske kongers krønike* [Heimskringla summary], transl. Mattis Størssøn. Copenhagen.
- 1633 *Snorre Sturlessøns Norske kongers chronica*, transl. H. Peder Claussøn. Copenhagen.
- 1644 *Historiae Danicae libri XVI* [Saxo Grammaticus], ed. Stephanus Stephanius. Sorø.
- 1664 *Gottrici & Rolfi Westrogothiae regum historia* [Gautreks saga, Hrólf's saga Gautrekssonar], ed. Olaus Verelius. Uppsala.
- 1665 *Edda Islandorum* [Snorri's Edda], ed. Peder Resen. Copenhagen.
- 1665 *Ethica Odini pars Eddæ Sæmundi vocata Haavamaal*, ed. Peder Resen. Copenhagen.
- 1665 *Philosophia antiquissima Norvego-Danica dicta Woluspa*, ed. Peder Resen. Copenhagen.
- 1666 *Herrauds och Bosa saga*, ed. Olaus Verelius. Uppsala.
- 1672 *Hervarar saga*, ed. Olaus Verelius. Uppsala.
- 1680 *Thorstens Viikings-sons saga*, ed. Jacob Reenhielm. Uppsala.
- 1691 *Saga om k. Oloff Tryywaszon i Norrege*, ed. Jacob Reenhielm. Uppsala.
- 1693 *Fostbrödernas, Eagles och Asmunds saga*, ed. Petter Salan. Uppsala.
- 1694 *Sagann af Sturlaunge binum starf-sama*, ed. Guðmundur Ólafsson. Uppsala.
- 1695 *Sagan af Illuga Grydar Föstra*, ed. Guðmundur Ólafsson. Uppsala.
- 1697 *Ketilli Haengii et Grimonis Hirsutigenae patris et filii historia*, ed. Olof Rudbeck. Uppsala.
- 1697–1700 *Heims kringla*, ed. Johan Peringskiöld. Stockholm.
- 1705 *Historia Hrolfi Krakii*, ed. Þormóður Torfason. Copenhagen.
- 1715 *Wilkina saga, eller Historien om konung Thiderich af Bern och hans kämpar; samt Niflunga sagan*, ed. Johan Peringskiöld. Stockholm.
- 1716 *Arae multiscii schedae de Islandia* [Íslendingabók], ed. Christian Worm. Oxford.
- 1720 *Hialmters och Olvers saga*, ed. Johan F. Peringskiöld. Stockholm.

- 1722 *Saugu Asmundar, er kalladur er Kappabani*, ed. Johan F. Peringskiöld. Stockholm.
- 1737 *Nordiska kämpa dater*, ed. Erik Julius Björner. Stockholm.

Among the works of more general textual, cultural and philological reference published during the same period, the following titles were of particular importance:

- 1555 Olaus Magnus, *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*. Rome.
- 1593 Arngrímur Jónsson, *Brevis commentarius de Islandia*. Copenhagen.
- 1609 Arngrímur Jónsson, *Crymogaea sive rerum Islandicarum dicarum*. Hamburg.
- 1636 Ole Worm, *RUNIR seu Danica literatura antiquissima . . . eller Literatura runica*. Copenhagen.
- 1650 Magnús Ólafsson (ed. Ole Worm), *Specimen lexici runici*. Copenhagen.
- 1651 Runólfur Jónsson, *Grammaticæ Islandicæ rudimenta*. Copenhagen.
- 1658 Olaus Magnus, *A Compendious History of the Goths, Swedes and Vandals, and other Northern Nations* (an anonymous English translation of Olaus Magnus 1555). London.
- 1673 Lucas Jacobsen Debes, *Færoæ et Færoa reserata*. Copenhagen. English transl. John Sterpin 1676.
- 1683 Guðmundur Andrússon (ed. Peder Resen), *Lexicon Islandicum*. Copenhagen.
- 1685 Petrus Lagerlöf, *Dissertatio de skaldis veterum hyperboreorum*. Uppsala.
- 1689 Thomas Bartholin, *Antiquitatum danicarum de causis contemptæ a danis adhuc gentilibus mortis*. Copenhagen.
- 1691 Olaus Verelius, *Index lingvæ veteris Scytho-Scandicæ sive Gothicæ*. Uppsala.
- 1695 Þormóður Torfason, *Commentatio historica de rebus gestis Færeysium*. Copenhagen.
- 1697 Þormóður Torfason, *Orcades*. Copenhagen.
- 1703–5 George Hickes, *Linguarum vett. septentrionalium thesaurus grammatico-criticus et archaeologicus*. Oxford.
- 1705 Þormóður Torfason, *Historia Vinlandiæ antiquæ*. Copenhagen.
- 1706 Þormóður Torfason, *Gronlandia antiqua*. Copenhagen.

Philological Energy, 1500–1750

From the high Renaissance onwards neo-classical critics, familiar with prestigious Graeco-Roman culture, viewed with some distaste the publication of primary and secondary texts associated with the barbarians who, led by the mighty warrior Óðinn, had once sacked Rome. In Britain Alexander Pope directed his archaized mockery at

the dullness and desiccation of scholars of Gothic antiquity: ‘But who is he, in closet close ypent, / Of sober face, with learned dust besprent?’; ‘Right well mine eyes arede the myster wight, / On parchment scraps y-fed, and Wormius hight’ (Sutherland 1963: 170, ll. 185–8). Yet many other readers were deaf to such disdain, believing, like William Temple in 1690, that Ole Worm and his Scandinavian colleagues had ‘very much deserved from the Commonwealth of Learning’ (Temple 1690: 92). Such devotees had found ways of identifying with the old north. They relished the discursive and geographical range of the new volumes. There was law, chronicle, romance, heroic legend, runology, grammar, lexicography, prosody; and the narratives described the foundation and development of Viking-Age communities in mainland Scandinavia, Iceland, Greenland, the Faeroe Islands, the Orkney and Shetland Islands, and Vínland, as well as of Viking adventures in the mistier fictional worlds of the *fornaldarsögur* (see chapter 25 below). Gothic antiquity could also impress modern articulate citizens with its coherent spirituality, its subtle systems of social and political interaction, its international court culture, and the unexpectedly high status it accorded to women.

Over two centuries after 1500, changes in modern aesthetic and political focus gradually encouraged the publication of new volumes. Thus, for some readers the attention paid by seventeenth-century Swedish editors to *fornaldarsögur* came to seem at odds with either neo-classical decorum or Enlightenment rationality. By the end of the eighteenth century, therefore, anthropological and historical curiosity promoted a more systematic engagement with the *Íslendingasögur* corpus (see chapter 6) than had previously been attempted. Though extracts from two dozen such works were included in the widely read work of 1689 by Bartholin, no editions or translations of complete *Íslendingasögur* texts were published before the comprehensive 1775–1840 text series published by the Arnamagnæan Commission and by Det nordiske Oldskrift-Selskab, both based in Copenhagen. Similarly, as late as 1750 only a limited range of Old Norse poetry was available in print: the 1665 Resen editions of *Hávamál* and *Völuspá*, and the extracts in works of reference such as that of 1636 by Ole Worm (‘*Krákumál*’, Egill Skalla-Grímsson’s ‘*Höfuðlausn*’; runic script texts with Latin translations) and of 1689 by Bartholin (21 eddic poems cited; Icelandic extracts with Latin translations). These selections came to seem no substitute for more comprehensive coverage of the eddic and skaldic corpora, which (it was believed) not only provided valuable ethnological, anthropological and comparative mythological data, but could also offer an invaluable Hyperborean perspective on the post-1760s cult of Ossian and other *Volks poesie*. Interest in Old Norse poetry developed strongly in this sympathetic intellectual milieu. The first comprehensive edition of the Poetic Edda, then often referred to as the *Sæmundar Edda* (after its attribution to Sæmundr fróði Sigfússon of Oddi, d. 1133), duly appeared in Copenhagen between 1775 and 1818, with what then passed for full scholarly apparatus. Such editions became prized items in private and public libraries.

Scandinavian cultural politics also helped to energize the publication and reception of old northern texts and traditions between 1500 and 1750. The spirit of Gothic

nationalism played over the pages of many of the primary and secondary volumes listed above. In the choice of texts edited, titles, dedicatees and other prefatory material, Danish and Swedish scholars could suggest continuities between their respective modern societies and the heroic spirit of the ancient Goths. This battle of the books was well joined by the middle of the sixteenth century, and continued unabated throughout a seventeenth century scarred by three wars and lengthy periods of diplomatic tension between the two countries. The first Danish translation of Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* (c.1200), packed with tales of Danish heroes and heroism, was published in Copenhagen in 1575. In Ole Worm's work of 1636, early Danish literary culture is presented as both complex and exotic (the extracts are presented in runic form, even though there was no manuscript support for this initiative). Worm's work of 1636 also began the process of establishing a relatively stable canon of frequently cited Old Norse poems and images, which exercised considerable influence all over Europe well into the twentieth century. The composite Viking-Age hero who emerged from such texts was noble-born, brave, buccaneering, restless, articulate, and clear-sighted at the approach of death. Two oft-repeated Latin mistranslations of phrases in 'Krákumál' in Worm's 1636 work added spice to this heady Gothic brew. They helped to establish the twin notions that Vikings quaffed ale from the hollowed-out skulls of their butchered foes (rather than from antlers), and that they regarded battle as a pleasure equal (rather than wholly inferior) to the embrace of a beautiful woman. Such filigree proved popular and hence stubbornly resistant to correction.

The 1665 Peder Resen editions of *Hávamál* and *Völuspá* helped still further to bang the drum for the old 'Norwegian-Danish' culture. As the respective title pages claim, the poems offer a comprehensible system of philosophy and ethics, far removed from the instinctual Viking barbarism depicted by hostile Roman historians, medieval chroniclers and (some) Renaissance humanists. Equally influential in this respect was Bartholin's work of 1689, which, thanks to the efforts of the Icelandic codicologist Árni Magnússon,⁴ was packed with prose and verse extracts from unpublished manuscripts, all chosen to explain and illustrate old northern patterns of thought and behaviour, notably the death-defying laughter of heroes. A late seventeenth-century Danish nation, mobilized for war, was encouraged to emulate this steely ancestral spirit.

Seventeenth-century Swedish scholars matched the patriotic antiquarianism of their Danish colleagues blow for blow. Johannes Magnus' dismissive portrait of Denmark in *Historia de omnibus Gothorum Sveonunqve regibus* (1554) immediately found fraternal support in Olaus Magnus' work of 1555. Patriotic pride and Counter-Reformation fervour encouraged Olaus to revel in accounts of Danish defeats, glory in Gothic triumphs, and highlight the wealth of natural and human resources in Sweden a land, ripe for immediate Catholic reclamation. For more than two centuries Olaus' *Historia* remained a richly stocked bran tub of old northern fact and fancy into which British and European scholars and writers dipped regularly.

In addition, by the end of the seventeenth century, a combination of favourable accident (the arrival in Uppsala of Icelanders such as Jón Rugmann with his bag of

manuscripts) and conscious design produced editions of *fornaldarsögur*, many of them set, wholly or in part, in ancient Sweden. These were prepared by Olaus Verelius (1664, 1666, 1672), Guðmundur Ólafsson (1694, 1695), Olof Rudbek (1697) and Johan F. Peringskiöld (1720, 1722). Some Swedish scholars embraced the soaring theories of Rudbeck as adduced in his vast *Atland eller manheim* (1679–1702), according to which Sweden was identifiable as the lost Atlantis, and hence the *fons et origo* of Graeco-Roman culture. Other readers favoured Biörner's 1737 work, a hefty 'sagoflock . . . om forna kongar och hjälter',⁵ again with Latin and Swedish translations. Biörner's tales of uncomplicated Viking-Age bravado attracted their full share of Enlightenment scepticism, but the volume's influence was widespread and long-lasting. One tale in particular caught the eye. Reenhielm's 1680 edition of *Þorsteins saga Víkingsson* had dealt with the father; now Biörner printed for the first time the saga about Þorsteinn's famous son Friðþjófr. *Friðþjófs saga hins frækna*, in a variety of incarnations (see below), became a defining text of old northernism in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe and North America.

'Swiss Philosophy and Danish Rhymes':⁶ Mallet, Percy and the New Old North

For all the importance of politicized antiquarianism in Scandinavia between 1500 and 1750, arguably the two most influential old northern texts published during this period were written in French by a native of Switzerland, albeit at the instigation of the Danish government. Paul-Henri Mallet was responsible for *Introduction à l'Histoire de Dannemarc, où l'on traite de la Religion, des Loix, des Mœurs et des Usages des Anciens Danois* (1755) and for *Monumens de la Mythologie et de la Poésie des Celtes, et particulièrement des anciens Scandinaves, pour servir de supplement et de preuves à 'L'Introduction à l'histoire de Dannemarc'* (1756); revised editions appeared in 1763 and 1787, and there were translations into German (1765) and English (1770; see below). In the *Introduction* Mallet followed Worm and Bartholin (and ultimately Snorri Sturluson) in claiming that the Æsir, led by Óðinn, had escaped from the ruins of Troy and re-established themselves in Scandinavia as a formidable military and cultural presence. He also argued that this relocated community had been the birthplace of European chivalry.

Mallet's French translations of the skaldic verse selections in Worm's 1636 work lent support to Mallet's claim that such prosodic complexity was in itself evidence of a sophisticated ancient culture. Modern responses, including his own, to early poetry were changing fast, however. In 1755–6 the neo-classicist Mallet praises the technical virtuosity of the skalds; by 1763 a more neo-romantic Mallet highlights instead their extravagant imagery and other sublimities, all reflecting the vivid impression which nature had made on primitive minds untamed by classical convention. It was through Mallet's original volumes, or through the translations, digests and popularizations based on them, that some of the substance and much of the significance of Old Norse mythology came to the attention of European readers.

The stages of Mallet's impact in Britain are representative of the reception situation elsewhere in Europe. Though Bishop Thomas Percy's two-volume translation, *Northern Antiquities* (1770), was not the first book published in England to celebrate the old north, it was certainly the most influential. Earlier scholars had marked out the ground. In *De Anglorum gentis origine disceptatio* (1670), Robert Sheringham was the first scholar to quote extensively from Old Norse texts in an English publication. Well read in contemporary Scandinavian scholarship, often floundering in philological detail, and insecurely served by baffled typesetters, Sheringham followed the example of Richard Verstegen (*Restitution of Decay'd Intelligence*, 1626) in asserting that there were significant British links with this long-forgotten old northern world. By writing in English, Aylett Sammes reached a wider readership with his *Britannia antiqua illustrata, or the Antiquities of Ancient Britain derived from the Phoenicians* (1676), which included many similar snippets of lore and literature, as did John Sterpin's translation of Debes's work of 1673, a colourful saga-derived human and natural history of the Faeroe Islands.

The respective canvases of Olaus Magnus in 1658 and Hickes in 1703–5 were broader. Hickes provided Anglo-Saxonists and old northernists in Britain and Europe with systematic comparative philological guidance in two pioneering – and wrist-breakingly weighty – volumes, both published in Oxford. The *Linguarum vett. septentrionalium thesaurus grammatico-criticus et archaeologicus* includes brief plot summaries, provided by Johan Peringskiöld, and again reflecting Swedish fondness for *fornaldarsögur*. Thus, unlike what is found in Bartholin's work of 1689, there is no mention here of *Njáls saga* or *Laxdæla saga*; *Egils saga* is dismissed in just three lines and *Hrafnkels saga* in four; whereas *Qrvar-Odds saga* and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* are assigned 12 lines each and *Hrólfs saga kraka* no fewer than 28. Hickes also provides the first English translation (prepared by a Swedish intermediary) of any complete Old Icelandic poem – 'The Waking of Angantýr' (as it became known), from *Hervarar saga* (Verelius' edition of 1672). The poem's spirited heroine and graveyard gloom came to enjoy great popularity, with the Hickes version serving as the sole or principal source for several subsequent eighteenth-century versions at home and abroad.

Bishop Percy certainly knew the Hickes volumes well and the 'Angantýr' version was a principal source for one of his *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* (1763). *Five Pieces* and *Northern Antiquities* operated as companion works. Feeding off the frenzied enthusiasm for 'antique' poetry generated by James Macpherson's *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland and Translated from Galic or Erse Language* (1760), all ascribed to the blind Celtic bard Ossian, and all (allegedly) offering intense and unchecked expression to 'genuine delineations of life in its simplest stages' (Warton 1774–81: I, iii), *Five Pieces* offered British readers a comparable selection (in a comparable format) of old northern pieces in spiky English translations. Enthusiasts could learn of Hervor's steely determination to avenge her murdered kinsfolk; of Ragnarr loðbrók's cavalier life and cruel death; of Egill Skalla-Grímsson's verbal

dexterity, which saved his neck in York; of King Hákon Hákonarson's final battle; and of King Haraldr harðráði's barn-storming travels and amatory frustrations. These pieces, supplemented by Thomas Gray's two paraphrastic 'Norse Odes' (published 1768; composed 1761),⁷ became the familiar mood music of the Viking Age for eighteenth-century enthusiasts. Their imagery and spirit were recycled by creative writers for decades thereafter; the attraction of the sanguinary sublime knew no bounds.

As its subtitle signals, Percy's 1770 translation of Mallet offered extensive cultural contextualization for the *Five Pieces* volume: *A Description of the Manners, Customs, Religion and Laws of the Ancient Danes, and other Northern Nations; including those of our own Saxon Ancestors. With a Translation of the Edda, or System of Runic Mythology, and other Pieces from the Ancient Icelandic Tongue*. Three of the *Five Pieces* were included in this first edition, and all five in the revised 1806 edition. In 1847, however, they were jettisoned in favour of four well-stocked supplementary chapters by J. A. Blackwell: on the colonization of Greenland, Icelandic laws and institutions, Icelandic manners and customs, and Icelandic literature. With its increased emphasis on specifically medieval Icelandic perspectives, the revised translation signalled a more general nineteenth-century paradigm shift. It remained in print in the Bohn's Antiquarian Library series until well into the twentieth century.

The works of Mallet, Percy and Gray certainly found a place at Sir Walter Scott's well-stocked library in Abbotsford. So, too, did most of the other seventeenth- and eighteenth-century volumes of Scandinavian scholarship listed above. Scott picked like a magpie from the oldest volumes when writing his newest novels for readers all over Europe. *The Pirate* (1821–2), for example, tells of the real and imagined survival of the Viking-Age Shetland spirit in the post-medieval insular community, and of the friction between those ancient values and the new world order of agrarian 'improvement' and political union with England. Scott needed to render the islands' old northern cultural residue as substantive and seductive, though ultimately moribund. Accordingly, he draws on the resources of his Scandinavian library: the sword dance at Magnus Troil's festivities and the sale of favourable winds to sailors (from Olaus Magnus' work of 1555), the fortune-teller's prophecies (Bartholin's work of 1689; from *Eiríks saga rauða*), and the songs of the fisherfolk (distantly based on *Darraðarljóð* from Bartholin's work of 1689, and Gray's 'The Fatal Sisters'; see Scott 1821–2/1996).

Along with these volumes, Scott's library included most of the handsomely produced Arnamagnæan Commission text editions: *Njáls saga* (1772; also a Latin translation, 1809), *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* (1775; with some striking illustrations), *Víga-Glúms saga* (1786), *Eyrbyggja saga* (1787) and *Egils saga* (1809); *Heimskringla* (1777–1826; in 6 folio volumes with Danish and Latin translations), *Kristni saga* (1773), *Hungrvaka* (1778) and *Rymbegla* (1780). Other new editions available from Copenhagen at this time included *Sturlunga saga* (1817–20); *Fornaldarsögur* (1829–30; Icelandic texts and Danish translation); and, finally, *Íslendingasögur* (1829–46; Icelandic texts, Danish and Latin translations).

Romantic Nationalism and Localism: Some European Versions

Access to additional and better-edited and/or better-translated texts enabled the reception history of old northern literature to develop new priorities and emphases during the nineteenth century. Revolutionary movements in Europe between 1789 and 1830 and their philosophical underpinning stimulated such developments. Greater cultural self-awareness emerged among localized communities, larger language groups, and embryonic as well as actual nations. The exploration of Old Norse culture lay comfortably along the grain of such romantic nationalist instincts. The old north proved as popular in Norfolk and Novgorod as in Norway and North America. The collection and examination of folklore in all such locations – prose tales, ballads, proverbs, seasonal customs – became a high priority. So did research into comparative philology, mythology, lexicography, archaeology and runology. In these emerging disciplines a vivid imagination and unpuncturable self-confidence sometimes encouraged scholars to paper over gaps in the documentary record, as they claimed links between their own societies and old northern traditions of democratic accountability, trial by jury, technological ingenuity, and unquenchable neo-colonialist energy.

The variety of forms in which these old northern claims and investigations found expression reached new heights between 1830 and 1914. There were yet more editions and translations of previously unexplored works; encyclopedias of the whole eddic and saga corpus; commentaries on individual works; new poems, plays, novels, paintings, book illustrations, public lectures and musical entertainments based on old northern sources; the emergence of archaeology as an art, if not yet (completely) a science; exhibitions and celebrations arising from old northern anniversaries; better pedagogy and pedagogical materials; recognition of the needs of young readers; and, not least, the growth of travel to Norwegian and Icelandic sagasteads previously encountered in primary texts, translations or travel books.

Inevitably such activities took different forms and proceeded at a different pace in different countries. In the present chapter there is space for brief comment on just a few of these diversities.

In Germany the publication of old northern literature began in earnest in the middle of the eighteenth century and played a significant part in the imaginative and (eventually) political unification of a previously fragmented country. The roots of the German national romanticism that nourished old northern enthusiasms had been watered from many sources, domestic and foreign. Among these influences may be named the sympathetic re-evaluation of Tacitus' *Germania*, the climatological determinism of Montesquieu (cold climes produce robust warriors), the primitivism of Rousseau, the lyricism of Ossian, the comprehensive vision of Mallet, and the impact of the newly rediscovered *Nibelungenlied* with its medieval representation of a noble and united Germany.

Johann Gottfried von Herder's valorization of *Naturpoesie* helped to define the philosophical and philological way ahead, both in and beyond Germany. Poetry,

history, law and religion had once formed a unified cultural whole created by the collective vigour of the 'folk'; social maturation had led to institutional and spiritual fragmentation; re-engagement with those long-forgotten sources could promote national re-invigoration. Accordingly, the scholarly house constructed by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm and others had many mansions – philological, runological, folkloristic, mythological, lexicographical; and old northern literature, now enrolled as part of a common Germanic culture, was assigned a key role. After the translation of Mallet 1763 into German, a handful of Old Icelandic poems had been included in volumes such as Herder's *Volkslieder* (1778–9) and Friedrich David Gräter's *Nordische Blumen* (1789). There followed German translations of *Þiðreks saga* (1814), *Völsunga saga* (1815), the heroic poems from the Edda (1814) and, eventually, the complete Poetic Edda (1851; the work of Karl Simrock).

The chivalric fancies of Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's 1810 (un)dramatic trilogy *Held des Nordens* were less scholarly but more influential. Richard Wagner was a keen devotee of these and other works, and of the critical debates to which they gave rise. The mythic shape and significance which Wagner gave to his diverse sources is as vigorously debated today as it was after the first performance of the complete *Der Ring des Nibelungen* cycle in 1876. Its popularity has never been in doubt, however. In 1912 alone there were 1,531 performances of parts of the cycle, in 81 German towns; and Wagner's vision was monumentalized lavishly in the Nibelungenhalle constructed at Königswinter during the same year. Wagner's example in setting the old north to music has been followed by some distinguished composers (among them Sir Edward Elgar, Eduard Grieg, Carl Nielsen and Howard Hanson) but matched by none, though recent symphonic and choral recordings now make it possible to appreciate the remarkable mid-twentieth-century ambition of Jón Leifs in Iceland.

The paths of Wagner and Konrad Maurer, arguably nineteenth-century Germany's greatest scholar of Old Icelandic language and literature, converged (in Munich) but never crossed. As well as producing a magisterial range of historical, legal and linguistic studies, Maurer was one of the first and (along with the Dane Kristian Kålund) best-informed of European travellers to the saga-steeds of Iceland (Hafstad 1997; Kålund 1877–82). The systematic provision of German translations of the *Íslendingasögur* that Maurer knew so well had ultimately to await the 24-volume *Thule: Altnordische Dichtung und Prosa* (1911–30) translation series from the Diederichs publishing house in Jena. It was an enterprise still driven by a nineteenth-century national romanticist mindset, and the translations, variously repackaged, came to serve a variety of complex agendas and controversial masters over several decades.

On the other side of the Dannevirke leading figures in Danish learned and literary life had, since the end of the eighteenth century, been keen to revitalize their nation's links with old northern culture. New scholarly editions had made primary works more accessible; and prize essay competitions in the University of Copenhagen had debated the relative virtues of deploying Graeco-Roman and old northern mythology in modern literature. A clarion call to poets and playwrights came in Adam Oehlenschläger's first and best-known romantic lyric poem 'Guldhornene' (1803). This tells

of two fifth-century golden horns twice found and lost by country folk in north Slesvig. Eventually assigned a place of honour in the Kunstkammer in Copenhagen, the horns were stolen in May 1802 and melted down for their precious metal. This act of cultural vandalism prompted the young Oehlenschläger to challenge other Danish writers to achieve a more secure hold on the rich Viking-Age imaginative legacy which the horns represented.

As several of his other lyrics, saga-derived tragedies, and (especially) his *Nordens guder: et episk digt* (1819) confirm (Frye 1845), Oehlenschläger practised what he preached, well aware that several philologists were already hard at work in the same creative nationalist spirit. The Icelander Grímur Thorkelín was sent to England on behalf of the Arnamagnæan Commission to search for relevant material, and unearthed (by accident) and repossessed (by transcript and Latin translation) the long-neglected Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* with its dramatic tales from early Danish history; Rasmus Rask's *Vejledning til det islandske eller gamle nordiske sprog* (1811) was much translated during the nineteenth century; and Bishop P. E. Müller's *Saga-bibliotek* (1817–20) offered authoritative guidance to the sprawling corpus of Old Icelandic prose. Müller's earlier *Um Asalærens Ægtbed* (1812), N. F. S. Grundtvig's *Nordens Mytologi* (1808) and Finnur Magnússon's *Eddalæren* (1824–6) all encouraged readers to produce ingenious allegorical readings of old northern myths.

The spirit of Grundtvig's eddic interpretations was actualized in the curricula of the new Danish folk high school system, and their potential for political interpretation was clear. As tensions on the Slesvig-Holsten border grew in the middle of the century, it was not difficult to interpret murals featuring Týr with his hand between Fenrir's jaws in terms of the sacrifice that (Danish) youth must make to subdue (foreign) worldly bestiality. A century later, comparable patriotic resonances could be read into scenes from *Historiske fortællinger om islændernes færd hjemme og ude* (1839–44), N. M. Petersen's four-volume set of *Íslendingasögur* translations, which were republished in Copenhagen in time for Christmas 1943. Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi's decision in *Njáls saga* to resist and die in Iceland rather than flee to safety abroad could have poignant (but very different) connotations for occupiers and occupied – and also for Björn M. Gíslason, the Copenhagen-based Icelander whose introductory essay was written far from his (still) Danish-ruled homeland.

In Norway Karl Sommerfelt's Norwegian-language version of *Njaals saga* (1871) was specifically designed to supplant Petersen's version, and more generally to challenge the extent of Danish influence on domestic culture. Freed in 1814 from four centuries of Danish political and linguistic control, Norway inevitably took its time to develop a broadly based sense of nationhood and a matching literary language, but Old Norse literature and culture played their full part in that process. There was a concerted effort by scholars such as C. R. Unger, P. A. Munch and Rudolf Keyser to provide their countrymen with new editions, translations and commentaries, all published in Christiania rather than Copenhagen. As in Germany the exploration of local and national history, mythology and folklore was seen as an integral part of this consciousness-raising process: Munch's *Nordmændes Gudelære i Hedenold* (1847) could

thus be read alongside his *Det norske Folks Historie* (1852–63). Both works were revised and reprinted well into the twentieth century. Unger's editions of *Stjórn* (1862), *Postola sögur* (1874), *Heilagra manna sögur* (1877) and related works highlighted the strongly Christian dimension to medieval Norse literary culture. In his *Sagaer eller Fortællinger om Nordmænds og Islændernes bedrifter i oldtiden* (1845), Munch stressed the Norwegian origins of many Icelandic saga heroes, and along with Jacob Aall (notably in the latter's 1838–9 version of Claussøn's work of 1633) sought (with mixed success) to voice saga texts in a less Danicized language.

Poets and playwrights also wrestled with the challenge of the old north. Many writers, though proudly aware of their country's medieval heritage, felt little nostalgia for Viking brutalities, as probing lyrics by Henrik Wergeland ('Til en ung Digter', 1833, and 'Et gammelnorskt Herresaede', 1835), then Henrik Ibsen's early play *Kjæmpehøien* (1854), and eventually Sigrid Undset's first historical novel, the taut and tragic *Fortællingen om Viga-Ljot og Vigdis* (1909),⁸ all confirm. Artists such as Thomas Fearnley and Johan Christian Dahl responded less cautiously to the natural grandeur and symbolic potency of mountain landscapes and fjord saga-steads. The steadfast *odalbonde* ('freeholder') became the acceptable modern face – and voice – of the old north. By the end of the century, though, the long-ships excavated at Gokstad and Oseberg signalled to poet and painter alike that proud archaeological fact now underpinned hazy romantic fantasy, while the Friðþjófr lounge in Kvikne's Hotel at Balestrand, and the giant Vangsnes statue of the saga hero (donated by Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1913), underlined the role of entrepreneurial localism and cultural imperialism in the reinvention of the old north in Norway.

Nineteenth-century Europe's widespread fondness for Friðþjófr of Sognefjord had its origins in Sweden. Bishop Esaias Tegnér's 1825 poetic paraphrase of the fourteenth-century Icelandic *Friðþjófs saga hins frækna*, as printed by Börner in 1737, was by far the most resonant Swedish contribution to the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reception of old northern literary culture. The saga tells of the humbly born hero's love for, loss of, and eventual reunion with Ingibjörg, a Sognefjord royal princess. It dramatizes Friðþjófr's confrontation with Ingibjörg's two possessive brothers; the tests of patience and honour in the hero's dealings with King Hringr, Ingibjörg's elderly husband; and, most famously, the scenes at sea in which Friðþjófr, the Viking warrior-poet, displays the flair and sangfroid of a natural leader as he overcomes the predatory sea-witches sent by the princes to destroy the low-born interloper.⁹ Tegnér's *Friðþjófs saga*, a prosodic *tour de force*, softens the sharper pagan edges of the medieval saga, and immediately attracted widespread scholarly and artistic attention.

While resident in Stockholm the fiery English philologist George Stephens produced the first English-language translation of the original saga, and one of the first of many nineteenth-century English translations of Tegnér's poem (Stephens 1839). A less neo-classical and more historically aware Viking-Age iconography than that favoured by eighteenth-century illustrators was emerging at this time, and it finds expression in the volume's many engravings: rune stones, grave mounds, doom rings,

drinking horns, pagan temples, Viking halls and long-ships. Stephens also included several specially composed saga songs, and some peppery annotation which reveals the translator's distrust of non-constitutional monarchy and his Anglo-Catholic fascination with the bells and smells of old northern paganism. As his dedication to Bishop Tegnér reminded readers, a Swedish poem about a Norwegian hero also symbolized the harmonious post-1814 union of the two countries. Tegnér's poem took a long time to lose its power to please, though a lengthy spell as an examination text in Swedish schools during the twentieth century may have helped that unhappy process.

It was as a result of another initiative by George Stephens, this time in Copenhagen in April 1846, that a special committee was charged with the task of collecting and preserving antiquities in Iceland, the Faeroe Islands and Greenland. Jón Sigurðsson, a politically aware philologist, who later emerged as the founding father of Icelandic independence, was to be the 'Archiv-sekretari'. Similar interests and sympathies had already been signalled by the nationalist-minded Copenhagen-based Icelanders known as the *Fjölnismenn* (because of their association with the periodical *Fjölnir*, which appeared from 1835 until 1847). Jónas Hallgrímsson's *Njáls saga*-derived poems 'Ísland' (1835) and 'Gunnarshólmi' (1837) were distillate lyric statements of a more broadly based romantic nationalism in which medieval Iceland's literary legacy became a constant reference point. Within Iceland, romantic regionalism also played its part in the reception of sagas: the texts of E. C. Werlauf's Copenhagen-edited texts of *Vatnsdæla saga* and *Finnboga saga ramma* (1812) were republished in 1858 by Sveinn Skúlason's press in Akureyri, then promoted in the local newspaper, and eventually transformed into Halldór Briem's *Ingimundur goði* (1900), a (melo)dramatized celebration of Vatnsdalur and its founding father. A fuller account of post-medieval Icelandic literary and artistic responses to edda and saga can be found elsewhere in this volume (see chapter 4).

In the Faeroe Islands romantic nationalism and localism inevitably ran together. In Copenhagen C. C. Rafn included his own Danish translation and Johan Schrøter's ground-breaking Faeroese version in his *Færeyínga saga* edition (1832). While welcoming the new edition, the emerging national movement in the islands subjected its familiar story to fresh scrutiny. Though Sigmundur Brestisson, the internationalist Christian missionary, clearly enjoyed the medieval saga narrator's approval, it was the stubborn pagan Þrándr á Gøtu who for many came to seem a more plausible Faeroese hero for the modern era.

The overall reception of the old north in Britain over the last two centuries has followed many of the European contours already outlined. Though seventeenth- and eighteenth-century priorities continued to exert an influence, important new features emerged during the Victorian era: travel to Icelandic saga sites; the publication of saga-oriented travel journals; pioneering English translations of works such as *Heimskringla*, *Njáls saga* and the Poetic Edda; poems and novels based on canonical works; public lectures; archaeological and folkloristic investigations; the supportive influence of the royal family; Icelandic grammar books and dictionaries in English; the

emergence of Icelandic as a university subject; the inclusion of eddic and saga texts in the curricula promoted by secondary school examination boards; and the organization of exhibitions relating to the Viking Age.

No dominant political pulse is discernible in this diverse range of Victorian activity. The old north attracted a rainbow coalition of devotees: landed gentry and sons of the soil; modestly situated Tories and champagne socialists; daughters of the home counties and sons of the colonies; royalists and republicans; atheists and Anglo-Catholics. While the eddas never lost their popularity, sagas now flourished as never before, unsurprisingly engaging a reading public for whom the realistic novel had become the dominant literary genre. Though repeated but unavailing attempts were made to convert sagas successfully into tragedies for the stage, William Morris's lengthy poems 'The Lovers of Gudrun' (1869) and *Sigurd the Volsung* (1876) showed what a crafty narrative poet could still achieve in the non-novelistic modernization of saga stories. Many Victorian Britons read these poems, and some were moved to follow Morris's example by visiting Iceland, in order to see for themselves where Kjartan and Bolli bathed, Grettir and Glámr fought, or Gunnarr and Njáll perished. For Morris, for W. G. Collingwood and – later – for W. H. Auden, Iceland became holy ground, a land fit for saga pilgrims.

The romantic nationalism which fuelled the reception of the old north in many European countries during the nineteenth century played a less significant role in Britain, though brittle triumphalism sometimes explained imperial success in terms of the Viking blood still coursing in Victorian veins. Romantic regionalism was important, however. In Scotland, for instance, philology could (like diplomacy) function as war pursued by alternative means. Grímur Thorkelín's 1787 observations on the similarity between the Icelandic language and the dialect of Angus were warmly received by Caledonian scholars anxious to resist Johnsonian claims that Scots was merely a degenerate form of English. The presence in Edinburgh during 1826–37 of another Icelander, the turbulent Þorleifur Repp, was a major catalyst in the development of old northern awareness in the Athens of the North. The founding of the Viking Society in London in 1892 provided a national forum for such regional enthusiasms.

A comparable regionalism can also be identified in Normandy, in those parts of Russia and Spain which had experienced contact with the Vikings, and in North American areas of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian settlement, not least on the eastern sea-board as attempts were made to locate the landfall of Leifr Eiríksson, following the publication, inevitably in Copenhagen, of C. C. Rafn's *Antiquitates Americanae* (1837). This folio compendium of real Vínland saga texts and imaginary Viking-Age inscriptions drew on the work of Icelandic scholars unblushingly claiming direct descent from Þorfinnr karlsefni and Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir. Immigrant Scandinavian communities were stimulated into constructing a foundation narrative for North America which valorized the Vínland voyagers and marginalized Christopher Columbus. The emergence of this nineteenth-century old northern consciousness in North America had other intriguing elements: the interest of two presidents – Thomas Jefferson and

Teddy Roosevelt; Longfellow's Tegnérian 'Skeleton in Armour' poem (c.1840), the product of a misdated ruin, misidentified bones and a vivid imagination; Icelandic emigration to Manitoba; the replica Viking ship at the World Fair in Chicago in 1892; and the cult archaeology of Eben Horsford and the novels of Otilie Liljencrantz, which claimed that Leifr Eiríksson's landfall had been in Boston, and that the Norsemen had eventually intermarried with native American Indians and created the great city of Norumbega, which had flourished until the fifteenth century. Neville Shute, Thomas Pynchon and George Mackay Brown are among the more recent novelists who have found public themes and private passions reflected in the idea of Vínland.

Revision and Renewal

Many of the features which characterized the reception of old northern texts over the last three centuries have disappeared. Horsford's virtual Norumbega has given way to the more verifiable L'Anse aux Meadows sites in Newfoundland. Eddas and sagas have now to fight their corner in academic and popular cultural environments offering many alternative attractions. Successful instruction in Old Icelandic is, alas, not yet available in a bottle. Yet the vigour with which the old north has reinvented itself in many countries is striking: new translations, international editorial projects, language summer schools, manuscript exhibitions, the marriage of archaeology and technology, cheap(er) flights to saga sites and centres, television series, feature films, comic book and computerized versions of sagas and eddic tales, and the widest imaginable variety of internet sites. The Viking Age also continues to attract the ingenious attentions of the advertising industry. Fantasy tales set in the Viking Age are among this popular genre's best sellers, with the millennial anniversary of the Vínland voyages in the year 2000 providing a pretext for several new historical novels highlighting the emblematic figure of Guðrún Þorbjarnardóttir. The Victorian reception of the old north informs A. S. Byatt's subtly crafted prize-winning novel *Possession: A Romance* (1990), and it should have escaped no one's attention that eddic and saga narratives and attitudes were a major influence on the texture and tone of J. R. R. Tolkien's all-conquering epic *Lord of the Rings*.

The extent to which Old Norse and Icelandic studies continue to be internationalized is signalled by the number of languages into which either Snorri's *Edda* or *Njáls saga* has been translated, often for the first time, in the last 30 years: Chinese, Czechoslovakian, Dutch, Georgian, German, English, Estonian, Faeroese, Finnish, French, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Latvian, Norwegian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian and Spanish.

Though studies in the reception of old northern texts began in earnest over 100 years ago, they have developed robustly in recent times. There is good reason to welcome this latest trend, not least because finding time to reflect on the history of Old Norse and Icelandic studies represents one way of helping them to flourish (or

preventing them from floundering) in the future. The shipwrecks of one generation provide sea-marks for the next. The reception process has always been a relay race, with the baton passing with occasional fumbles from one age to the next. In the early twenty-first century there appear to be plenty of new competitors in the fun-run section; the shortage of sprinters and sponsorship in the elite division may be a cause for greater concern.

See also ARCHAEOLOGY; CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; CONTINUITY; EDDIC POETRY; FAMILY SAGAS; GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL; HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PSEUDO-HISTORY; LANGUAGE; LAWS; METRE AND METRICS; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; PROSE OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION; ROMANCE; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; RUNES; SAGAS OF ICELANDIC PREHISTORY; SKALDIC POETRY; SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS; WOMEN IN OLD NORSE POETRY AND SAGAS.

NOTES

- 1 'The European nations even now admire the learning and wisdom of our forefathers': text and translation by Finnur Magnússon. In Mackenzie (1811: 461).
- 2 'First the battle of the present; then the battle ballads of the past': Sven Grundtvig to V. U. Hammershaimb, 10 April 1848. See Bekker-Nielsen (1988: 372).
- 3 'Compiled from old manuscripts and previously unedited records': a phrase (and claim) from the title page of Bartholin's 1689 work, listed in this section.
- 4 The most recent studies are Jónsson (1998); Steingrímsson (2002).
- 5 'Collection of tales about ancient kings and warriors': a phrase from the work's subtitle.
- 6 A phrase from Garth (1699: canto iv, l.131).
- 7 'The Descent of Odin' (based on *Baldrs draumar*), and 'The Fatal Sisters' (based on *Darðarljóð*), in Gray (1768).
- 8 Discussed by Sherrill Harbison in her introduction to Undset (1936/98). Undset's *Kristin Lavransdatter* (1920–2), set in fourteenth-century Norway, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1928.
- 9 For the striking *Sturm und Drang* response of the Danish artist Carl Peter Lehman to this scene see Sigurðsson and Ólason (2002: 134). The original painting is in the Bergen Kunstmuseum.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Editions, Translations and Other Works, 1500–1750*
- See the chronological lists in the first section of this chapter for details.
- Secondary Literature*
- Allchin, Arthur Macdonald, Jasper, David, Schjørring, Jens Holger and Stevenson, Kenneth (eds.) (1993) *Heritage and Prophecy: Grundtvig and the English-Speaking World*. Aarhus.
- Barnes, Geraldine (2001) *Viking America: The First Millennium*. Cambridge.
- Bekker-Nielsen, Hans (1988) 'Hammershaimb and Grundtvig – and the Rise of Faroese.' In Gerd Wolfgang Weber (ed.) *Idee – Gestalt – Geschichte: Festschrift Klaus von See*. Odense, pp. 367–79.
- Bergmann, Árni (1995) 'Niðjar Óðins, hetjur og skáld: Ísland og norrænn menningararfur í rússneskum bókmenntum og menningarumræðu.' *Skírnir* 169, 423–61.
- Boyer, Régis (1986) *Le mythe viking dans les lettres françaises*. Paris.
- Bragason, Úlfar (ed.) (1995) *Wagner's Ring and its Icelandic Sources*. Reykjavík.

- Bödl, Klaus (2000) *Der Mythos der Edda: nordische Mythologie zwischen europäischer Aufklärung und nationaler Romantik*. Tübingen.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret (1998) *The Norse Muse in Britain, 1750–1820*. Trieste.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret (ed.) (2002) *The Old Norse Poetic Translations of Thomas Percy: A New Edition and Commentary*. Turnhout.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret and Lonnröth, Lars (1999) 'The Norse Muse: Report from an International Research Project.' *Alvíssmál* 9, 3–28.
- D'Arcy, Julian (1996) *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen: Old Norse Influence on Modern Scottish Literature*. East Linton.
- Egilsson, Sveinn Yngvi (1999) *Arfur og umbylting: ramnsókn á íslenskeri rómantik*. Reykjavík.
- Faulkes, Anthony (ed.) (1977–9) *Two Versions of Snorra Edda from the 17th Century*. Reykjavík.
- Foote, Peter (ed.) (1996–8) *Olaus Magnus: A Description of the Northern Peoples (Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus)*, transls. Peter Fisher and Humphrey Higgins. 3 vols. London.
- Frye, W. E. (transl.) (1845) *The Gods of the North*. London.
- Garth, Samuel (1699) *The Dispensary*. 2nd edn. London.
- Gray, Thomas (1768) *Poems by Mr Gray*. London.
- Greenway, John L. (1977) *The Golden Horns: Mythic Imagination and the Nordic Past*. Athens, GA.
- Hafstad, Baldur (transl.) (1997) *Konrad Maurer – Íslandsferð 1858*. Reykjavík.
- Harris, Richard L. (ed.) (1992) *A Chorus of Grammars: The Correspondence of George Hickes and his Collaborators on the Thesaurus linguarum septentrionalium*. Toronto.
- Helgason, Jón Karl (1999) *The Rewriting of Njáls Saga: Translation, Politics and Icelandic Sagas*. Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto and Sydney.
- Johannesson, Kurt (1991) *The Renaissance of the Goths in Sixteenth-Century Sweden*. Berkeley and Oxford.
- Jónsson, Már (1998) *Árni Magnússon: Ævisaga*. Reykjavík.
- Kälund, Kristian (1877–82) *Bidrag til en historisk-topografisk Beskrivelse af Island*. 2 vols. Copenhagen.
- Mackenzie, Sir George S. (1811) *Travels in the Island of Iceland... in the Summer of the Year 1810*. Edinburgh.
- Magee, Elizabeth (1990) *Richard Wagner and the Nibelungs*. Oxford.
- Malm, Mats (1996) *Minervas äpple: Om diktsyn, tolkning och bildspråk inom nordisk göticism*. Stockholm and Stehag.
- Mjöberg, Jöran (1967–8) *Drömmen om sagatiden*. 2 vols. Stockholm.
- Omberg, Margaret (1976) *Scandinavian Themes in English Poetry, 1760–1800*. Uppsala and Stockholm.
- Roesdahl, Else and Sørensen, Preben Meulengracht (eds.) (1996) *The Waking of Angantyr: The Scandinavian Past in European Culture*. Aarhus.
- Schnall, Jens Eike (2003) 'Zementiertes Deutschtum: Wagner, Siegfried and andere Götter in der Nibelungenhalle zu Königswinter.' In Wilhelm Heizmann and Astrid van Nahl (eds.) *Runica – Germanica – Mediaevalia* [= Heinrich Beck et al. (eds.) Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Alterumskunde 37]. Berlin and New York, pp. 727–58.
- Scott, Sir Walter (1821–2/1996) *The Pirate*, intro. Andrew Wawn. Lerwick. Rpt of 1871.
- Seaton, Ethel (1935) *Literary Relations of England and Scandinavia in the Seventeenth Century*. Oxford.
- Sigurðsson, Gísli and Ólason, Vésteinn (eds.) (2002) *Handritin: Ritgerðir um íslensk miðaldahandrit, sögu þeirra og ábrif*. Reykjavík.
- Steingrímsson, Sigurgeir (2002) 'Árni Magnússon.' In Gísli Sigurðsson and Vésteinn Ólason (eds.) *Handritin*. Reykjavík, pp. 85–100.
- Stephens, George (transl.) (1839) *Esaías Tegnér: Frithiof's Saga: A Legend of Norway*. London and Stockholm.
- Sutherland, James (ed.) (1963) *Alexander Pope: The Dunciad*. 3rd edn. London and New Haven, CT.
- Temple, William (1690) 'Of Heroick Virtue.' In *Miscellanea: The Second Part*. In *Four Essays*. London.
- Thomsen, Rógvi (1993) 'Høvdingar hittast: Tröndur í Gøtu og Sigmundur Brestisson í føroyskum bókmentum og samleika.' In Magnús Snædal and Turið Sigurðardóttir (eds.) *Frændafundur: Fyrvirlestir frá íslensk-føroyskeri ráðstefnu í Reykjavík 20.–21. ágúst 1992*. Reykjavík, pp. 99–120.

- Undset, Sigrid (1936/98) *Gunnar's Daughter*, transl. Arthur Chater, intro. Sherrill Harbison. New York and London.
- von See, Klaus (1994) *Barbar – Germane – Arier: Die Suche nach der Identität der Deutschen*. Heidelberg.
- Warton, Thomas (1774–81) *The History of English Poetry, from the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century*. 3 vols. London and Oxford.
- Wawn, Andrew (ed.) (1994) *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga*. Enfield Lock.
- Wawn, Andrew (2000) *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Cambridge.
- Wilson, David (1997) *Vikings and Gods in European Art*. Højbjerg.
- Zernack, Julia (1994) *Geschichten aus Thule: Íslendingasögur in Übersetzungen deutscher Germanisten* (Berliner Beiträge zur Skandinavistik). Berlin.
- Ægidius, Jens Peter (1985) *Bragesnak: Nordiske myter og mytefortælling i dansk tradition (indtil 1910)*. Odense.

Prose of Christian Instruction

Svanbildur Óskarsdóttir

Er kykvende þat er heitir cervus. David mælir: Svá sem hiqrtr girnesk til brunna, svá girnisk ond mín til þín, Guð.

En þá er hann drekkur ok kennir hoggorm vera í munni sér, spýtir hann honum út ok trøðr hann undir fótum til bana.

Svá sér dróttinn várr Jesus Chrístr djöful, óvin várn, ok með brunni guðligrar spekðar rekr hann á braut hann frá hiqrstum órum. (Del Zotto Tozzoli 1992: 104, with spelling normalized)

[There is a beast called cervus. David says: My soul is drawn to you, God, like the stag which is drawn to the drinking well.

And when it drinks and finds a venomous serpent in its mouth, it spits it out and tramples it to death underfoot.

Thus our Lord, Jesus Christ, sees the devil, our enemy, and by drawing on the well of divine wisdom, drives him away from our hearts.]

The elementary education of a Christian individual may be seen as a prolonged conversion, a striving to draw the soul towards God, away from Satan. Medieval preachers and exegetes found it crucial in this endeavour to be able to show how the will of God was at work everywhere, how all things created bore witness to their maker. From the study of nature, of things visible, people could proceed to some understanding of things invisible; external nature came to symbolize the ineffable truths of divine grace and human redemption. Similarly, individuals became examples or embodiments of virtues and vices. Saints were models of virtuous conduct while the immoral deeds of sinners served as a warning against vices and the devious ways in which the devil works.

The passage above shows some of the typical aspects of Christian instruction in the Middle Ages. It captures the battle for the souls between Christ and the devil; it illustrates the saving work of Christ through an allegorical interpretation of the stag (still, today, a vivid symbol for Christ), and it shows how the Bible provides the basis for such an interpretation. It is taken from a twelfth-century Old Norse translation of

Physiologus, a Latin work of Greek origin which was widely read in the Middle Ages. *Physiologus* is a bestiary of sorts where the description of animals is linked to biblical passages and given symbolic significance. Latin versions of it were in all likelihood produced already in the fourth century, which would make it an early example of popular exegesis in Latin. The Old Norse translation similarly bears witness to the early adoption of Christian exegesis among the newly converted people of Norway and Iceland. It is preserved in two fragments (AM 673a 4to I–II) dated to c.1200, which are among the oldest Icelandic manuscripts extant.

Sermons

The *Physiologus* translation also indicates *how* Icelanders received the exegetical tradition of the church – through popular works and commonplace passages which were translated into the vernacular and often reshaped in the process. Allegorical interpretations of natural phenomena and glosses on the Scriptures were standard elements in sermons and preaching, and some of the animals treated in the *Physiologus* fragments raise their heads in Old Norse sermons, which are likely to have been among the first attempts at vernacular writing in Iceland.

The oldest fragment containing sermons in Old Norse, AM 237 fol., is dated to the middle of the twelfth century, and there are other fragments and parts of manuscripts containing single sermons which are only slightly younger. Two fuller manuscripts with collections of sermons survive from the beginning of the thirteenth century. The first of these is the so-called 'Icelandic Homily Book' (now Perg. quarto no. 15 in the Royal Library in Stockholm), a collection of more than 50 homilies with some additional material (such as prayers and liturgical notes). The other collection, the 'Norwegian Homily Book' (AM 619 4to, in Copenhagen), contains 31 homilies systematically arranged according to the church year and preceded by a translation of a treatise on virtues and vices by the eighth-century scholar Alcuin of York (see below). There is considerable overlap between the two homily books and it is evident that the text in each of them is a copy. This, and the fact that the fragment 237 contains the text of two homilies which are also preserved in both the Icelandic and the Norwegian homily books, has led scholars to believe that all three manuscripts ultimately stem from the same source, which would have been a collection of homilies in Old Norse compiled some time in the first half of the twelfth century. There is, however, hardly enough evidence for the existence of such a collection, although some or all of the homilies still extant may have originated in that period.

It is customary to distinguish between two main types of preaching: the *homily*, in which a scriptural passage is commented upon phrase by phrase, and the *sermon*, where the preacher takes the passage as a point of departure for the exposition of a particular theme. Despite their name the Old Norse homilies conform more closely to the latter type. Their purpose, irrespective of their form, is to instruct the members of the congregation in Christian doctrine and inspire them to lead a life of virtue. To

illustrate the latter the preacher could draw on saints' lives and *exempla*, that is, short, epigrammatic narratives, usually depicting some moral dilemma. When outlining points of doctrine he might consult a handbook on doctrinal matters, but the basis for his exposition would be the exegetical tradition of the church, in which the Scriptures were interpreted allegorically as well as tropologically, that is, morally.

The so called 'Dedication Homily' (or 'Stave-Church Homily'), the most celebrated of Old Norse homilies, is an example of such an allegorical approach. It is preserved in both homily collections as well as in the manuscript AM 624 4to (dated to c.1500) and, fragmentarily, in AM 237 fol. The church described in the homily is a wooden building and the symbolic significance of its different parts is carefully outlined in the text: near the beginning it is explained how a part of the Christian flock is already with Christ in heaven, though the other part is still in this world. The church therefore signifies not only the glory of heaven but also Christ's church on earth: the altar symbolizes Christ, and the choir the heavenly hosts, but the nave is a symbol of Christians in this earthly life. These are of two extractions, Jews and Gentiles, as is reflected in the two main walls of the church, but the *brjósthili* – that is, the front wall of the church which joins the two main walls together – symbolizes God, who unites the two groups in one faith. The entrance of the church is a symbol of that faith as it inducts people into the Christian community.

The significance of the church building is, however, not restricted to its image of Christianity with its holy people and congregation of the religious. It is also symbolic of every Christian soul, as is outlined in the latter part of the homily, where the altar is shown to stand for love and the choir for singing and praying. 'Því at hverr maðr skal smíða andliga kirkju í sér, eigi úr trjám né steinum heldur úr góðum verkum' ('For every man shall build in himself a spiritual church, not from wood or stones but from good deeds').

Many of the homilies in the two homily books have been shown to be translations of Latin sermons. This is not the case with the Dedication Homily, however, and it is often futile to search for a single source behind these sermons. They are based on a tradition shaped by the centuries, the foundations for which were laid by the *doctores ecclesiae*, the Fathers of the church. Much of the exegetical material used by the authors of the Old Norse homilies can thus be traced to Origen, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine – echoes of their teaching reverberate throughout the Norse homilies. The formulation of ideas is often the work of later authors, such as Caesarius of Arles, Bede, some of the learned homilists of the Carolingian Age like Paul the Deacon and Paschasius Radbertus, or even twelfth-century writers like Honorius Augustodunensis. Some of these authors made original contributions themselves, but it should be borne in mind that originality was not the standard by which medieval writers were judged. On the contrary, they were valued according to the fidelity with which they represented the *auctoritates* ('authorities'). Many of the Latin writers who became well known in Norway and Iceland were skilful compilers rather than original thinkers, their works being practical collections or digests of exegetical activity.

It should also be mentioned at this point that we cannot be certain that the sermons, as preserved, reflect with any accuracy preaching as it was actually practised in Iceland and Norway. The homily books may well have been intended as handbooks in which priests could find sermons upon which they might model their own preaching, rather than textbooks to reach for and read from in lieu of giving a sermon.

Although the works of the church Fathers were thus often disseminated through secondary sources, some tractates were translated into Old Norse early on. The writings of Pope Gregory the Great stand out in this respect. Ten of his homilies on the gospels are preserved in an Old Norse translation in the manuscript AM 677 4to, together with a translation of his *Dialogues*. The manuscript, which is a copy dating from the beginning of the thirteenth century, may originally have contained all 40 of Gregory's gospel homilies, but unfortunately it has not been preserved in its entirety. References to some of these homilies are found in other works of religious literature in Old Norse, attesting to the popularity of Gregory's teachings.

Exempla

The *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great are divided into four books and, as their title suggests, take the form of a conversation, in this case between Pope Gregory and his protégé, Peter. Their roles are by no means equal, however; Peter's is that of the disciple who asks simple questions, whereas Gregory seeks to enlighten him by telling him stories of monks renowned for their piety. They are held up as models of monastic virtue, often in contrast to other characters in the stories who serve to illustrate the main vices: lust, greed and intemperance. This approach to moral teaching is somewhat different from that taken in learned treatises on virtues and vices, some of which were translated into Old Norse and will be discussed in the section on 'Moral Treatises', below. With their emphasis on instructive tales, the *Dialogues* are closer to the *exempla* in *Vitae patrum* ('Lives of the Fathers'), a collection of stories about the Desert Fathers, early Christian anchorites, and other exemplary men of God, the aim of which was to inspire men (and women) in religious communities. Parts of *Vitae patrum* were translated into Old Norse, probably around 1300, and the title is listed in inventories for several churches and religious houses in Iceland.

Texts such as the *Dialogues* and the *Vitae patrum* were, like the sermons in the two homily books, intended first and foremost for members of religious communities. Whereas the sermons had a liturgical function and were meant for mass and the divine office, *exempla* and saints' lives had their place at the table, where it was customary for one person to read aloud to the others during mealtimes. This custom is referred to in the Rule of St Benedict, where *Vitae patrum* is specifically mentioned as a suitable text. The early monasteries in Iceland were of the Benedictine order and a chapter of the rule in Icelandic translation is preserved in the Icelandic Homily Book. St Benedict has an important role to play in Gregory's *Dialogues*: his life takes up the best part of the second book. The last two books revolve, on the other hand, around questions on

the nature of death and the fate of the soul after it leaves the body. Through a series of *exempla* St Gregory describes how souls are purged of sins, and his treatment of the subject greatly influenced subsequent descriptions of the afterlife in medieval visionary literature (see 'Visions', below).

Cosmology and Universal History

The dialogue was a cherished literary form in the Middle Ages, not least when it came to works of a didactic nature. Icelanders were introduced to such works early on, as the translation of Honorius Augustodunensis' *Elucidarius* testifies. *Elucidarius* is a survey of theological topics written as a dialogue between a master and his disciple. It was composed around 1100 and translated into Old Norse some time in the course of the twelfth century; the oldest manuscript containing the translation has been dated to c.1200.

Honorius remains a rather elusive figure. He is thought to have been born into the nobility of Savoy and the Alps, but he spent a considerable time in England, and became part of the circle of learned men who gathered around his kinsman, Anselm of Canterbury. *Elucidarius* depends considerably on the writings of St Anselm, and Honorius' aim in writing the work may have been to convey Anselm's teachings to a larger audience. The work is divided into three books. The first is devoted to questions on the nature of God, on Creation and the Redemption. Book II is concerned with the human condition and moral issues and covers questions of good and evil, sins and sacraments, fate and free will. In the third book the master and the pupil discuss the last things: paradise, purgatory and hell, the coming of Antichrist, the Resurrection and the Last Judgement, rounding the discussion off with a juxtaposition of the celestial bliss of the blessed and the infernal torment of the damned.

Elucidarius is a good example of an elementary 'textbook' in theology: its chief virtues lie in its coherent structure and the logical organization of the subject matter. Its accessibility made it a popular and much-quoted work and its influence can be detected in several Old Norse works.¹ Honorius' text was widely copied on the continent as well as in the British Isles, and there are also several vernacular versions extant, in addition to the Old Norse one. Many of his other writings (he is thought to have written around 30 works) likewise enjoyed wide circulation in western Europe throughout the Middle Ages. Their popularity was undoubtedly due, in part, to their pedagogical nature, and to their author's gift for bringing together material from many different sources and presenting it with great lucidity. Several of these works were certainly known in Iceland and Norway. The liturgical works *Speculum ecclesiae* ('Mirror of the Church') and *Gemma animae* ('Jewel of the Soul') are among the sources for the two homily books, and the cosmological treatise *Imago mundi* ('Representation of the World') has left its mark on several Old Norse texts.

Imago mundi is, like *Elucidarius*, divided into three books. The first book describes the universe, the geography of the world, the elements and the heavenly bodies. The

second book is a computistical treatise, and the third sketches briefly the history of humankind. (A similar combination of a world description and computistics can be seen in the manuscript GKS 1812 4to, which contains some of the oldest encyclopedic texts in Old Norse.) *Imago mundi* was originally aimed at priests, to aid them in preaching and teaching, but soon became popular among the laity as an accessible cosmology-cum-history. Although we have no concrete evidence that a translation of the entire work was ever available in Old Norse, it is so frequently alluded to that it must have been one of the main sources Icelanders and Norwegians drew on for cosmological and historical information. It seems to have been one of the sources for *Historia Norvegiae* ('History of Norway'), it was used in computistical treatises and geographical descriptions, and it found its way into biblical compilations (see below). It has also been suggested that it could have served as a model for Snorri Sturluson in the composition of his *Edda* (Clunies Ross 1987: 155–67).

Imago mundi must also have served as an apt model and useful source for Icelandic compilers who were putting together a Christian history of the world. Other important sources and models were provided by the *Etymologiae*, an encyclopedic work compiled by Isidore of Seville which included a short chronicle of world history, and the chronographical works of Bede which are referred to in early Icelandic sources. Compilations of Christian history could take various forms, but common to them all is the view of history as the history of salvation, in which Adam's Fall marks the starting point, the Incarnation a turning point, and the Last Judgement a conclusion as well as a new beginning for the souls of the righteous. Within this framework events are recorded in chronological order. Historical time was usually divided up into six ages (*aetates*), which had their counterpart in the six days of Creation. Early attempts at such chronicle writing can be seen in *Veraldar saga* (see chapter 9 above) and the short treatise *Heimsaldrar* in the manuscript AM 194 8vo, but a more ambitious undertaking of the same sort is preserved in the fourteenth-century codex AM 764 4to. It is a chronicle divided up into eight ages which records history from the Creation down to Pope Clement IV (d. 1270), with additional prophetic chapters on the coming of Antichrist and the Last Judgement. Much of the material the compilers drew on came from Old Norse Bible translations: stories from the Old Testament serve as the backbone of the narrative from the Creation to the Incarnation, and the New Testament provides some of the information on the times of Christ and the apostles.

Translations from the Old Testament

Lessons from the Bible were of course an integral part of the celebration of mass and the divine office. These, however, were read in Latin and the Bible text used for the liturgy was the Vulgate. Knowledge of Latin was not common among Icelanders and Norwegians in the first decades after the conversion, and throughout the Middle Ages it remained largely the privilege of those who had received a clerical education. The

Scriptures became known to the common people through preaching, in which the Bible was quoted in translation. The homilies and saints' lives are therefore the earliest source of knowledge about Old Norse biblical language. With time longer chapters and whole books of the Bible were translated, but the development of this translation activity remains the subject of speculation, since most of these texts have come down to us in versions found in composite manuscripts of the fourteenth century. The most substantial of these is a compilation usually referred to as *Stjórn*, which contains translations of the historical books of the Old Testament.

Stjórn is not a homogeneous work, but one made up of three parts which are different in nature and of different age, and a scholarly consensus regarding their relationship has not yet emerged. The part generally believed to be the oldest (part II) contains a translation which is close to the Latin original and largely lacking in commentary. The other two parts expand the Bible text with commentary and exegesis, but differ in the extent to which they do so. It is indeed the extent of the additions they make that, along with stylistic differences, distinguishes these two parts from each other and from part II, and has been used as the basis for the relative dating of all three.

The first part is believed to be the youngest of the three. It consists of Genesis and the first 18 chapters of Exodus, and is preceded by a prologue which states that it was compiled under the auspices of King Hákon Magnússon (1299–1319) of Norway (and Iceland). The prologue also reveals that the king had previously commissioned a compilation of saints' lives so that lessons from it might be read on feast days, and that he thought it no less important to have a compilation of Bible texts made for reading out on Sundays. The Scriptures are likened to a building and it is explained how the literal (or historical) sense of the text equals the foundations of the building. The prologue ends by reiterating the importance of the literal sense as the basis of the narrative.

What follows is the first part of *Stjórn*, which is 'in essence not so much a translation of the Bible as a compilation based on it, in which the Bible story is augmented with considerable elaboration and commentary and also with some entirely extraneous material' (Kirby 1986: 52). It is conceivable that the compiler(s) relied, in part, on an earlier translation of the Pentateuch, but the exegetical material comes for the most part from two well-known Latin works, Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica* ('Scholastic History') and the *Speculum historiale* ('Historical Mirror') compiled by Vincent of Beauvais. The text breaks off before the end of Exodus and we cannot know whether the compiler(s) working for King Hákon had plans to recast a larger part of the Bible in their new mould. The manuscript transmission has left us only this initial part of the Pentateuch; later copiers evidently adopted the course of coupling it together with other existing translations which were quite different in tone.

The second part of *Stjórn* begins where the first one leaves off in Exodus, and extends to the end of Deuteronomy. This part is much simpler in style than the first one and, as we have said, virtually free of commentary. Scholars have assigned the

translation to the first half of the thirteenth century, although the arguments for the dating are by no means conclusive. It is, for instance, strange that the text is preserved only as a fifteenth-century addition to one of the three main manuscripts of *Stjórn*.

The third part begins with the Book of Joshua and continues to the end of the Books of Kings. The Bible text is here amplified with exegetical material, though to a much lesser extent than in part I. Part III also differs from part I in that it rarely names the sources for the interpolations. Honorius' works *Imago mundi* and *Speculum ecclesiae* are, however, mentioned, and the compiler has also made use of Comestor's *Historia scholastica* and of the *Liber exceptionum* ('Book of Exceptions') by Richard of St Victor. *Stjórn* III has been dated to the middle of the thirteenth century, in part because it is textually linked to the *Speculum regale* ('Royal Mirror': see below).

It is instructive to look at the make-up of the different manuscripts of *Stjórn*. There are three principal medieval manuscripts of the work (or parts of it). One of them, AM 228 fol., contains only part III. Another, AM 227 fol., a beautifully illuminated codex, contains parts I and III and nothing else. But in the third manuscript, AM 226 fol., the text of *Stjórn* precedes *Rómverja saga* (Icelandic translations of Sallust and Lucan), *Alexanders saga* (a translation of Walter of Châtillon's Latin epic *Alexandreis*, about Alexander the Great), and *Gyðinga saga*, a composite work on the history of the Jews based on the Books of the Maccabees, Josephus' *De bello Judaico* ('On the Jewish War') and Comestor. (Comestor, rather than the Bible, is also the source for the story of Joshua in this manuscript.) This indicates that the compilers of AM 226 fol. looked upon the text of *Stjórn* as a historical text that could serve as the first part in a compilation which brought together texts illustrating the history of the world. The transmission of the Icelandic Bible translations thus became intertwined with the development of universal history. The biblical texts were seen as a source for the early history of humankind and incorporated into larger compilations which aimed to bring together existing knowledge about the ancient world. It is therefore not surprising to find in the universal chronicle in AM 764 4to, written in the late fourteenth century (see above), the most significant Old Norse Bible texts outside *Stjórn*. These are the Book of Judith and chapters from the Book of Daniel.

It is evident that the text in this manuscript is a copy and everything seems to suggest that the scribes had a full text of Daniel to hand, even though they decided to include only parts of it in their book. The translation is close to the Latin and there are no traces of commentary in the text. In addition to the translations of Judith and Daniel the compilers of AM 764 4to seem to have made use of a version of a *Stjórn* III text which also included the first part of the Pentateuch. The evidence presented by AM 764 4to points in the same direction as the textual transmission of *Stjórn*, suggesting, that is, that existing translations were incorporated (sometimes considerably reworked) into historical (or pseudo-historical) works, which were not meant for church purposes in a narrow sense but rather for the more general edification of the public.

It is significant in this context that in the principal manuscripts of *Stjórn* (and in the chronicle preserved in AM 764 4to), the main part of the Pentateuch (after Exodus

1.18) is omitted. That is the part covered in *Stjórn* II, which is a later addition to AM 226 fol., inserted into the manuscript some 100 years after the other parts were written. It is therefore evident that the material in *Stjórn* I and III was transmitted together, whereas *Stjórn* II has a different textual history. This indicates that for the scribes and their audiences parts I and III were sufficient, in the sense that those parts could be seen as forming a coherent history or storyline. This is understandable if consideration is given to the material that takes up the three last books of the Pentateuch. Much of it concerns the shaping of Jewish law and customs. It holds little interest for those receiving an elementary Christian education and will not have meant much to Scandinavians. The Old Norse translators/compilers passed it over, proceeding direct from the story of the Exodus to the story of Joshua, where they resumed their storytelling.

The Icelandic Bible translations as they have come down to us are thus firmly narrative-oriented. This is reflected not only in the emphasis put on the historical sense in the prologue to *Stjórn* I, in the way the Bible text is incorporated into larger historical compilations, and in the choice the scribes exercised when selecting material, but also in the way they treat the text itself. They maintain the elements that serve the story most directly (descriptions of main characters, stylistic amplification etc.), often heightening dialogues for dramatic effect but excising monologues and prayers as well as information they considered redundant, such as lists of names or geographical descriptions (Fell 1973).

The New Testament and the Psalms

This same fondness for stories may also explain aspects of the reception of the New Testament in Iceland and Norway. As far as is known it was not translated in its entirety until the Icelandic translation by Oddur Gottskálksson appeared in 1540. Judging from the many quotations from the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles that are found in Old Norse literature, particularly in lives of the apostles, it is not unlikely that those parts of the New Testament existed in Old Norse in some form, again showing a preference for narrative-oriented rather than contemplative texts.

The Gospels are frequently cited, as would be expected, in homilies and other religious texts. Examination of some of this material has led scholars to advance the theory that a Gospel harmony (that is, a collation of the material of the four Gospels) in Old Norse may have been the source for some of these quotations, but more work needs to be done in this field before any firm conclusions can be drawn. Oddur Gottskálksson's translation betrays some similarities with quotations found in medieval saints' lives and similar works (*Jóns saga baptista* by Grímr Hólmsteinsson in particular) and shows that he was at least familiar with Old Norse biblical language. There is in fact considerable continuity in Icelandic biblical language from the earliest texts to the present day (Karlsson 2000).

The person who copied the Icelandic text of the Psalms as an interlinear gloss to a Latin Psalter some time in the decades following the Reformation seems also to have been relying on an older tradition. The manuscript, which is preserved in Vienna (Cod. Vind. 2713), is fragmentary but must have originally contained the entire text of the Psalter, written in the thirteenth century, to which an Icelandic text, based on the Vulgate, was added in the latter half of the sixteenth century. The scribe seems to have used an already existing translation which he modified to suit his own ends. This indicates that an Icelandic version of the Psalter existed before the Reformation; the text as it appears in the Vienna Psalter has been dated to c.1500. It is furthermore considered likely, judging by the many quotations from the Psalms which are found in Old Norse literature, that other versions of the Psalter existed in Old Norse. Given the fact that the Psalter played an important part in elementary education – it was a basic text for those who were learning to read – it must have been glossed frequently. Out of the glosses, then, more substantial versions might have emerged.

The Psalms formed the backbone of the liturgy for the divine offices in convents and monasteries and they were a key text for private devotion. *Laxdæla saga* mentions that its heroine, Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, became the first Icelandic woman to read the Psalter, which indicates that the author of the saga knew this to be a common practice at the time of writing (c.1250). In addition to sacred texts laypeople had access to literature specifically intended for their religious and moral edification, laying down the foundations for proper conduct.

Moral Treatises

Stories of saints and other religious people provided examples of virtuous behaviour, but they did not outline systematically the doctrine of sin and grace and the pitfalls inherent in the human condition. These were to be sought in works of a different nature, tractates on virtues and vices and other expositions of moral issues. Many of these works can be seen as practical manuals demonstrating how people could emulate the virtuous conduct of the saints.

An early work of this kind is Alcuin's *De virtutibus et vitiis* ('On Virtues and Vices'), which was translated into Old Norse sometime before 1200 and is preserved in the Norwegian Homily Book as well as in three fifteenth-century Icelandic fragments. Alcuin's treatise is in the form of a letter to Wido, a Breton nobleman who, according to Alcuin, had requested some moral guidance so that he might reflect upon his own conduct. In his initial greeting, which serves as a preface, Alcuin urges Wido to be generous in almsgiving and prudent as well as merciful when passing judgements. Alcuin strikes a similar note in his valediction at the end of the work, where he says he has kept his treatise short so that it might be of daily use to Wido, that is, a manual of sorts. Alcuin then emphasizes that salvation does not depend on status or wealth but on the good deeds a person has done. Accordingly, the bulk of the treatise is devoted

to a description first of virtues, then of vices, but ending with a chapter on the four cardinal virtues: wisdom, fortitude, temperance and justice.

Justice is also a key concept in the *Speculum regale* or *Konungs skuggsjá*, a didactic treatise written in Norway around the middle of the thirteenth century. It is in the form of a dialogue between father and son where the son seeks edification from his father regarding the proper conduct, first of merchant sailors, then of members of the king's retinue. The last part of the work is devoted to a discussion of the duties of a king, especially in the sphere of jurisprudence. In his answers the father draws on the Bible to illustrate the importance of temperate justice, citing examples of sins and their retribution from the Old as well as the New Testament. The author's learning is evident in the exegetical treatment given to the chapters from the Scriptures, where typological and allegorical interpretation is frequently used. Indeed the art of commentary itself is discussed by the father, who uses the Psalter and its commentators as an example.

The discussion follows upon a passage where Psalm 84 serves as a starting point for a treatment of the elements of justice where truth (*sannindi*), righteousness (*réttvísi*), peace (*fríðsemi*) and mercy (*miskunn*) are personified as sisters, and as daughters of God. It is stressed that in passing judgements the king must reconcile these four principles: although truth and righteousness, as a rule, decide the verdict, peace and mercy must concur in the judgement. It may also happen that truth and righteousness refer the judgement to the other two, who nevertheless cannot rule entirely against the wishes of their sisters. This is illustrated in the work with the help of examples from the Bible. Lucifer, whose grave sins are catalogued, is for instance judged harshly, and there is similarly little room for mercy in the case of Judas. But cases like that of King David and of the adulterous woman whom Jesus saved show, on the other hand, how God's judgements are frequently mitigated through mercy. It is worth mentioning in this context that extracts from the *Speculum regale* and from Alcuin's tractate, urging judges to exercise mercy, were interpolated into Icelandic law-books from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

The theological views expressed in *Speculum regale* (including the theory of the daughters of God) may owe a good deal to twelfth-century Parisian theology. It has been established that soon after the foundation of the archiepiscopate of Niðaróss in Norway in 1153 ties were established between the Norwegian church and the canons at St Victor in Paris, and some of the canonical houses which were subsequently founded in Norway and Iceland belonged the Victorine order (Johnsen 1951). The works of Hugo and Richard of St Victor became known in the archdiocese and some were translated into Old Norse (see below).

The author of *Speculum regale* evidently belonged to a circle of learned men; he may have been a cleric, but much suggests that he was part of the courtly milieu in Norway. As mentioned above, the first two parts of the work are concerned with the status and conduct of the merchant, on the one hand, and the retainer on the other. The son inquires after the norms of behaviour that befit the prudent merchant and the graceful courtier. The answers the father gives involve everything from lessons in

navigation and geography to details about clothing and weaponry and advice on how to secure the attention and the goodwill of the king.

Speculum regale is thus partly a theological/judicial tractate, partly a practical guide to life at sea and at court, aimed at a specific audience.² Treatises of this kind, outlining the virtues and duties of certain classes of people, learned as well as lay, became a popular genre in the later Middle Ages, often associated with the Latin word *speculum* – these works were mirrors in which the reader might regard himself or herself and see where he or she fell short of moral standards. This idea is formulated thus in *Speculum penitentis* ('Mirror of the Penitent'), a penitential treatise preserved in Icelandic manuscripts from the fifteenth century:

svo sem þú sér í glerinu meður líkams augum þína ásjónu, hvort sem hún er björt eða svört eða flekkótt, svo sér þú í þessum spegli þína sál meður hugskots auga hvort þú hefir gert hana bjarta með góðum verkum eða svarta með illum eða flekkótta. (Holme Pedersen and Louis-Jensen 1985: 222)³

[just as you perceive with your corporeal eyes your countenance in the glass, be it [that is, the countenance] bright or dark or both, so you will in this mirror see your soul with your inner eyes [and know] whether you have made it bright by good deeds or [made it] dark, or chequered, through bad deeds.]

According to the prologue of *Speculum regale*, its intended purpose is similar: the king is meant to use the work as a guide for himself and for all his subjects, since he is responsible for the discipline of those who are under his rule. This puts *Speculum regale* on a par with other European works meant for the edification of kings, often grouped together under the German term *Fürstenspiegel* ('Mirror of Princes'), although nothing suggests that the Norwegian author modelled his work on any specific work of that kind. But despite the words of the prologue, and the fact that a large part of the work concerns questions on how a king should exercise his judicial power, the work as a whole seems to be aimed at the king's subjects – or more specifically the members of his court – rather than the king himself.

Translations of two treatises incorporated into *Hauksbók*, a codex written at the beginning of the fourteenth century for, and in part by, the Icelander Haukr Erlendsson,⁴ also seem to be the fruits of literary activity at the court of the Norwegian king. The former, *Senna æðru og hugrekkis* ('Debate between Anxiety and Courage'), is a translation of *De remediis* ('On Remedies'), a pagan stoic tractate attributed to Pseudo-Seneca in which courage and piety in the face of death are advocated. In the prologue of the Norse version the author is named as 'meistari Valtírr', which possibly refers to Walter of Châtillon, the author of *Alexandreis*. Walter was also reckoned to be the author of *Moralium dogma philosophorum* ('Doctrine of Moral Philosophers'), a composite work containing, *inter alia*, an abridged version of *De remediis*. The Norse text, however, does not seem to be based exclusively on the *Moralium dogma* since the former contains material not included by Walter. The subject matter of the text, with its emphasis on courage and valour, evokes romances and courtly literature, and it

seems likely that the translation was made in the same milieu as spawned the writing of *Speculum regale*.

The second treatise in *Hauksbók* is a translation of *Soliloquium de arrha animae* ('Soliloquy on the Pledge of the Soul') by Hugh of St Victor (d. 1141/2). That work is more spiritually oriented than the treatises already discussed, although much suggests that the translation was meant for laypeople (again probably those associated with the Norwegian court). Its title in *Hauksbók* is *Viðræða líkams ok sálar* ('A Debate between Body and Soul'), but the work is rather a dialogue between a man (perhaps Hugh himself) and his soul, in which the soul asks where she may find a worthy recipient of her love. Her interlocutor leads her, through various arguments, to an understanding of her relationship with God, which is likened to that of a woman to her betrothed. The dowry which her betrothed gives to her in evidence of his love is the entire Creation, and salvation. The Creation shows how extensive and manifold this love is, and through contemplation of salvation the soul discovers that the dowry is given out of pure love, not because the soul merits it of her own accord. For she is tainted by sin, but through salvation is given the opportunity to purge herself and thus prepare for the union with her beloved.

A very different note is struck in another dialogue, a debate between the body and soul of a dead man, preserved in the Norwegian Homily Book as well as in three younger Icelandic manuscripts. The text is a prose version of an Old French poem, *Un samedi par nuit* ('One Saturday Night'), and describes a conversation where the soul (feminine) berates the body (masculine) for its vanity, pride and avarice. She blames him for her present calamities, claiming that she is banished from paradise on account of his sins. He retorts that he merely carried out her wishes, in that his actions were the result of her sinful thoughts, and he draws a parallel between himself and Adam, who was led astray by Eve. He ends by stating that they (body and soul) are now beyond any help, and expresses the wish that God should warn those still living of such fate, since it is too late for people to repent when they are dead. The narrative frame of the dialogue provides the channel for this warning: the dialogue is introduced by a narrator who describes how he lay in his bed one Saturday night and in his sleep saw a dead man whose soul had left the body and was hovering nearby. He witnesses the conversation between the body and the soul, at the end of which he describes how demons arrive to take the soul away.

Visions

The narrative frame of *Un samedi par nuit* is reminiscent of vision literature, and in the Homily Book the text is in fact preceded by the title *Visio sancti Pauli apostoli* ('Vision of St Paul the Apostle'). That title, however, is incorrect; it applies to another work which was also translated into Old Norse, an apocryphal apocalypse, Greek in origin.

The Old Norse text is a translation of one of several Latin versions of the work and it is preserved, incomplete, in two manuscripts which also contain *Duggals leiðsla*, a translation of another Latin work, *Visio Tnugdali* ('Vision of Dougal'). These visions serve the purpose, expressed by the body in *Un samedi par nuit*, of acquainting those still living with conditions in the afterlife and urging them to lead virtuous lives so that they may be spared the torments of purgatory and hell. The visionary leaves the body temporarily and is guided through the various dwelling-places of the souls of the dead, where sinners receive retribution appropriate to their crimes. In *Visio Pauli* the apostle himself visits places of torment, accompanied by St Michael, whereas in *Duggals leiðsla* the visionary is a sinner, an Irish knight of cruel disposition. He is shown valleys of death and darkness, but proceeds to view the splendid abodes of saints and angels who fill the air with sweet music.

Although the dating of these translations is problematic, it is clear that Latin visionary literature played a part in devotional life in Norway and Iceland at least from the twelfth century onwards. Visions form a part of Gregory's *Dialogues* (see above) and other collections of theological writings, such as Honorius' *Speculum ecclesiae*, to name but two works known and used in these countries from early on. Not only translations but also indigenous works testify to the need for literature which portrayed the worlds believed to lie beyond the boundary separating life from death. The poem *Sólarljóð* (see chapter 3 above) and the later Norwegian *Draumkvæði* are clearly inspired by visionary literature, and similar claims have been made for *Voluspá*. The prose narrative *Rannveigar leiðsla*, however, conforms more closely to the genre. It is incorporated into *Guðmundar saga biskups* (see chapter 2 above) and describes how Rannveig, a priest's concubine, is shown the torments that await her soul, and the souls of secular leaders in Iceland who are guilty of abusing their power. After witnessing these horrors she is blinded by a great light and Elysian fields open up to her. There she is shown the dwellings of holy men, several of the Icelandic bishops among them.

Although not a vision in the strictest sense, *Niðrstigningar saga* – an Old Norse version of the Gospel of Nicodemus – nevertheless describes a journey to the underworld. It is one of the earliest preserved translations from Latin and exists in four versions which are all thought to stem from a single translation made in the twelfth century. It is a narrative characterized by a lively dialogue and dramatic descriptions where Satan and his acolytes are vividly portrayed. If the *Physiologus*, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, invites people to reflect philosophically on the role of Christ in human salvation, *Niðrstigningar saga* powerfully celebrates his victory over the demons who trouble the living and torment the dead.

See also CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; CHRISTIAN POETRY; FAMILY SAGAS; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PSEUDO-HISTORY; LAWS; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY.

NOTES

- 1 For instance in *Eiríks saga víðforla*; cf. Jensen (1983).
- 2 According to its prologue the work was originally meant to include a chapter on learned men and farmers, as well as merchants and courtiers, but those parts were never completed, it seems.
- 3 *Speculum Penitentis* is a detailed definition and analysis of the different types and categories of sins. It is based largely on extracts from a Latin theological treatise, *Compendium Theologicae Veritatis* ('Compendium of Theological Truth'), compiled 1260–5 by the Dominican Hugo Ripelin of Strasburg. Hugo's work is also among the sources for a description of Judgment Day incorporated into the composite *Tveggja postola saga Jóns ok Jakobs*, and it seems to have been used by the compiler of the Icelandic *Oculus sacerdotis* ('The Eye of the Priest'), a manual for priests based on a treatise of the same name by the Englishman William of Pagula. *Oculus sacerdotis* contains *inter alia* a chapter on the seven cardinal sins and another on the seven sacraments, followed by a short penitential, that is, a work listing the appropriate penance for each type of sin (McDougall 1996).
- 4 Haukr Erlendsson (d. 1334) was an Icelandic lawman who seems to have settled in Norway around 1300. He is the earliest Icelandic scribe identifiable by name.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Astás, Reidar (1987) *Et bibelverk fra middelalderen: Studier i Stjórn*. Oslo.
- Bagge, Sverre (1987) *The Political Thought of The King's Mirror* (Mediaeval Scandinavia Supplements 3). Odense.
- Benediktsson, Jakob (forthcoming) 'Stjórn.' *Gripla* 15.
- Boyer, Régis (1973) 'The Influence of Pope Gregory's Dialogues on Old Icelandic Literature.' In Peter Foote, Hermann Pálsson and Desmond Slay (eds.) *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference, University of Edinburgh 1971*. London, pp. 1–27.
- Cahill, Peter (ed.) (1983) *Duggals leiðsla*. Reykjavík.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret (1987) *Skáldskaparmál: Snorri Sturluson's Ars Poetica and Medieval Theories of Language*. Odense.
- De Leeuw Van Weenen, Andrea (ed.) (1993) *The Icelandic Homily Book. Perg. 16 4° in the Royal Library Stockholm*. Reykjavík.
- Del Zotto Tozzoli, Carla (ed.) (1992) *Il Physiologus in Islanda* (Biblioteca Scandinava di studi, ricerche e testi 7). Pisa.
- Fell, Christine E. (1973) 'The Old Norse Version of the Book of Joshua.' In Peter Foote, Hermann Pálsson and Desmond Slay (eds.) *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference, University of Edinburgh 1971*. London, pp. 114–42.
- Firchow, Evelyn S. and Grimstad, Karen (eds.) (1989) *Elucidarius in Old Norse Translation*. Reykjavík.
- Hardarson, Gunnar (1995) *Littérature et spiritualité en Scandinavie médiévale: La traduction norroise du De arba animae de Hugues de Saint-Victor: Étude historique et édition critique*. Paris and Turnhout.
- Holme Pedersen, Knud-Erik and Louis-Jensen, Jonna (1985) 'Speculum penitentis.' *Opuscula VIII*, 199–225.
- Jensen, Helle (ed.) (1983) *Eiríks saga víðforla* (Editiones Arnarnænae B 29). Copenhagen.
- Johnsen, Arne Odd (1951) 'Les relations intellectuelles entre la France et la Norvège (1160–1214).' *Moyen Age* 57, 247–68.
- Karlsson, Stefán (2000) 'Samfelling í íslensku bíblíumáli.' In Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (ed.) *Stafkrókar*. Reykjavík, pp. 405–14. Originally printed 1985.
- Kirby, Ian J. (1976–80) *Biblical Quotation in Old Icelandic-Norwegian Religious Literature I–II*. Reykjavík.
- Kirby, Ian J. (1986) *Bible Translation in Old Norse*. Geneva.

- Marchand, James W. (2000) 'The Old Icelandic Physiologus.' In Anna Grotans, Heinrich Beck and Anton Schwob (eds.) *De consolatione philologiae: Studies in Honor of Evelyn S. Firchow*. Göppingen, pp. 231–44.
- McDougall, Ian (1996) 'Latin Sources of the Old Icelandic Speculum Penitentis.' *Opuscula* X, 136–85.
- Óskarsdóttir, Svanhildur (forthcoming) 'Writing Universal History in Ultima Thule: The Case of AM 764 4to.' *Mediaeval Scandinavia*.
- Schnall, Jens Eike and Simek, Rudolf (eds.) (2000) *Speculum regale: Der altnorwegische Königspiegel (Konungs skuggsjá) in der europäischen Tradition*. Vienna.
- Springborg, Peter (1988) 'Weltbild mit Löwe: Die Imago mundi von Honorius Augustodunensis in der Altwestnordischen Textüberlieferung.' In *Cultura classica e cultura germanica settentrionale: Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi Università di Macerata*. Rome, pp. 167–219.
- Turville-Petre, Joan (1960) 'Sources of the Vernacular Homily in England, Norway and Iceland.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 75, 168–82.
- Tveitane, Mattias (1965) *En norrøn versjon av Visio Pauli* (Årbok for Universitetet i Bergen 1964 no. 3). Bergen.
- Uecker, Heiko (ed.) (1980) *Der Wiener Psalter: Cod. Vind. 2713* (Editiones Arnemagnæanæ B 27). Copenhagen.
- Widding, Ole (1960a) 'AM 672 4^o: en skyggetilværelse.' *Opuscula* I, 344–9.
- Widding, Ole (ed.) (1960b) *Alkuin i norsk-islandsk overlevering* (Editiones Arnemagnæanæ A 6). Copenhagen.
- Widding, Ole and Bekker-Nielsen, Hans (1959) 'A Debate of the Body and the Soul in Old Norse Literature.' *Mediaeval Studies* 21, 272–89.
- Wolf, Kirsten (1993) 'The Influence of the Evangelium Nicodemi on Norse Literature: A Survey.' *Mediaeval Studies* 55, 219–42.

Rhetoric and Style

Þórir Óskarsson

A widely accepted view among scholars is that Old Norse literature consists of two main elements: a popular tradition of storytelling and poetry practised by ordinary people from time immemorial, and a foreign literary culture, which learned people began to practise when literacy was introduced in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Within this dualistic framework, reference is often made to the two stylistic and rhetorical traditions in Old Norse literature, one seen as popular and indigenous, the other as learned and exotic. Sometimes this division seems quite evident; for example, it is a simple matter to claim that a close connection exists between, on the one hand, translated religious works and chivalric sagas, and, on the other, foreign rhetorical disciplines, and then to demonstrate it by comparing the translated texts with their originals. It is much more difficult to demonstrate the connection between Old Norse literature and oral tradition, since the tradition and the language in which it was couched have long since disappeared in their original form. Most scholars nevertheless assume the existence of such a tradition, and some have even tried to find evidence of it, particularly where narratives deviate from the patterns of foreign rhetoric or are not based on known rhetorical linguistic or stylistic devices. In this connection, attention is also given to whether works show the influence of foreign languages.

The main drawback to this dualistic division is that medieval rhetoric was a complex and many-sided discipline that required authors to adjust their style to the circumstances applying at any given time. For example, they were advised to employ a simple and accessible style in ordinary narrative and when addressing an audience of common people, or a mixed audience. Also, it is difficult to state without doubt whether particular features of language or style in Old Norse historical writings are derived from the speech of ordinary uneducated people or from foreign works. Three stylistic features can be cited as examples of this problem: set phrases used to introduce new material or change the subject, such as *Nú er þar til máls at taka* ('Next we hear about') or *Víkr nú sǫgunni til* ('Now our story turns to'); clauses in which the verb is placed first, causing a reversal of normal word-order, such as *Stefna*

þeir austr til Markarfljóts ('They set out eastwards towards Markarfljót'); and understatement: *Par voru þeir í höfn nokkurri eigi allskamma stund* ('They were in a certain harbour there for no very short time'). These stylistic features have long been attributed to indigenous tradition and have even been looked upon as some of the principal characteristics of the classical Icelandic saga style. None the less, they are well-known devices (*aphodos*, *inversio*, *litotes*) found in foreign historical works and manuals of rhetoric that Old Norse writers came into contact with as early as the twelfth century, and scholars have even allowed for the possibility that they entered Old Norse literary style from these sources.

It is difficult to make any definite statements about matters like these. But it is evident that, by an early date, Norwegian and Icelandic writers had developed the basis of a sophisticated rhetorical art which determined, to some extent, the narrative, linguistic and stylistic devices that were considered appropriate or permissible. It is also clear that the individual writer's subject, setting or purpose exerted an influence on style. Finally, style underwent certain changes from one period to another, sometimes because of new ideas or trends in rhetoric and sometimes because of changes in material or in the internal development of individual literary genres. Thus, Old Norwegian-Icelandic literary style exhibits an immense variety, and generalizations are seldom valid.

Norse Medieval Rhetoric

Rhetoric was one of the main subjects taught in the schools run in Norway and Iceland during the Middle Ages: together with Latin grammar and logic, it formed the basis of the applied language skills of being able to read, write, compose and interpret texts. Ancient book-lists and individual manuscript fragments give us certain indications as to the main textbooks used in teaching grammar and rhetoric. In the early period, the *Artes grammaticae* of Aelius Donatus (fourth century AD) and the *Institutiones grammaticae* of Priscianus (c. AD 500) were two of the main books, not forgetting St Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* (c. AD 400), in which classical rhetoric was enlisted in the service of the church and the student was taught the art of writing sermons. Towards the end of the thirteenth century some more recent works in the spirit of the scholastic movement were beginning to make their influence felt, such as the *Doctrinale* of Alexander de Villa-Dei from c.1200 and the *Graecismus* of Eberhard de Béthune from the early thirteenth century. By the fourteenth century, at the latest, Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* was also known. Most of these Latin works were mainly concerned with grammar, which meant the skill of speaking correctly, but they also contained excursions into rhetoric, that is, the art of speaking well. From evident linguistic errors (*barbarismus*) in ordinary speech, it was a short step to various 'permissible errors', that is, poetic licence and artistic flourishes in which the aim was an unnatural word-order (*figuræ verborum*) or a figurative sense (*figuræ sententiae*). Grammar and rhetoric, as academic disciplines, were the basis of the arts of preaching

(*ars praedicandi*), letter-writing (*ars dictaminis*) and poetry (*ars poetica*), and their influence can be seen in many areas of Old Norse literature.

There is no evidence that Norwegian writers tried to develop domestic disciplines of grammar and rhetoric in the Middle Ages; in Norway, as in other parts of the European mainland, Latin, the literary language of the age, was dominant. In Iceland, on the other hand, writers began composing works on these topics in the vernacular early on, using domestic poetry as their subject matter or as the source of illustrative examples of the features and ideas they were writing about. This indicates that these works were intended not only for scholars who were trained in Latin, but also for schoolboys and laymen, and doubtless also for writers and poets writing in the vernacular. In other words, the aim of these works was to educate the reader and have a direct influence on Icelandic culture and literary development. This is clear from the four Icelandic grammatical treatises, which are preserved in one of the main manuscripts of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, the Codex Wormianus, which was written about the middle of the fourteenth century. In this manuscript they are prefaced by a short introduction describing the treatises and drawing attention to their value for poets and scholars.

These treatises were written over a period of nearly two centuries, extending from the mid-twelfth century to the first decade of the fourteenth. The first two, the *First* and *Second Grammatical Treatises*, deal with the problems of spelling and the need to adapt the Roman alphabet to the phonetic system of Icelandic. Scholars have also seen the second of these treatises as being intended to help the reader to understand the nature of rhyme and to make rhymes. Moreover, it contains some discussion of oratory, and says that it requires 'intelligence and vocabulary and intention and developed skill in speech'. This is a clear reference to three of the main aspects of classical rhetoric: invention of the material (*inventio*), its disposition (*dispositio*) and its presentation or style (*elocutio*). The *Third* and *Fourth Grammatical Treatises* are mostly concerned with rhetoric, and in particular those aspects of language that make it beautiful or can be regarded as faults. Snorri's *Edda* itself is partly a textbook on the art of poetry (*ars poetica*), based mainly on Icelandic poetry and using vernacular metrical terms, though the author clearly had some acquaintance with foreign educational traditions. Thus, the Codex Wormianus can be seen as an interesting source for the medieval literary and rhetorical disciplines, both domestic and international, that Icelandic writers were familiar with.

There is no question that the authors of the works preserved in the Codex Wormianus were all deeply learned by European standards and that they intended those works for readers who had at least a nodding acquaintance with the subject and the traditions on which it rested. Apart from Snorri Sturluson (1178/9–1241), only one of the authors in question is known by name: the *Third Grammatical Treatise* is attributed in early manuscripts to Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld ('the White Poet') c.1210/12–59), the brother of the historian Sturla Þórðarson and nephew of Snorri Sturluson. Óláfr Þórðarson is known to have taught trainees for the priesthood, and many believe he wrote this work as an aid or textbook for his pupils. The first part,

dealing with the fundamental parts of speech, is based mainly on Priscianus' Latin grammar; the second, which is often called *Málskrúðsfræði* (literally, 'the art of linguistic ornamentation'), is based on the part of Donatus' work that deals with linguistic faults and the linguistic devices that enhance the beauty of ideas and their presentation. Óláfr sums up the practical value of this theory for poets and writers in the comment: 'only someone who knows both what is praiseworthy and to blame in language can speak or write beautifully'. In other words, rhetoric was essential for all writers.

As is to be expected, Óláfr Þórðarson generally uses Latin rhetorical and linguistic terms, though vernacular terms occur from time to time, as they do in Snorri's *Edda*. On the other hand, he explains all rhetorical devices in Icelandic, or illustrates them with Icelandic equivalents. It is also interesting to note that the numerous examples he quotes from texts to illustrate rhetorical devices are not from classical Latin but from Icelandic *dróttkvætt* poetry (see chapters 15 and 27), both old and relatively recent. This indicates that the author's intention was to put the Latin scholarly tradition within the reach of Icelanders and to show them how it could be used to explain, categorize and appreciate Icelandic poetry. Óláfr says that the indigenous poetry is of the same family as that which Roman scholars learned in Athens and translated into Latin, since Óðinn, the god of poetry, originally came from Troy. Thus, for Óláfr, Icelandic and Latin poetry were not different things – which should be borne in mind when considering style in Old Norse literature.

Although Óláfr Þórðarson's work has direct foreign models, it is highly independent, and there can be no doubt of its value as a source for the metrical and stylistic knowledge of educated Icelanders of the early thirteenth century, indicating that they saw their own poetry as being comparable with classical Latin poetry. It also shows how Óláfr went about interpreting literature – for example, taking account of the allegorical dimension – and how he distinguished between popular style (*alþýðligt orðtæki*, *sermo communis*) and poetic language. Furthermore, Óláfr explains the linguistic devices that characterize the discourse of scholars (*ræður spekinga*) and courtly eloquence (*birðlig málsnild*), drawing a distinction between this type of speech and ordinary language. For example, he says that scholars mark their language with tropes, that is, ornamental language used in a metaphorical sense, and he mentions the connection between courtly language and the trope *astismos*, that is, sophisticated humour. This treatment shows clearly that the author saw speakers' social class and the setting of language as being crucial factors in determining what was appropriate at any given time. It also shows that the setting had a great deal to say about whether a particular usage was to be regarded as a linguistic blemish or an ornament. Various things are permissible for poets that are regarded as undesirable or plainly wrong when used by ordinary people.

The *Fourth Grammatical Treatise*, which is believed to have been written at the beginning of the fourteenth century, is similar to the second part of Óláfr Þórðarson's work, and in fact more or less forms a continuation of it. It concentrates largely on stylistic ornamentation (figures and tropes), and, as in the *Third Grammatical Treatise*,

Latin terms are generally explained in Icelandic. Another similarity is that all the illustrative examples are taken from Icelandic poetry, and the author even composes some verses as illustrations. It is interesting to note that the *Fourth Grammatical Treatise* is based partly on recent works by Alexander de Villa-Dei and Eberhard de Béthune, and there is much evidence that the views on rhetoric in those works had an influence on Icelandic prose style, particularly in hagiographical works, which became far more ornate and emotionally charged at this time than had been the fashion previously, with excursions and explanations of various sorts becoming more and more prominent.

Categories of Prose Style

Medieval Latin rhetorical theory allowed for three types of style: a low style (*stilus humilis*), a middle style (*stilus mediocris*) and a high style (*stilus gravis*). This categorization was sometimes based on the material or the genre that the style was supposed to suit, but most often on the purpose it was to serve. The low style was to be used when imparting information, the middle style when the intention was to give pleasure, and the high style when attempting to move the audience or appeal to their feelings. It seems clear that Old Norse writers were familiar with such stylistic categories. In recent years, for example, it has been pointed out that two terms which occur in hagiographical writings are derived from medieval European rhetorical works. These are *lágr málsháttur* ('low style') and *skreyttur málsháttur* ('ornate style'); as the terms themselves indicate, they refer to opposing stylistic qualities (Tómasson 1988: 174). The first term is a direct translation of St Augustine's term *sermo humilis* and refers to the style used by Christ and his disciples when teaching the common people. In general, this style is ordinary and uses little ornament; the message was regarded as so beautiful and sublime that it needed no linguistic ornamentation. None the less, emphasis was placed on good language and a certain use of stylistic devices when the intention was to influence the audience, for example to arouse in them a feeling of awe or to urge them to contemplation or action. Old Norse writers referred to such stylistic devices as *skreyttur málsháttur*. This term appears to have referred equally to the middle style, in which the emphasis was on simple ornamentation (*ornatus facilis*), euphony, litotes, parallels and contrasts, and the high style, which made use of complex ornamentation (*ornatus difficilis*), such as metaphors, periphrasis, metonymy and hyperbole.

Comments by the writers of Old Norse religious works show that they not only knew of the existence of these different styles but also understood their implications. Some of these writers, for example, express serious doubts about the merits of the ornate style, saying that it is opposed to the fundamental outlook of Christianity, while they justify, both to themselves and others, the use of stylistic devices to illustrate and explain the sublime subject matter of their works, improve their audience's understanding or memory, or create a sense of mystery which only Chris-

tians could understand. Thus, style varies according to the author's subject and purpose. Consequently, there may be a substantial difference in style both between works of the same period and also within one and the same work. For example, the narrative sections of the saints' lives – and in fact of all saga literature – are generally couched in a far simpler style than the authorial comments, personal descriptions, conversations or speeches, and in sermons there is a striking stylistic difference between the pericope (the Bible reading for the day) and its interpretation.

There are other examples of attempts by Old Norse writers to categorize style. Mention has been made above of Óláfr Þórðarson's discussion of three types of language: popular style (*alhýðligt orðtæki*), the discourse of scholars (*ræður spekinga*) and courtly eloquence (*hirðlig málsnild*). As has already been stated, the popular style is based on the general foundation of the language, that is, simple, unsophisticated and grammatically correct language. As such, it is the opposite of poetic language, which always deviates from this basis in some way; the same applies to learned and courtly language. It is therefore evident that Óláfr Þórðarson was of the same opinion as medieval rhetoricians in general that style was the clothing of the material, a costume that could be tailored, beautified and decorated so as to serve as well as possible the speaker's purpose, education and social class. The authors of learned Old Norse works frequently comment on the relationship between matter and style, sometimes apologizing and saying that the style does not do justice to the qualities of the material. There are also places where authors point out how the beauties of language and style can lead to people paying more attention to how something is said than to what is being said, and even warnings that texts contain more stylistic ornamentation than solid truth. All this indicates that some people believed, or were at least familiar with, the view that brilliant language could be used independently of the subject matter, and also with the doctrine of the classical rhetoricians that rhetorical art always had to be founded on wisdom: it should have a moral purpose or aim at expressing some truth, and should not be an irresponsible or hollow technical device.

It is not certain, and perhaps is even improbable, that Óláfr Þórðarson regarded *alhýðligt orðtæki*, *ræður spekinga* and *hirðlig málsnild* as actual categories of style. Nevertheless these terms have direct parallels in those used by later scholars: popular style, learned style and courtly style. Particular mention must be made in this context of the writings of the Norwegian scholar Marius Nygaard, who in the period around 1900 attempted to classify and analyse Old Norse literary style with reference to two contrasted linguistic and literary trends, one domestic and popular (that is, originating among, and practised by, ordinary people), the other foreign and learned (Nygaard 1896, 1905). Nygaard considered that these trends had set their stamp on Old Norwegian-Icelandic literature throughout the period during which it constituted a separate entity, without becoming so intermixed as to lose their main characteristics. He identified two categories of prose style. One was the 'popular style' (*den folkelige stil*), rooted in everyday speech and the narrative procedures that had been practised from time immemorial in oral storytelling and the reciting of laws. Nygaard

identified the main characteristics of this style as being objective narration, simple syntax based principally on main clauses, domestic vocabulary, and little use of adjectives or stylistic ornamentation. Nygaard considered this trend as being strongest in those literary genres that were of domestic origin; in narrative literature, he saw it as most clearly illustrated in the sagas of Icelanders. The other prose style was the 'learned style' (*den lærde stil*), derived from foreign (Latin) literary culture and the linguistic and rhetorical traditions practised there. This style was characterized by great wordiness, complex syntax frequently involving the use of clause structures foreign to the Nordic languages, and extensive use of adjectives and stylistic devices. Nygaard considered this tradition as being mostly restricted to the religious works that were translated from Latin or else composed in the spirit of Latin works.

While Nygaard emphasized the distinguishing aspects of the two styles, he fully recognized their internal complexity and mutual interconnectedness. In his view, the popular style could appear in either a clumsy or a sophisticated form, and could also exhibit some influence of the learned style. Similarly, the learned style was sometimes overdone and peculiar, and sometimes unpretentious and easily understood, this being due to the influence of the popular tradition. Various later scholars have tried to describe these stylistic variants in greater detail. In particular, they have striven to trace and account for the development of the learned style with reference to individual literary genres or periods. In doing this, they have used terms such as the 'courtly style' (*Hofprosa, høvisk stil*) and the 'florid style' (*den florissante stil*).

Obviously, the first of these terms is close to Óláfr Þórðarson's *hvirðlig málsnild*, and the style to which it refers is seen as being best represented by the sagas of knights that were translated from French in the early thirteenth century for the entertainment and edification of the Norwegian court (Meissner 1902; Halvorsen 1959, 1962). The term 'florid style', on the other hand, seems to be based on one of the Latin terms for the middle style, *genus floridum*, in which the intention was to amuse the audience with highly ornate, yet appropriate, language. In Old Norse literature, it is seen primarily as the characteristic of religious works, original and translated, of the late thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries (Widding 1965, 1979). None the less, both the courtly and the florid style are seen as having influenced other literary genres, such as the sagas of Icelanders. Some scholars have taken the view that these two stylistic categories are to some extent variants of Nygaard's learned style, while others have pointed out that certain aspects of the courtly style, such as an emphasis on euphony, are evidently an echo of the original French texts, which were generally in verse. It has been argued that the particular characteristics of the florid style, such as extensive and emotionally charged excursions, complex imagery and various combinations of nouns, adjectives and adverbs, can be traced on the one hand to the authors' striving to appeal to their audience's emotions, and on the other to various new ideas regarding style that were probably derived from new treatises on rhetoric.

The stylistic categories named above – that is, the popular, learned, courtly and florid styles – are still sometimes used in discussion (cf. Astås 1993), but are not regarded as being above criticism. In particular, scholars have cast doubt on the

premises for the dualistic division into a popular and a learned style, that is, the alleged connection between the popular style and domestic folk culture and between the learned style and foreign learned disciplines. For example, many scholars have pointed out that the style that has been named 'popular' is far from being a simple folk-type narrative style, even though it may seem to pretend to be so. They argue that it is, rather, a sophisticated technical construct that requires both literary skill and practice to be used properly. In fact this view was expressed in Nygaard's own works, but it became dominant in the writings of those who argued for the 'book-prose' theory in the 1930s and 1940s. They sought to demonstrate how the popular style, or 'saga style' as it was also called, had developed over time and in response to the literary influences that authors had come under. To begin with, they argued, this style had been primitive and unsophisticated, but with accumulated practice in the art of writing and growing familiarity with domestic and foreign works, it gradually matured and reached its peak in the Golden Age of Icelandic literature in the thirteenth century. Thereafter, they argued, a decline set in, due partly to foreign linguistic influence and to new ideas about style in which more importance was attached to rhetorical ornament. In the 1960s a theory was advanced arguing that the popular style was not as 'popular' as Nygaard had thought (Halvorsen 1966). It was argued that initially it had been based more on the ordinary sermon and instructive style of Latin than on domestic narrative art, later developing under the influence of, yet also in partial resistance to, the artistic style that reached the Nordic countries in about 1200. Similarly, in recent years, attention has been drawn to the connection between the popular style and the 'low style' prescribed by the church, which was not only learned but also of foreign origin.

As a result of these last arguments, less distinction than before is now drawn between the style of learned works of foreign origin and those that were originally written in Old Norse. Recent studies of the style of translated and original religious works of the twelfth century have also revealed the weaknesses of arguing for such a division on stylistic grounds (Kristjánsson 1981, 1985; Kratz 1988). Broadly, it can be said that research has shown that the traditional definition of the learned style sits ill on the style of these works, even though they are frequently of foreign origin or are actually translations: in fact, the stylistic features that are regarded as characterizing the learned style are no more common in these works than they are in works that are regarded as being in the popular style. Admittedly, the religious works indicate that their authors or translators had a working knowledge of Latin rhetorical theory; nonetheless they are for the most part couched in a plain style that takes constant account of the Old Norse linguistic tradition and conceptual framework. Some scholars have even come to the conclusion in their studies that there is no real stylistic difference between the translated saints' lives and the non-translated secular sagas of the oldest date. They see both these saga groups as being written in the 'saga style' or the 'low style'. In their view, the difference in style between learned and popular works does not appear until the late thirteenth century, and more as a result of the appearance of a new stylistic fashion (the ornate style) than as a direct result of the influence of Latin works.

In the light of these arguments, scholars are now far more cautious in their use of the terms 'learned style' and 'popular style', and the description of Old Norse literary style below will focus more on historical development than on particular stylistic categories. Instead of attempting a comprehensive survey of all genres, a few are examined as interesting representatives of their age: learned and instructive works of the twelfth century, sagas of Icelanders and chivalric sagas of the thirteenth century, and saints' lives of the fourteenth century. These groups also present the opportunity to give passing attention to the classification of Old Norse style discussed above (see also Hauksson and Óskarsson 1994: 169–337).

Early Learned Writings

Icelanders and Norwegians are believed to have begun writing in the vernacular in about 1100 or shortly before. The first works to be written included laws, homilies, saints' lives and learned works of various types, such as Ari Þorgilsson the Knowledgeable's *Íslendingabók* and short works on chronology and grammar. This list shows that the emphasis was on practical material and factual information about contemporary society, its origins and its principal institutions, namely the legislature and the church; to put it another way, it is difficult to find examples from this period of writings that were intended to entertain ordinary people with amusing or exciting narratives. No doubt this had a considerable influence on the style of the earliest works, causing them to be generally concise and unassuming. The stylistic policy would also have been determined by the fact that these works were intended for a mixed audience, the largest part of which had little book-learning. The laws were read out to those farmers and chieftains who attended the legislative and judicial assemblies, while sermons and saints' lives were intended both for the ordinary congregation and for monks and nuns. Therefore the language had to be simple and easily understood; moreover, a comparison of translated religious works with the original texts shows that in many cases the translators made substantial efforts to create vernacular terms or adapt foreign concepts and unfamiliar phenomena to fit local experience, and to rework the complex narrative methods and syntax of the originals.

Despite this 'purist' approach, the oldest Old Norse writings are by no means free of all learned or foreign literary features. Influence of this type is found particularly in the saints' lives and sermons, which, as might be expected, are coloured to a considerable extent by vocabulary, imagery and quotations from both the Bible and patristic literature. It also happens frequently in these works that authors resort to symbolic interpretation to explain the sublime concepts of Christianity and to express the many-layered significance of individual events related in the Scriptures or concepts on which Christian society is based. We must also not ignore the fact that, in many places, the sentence structure of translated religious writings reflects Latin tradition. For example, the ends of sentences and clauses are often given the regular rhythmical patterns known in rhetorical theory as *cursus*, which flourished in twelfth-

century European letter-writing. By contrast, such rhythmical patterns were not used, or were used only to a very limited extent, in original writings (Benediktsson 1968, 1974). It is also common to find syntactical features in translated religious works that are not a part of ordinary Norwegian or Icelandic, such as past participles used instead of relative clauses. All of this gives this literature a special quality that is readily distinguished from the 'popular saga style' for which Old Norse narrative is known, and is much closer to the 'low style' prescribed by Christian rhetoricians. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the oldest of the Old Norse saints' lives point the way forward to the classical sagas in their personal descriptions, settings and conversations in direct speech. Many scholars have even seen these saints' lives as helping Old Norse writers to develop their own narrative style, by showing them ways of relating historical events (Turville-Petre 1953: 142).

The oldest extant law texts, as well as Ari's *Íslendingabók* and the *First Grammatical Treatise*, all display the same stylistic intention as these religious works. The main emphasis is on putting the material across clearly and intelligibly without cluttering it with unnecessary wordiness or stylistic ornament. It is interesting, for example, to note the effort made in the *First Grammatical Treatise* to translate grammatical terms into Icelandic and to explain in relatively simple language many complex grammatical features which there was no tradition of discussing in Icelandic. It seems clear, on the other hand, that this policy did not spring from an ignorance of Latin or of rhetoric. This is shown by the fact that Ari the Knowledgeable structured his *Íslendingabók* in the way that had become the established tradition for Latin chronicles of the Middle Ages, with an introduction, a narrative divided into chapters in chronological order, and a conclusion. The *First Grammatical Treatise* is even more formally structured, embodying all the five basic sections of a spoken or written discourse that were recommended by classical rhetoric: an introduction (*exordium*), a narration (*narratio*), an argument (*argumentatio*), a refutation (*refutatio*), and a conclusion or peroration (*peroratio*). It may also be pointed out that the legal code of the Icelandic Commonwealth, *Grágás*, is considered to be unusually literary and sophisticated.

Looking at these texts in further detail, we find clear evidence that their authors understood the value of narrative and stylistic devices where appropriate. It is interesting to note that when Ari comes to relate one of the most important events in the history of Iceland, the conversion, he changes from the dry chronicle style that characterizes most of his text and adopts a lively epic narrative style, with clear descriptions, dramatic setting and direct speech. At other points in his narrative, he makes use of various well-known rhetorical devices, such as the reversal of the order of words in parallel clauses (*chiasmus*), parallels (*accumulatio*) and the use of a part for the whole (*pars pro toto*). Such stylistic devices are generally little used in original works of the twelfth century, however. Particular mention should be made of some oaths presented in the *Grágás* law texts in the form of poetic lists, and characterized by alliterative patterns and a regular rhythm. Opinion is divided as to whether these oaths, which are also found in Icelandic sagas of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, originated in an ancient tradition of legal recitation or are the pure

invention of authors who could have known of the existence of such stylistic devices in Roman law texts. Proponents of this latter view point out that alliterative formulaic structures of this type occur least frequently in the Old Norse law texts that are thought to be oldest.

No attempt will be made here to resolve this dispute. It should be mentioned, however, that these oaths give an insight into rhetorical practice, where standardized formulae, alliteration and rhythm are intended to play a key part as an aid to memory and to lend weight to the content. In this, they bear witness to the historical sense of those who recorded the laws in writing, irrespective of whether their aim was to preserve ancient stylistic remnants or to re-create them as they might have been. In the light of these considerations, it can be said that both ancient laws and learned works deviate from what Óláfr Þórðarson called the popular style (*alþýðligt orðtæki*). Like Old Norse religious works, they were written by well-educated authors who had been trained in rhetoric and knew how to compose literary texts.

The Sagas of Icelanders

The Sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*) are regarded as the Old Norse literary genre in which the popular style can be seen most clearly. At the same time, scholars have emphasized the close stylistic bonds between them and certain other genres, particularly the kings' sagas. The style of these works was long believed to have originated in oral narrative tradition, but in recent years the search for the earliest models of this style has been focused no less on translated historical works of the twelfth century, saints' lives, and works recording the history of individual nations. In this context, particular attention has been paid to certain aspects of the form and narrative technique of the sagas, including the way they stage events, describe surroundings and the appearance of characters, present speech, conversations and comments, and employ stranded narrative (two plots running simultaneously); it is likely that such literary features are derived from foreign writings. Good examples of such features are the accounts in the kings' sagas of how clever orators manage to bring a suspicious or antagonistic audience round to their point of view. Their speeches are generally structured in the regular pattern prescribed by classical rhetoric, in addition to which they often make use of the methods taught in rhetoric to enlist listeners' sympathy and move and convince them.

Speeches of this type are also found in the sagas of Icelanders, though in the nature of things they are rare, since these sagas describe a world in which individuals confront one another, with weapons and physical strength playing a leading role. On the other hand, the other literary narrative devices mentioned above are no less common in the sagas of Icelanders than in the kings' sagas. Vivid personal descriptions, pithy utterances and a skilful development of tension achieved through stranded narrative – these are among the features regarded as being most characteristic of the sagas of Icelanders. Furthermore, it is in the personal descriptions and the

characters' comments that the authors excel in showing their stylistic mastery; this is particularly striking in the classical sagas, such as *Egils saga*, *Laxdæla saga* and *Njáls saga*. In personal descriptions, particularly those of the main characters, frequent use is made of alliterative phrases and repetition of words at the beginning or the end of successive clauses (*anaphora* or *epistrophe*), and there are cases where such descriptions conform to the stereotyped syntactic structures known as *isocolon* in classical rhetoric. Similarly, the pithy utterances made by characters in the sagas are frequently cast in the form of proverbs or saws which in some cases have direct parallels in classical Latin works. These utterances certainly play a part in raising the style above that of everyday speech, as they are often marked by euphony, parallels or antitheses. At the same time they have a clear role in the narrative, for example as prophecies, interpretations or revelations of inner character. Mention should be made in this connection of the many occasional verses declaimed by saga characters, which generally have a similar function, namely to deepen the presentation of character by revealing the speaker's emotional state.

The concise and pithy utterances made by characters in the sagas epitomize the characteristically laconic and economic style of the sagas, reflecting a desire on the part of the authors to use as few words as possible by avoiding needless fillers or restatements of the same thought in verbal repetitions or parallels. Frequently, later copyists continued to work on texts in this way, and it is safe to say that they played some part in creating the typical concise and polished saga style. The economy of the saga writers also appears in another, completely dissimilar guise; that is, the use of a relatively small and simple vocabulary. This is especially apparent in ordinary narrative passages. In some places, such as where new characters are introduced, common actions are described or a new course of events begins, or where the end of a section of text of this type is reached, we sometimes find a tendency to use a fixed and formulaic wording. At any rate, it can be said that an original or varied choice of vocabulary seems not to have been regarded as a stylistic virtue. The greatest stylistic variety is encountered in sagas that are believed to be of a late date; in these, characters' physical appearance, the environment, objects and events are also described in far greater detail than in the older sagas. This has sometimes been explained as showing the influence of the sagas of knights, as certain points of relation with them can be identified.

Compared with the sagas of knights, however, the style of the sagas of Icelanders must be considered very 'popular'; this can be explained in terms of the environment in which they came into being. If the *dróttkvætt* verses, the descriptions and the characters' comments are left out of account, the vocabulary of the sagas of Icelanders is generally everyday and concrete, sentences are short, and the word-order and syntax are simple. The main deviations from ordinary Modern Icelandic consist of certain differences in the order of words, aimed at placing greater emphasis on the most significant material. Frequently, for example, the pace of the narrative is accelerated by placing the verb first in the sentence. Parallel main clauses, joined by *ok* or *en* ('and' or 'but') are the most common sentence structure, and long sequences of clauses are virtually unknown. Foreign influence in the language is rare. All this has been seen as

indicating that the sagas are connected with an oral narrative tradition. In their search for particular oral narrative features, scholars have also pointed out that narratives tend to be structured in chronological order, with use of the past tense being broken up by use of the historic present. A mixture of direct and indirect speech (*oratio mixta*) is also common, with sudden switches from indirect to direct speech without any introductory words. In fact, these features are not as conspicuous in some sagas as they are in others; for example, *oratio mixta* scarcely occurs at all in *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, while it is common in *Egils saga*, *Njáls saga* and *Laxdæla saga*.

The sagas of Icelanders are famous for being extremely objective. It is said that the authors almost never appear in their own person. It is said that they never appeal directly to their audience in introductions or concluding sections; nor do they intrude into the narrative to explain or evaluate events or characters' deeds. They even avoid the use of adjectival elements that involve value judgements. It has also been pointed out that in some sagas, such as *Eyrbyggja saga*, it is extremely difficult to see which characters the author has the most sympathy with. This objectivity applies both to the narrators' point of view and to the information they present. Character descriptions are generally external, and the events related are mostly those to which there could have been witnesses. Certain things that could not be stated clearly because of the need for objectivity are nevertheless implied in these descriptions; characters' appearance and facial expressions sometimes function as a sort of mirror of the soul, and if it is stated that two people had a conversation in private, then some decisive action can be expected to come of it. For an audience alive to the conventions, these features concentrate the text and prepare for what lies ahead.

It will be clear from the foregoing that the authors of the sagas of Icelanders had a considerable knowledge of rhetoric. On the other hand, the strength of the popular narrative tradition, whether this was oral or literary, is demonstrated in the fact that the simple and unadorned style that was aimed at was never seriously threatened. In some cases, admittedly, individual authors went off the tracks, for example in *Fóstbræðra saga*, in many parts of which there occur highly complex and run-on images and learned excursions, though later copyists took control and 'corrected' the style in conformity with the prevailing norms. Revision of this type has no doubt left the sagas more stylistically uniform in their extant versions than they were when they were first composed.

Translated *riddarasögur*

The early thirteenth century saw a wave of activity in which French, German and Latin poetic romances were translated into Old Norse prose: the sagas of knights (*riddarasögur*). Originally these tales of the heroic deeds and amatory passions of the European nobility were the literature of the ruling class, though they later became the property of the common people and gave rise to a host of original works composed in the same spirit. They were translated by well-educated people at the behest of the

Norwegian kings and were recited to the Norwegian court both for its entertainment and also in order to teach courtly manners, and how one should serve a powerful monarch. The elevated style of these sagas reflects both the material itself and also the setting and aims of the translators; it has been called the 'courtly style' or 'mannered style'. Great emphasis is placed on the magnificence, manners and finery of the knights, and on giving the audience pleasure by means of poetic, fine-sounding and emotionally charged language.

There is no doubt that the translators of the sagas of knights were well up in medieval Latin rhetoric and knew the sort of style that suited the sublime material they were translating and the high-born audience that would listen to it. At the same time, it is logical to examine the original foreign texts and to explain the elevated language and poetic rhythms that occur in the translated sagas as a sort of compensation for the poetic colouring that is lost when poetry is translated into prose. Comparison of the sagas of knights with their originals has revealed that the translators attached varying levels of importance to individual aspects of the texts. It is interesting to note, for example, that they often dropped, or substantially shortened, evaluative comments inserted by the authors, extensive descriptions of persons or landscapes, lengthy verbal exchanges, and descriptions of characters' thoughts and feelings, even though these things must be regarded as some of the main characteristics of these tales. These changes have been explained in terms of either the domestic narrative tradition or the entertainment value that the sagas were intended to have. Frequent transformation of indirect speech in the originals into direct speech in the translations is also seen as contributing to their dramatic impact.

As in other saga genres, the style of the sagas of knights exhibits some variety, but it is considered as most characteristic in the sagas that were translated during the reign of King Hákon Hákonarson (1217–63), such as *Tristráms saga*, *Elis saga* and *Strengleikar*. Everything in these narratives, whether everyday details or deeply serious events, is related with lightness and panache; the translators combine simple and complex ornamentation. Simple ornamental devices, such as regular rhythms, alliteration, rhyme, repetitions, periphrases, anaphora and epistrophe, parallels and antitheses, are generally more conspicuous than complex devices such as metaphors, extended similes, personifications or metonymy. Thus, the style is marked more by an abundance of rhetorical qualities than by being difficult or complex. Scarcely is an event or phenomenon described without a synonym, parallel, contrast or at least an adjectival element being present to qualify it, decorate it and raise it up above the level of the ordinary. These descriptions are frequently alliterative, or are cast in a regular rhythm, and some come close to qualifying as pure formulae.

Indulgence in this descriptive tendency leads to very long sentences, but generally they are neither difficult nor particularly at variance with Old Norse linguistic practice. Latinate syntax is most conspicuous in the latest sagas, such as *Clári saga*, and this has sometimes been explained as being due to the influence of the florid style. In the oldest sagas, such as *Strengleikar* and *Elis saga*, on the other hand, it sometimes happens that the ends of sentences have a rhythmic pattern of the *cursus* type

(Benediktsson 1974). In these respects, the sagas of knights evidently resemble the learned religious works with which they were contemporary, and it can be argued that many of the translators had received a clerical education. Such education is expressed only incidentally, however, in their vocabulary, which is characterized by a large number of foreign loan-words and expressions connected with courtly life and chivalry. Most of these words are of German and French origin, and some entered popular literary genres such as the sagas of Icelanders and legendary sagas, and became established in everyday speech, while others remained mainly or exclusively restricted to the sagas of knights.

One of the most striking features of the sagas of knights is that they are far more subjective than is generally the case with non-religious literature. The narrators are very much in evidence; many of them preface their works with an introduction in which they call for attention, introduce their works and describe how they came to be written, what their purpose is and what message they are intended to convey. In the same way, they interrupt the narrative to heap praise on the hero and scorn on his enemies, to explain or comment on events, or even to give the audience good advice. Hyperbolic descriptions and statements are very common in this connection, particularly when the author turns to the virtues of the knight and the beauty of the damsel he seeks to win. Contrary to the approach in the sagas of Icelanders, the author does not rest content with describing the external appearance of his characters and their main qualities; instead, he goes deep into their psychological states and presents his own judgements on their merits. The characters also express themselves in a strikingly exaggerated fashion, with constant exclamations and highly emotional and grandiose declarations. Nor do the narrators economize when it comes to describing battles in which the knights fight, generally single-handed or with only a small band of comrades, against a vast host, slaying dozens of their enemies either by splitting them down the middle or cutting them clean in half. These descriptions are often highly formulaic. For example, the knight is frequently described as a lion attacking a flock of sheep, or a hungry falcon swooping on its prey. Young damsels are frequently likened to beautiful flowers, generally white lilies or red roses, the symbols of chastity and patience. To begin with, this imagery reflected models in the original foreign texts, but as time passed it took on a life of its own and became a stock feature of original works in the genre. However, the original style of the translated *riddarasögur* underwent various changes in the hands of copyists, most of which affected its most characteristic features, and it was not always the model for those who composed original sagas of knights in Old Norse: some of these authors were just as likely to cast their works in simple saga style or in the florid style.

Saints' Lives of the Fourteenth Century

The saints' lives written in Icelandic in the fourteenth century are without doubt the Old Norse literary genre that bears the strongest witness to the authors' training in

the art of rhetoric. Unlike the oldest saints' lives, these are written in an extremely wordy, expansive, complex and flamboyant style that has been called the florid style. The most natural explanation of the origin of this style is that it was a product of domestic Icelandic tradition, as only a small part of these sagas consists of actual translated material. On the one hand, new rhetorical prescriptions appeared, with different priorities in the arrangement of the material, while on the other there was a change in the authors' goals: they were aiming at stimulating devotion to particular saints. They were no longer content to give short biographies of the saints; instead, they gathered together everything that could be found to indicate how impressive their lives had been, explaining and interpreting their utterances and actions in the fullest possible detail, at the same time seeking to inspire their audience with beautiful and emotionally charged language. As a result, these works consist largely of extensive digressions. Sometimes these involve historical information that forms the background of the works; sometimes they contain meditations on the material, drawing attention to the religious or moral message that is to be conveyed. In the best scholarly and rhetorical tradition, the authors also put a great deal of effort into gaining their audience's confidence in such interpretations, with constant references to the Scriptures or the works of the church Fathers. Sometimes the authors even stage imaginary debates on how the utterances or actions of the saints are to be understood. All this gives the text a very learned and subjective slant, frequently making it read more like a homily than a history.

In their vocabulary and syntax, the saints' lives also differ radically from those Old Norse works that are regarded as the truest representatives of the popular style. To some extent, this can be accounted for in terms of various changes that took place at this time in the languages of Scandinavia as a result of German influence, but gained little currency in Icelandic. These are most clearly seen in the large numbers of German loan-words, various changes in word-order and syntax, and a tendency to use case-declined relative pronouns instead of the older invariable relative particle. There are also Latin influences, such as the use of the present participle instead of a subject with a finite verb to describe an action. In many places, the syntax is also based on the rules applying to Latin letter-writing. It is common, for example, for the ends of sentences to be cast in a formal *cursus* rhythm (Benediktsson 1984). Sentences are frequently complex and consist of accumulated clauses: the intention is commonly to make each main idea and everything associated with it form a single unbroken entity. An important element in this is the tendency to repeat the same or similar thoughts with altered wording, synonyms or periphrases. A particular feature is the large number of (often newly coined) compound words and evaluatively coloured adjectives and adverbs.

As in the sagas of knights, the boundary between poetry and prose is frequently unclear. Alliteration is common, as are other phonemic echoes, both in connection with parallels and antitheses and also to create anaphora and *homoeoteleuton* (a series of words with the same or similar endings). Extended poetic images and similes are also common; some are reminiscent of the complex kennings of *dróttkvætt* verse. These are

often intended to illustrate abstract phenomena, for instance virtues and vices, though people are also frequently described in terms of imagery. Three particular images are commonly used to describe the saints. Some of them are described as knights living in fine palaces or fighting Christ's battles armed with the sword of divine truth and the shield of faith; in another image, they are compared to tillers of the fields uprooting the weeds of doubt and cultivating the fairest flowers of Christianity; while others again are likened to shepherds who defend God's flock against the wolves of evil. These images are based on originals in foreign religious works and may be connected with the medieval stylistic system known as Virgil's Wheel (*Rota Vergilii*), but here they are employed independently, these works for the most part being originally composed in Icelandic.

Though many of the stylistic features of the saints' lives of the fourteenth century are certainly modelled on earlier works, they are found here far more abundantly than in older writings. It can also be argued that the authors were far more conscious of the value and effect of individual linguistic and stylistic devices and used them in more deliberate ways than their predecessors: many of these writers go to considerable lengths to explain and justify their style, declaring, for example, that it is fitting to discourse at such length about the qualities of the saints and to interpret their sublime utterances so that they will not fall as pearls before swine. They say there is no reason to allow the authors of secular works to monopolize the important tools or weapons available in rhetoric. What is certain is that there were many people who valued this style, which indicates that the authors achieved their aim. Most latter-day readers, on the other hand, tend to rank it below that of the classical sagas.

See also CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; EDDIC POETRY; FAMILY SAGAS; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PSEUDO-HISTORY; LANGUAGE; LATE PROSE FICTION; LAWS; METRE AND METRICS; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; PROSE OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION; ROMANCE; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; SKALDIC POETRY; SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Astás, Reidar (1987) 'Lærd stil, høvisk stil og florissant stil i norrøn prosa.' *Maal og minne*, 24–38.
- Astás, Reidar (1993) 'Style: West Norse.' In Philip Pulsiano, Paul Acker and Kirsten Wolf (eds.) *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*. New York and London, pp. 619–20.
- Benediktsson, Jakob (1968) 'Traces of Latin Prose Rhythm in Old Norse Literature.' In *The Fifth Viking Congress, Tórshavn, July 1965*. Tórshavn, pp. 17–24.
- Benediktsson, Jakob (1974) 'Cursus in Old Norse Literature.' *Medieval Scandinavia* 7, 15–21.
- Benediktsson, Jakob (1984) 'Cursus hos Bergi Sökkason.' In *Festskrift til Ludvig Holm-Olsen på hans 70-årsdag*. Øvre Ervik, pp. 34–40.
- Clover, Carol (1982) *The Medieval Saga*. Ithaca, NY, and London.
- Collings, Lucy Grace (1974) *The Codex Scardensis: Studies in Icelandic Hagiography*. Ithaca, NY.
- Hallberg, Peter (1987) 'Imagery in Religious Old Norse Prose Literature: An Outline.' *Arkiv för nordisk Filologi* 102, 120–70.
- Halvorsen, Eyvind Fjeld (1959) *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland* (Bibliotheca Arnarnæana XIX). Copenhagen.

- Halvorsen, Eyvind Fjeld (1962) 'Høvísk stíl.' *Kulturbíhistorísk leksíkon for norðísk miðalalder VII*, 315–18.
- Halvorsen, Eyvind Fjeld (1966) 'Lærð og folkelig stíl.' *Kulturbíhistorísk leksíkon for norðísk miðalalder XI*, 119–23.
- Hauksson, Þorleifur (ed.) and Óskarsson, Þórir (1994) *Íslensk stílfræði*. Reykjavík.
- Kalinke, Marianne E. (1981) *King Arthur, Northby-Northwest: The Matière de Bretagne in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances* (Bibliotheca Arnarnæana XXXVII). Copenhagen.
- Kratz, Henry (1988) 'The Language of the Old Norse Saints' Lives.' *Maal og minne*, 159–73.
- Kristjánsson, Jónas (1981) 'Learned Style or Saga Style?' In Ursula Dronke et al. (eds.) *Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*. Odense, pp. 260–92.
- Kristjánsson, Jónas (1985) 'Sagas and Saints' Lives.' In *The Sixth International Saga Conference* (Workshop Papers I). Copenhagen, pp. 551–71.
- Meissner, Rudolf (1902) *Die Strengleikar: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der altnordischen Prosaliteratur*. Halle.
- Nygaard, Marius (1896) 'Den lærde stíl i den norrøne prosa.' In *Sprøglig-historiske Studier tilegnede Professor C. R. Unger*. Christiania, pp. 153–70.
- Nygaard, Marius (1905) *Norrøn syntax*. Christiania.
- Tómasson, Sverrir (1985) 'Norðlenski Benediktínaskólinn.' In *The Sixth International Saga Conference* (Workshop Papers II). Copenhagen, pp. 1009–20.
- Tómasson, Sverrir (1988) *Formálar íslenskra sagnavitava á miðöldum*. Reykjavík.
- Turville-Petre, Gabriel (1953) *Origins of Icelandic Literature*. Oxford.
- Tveitane, Mattias (1968) *Den lærde stíl: Oversetterprosa i den norrøne versjonen av Vitæ Patrum*. Bergen.
- Widding, Ole (1965) 'Jærtegn og Maríu saga: Eventyr.' In Hans Bekker-Nielsen et al. (eds.) *Norrøn Fortællekunst: Kapitler af den norsk-islandske middelalderlitteraturs historie*. Copenhagen, pp. 127–36.
- Widding, Ole (1979) 'Den florissante stíl i norrøn prosa (isl. skruðstíllinn) specielt i forhold til den lærde stíl.' In *Selskab for Nordisk Filologi: Årsberetning*. Copenhagen, pp. 7–10.

Romance

(Translated *riddarasögur*)

Jürg Glauser

Along with the sagas of Icelandic prehistory (*fornaldarsögur*) and the lying sagas (*lygisögur*), the translated *riddarasögur* are among the narratives of Norwegian and Icelandic literature of the Middle Ages that have attracted least attention in the research community. As translation literature, they have usually been viewed as less interesting than the indigenous genres, such as the family sagas or kings' sagas, and since their narrative style was not oriented to the objectivity of the classical saga style, they have at times come near to being held responsible for the alleged decline in the highly developed art of Old Norse narrative. One result of this, among others, is that they have been neglected and little researched. Not even international romance research has taken much notice of the Norse translations of courtly literature, and only recently has a certain reorientation emerged in this field. The aim of the present chapter is to outline this reorientation, by giving an overview of the corpus, a brief survey of the development of the texts in literary history, and a description of the current research situation.

Terminology, Corpus, Genre Definition

The narratives discussed here will be called translated *riddarasögur*, following a tradition reaching back to the Middle Ages. In the longer version of *Mágus saga jarls* ('The Saga of Earl Mágus', c.1350), there is a reference at the end to 'frásagnir . . . svo svem . . . Þiðreks saga, Flóvenz saga eðr aðrar riddarasögur', 'narratives such as the saga of Þiðrekr, the saga of Flóvent, or other knights' sagas' (see also Kalinke 1985: 316). In English these sagas are usually referred to as 'sagas of knights' – *riddari* meaning 'knight' – or 'chivalric sagas' or 'sagas of chivalry'. The specification 'translated' indicates that, as a rule, these are translations, in contrast to the indigenous *riddarasögur* (*lygisögur*) and the *fornaldarsögur*, both of which belong within the comprehensive genre of romance. The generic designation *saga* indicates that, unlike

their originals, these translations are prose works. The translations and adaptations came into being for the most part in the thirteenth century, both in Norway and in Iceland. They have come down to us in manuscripts written, with few exceptions, considerably later, most of those containing *riddarasögur* being no older than around 1300.

It is useful to divide the entire corpus of Norse translations and adaptations of continental courtly literature into two groups. On the one hand, they consist of the *riddarasögur* in the relatively strict sense, that is, prose translations of Old French, Anglo-Norman and Latin works into Old Norwegian and Old and Middle Icelandic. On the other hand, they can also be said to include the Old Swedish and Middle Danish *Eufemiavisor* (see below), a number of Norwegian, Faeroese, Icelandic, Swedish and Danish medieval ballads, and Icelandic *rímur* dealing with chivalric subject matter transmitted by way of the *riddarasögur*. Such a broad definition of the genre was used by, for example, Henry Goddard Leach, in what has now become a classic study, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, dating from 1921. In his 'Hypothetical chart of foreign romances in Scandinavia' the 'Thirteenth-century importations from England into Norway' represent merely the starting point of the relatively open-armed reception of the chivalric romances in Scandinavia (see Leach 1921: 382–5).

More specifically, the corpus of translated *riddarasögur* includes the following texts. First, there are translations of Old French *chansons de geste* (and of one Latin chronicle), stemming from the body of material known as the *matière de France*, the 'Matter of France'. These are *Karlamagnús saga* ('The Saga of Charlemagne', a voluminous collection of seven sagas), *Elis saga ok Rósamundu* ('The Saga of Elis and Rósamunda') and *Beveris saga* ('The Saga of Bevers'). In terms of subject matter, *Flóvents saga* ('The Saga of Flóvent') and *Mágus saga jarls* also share some features with this group. Second, there are translations of Old French courtly romances, *fabliaux* and *lais* concerned with the so-called *matière de Bretagne*, the 'Matter of Britain'. To this group belong *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* ('The Saga of Tristram and Ísönd') and *Mottuls saga* ('The Saga about the Cloak'); four texts based on works by Chrétien de Troyes, namely *Ívens saga* ('The Saga of Íven'), *Erex saga* ('The Saga of Erex'), *Parcevals saga* ('The Saga of Parceval') and *Valvers þáttur* ('The Story of Valver'); and translations of *lais* attributed to Marie de France and others, known in Old Norse as *Strengleikar* ('Sung Stories'). Third and finally, *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr* ('The Saga of Flóres and Blankiflúr'), *Partalopa saga* ('The Saga of Partalopi') and *Clári saga* ('The Saga of Clarus'), which last may be based on a (lost) Latin narrative, stem from the so-called *matière d'aventure*, the 'Matter of Adventure'.

Within the group of younger *riddarasögur*, for which no foreign-language sources are known, but which display thematic and stylistic connections to the translated *riddarasögur*, are included texts such as *Bærings saga* ('The Saga of Bæringr'), *Mírmanns saga* ('The Saga of Mírmann'), *Rémundar saga keisarasonar* ('The Saga of Rémundr, Son of an Emperor') and *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* ('The Saga of Konráðr, Son of an Emperor'). The saga titles may vary, as the manuscripts naturally had no consistent system of indicating their contents.

Sometimes the Icelandic adaptations of ancient and medieval historical tales, such as *Alexanders saga* ('The Saga of Alexander'), *Breta sögur* ('The Sagas of the British'), *Trójumanna saga* ('The Saga of the Troy-men'), *Gyðinga saga* ('The Saga of the Jews'), *Rómverja saga* ('The Saga of the Romans') and *Veraldar saga* ('The Saga of the World') are also included among the *riddarasögur*. Other borderline cases are *Barlaams ok Josaphats saga* ('The Saga of Barlaam and Josaphat'), which stands midway between romances and saints' lives, and *Þiðreks saga* ('The Saga of Þiðrekr'), which takes its subject matter from Germanic and German heroic legendary tradition.

Although it is not widely comprehensive, the corpus is heterogeneous in respect of the genres that its texts reflect. These range from French heroic poetry – *chansons de geste* – to courtly romances, such as *romans courtois* and *lais*; they also include *fabliaux*. However, these different genres tend to merge in the *riddarasögur* (see also Kjær 1996: 57–9). Like all concepts of genre in Old Norse studies, *riddarasaga* is not a precise scientific term, but rather a kind of collective term. The key point here is that the *riddarasögur* represent translations or adaptations of texts originally written in foreign languages, in the majority of cases Old French and Anglo-Norman, and in a few cases Latin and – depending on the definition – Low German.

Short History of the Genre

The definition of the sagas of knights as translated literature indicates that these narratives are texts which cannot be regarded as autonomous in terms of modern aesthetics. They are part, rather, of an outflow of master texts, translations and adaptations, in which the master texts are themselves often translations or adaptations. What this means in the case of the sagas of knights is that the models and source texts were texts containing courtly literature and heroic poetry that originated in France and Anglo-Norman England. Anglo-Norman is the French dialect that was used in England in the three centuries following the Norman conquest, and which experienced a heyday as a literary language in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In some cases the Old French romances were translated into Old Norwegian via an Anglo-Norman intermediary; however, there were also direct transfers from Old French to Old Norwegian. Some *riddarasögur* go back to works of known French authors, such as Chrétien de Troyes or Marie de France, as already indicated, though most are based on anonymous texts.

Viewed in the aggregate, the Old French and Anglo-Norman sources of the *riddarasögur* pose great philological problems. Since not a single Old French, Anglo-Norman or Latin manuscript that was translated has been preserved, and since the Norwegian and Icelandic manuscripts mostly date from a much later period than the translations, one cannot in general say for certain whether the translation was made in Norway or Iceland. This is the case, for example, in specific sections of *Karlamagnús saga* or in *Beyvers saga* (see, for example, Kjær 1996: 51 f; Sanders 2001: clv). On the other hand, the Norse romances often have a certain value as sources for

the reconstruction of lost French texts, as is the case, for example, with *Tristrams saga*, with individual parts of *Karlamagnús saga* and *Strengleikar*, and with *Flóvents saga* and other sagas (see, for example, Aebischer 1954, 1956; Halvorsen 1959; Skårup 1998). We have to reckon with both Norwegian and Icelandic translations and also with Icelandic redactions of Norwegian translations, sometimes in the case of one and the same saga. In *Elis saga*, for example, a continuation without a French source that was written in Iceland follows a first part that was certainly translated in Norway.

Scholars generally assume that translation activity became relatively systematic and extensive during the reign of the Norwegian King Hákon Hákonarson (born 1204; reigned 1217–1263). This dating of the Norwegian translations to the decades around the mid-thirteenth century is primarily based on two criteria. On the one hand, the *riddarasögur* are seen in the context of the civilizing and feudalizing efforts energetically undertaken by King Hákon during his reign; the general view is that transmission of the new chivalric ideology, as deliberately targeted by Hákon, could be achieved especially effectively through the medium of literature. On the other hand, the dating is based on details in *riddarasögur* manuscripts, where references are made to King Hákon as commissioner in the prologues and epilogues of some sagas (for example, *Tristrams saga*, *Elis saga*, *Strengleikar*, *Ívens saga*, *Móttuls saga*). However, one must keep in mind here that these references are often found in recent, sometimes post-Reformation manuscripts and are of uncertain value as sources.

With these reservations in mind, then, we may outline the development of the *riddarasögur* as follows. In the first half of the thirteenth century the most important works of Arthurian literature were translated in Norway from Old French and Anglo-Norman into Old Norwegian, by clerics at or around the royal court. Individual *chansons de geste* had presumably been translated beforehand. The translation of the Latin *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* as *Af Agulando konungi* ('About King Agulandus'), part IV of *Karlamagnús saga*, for example, was thus in all likelihood already written before 1200, possibly in Iceland and without a Norwegian intermediary. The earliest dating of a *riddarasaga* is found in the prologue of *Tristrams saga*, where it says:

Hér skrifaz sagan af Tristram ok Ísönd dróttningu, í hverri talat verðr um óbæriliga ást, er þau höfðu sín á milli. Var þá liðit frá hingatburði Christi 1226 ár, er þessi saga var á norrænu skrifuð eptir befallingu ok skipan virðuligs herra Hákonar kóngs. En Bróðir Robert efnaði ok upp skrifaði eptir sinni kunnáttu með þessum orðtökum, sem eptir fylgir í sögunni ok nú skal frá segja.

[Written down here is the story of Tristram and Queen Ísönd and of the heartrending love that they shared. This saga was translated into the Norse tongue at the behest and decree of King Hákon when 1226 years had passed since the birth of Christ. Brother Robert ably prepared the text and wrote it down in the words appearing in this saga. And now it shall be told.] (transl. Peter Jorgensen, see Kalinke 1999: I, 28 f; for problems regarding the source value of this passage see Tómasson 1977)

In the manuscript DG 4–7 it says at the end of *Elis saga*: 'en Roðbert aboti sneri, oc Hakon konungr, son Hakongs konungs, lét snúa þessi norrœnu bok yðr til

skemtanar' ('Abbot Robert translated and King Hákon, son of King Hákon, had this Norse book translated for your amusement'). Scholars have assumed that this (otherwise entirely unknown) Abbot Robert was the same translator as that of *Tristrams saga*, an assumption which, if well founded, would provide a relative chronology for the two sagas.

In *Clári saga* it says that Jón Halldórsson, a Norwegian clergyman who later became bishop in Iceland, translated the story from Latin. Otherwise there are no indications as to the names of translators of these sagas. Other sagas of the group, which are in general dated to the decades around the middle of the century, are the three romances of Chrétien – *Erex saga*, *Ívens saga* and *Parcevals saga*, the oldest manuscript of *Erex saga* dating from the seventeenth century – and the *Strengleikar*, which have an especially complicated manuscript interrelationship and transmission history. *Af frú Olif og Landres* ('About Lady Olif and Landres'), part II of *Karlamagnús saga*, was, according to its prologue from 1286/7, translated from English. By the end of the thirteenth century at the latest, translations of French courtly literature and adaptations of already translated *ridðarasögur* were also being made in Iceland as well as in Norway. Sagas like *Flóres saga* (see Degnbol 1985; cf. Skårup 1998: 65–95) and *Clári saga* probably came into being around 1300. On the basis of current knowledge, however, it is not possible to draw up an absolute or even a relative chronology for the texts of the corpus.

Around the year 1300, adaptations of the courtly subject matter of romances were written in other genres, presumably by members of the Norwegian court circle. *Eufemiavisor* is the name of three Old Swedish translations, written in the *knittel* metre (that is, in lines most often of four stresses each, and rhyming in pairs) at the beginning of the fourteenth century. *Herr Ivan* ('Sir Ivan', dating probably from 1303) is a rendering of Chrétien's *Yvain*. *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie* ('Duke Frederic of Normandy', probably from 1308) was translated from a lost German source which in turn was a translation of a French narrative, also lost. *Flores och Blanzefflor* ('Flores and Blanzefflor', probably from 1311–12) goes back to the Old French romance *Floire et Blancheflor*. The poems are named after the Norwegian Queen Eufemia, who died in 1312 and supposedly commissioned their translation. Middle Danish translations of *Eufemiavisor* date from c.1450–1500, and two editions of *Flores og Blansefflor* (as *Flores och Blanzefflor* was called in Danish) were printed in Copenhagen in 1504 and 1509. Swedish and Danish adaptations of a version of *Karlamagnús saga*, which document the late medieval interest in chivalric literature, stem from the fifteenth century; these are *Karl Magnus* (Swedish), from about 1400, and *Karl Magnus' Krønike* ('The Chronicle of Charlemagne') (Danish), from the fifteenth century; editions of the latter appeared in 1509 and 1534. The Danish adaptation is particularly important in terms of source criticism.

According to Bengt R. Jonsson, the literary culture of Norway's courtly milieu in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries was also the prerequisite for the creation of the Scandinavian ballads. Contrary to earlier theories regarding their origin, Jonsson makes it probable that this genre followed a path similar to that of the

riddarasögur; that is, it originated in northern France, came into the Anglo-Norman region and was brought from there – as part of the courtly translation literature – to Bergen in western Norway. Jonsson assumes a close connection in terms of genesis between *Eufemiavisor* and the ballads, and presumes that the genre of the dance ballad was brought from Bergen in a westerly direction to the Faeroe Islands and to Iceland, and in an easterly direction to Sweden and from there to Denmark (see Jonsson 1991).

From the fourteenth century on, narrative poems of the type known as *rímur* were composed in Iceland on the basis of *Karlamagnús saga*, *Beyvers saga*, *Flóvents saga*, *Partalopa saga*, *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr* and other *riddarasögur*, though remarkably enough there are no early *rímur* on the subject matter of the Arthurian romances in a narrower sense. On the other hand, the translated *riddarasögur* had a significant influence on the Icelandic saga literature of the late thirteenth and the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Family sagas, legendary sagas and indigenous *riddarasögur* not only made use of narrative material – motifs, subject matter, texts – from the romances, but also adopted narrative structures and modes of narration.

As already indicated, the manuscript transmission of the *riddarasögur* poses many difficult questions, and not only with regard to the French sources of the translations. A Norwegian fragment of *Karlamagnús saga* (NRA 61) consisting of two sheets can be dated back to around 1250. The oldest manuscript containing *riddarasögur* that is preserved relatively complete from the thirteenth century is the codex DG 4–7 fol., which was written in Norway and contains as the main texts *Elis saga* and the *Strengleikar*, and probably dates from around 1250–70. However, the majority of the *riddarasögur* have come down to us in complete form only in Icelandic manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The Icelandic manuscript Perg. 4to nr 6 from around 1400 represents an important collection for this period (see the facsimile edition by Slay 1972). It contains, among other things, *Beyvers saga*, *Ívens saga*, *Parcevals saga*, *Valvers þáttur*, *Mírmanns saga*, *Flóvents saga*, *Elis saga*, *Konráðs saga*, *Mottuls saga* and *Clári saga*, and is thus a key source for the Icelandic reception of courtly translation literature in the late Middle Ages. Of most of the sagas collected in this codex, only small fragments have been preserved, dating from the beginning and middle of the fourteenth century. Some sagas have also been retained only in manuscripts from the seventeenth century. All too little systematic research has to date been carried out on the transmission of the Norwegian and Icelandic romances. However, the evidence of the manuscript situation reveals that already in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries attempts were made to put together collections of *riddarasögur*, which indicates a pronounced genre-consciousness on the part of their recipients at that time.

With a few exceptions, however, these literary-historical factors are not readily deducible from the existing text editions of the *riddarasögur*. As a rule, the sagas are still individually edited, and consequently isolated from each other; only facsimile editions reproduce entire manuscripts *in extenso* (see, for example, Slay 1972; Sanders 2000 offers a digital facsimile edition), and it is only through editions of complete codices that one might obtain a picture of the manuscript situation of the sagas in

their actual transmission context (for some general remarks on this topic see Glauser 1998). In recent years and decades new critical editions, some of them with English translations, have been made of the following *riddarasögur*, among others: *Erex saga*, *Ívens saga*, *Strengleikar*, *Mottuls saga*, *Partalopa saga*, *Mírmanns saga*, *Konráðs saga*, *Beyvers saga* (see Kalinke and Mitchell 1985; Kalinke 1999; Sanders 2001). However, texts that are central to the genre, such as *Tristrams saga*, *Parcevals saga*, *Karlamagnús saga*, *Flóvents saga*, *Elis saga*, *Flóres saga*, *Mágus saga* and *Bærings saga*, are accessible only in editions from the nineteenth century, most of which are inadequate.

Recent Issues in *riddarasaga* Research

Research on sagas of knights in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was dominated by, on the one hand, the editions of such scholars as C. R. Unger, Eugen Kölbing and Gustaf Cederschiöld (see Kalinke 1985; Kalinke and Mitchell 1985) and, on the other, studies such as that conducted by Rudolf Meissner, who devoted himself to the translation style of the *riddarasögur* (see Meissner 1902). Important studies in this context were made in the field of comparative literature, in which Old Norse texts such as *Karlamagnús saga*, *Strengleikar* and *Tristrams saga* were primarily used in the (re)construction of lost French versions. This approach was still current in the 1950s and 1960s, as is shown by the work of Paul Aebischer and E. F. Halvorsen, in their studies of *Karlamagnús saga/La Chanson de Roland*. In general the primary focus of research in those decades was on the large *Karlamagnús saga* collection (see Aebischer 1954, 1956; Halvorsen 1959; Kalinke 1985). From the 1960s to the 1980s, interest increasingly shifted to the Arthurian romances (see Schach 1957–61, 1965; Gunnlaugsdóttir 1978; Kalinke 1981, 1985; Barnes 1984; and others), while research on sagas of knights in the 1990s gradually devoted its attention to more general questions of literary studies. As already stated, a whole string of *riddarasögur* has been re-edited; the philological preoccupation with these texts clearly persists.

For a long time the translation processes as such were the focus of research on the sagas of knights, though in most cases research was concerned with determining how reliably the Old Norse translations preserved the content and stylistic aspects of their sources (see Barnes 1989). Thus, the translation analyses frequently involved analyses of style. Researchers like Aebischer and Halvorsen expressed criticism of the results and quality of the work of Old Norse translators, but their critical observations were often of a rather superficial nature and had no basis in translation theory. Observations of this kind nevertheless characterized scholars' conception of the sagas of knights for a long time. It is only relatively recently that Aebischer's and Halvorsen's findings have been refuted (see, for example, Cook and Tveitane 1979: xxxf.; Kjær 1996: 62–8). Jonna Kjær, for example, showed that the translation of *Karlamagnús saga* is by no means as poor as Halvorsen described it, but rather that, in a very systematic and consistent fashion, it makes out of the French *chanson* a 'plus courtoise' (Kjær 1996: 67) version of the narrative. *Af Rúnzivals bardaga* is in Kjær's view 'une refonte

cohérente [of *La Chanson de Roland*] qui se rapproche d'un idéal de courtoisie' (Kjær 1996: 69). She in fact calls, with complete justification, for an enlistment of medieval translation theory in the service of evaluating the translation processes involved in the production of the sagas of knights, a demand which, according to Kjær, romance scholarship currently does not meet.

As well as the translation process, the process of the post-translation transmission of the texts has also been described by research, and in even stronger terms: with reference made to destruction and disintegration. Meissner, for example, refers in his stylistic study of the *Strengleikar* to the way alliterations and other artistic (or affected) constructions in the Norwegian translation have been destroyed by Icelandic writers in the course of manuscript transmission (see, for example, Meissner 1902: 226, 234). Marianne Kalinke arrives at broadly similar results in her studies of the reliability of the earliest translations of sagas of knights (see Kalinke 1981): it is not that the original translators were 'in error', but rather that the divergences between the French sources of the twelfth century and Icelandic saga manuscripts of the fourteenth century and later were the result of the process of scribal transmission, and it was not the translators into Norwegian, but later Norwegian and in particular Icelandic writers, who changed the texts. The differences, which are, of course, readily discernible, are described accurately and with great precision by Kalinke. However, the assessments on which these descriptions are based, such as 'textual attrition', 'corruption' and 'error' (Kalinke 1981: 50–3), are questionable to the extent that they, like Meissner's, are based on an essentially ahistorical concept of textual constancy, such as would never have existed in a manuscript culture in which dynamic textual changes were themselves a constant feature (see also in this connection Glauser 1998).

The question of the function of the texts, whether more or less clearly formulated, was often linked to the assessment of their style. The changes made at the stylistic level were immediately seen by many students of the sagas of knights as an indication of how their message was to be understood. After all, the main debate prevailing in research on the *riðdarasögur* in the 1980s focused precisely on the question of whether the function of the romances was entertainment or instruction (see in this connection the review articles of Barnes 1989, 2000; Kalinke 1985). Scholars who emphasized the entertainment aspects of the romances started out from the stylistic and narrative simplifications of the translations in relation to their French originals, and were able to point out that the prologues and epilogues of the sagas of knights frequently give explicit emphasis to the entertainment value of these sagas. In numerous sagas reference is indeed made in such places to the fact that they were written *til gamans ok skemmtanar* 'for pleasure and amusement' (for examples see Kalinke 1981: 20–45). However, these are extremely formalized and stereotypical topoi; and it must further be borne in mind that the sagas also refer – no less formulaically – to didactic intentions, in emphasizing their status as a source not only of entertainment, but also of instruction, *fróðleikar*, 'information'. The didactic aspect of them should no doubt be understood in the light of an impulse to educate the audience with regard to the glorification of the king (see Kjær 1996: 57–9).

Whichever view is preferred, however, it is clear that not too much trust should be placed in isolated passages such as these, which very clearly follow the tradition of classical rhetoric, as evidence of possible narrative intentions. It is in any case questionable whether it is meaningful or methodologically admissible to reduce the functions of entire sagas, or even a group of many different sagas, to a single intention, in such a way that the potential diversity of the texts, and the playful treatment of them in the reception process, are totally ignored. This dichotomizing tendency, which is in the long run unfruitful, is symptomatic of the narrative research of the 1970s and 1980s, which no longer applies today, and has consequently receded into the background in the most recent discussions of the *riddarasögur*.

In 1986 Gerd Wolfgang Weber published a since much-cited essay with the pregnant title 'The Decadence of Feudal Myth', which deserves some detailed discussion here. In what I should like to call a negativistic approach to the sagas of knights, Weber notes a continuous reduction of the courtly or feudal elements essential to Old French culture in the course of the various stages of adaptation from French into Norwegian, and then into Icelandic. According to him, this process led from the refined, complex and aesthetically highly advanced works of art produced by such as Chrétien de Troyes to the trivial, one-dimensional products of the Icelandic *riddarasögur* in their stages of decline. A number of contributions brought together by Régis Boyer (1985) in the proceedings of the Fifth International Saga Conference, which took place in Toulon in 1982, and other publications written in the 1980s, focused much as Weber did on the relationship between French source and Norse translation, with reference to concrete examples. The results, which ultimately showed a certain sameness, indicated that far-reaching changes in narrative style and narrative structure could be observed in the translated romances when these were compared with the courtly literature of the continent; and these changes were usually interpreted as amounting to a destruction of the feudal mythical structures, or even, from Weber's perspective, as producing decadent forms of them.

It is surely banal, however, simply to state that in the transfer of semiotic signs from one cultural system to another certain elements that define those signs in the source culture are defined differently in the new system, or are realized there only in part, or can be omitted from it. In other words it would be really astonishing if the Old Norse sagas of knights had preserved all signs of the source texts in full. Anything other than a reduction in courtly aspects, such as appears in the specific cases of the translations of *Erec*, *Yvain* or *Perceval*, would have to be viewed as extraordinary or surprising. What is decisive in this context is not, therefore, the rather irrelevant question of whether it is possible to trace a gradual destruction of feudal features in the subject matter and narrative structures of the translated romances, since anything other than this would be hard to understand. What is of interest, surely, is the question of how, in the context of the history of Old Norwegian/Old Icelandic literature, there came about a development of narrative methods and thematic spectra that were new and innovative in that context. After all, the destruction and reduction are matched by the construction, not only of new themes

and plots, with discourses on love and sentiment, desire and sexuality, gender and social identity (*Tristrams saga*, *Parcevals saga*, etc.), but also of a writing consciousness. Overall, the influence of the translations of the romances in these fields on the development of Old Norse Icelandic prose literature was extensive, and is by no means adequately explained by a simple reference to a feudal structure that was reduced in relation to the French source texts.

This is made clear by, for example, Geraldine Barnes, in a recent paper on the Icelandic romances, in which she points out how these texts treat central aspects of courtly literature ironically, and thus criticize them, in a manner very specific to the genre (see Barnes 2000). In similar fashion Regina Psaki is able to show in a comparative reading that a text like *Parcevals saga* presents, when compared with *Perceval*, a decidedly original and innovative image of women that is by no means adequately accounted for by the simplistic thesis of decline (see Psaki 2002).

From these and from some other recent papers it seems as if the sagas of knights are being viewed for the first time as texts in their own right and not always in contrast to the French sources, or in negative dissociation from them. In this connection, thematic, ethical and aesthetic aspects of these works are analysed as well, and the works themselves are not merely written off, as has usually been the case to date, as the poor products of a translation process viewed as ultimately unsuccessful.

Translation, Transmission, Textuality

The following observations simply point out a number of possible issues that research on the sagas of knights could examine to its advantage and which would at the same time bring it into line with international discussions. To a certain extent they are interrelated, in that all of them have to do with various aspects of the textuality of sagas.

Translation

It has been shown above that the history of research on the sagas of knights was for a long time the history of research into their translation processes. As also mentioned above, however, this research, ironically, is not informed by a translation theory, a fact which has led to many a dubious judgement in recent times and which, in 1996, induced Kjær to demand a theory of translation for the Norse romances. In this context it must be pointed out that the concept of medieval translation as rewriting, as applied with great success to *Njáls saga* by Jón Karl Helgason (1999), represents a method that can be used as a basis on which to proceed. In fact, rewriting – thought of as continuation, writing anew, paraphrasing, etc. – is precisely the word to describe the phenomena that also define the sagas of knights. In evaluating the translation performance of these sagas, such an approach would be highly advantageous, enabling literary translations to be viewed within the framework of such a concept as part of a

process of cultural appropriation, and as contributing to a discussion in the recipient culture of what that culture perceives as foreign. This would be a very much more productive approach to the phenomena that need to be described in this connection than an argumentation using such terms as 'exact'/'correct' vs. 'inexact'/'incorrect', etc.

The sagas of knights, both as individual texts and as a corpus, are an extremely interesting example of how a dialogue was conducted in medieval Scandinavia with a foreign culture that evidently held a certain fascination for the Scandinavian peoples. These sagas offer an abundance of illustrative material relevant to the questions of which elements of this new culture – whether content-related, ideological, dramatic, stylistic or other – people in the north were willing to accept, and which ones they would tend to reject. This culture, which was up to then largely unknown, was encountered primarily in the form of ideas and conceptions presented in writing that opened up an imaginary world full of new possibilities and impossibilities. The sagas of knights thus make perfect subjects for translation analyses of the kind that focus on the creative, selective appropriation of foreign cultures.

Transmission

Closely related to the phenomenon of rewriting is that of transmission. This also involves translation and transfer, change in genre, and descent through different stages of a written tradition. Since the surviving texts of the *riddarasögur*, as we have seen, are found predominantly, and in individual cases exclusively, in manuscripts dating from as recently as the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, this means that, in an analysis of these texts that takes their transmission into account, the focus of interest shifts away from the original stage of the saga's existence as a translation, or is at least extended in such a way as to encompass the late medieval and post-medieval stages. Almost all the sagas of knights involve texts that were elaborated on in creative fashion during the decades and centuries after they were first recorded. This means that, in reading sagas like *Tristrams saga* or *Erex saga* today, we are doing so in the company of a fifteenth- or seventeenth-century readership.

Textuality

For the literary historian, the significance of the sagas of knights in the context of Norwegian-Icelandic saga literature has largely to do with the intertextual, re-semiotizing links they show with other texts and groups – indigenous *riddarasögur*, family sagas, ballads, etc. – as Susanne Kramarz-Bein has made plain in a series of recent contributions on the text connections of *Þiðreks saga*, *Karlamagnús saga*, *Tristrams saga* and other works from the corpus (Kramarz-Bein 1996, 2000, 2002). The fascinating complex of text–context–intertext, which, however, has been by no means adequately described as yet as far as the romances are concerned, draws attention to the fact that, if viewed in the light of genre typology, the romances in

Icelandic as well as in other literatures do not represent a fixed, narrowly defined genre, but should rather be regarded as a new and different mode of narration. In particular, it is the plot structure of the romance which became extremely influential, and which endows the sagas of knights with the status of a central group among the sagas (see also in this connection, for example, Kjær 1996), a group whose impact can be seen in the entire saga literature: in the *fornaldarsögur*, and especially, of course, in the indigenous *ridðarasögur*, which interrelate easily with the translated ones; in continuations and, as in the case of the Tristan material, satirical treatments (see Barnes 2000; Kramarz-Bein 2000); and also in relatively young family sagas, such as *Víglundar saga* and *Grettis saga*.

One of the fundamental differences between the sagas of knights and other saga genres is the fact that the written form characterizes the sagas of knights right from the very beginning, and that the texts also give clear evidence of an awareness of this written form. This awareness of their writtenness repeatedly surfaces in, for example, the passages in the prologues of the kind already mentioned, and is the subject of metafictional comments. In one case a discourse on writtenness as an aid to memory is conducted on the lines that writing in the form of the particular book under discussion guarantees recollection and keeps people from forgetting, as stated in the prologue to *Equitan* in *Strengleikar*, with reference to the translated *ljóðabók* 'book of songs':

Equitans strengleicr er her. Dyrleger menn ok daða fuller hygner menn ok hœverskir voru i fyrnskonne i brætlandi at ríki ok at rœysti. at vizsko ok at vallde. at forsó ok kvrtæisi. er um atburðe þa er jnnanlandz gærðuzt at kunnigir skylldo vera viðrkoman-dom ok æigi glœymazt okunnom þa leto þær rita til aminningar. i strængleika lioð ok af þæim gera til skemtanar ok varo mioc margir þær atburðir er oss samer æigi at glœyma, er viðr læitom lioða bok at gera.

[‘The Lai of Equitan’ begins here. Excellent and accomplished men, clever men and courteous, were in Brittany in olden days, with power and prowess, with wisdom and with might, prudence and politeness, who, concerning the events which took place in that country – in order that they be known to posterity and not be forgotten by unknowing people – had them written in lais for remembrance’s sake and made into entertainment. There were many of these adventures which we ought not to forget when we are trying to make a book of lais.] (See Cook and Tveitane 1979: 66f.)

There are, of course, numerous other texts of the Icelandic Middle Ages that show a consciousness of themselves as written, such as Snorri’s *Edda* or *Heimskringla*, the latter of which also has a prologue that examines the role of written tradition and is consequently of great importance for a study of the development of writing, though here the problem connected with writing is not so much of a burning issue as in the case of the sagas of knights. These latter distinguish themselves by constantly making a point of indicating that they are not originals; that is, that they are part of a process of the handing down of manuscripts, and their content is mediated and conveyed in ways which involve the need for various factors to be taken into account: the foreign

language(s) of their source texts, their own coming into existence as written texts, and the change in genre and medium from verse to saga prose. In addition to the frequent references to the translation process that are made in their prologues, their dense network of references to royal patronage means that the *riddarasögur* are, as written objects, much more intensively integrated into a higher-level, quasi-official system than other types of saga.

It is through the sagas of knights that an awareness of writtenness is fully introduced into Icelandic literature, bringing with it an explicit discussion of the (manu)script as a medium, as a third party: the writing (the *bók* 'book'), joins the narrator (the *ek* 'I') and the narrative (the *saga*, *frásögn*, etc.) as a vehicle of mediation in an entirely different way from what happens in the case of Snorri Sturluson, for example. In the space separating narrator, text and *écriture* there arises in the sagas of knights a reflection on the possibilities of fiction. In Norwegian and Icelandic literature, moreover, romances – in the form of the translated *riddarasögur* – contribute to a broadening of the range of these narrative and fictional possibilities. In writing, as opposed to exclusively oral narration, fictionally different possibilities can be tried out, possibilities that point to a potential narrative of a different kind.

A particularly good example of this is *Tristrams saga*, in which the identities of the characters are played with in what is ultimately a conscious and very subtle way, and different characters bear the names Tristram and Ísönd. These doublings open up perspectives onto stories which the concretely realized text does not tell, but which are theoretically possible and potentially of great interest in terms of the discussion of the possibilities of fiction in general that the consciousness of writing brings with it. It is from the awareness of writing as a vehicle of mediation, taking its place between the narrator and the text, that fiction can come into being.

Although writing in the form of a 'book' guarantees memory, as the author of *Equitan* says, it is also variable, to some extent contingent, and in any case unstable, as the authors and translators of the sagas of knights must have known very well, since amplifications, abridgements, and other features of textual alteration and transmission, along with the different languages involved, all have to be taken into account in studying these narratives. To this extent, the consciousness of writing is closely related to the phenomenon of transmission, understood as a complex of transfer, translation, change in genre, and appropriation – as well as critical analysis – of foreign elements. And it is precisely this variability and variance that make possible what in terms of literary history is a forward-looking discussion of fictional potential.

As Barnes has shown, the indigenous Icelandic *riddarasögur* may be said to criticize the genre conventions of the romance in so far as they, the indigenous *riddarasögur*, 'move beyond the traditional boundaries of medieval romance into the realm of literary experiment', and explore 'the process of composition and the fabric of fiction itself' (Barnes 2000: 283). It should nevertheless be recognized that these tendencies, accurately described by Barnes as far as the non-translated *riddarasögur* are concerned,

had already begun with the translated *riddarasögur*, for they show very much the same metafictional, self-reflective, experimental qualities. It is through the sagas of knights that a self-reflective approach to writing finds its way into Norwegian and Icelandic literature of the thirteenth century, and the transmission of Icelandic texts over several centuries continues this practice of reflection on the conditions of the origin of fiction and its possibilities. The *riddarasögur* not only absorb courtly subject matter in translating foreign narratives, but are also stimulated by them to produce novel modes of narration which they combine with the Nordic traditions of storytelling, thus making their contribution to the development and enrichment of the saga as a narrative genre.

See also CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; FAMILY SAGAS; LANGUAGE; LATE PROSE FICTION; LATE SECULAR POETRY; ORALITY AND LITERACY; RHETORIC AND STYLE; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; SAGAS OF ICELANDIC PREHISTORY; WOMEN IN OLD NORSE POETRY AND SAGAS.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Aebischer, Paul (1954) *Rolandiana borealia: La Saga af Runzivals bardaga et ses dérivés scandinaves comparés à la Chanson de Roland. Essai de Restauration du manuscrit français utilisé par le traducteur norrois* (Université de Lausanne. Publications de la Faculté des Lettres XI). Lausanne.
- Aebischer, Paul (1956) *Les versions norroises du 'Voyage de Charlemagne en Orient': Leurs sources* (Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège CXL). Paris.
- Barnes, Geraldine (1984) 'Parcevals saga: riddara skuggsjá?' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 99, 49–62.
- Barnes, Geraldine (1989) 'Some Current Issues in Riddarasögur Research.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 104, 73–88.
- Barnes, Geraldine (2000) 'Romance in Iceland.' In Margaret Clunies Ross (ed.) *Old Icelandic Literature and Society* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 42). Cambridge, pp. 266–86.
- Boyer, Régis (ed.) (1985) *Les Sagas de Chevaliers (Riddarasögur): Actes de la Ve Conférence Internationale sur les Sagas (Toulon, Juillet 1982)* (Civilisations 10). Paris.
- Cook, Robert and Tveitane, Mattias (eds.) (1979) *Strengleikar: An Old Norse Translation of Twenty-one Old French Lais. Ed. from the Manuscript Uppsala De la Gardie 4–7 – AM 666 b, 4°* (Norsk historisk Kjeldeskrift-institutt. Norrøne tekster 3). Oslo.
- Degnbol, Helle (1985) 'Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr.' In Joseph R. Strayer (ed.) *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, vol. V. New York, pp. 108f.
- Glauser, Jürg (1987) 'Vorbildliche Unterhaltung: Die Elis saga ok Rosamundu im Prozess der königlichen Legitimation.' In Walter Baumgartner (ed.) *Applikationen: Analysen skandinavischer Erzähltexte* (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Germanistik und Skandinavistik 13). Frankfurt, Bern and New York, pp. 95–129.
- Glauser, Jürg (1998) 'Textüberlieferung und Textbegriff im spätmittelalterlichen Norden: Das Beispiel der Riddarasögur.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 113, 7–27.
- Gunnlaugsdóttir, Álfrún (1978) *Tristán en el Norte* (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 17). Reykjavík.
- Halleux, Pierre (ed.) (1975) *Les Relations littéraires franco-scandinaves au Moyen Âge: Actes du colloque. Liège, avril, 1972* (Les congrès et colloques de l'Université de Liège 73; Bibliothèque de la Faculté de philosophie et lettres de l'Université de Liège 208). Paris.
- Halvorsen, Eyvind Fjeld (1959) *The Norse Version of The Chanson de Roland* (Bibliotheca Arnarnag-næana XIX). Copenhagen.
- Helgason, Jón Karl (1999) *The Rewriting of Njáls saga: Translation, Ideology and Icelandic Sagas* (Topics in Translation 16). Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto and Sydney.

- Jonsson, Bengt R. (1991) 'Oral Literature, Written Literature: The Ballad and Old Norse Genres.' In Joseph Harris (ed.) *The Ballad and Oral Literature* (Harvard English Studies 17). Cambridge, MA, and London, pp. 139–70.
- Kalinke, Marianne E. (1981) *King Arthur, North-by-Northwest: The Matière de Bretagne in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances* (Bibliotheca Arnarnæana XXXVII). Copenhagen.
- Kalinke, Marianne E. (1985) 'Norse romance (*Riddarasögur*).' In Carol J. Clover and John Lindow (eds.) *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide* (Islandica XLV). Ithaca, NY, and London, pp. 316–63.
- Kalinke, Marianne E. (ed.) (1999) *Norse Romance*, vol. I: *The Tristan Legend*, vol. II: *Knights of the Round Table*, vol. III: *Hærra Ivan* (Arthurian Archives, III–V). Cambridge.
- Kalinke, Marianne E. and Mitchell, P. M. (1985) *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances* (Islandica XLIV). Ithaca, NY, and London.
- Kjær, Jonna (1996) 'La réception scandinave de la littérature courtoise et l'exemple de la *Chanson de Roland*/Af *Rúnzivals bardaga*: Une épopée féodale transformée en roman courtois?' *Romania* 114, 50–69.
- Kramarz-Bein, Susanne (1996) '*Þiðreks saga* und *Karlamagnús saga*.' In S. Kramarz-Bein (ed.) *Hansische Literaturbeziehungen: Das Beispiel der Þiðreks saga und verwandter Literatur* (Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde: Ergänzungsbände 14). Berlin and New York, pp. 186–211.
- Kramarz-Bein, Susanne (1999) 'Höfische Unterhaltung und ideologisches Ziel: Das Beispiel der altnorwegischen *Parcevals saga*.' In Stig Toftgaard Andersen (ed.) *Die Aktualität der Saga: Festschrift für Hans Schottmann* (Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde: Ergänzungsbände 21). Berlin and New York, pp. 63–84.
- Kramarz-Bein, Susanne (2000) 'Die jüngere altisländische *Tristrams saga ok Ísoddar* und ihre literarische Tradition.' In Robert Nedoma, Hermann Reichert and Günter Zimmermann (eds.) *Erzählen im mittelalterlichen Skandinavien* (Wiener Studien zur Skandinavistik 3). Vienna, pp. 21–45.
- Kramarz-Bein, Susanne (2002) *Die Þiðreks saga im Kontext der altnorwegischen Literatur* (Beiträge zur Nordischen Philologie 33). Tübingen and Basel.
- Leach, Henry Goddard (1921) *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia* (Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature VI). Cambridge, MA, London and Oxford. Rpt Millwood, NY, 1975.
- Meissner, Rudolf (1902) *Die Strengleikar: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der altnordischen Prosaliteratur*. Halle.
- Psaki, F. Regina (2002) 'Women's Counsel in the *Riddarasögur*: The Case of *Parcevals saga*.' In Sarah M. Anderson with Karen Swenson (eds.) *Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology*. New York and London, pp. 201–24.
- Pulsiano, Phillip, Acker, Paul and Wolf, Kirsten (eds.) (1993) *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*. New York and London, s. v.: 'Bevis saga'; 'Elis saga ok Rósamundu'; 'Erex saga'; 'Eufemiavisorna'; 'Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr'; 'Flóvents saga Frakkakonungs'; 'Ívens saga'; 'Karlamagnús saga'; 'Klári (Clári) saga'; 'Mǫttuls saga'; 'Old Norse-Icelandic Literature, Foreign Influence on'; 'Parcevals saga'; 'Partalopa saga'; 'Riddarasögur 2: Translated'; 'Strengleikar'; 'Tristrams saga ok Ísoddar'; 'Þiðreks saga af Bern'.
- Sanders, Christopher (ed.) (2000) *Tales of Knights: Perg. fol. nr 7 in The Royal Library, Stockholm...* (Manuscripta Nordica 1). Copenhagen.
- Sanders, Christopher (ed.) (2001) *Bevens saga: With the Text of the Anglo-Norman Boeve de Haumtone* (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi. Rit 51). Reykjavík.
- Schach, Paul (1957–61) 'Some Observations on *Tristrams saga*.' *Saga-Book* XV, 102–29.
- Schach, Paul (1965) 'The Style and Structure of *Tristrams saga*.' In Carl F. Bayerschmidt and Erik J. Friis (eds.) *Scandinavian Studies: Essays Presented to Dr. Henry Goddard Leach on the Occasion of his Eighty-Fifth Birthday*. Seattle, pp. 63–86.
- Skårup, Povl (ed.) (1998) 'Traductions norroises de textes français médiévaux: Études réunies par P. S.' *Revue des Langues Romanes* CII, 1–113.
- Slay, Desmond (ed.) (1972) *Romances: Perg. 4:o nr 6 in The Royal Library, Stockholm* (Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile X). Copenhagen.

Tómasson, Sverrir (1977) 'Hvenær var Tristrams sögu snúið?' *Gripla* II: 47–78. (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 16. Reykjavík.)

Weber, Gerd Wolfgang (1986) 'The Decadence of Feudal Myth: Towards a Theory of *Riddarasaga*

and Romance.' In John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth and Gerd Wolfgang Weber (eds.) *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism* (Viking Collection 3). Odense, pp. 415–54.

Royal Biography

Ármann Jakobsson

Genesis

The group of sagas often classified as a sub-genre of the saga literature under the heading 'kings' sagas' (*konunga sögur*) is extremely diverse in length, structure and subject matter. The kings' sagas are not even all written in the same language. Under this heading we find not only sagas in the vernacular which structurally and thematically have much in common with the sagas of Icelanders, but also some synoptic historical works in Latin with a strong resemblance to other European royal biographies.

It may be helpful to start with a rather loose definition, somewhat on these lines: kings' sagas are historical and biographical works concerning Norwegian and Danish kings of what, at their time of writing, was the relatively recent past (c.850–1280). Most kings' sagas were composed in 1180–1280. A unifying feature of this saga category, which separates it from the sagas of Icelanders, if not from the legendary sagas which are for the most part concerned with a more ancient past, is the figure of the king. Kingship ideology is thus very relevant to all attempts to deal with the kings' sagas in generic terms.

Power feeds upon ideology. Without ideology, no power can be lasting, and power without some kind of ideology, however puny, is almost unthinkable. The ideology of power must be conveyed to the learned and unlearned alike, either in an analytical manner, as in, say, a political treatise, or in a more simple and accessible and yet far more subtle way, as in an anecdote, such as Christ himself, the central figure of the dominant ideology in the Middle Ages, was reputed to have used to illustrate his ideology. His ideology was indeed transmitted as a biographical narrative in the Gospels.

Apart from the church, kingship was perhaps the most important social institution of the Middle Ages, and royal power was confirmed and examined in learned as well as narrative texts. The Old Norse-Icelandic kings' sagas are a prime example of the latter.

Owing to the scarcity of actual treatises on kingship in Old Norse, the kings' sagas are the most important textual sources for the ideology of the kingship that was prevalent in the West Norse area. At the same time they are nourished by that same ideology. Without the institution of kingship there would be no kings' sagas, and the ideology of royal power is pivotal to the *raison d'être* of the genre.

The kings' sagas are, along with the hagiographical literature, the oldest prose genre. The term 'the first saga' has indeed been used (by Guðnason) about a kings' saga (**Hryggjarstykki*; the asterisk indicates that the work is now lost, though its existence is clear from references to it in surviving works). Nevertheless, the genesis of the kings' sagas remains obscure. It seems quite clear that, from the outset, the historical interest of Icelandic scholars was directed towards kings. The first recognized historians of medieval Iceland, Ari Þorgilsson (d. 1148) and Sæmundr Sigfússon (d. 1133) (each known as 'fróði', 'the Knowledgeable'), are believed to have been royal biographers. However, neither has left an extant work of this kind, and we cannot even be sure that either of them composed an actual kings' saga (Andersson 1985).¹

The historical interest of twelfth-century Icelanders was, perhaps not surprisingly, partly directed towards their own family history. Ari Þorgilsson concludes his *Íslendingabók* by naming himself, and even though the oldest extant versions of *Landnámabók* date from the late thirteenth century, we have reason to believe that a good deal of history of this kind was written in the twelfth century – it has been suggested that Ari himself may have had a hand in an older version of *Landnámabók*.² It is nevertheless striking, and perhaps poignant, that the earliest extant historical writing of Icelanders should be concerned with the kings of Norway and Denmark.

In the wake of Ari and Sæmundr, the mysterious Eiríkr Oddsson wrote a history of the contemporary kings of Norway, perhaps centring on the pretender Sigurðr slembir ('the Sham', d. 1139). This work is mentioned in later kings' sagas, and bears the interesting name of *Hryggjarstykki* ('Backbone-piece'), which may provide a clue as to its length.³ It is now lost, and our conjectures about it must rely upon *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*, which use **Hryggjarstykki* as a source. Bjarni Guðnason came to the conclusion that **Hryggjarstykki* may have been rather brief and concise. According to him, **Hryggjarstykki* was not in the spirit of Ari's *Íslendingabók* or the later synoptic works, but was more akin to sagas concerning individual kings, such as Óláfr Tryggvason, Óláfr the Saint and King Sverrir, albeit much shorter (Guðnason 1978).

Since **Hryggjarstykki* and the works of Sæmundr and Ari are lost, the oldest extant kings' sagas date from around 1180, but they are nevertheless some decades older than the translated romances, the indigenous legendary sagas and romances, the contemporary sagas of the Sturlungar, and probably also the sagas of Icelanders. The only Icelandic saga genre which may predate the kings' sagas is that of the translated hagiographical sagas. These have their place within the European hagiographical tradition, though some are clear-cut hagiographies whereas others are influenced by the native literary traditions (*mannfræði*) of Iceland (Egilsdóttir 1994: 11–18).

The same cannot be said of the Norse-Icelandic kings' sagas, even though royal biographies existed all over Europe in the Middle Ages. In spite of this, scholars have not seen close affinities between the Norse-Icelandic kings' sagas and their European counterparts, even though some kings' sagas, particularly those in Latin, show a certain family likeness to other European royal biographies (Bagge 1989).

The uniqueness of most of the kings' sagas lies not least in the language they use. Whereas elsewhere in Europe epic songs and romances were composed in vernacular languages, Latin was the language of the more serious attempts at history. The obvious models – that is, the most celebrated national histories and biographies of individual kings of medieval Europe – were all in Latin: the works of Gregory of Tours and Cassiodorus, Bede, Geoffrey of Monmouth, William of Malmesbury, and the *Gesta Hammaburgensis* of Adam of Bremen. Danish historians, most prominently Saxo, used Latin as well. It has been suggested that the originality of Old Norse-Icelandic historiography in making use of the vernacular was mostly due to the Icelandic historians, who may have been the pioneers of the genre and influenced their Norwegian colleagues (Guðnason 1977).

Only in England do we otherwise find vernacular history, especially in the ninth century. The idea of English influence on Icelandic historical writing is attractive, since *Íslendingabók* and *Hungrvaka* mention English bishops in Iceland in the eleventh century, at the beginning of the age of writing. However, it is impossible to reach more than tentative conclusions about English influence on the historical writing of Iceland, since we lack clear indications of how widespread it was.⁴ Another important factor here might be skaldic poetry, which is best preserved in Iceland. As the genre developed, it became customary for kings' sagas to include a good deal of skaldic poetry, which seems to have been mainly the work of Icelanders in the eleventh century. That heritage may have had some influence on the saga writing, although it is difficult to find two literary genres more unlike in character than a saga and a skaldic stanza.

The Synoptics

In the wake of the earliest Icelandic kings' sagas, represented by the works of Ari, Sæmundr and Eiríkr, the sub-genre seems to have developed into two kinds: the Norwegian synoptical works, where lives of many kings are briefly summarized, and the much more lengthy biographies of individual kings. To this second class belong the biographies of Óláfr Tryggvason (d. 1000), St Óláfr (d. 1030) and King Sverrir (d. 1202). The sagas about the two Óláfr namesakes were preceded and probably influenced by hagiography, whereas *Sverris saga* is a contemporary saga, its composition having begun while King Sverrir was still alive, perhaps at his own instigation.

The earliest extant Norwegian royal biography is the *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*, written by the unidentified monk Theodoricus (whose Norwegian

name may have been Þórir) and dedicated to Eysteinn, archbishop of Niðaróss (d. 1188). This work, which may be dated to around 1180, relates the history of the kings of Norway from the mythical Haraldr Finehair (ninth century) until the 1130s, and is the first extant history of Norwegian kings to begin its narrative with this Haraldr, which later became a custom in kings' sagas. In this, the Norwegian monk may have taken his cue from Sæmundr and Ari. He claims to depend upon Icelandic sources, and Guðnason has suggested that he indeed did so, and that the sources in question may well have been written as well as oral. In spite of its conciseness and its plain Latin, Theodoricus's *Historia* is an accomplished piece of work in the learned tradition, and the author refers not only to the *patres* or church Fathers but also to such eleventh- and twelfth-century scholars as William of Jumièges and Hugh of St Victor respectively. In his use of digressions with exemplary value, the author may have influenced later saga writers, particularly the author of *Morkinskinna*.⁵

Ágrip af Nórøgs konunga sögum resembles the *Historia* of Theodoricus to a degree, but the author, who may have been from the region around Niðaróss (Trondheim), chose to use the vernacular instead of Latin, and is much less interested in learned digressions and examples. In fact, although its style is verbose and differs from typical 'saga style', *Ágrip* may be regarded as a sort of bridge between the learned Latin works and the later sagas. While Theodoricus broke off in the 1130s, *Ágrip* is believed to have continued until the arrival of King Sverrir in Norway in 1177, which became a customary breaking-off point for later sagas. This may suggest that *Sverris saga* is older than *Ágrip*, or that its author knew of its planned composition. Although *Ágrip* is indeed very much shorter than later sagas of the Norwegian kings, it is fuller and richer than the work of Theodoricus, and had a pervasive influence on later sagas (Ulset 1983; Einarsson 1985; Lange 1989).

Like the *Historia* of Theodoricus, *Historia Norvegiae* is a learned work which seems to fit easily within the tradition of European historiography. It is less tightly constructed. Much of it is a geographical description of Norway and the islands in the west, including Iceland. *Historia Norvegiae* seems to have had less formal influence than Theodoricus' *Historia* upon later works. Its summary of the history of Norway starts with the Ynglingar, the ancestors of the kings of Norway, and ends with the return of St Óláfr from England. This interest in the prehistory of Norwegian kings is later paralleled in *Skjoldunga saga*, and also in *Ynglinga saga*, which latter forms part of *Heimskringla*. While Theodoricus' *Historia* was probably composed around 1180, *Ágrip* and *Historia Norvegiae* may be somewhat younger, or even composed as late as between 1210 and 1220.⁶

Even though they are not quite kings' sagas, historical works such as *Orkneyinga saga*, *Færeyinga saga*, *Jómsvíkinga saga* and perhaps lost sagas such as **Hlaðajarla saga* are close relations. *Færeyinga saga* is often regarded as a counterpart to the sagas of Icelanders, even if it is preserved in *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. All these sagas are usually believed to have been composed around 1200, but their textual history is problematic, and it is doubtful whether their origins should be linked to the rise of the kings' saga genre. If they are indeed as old as they are believed to be, they precede

most of the other saga genres, and could perhaps be regarded as an 'outgrowth' of the kings' sagas (Berman 1985).

Skjoldunga saga no longer exists, but it is possible to reconstruct it from a Latin version made by Arngrímur Jónsson the Learned at the end of the sixteenth century. *Skjoldunga saga* is a synopsis much in the vein of the three Norwegian ones. The difference is that it is an account of the prehistoric kings of Denmark, and may be the work of an Icelander, Bishop Páll Jónsson (d. 1211). Its genesis could thus be related to Danish influence in Iceland in the early twelfth century, concentrated on the two bishoprics. Its interest in prehistory may be connected to the renaissance of the twelfth century, and its author may have been inspired by Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*. His saga is, however, much more concise than Geoffrey's work or Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, and may in fact be viewed as a close relative of the Norwegian synoptics (Guðnason 1963).

The Biographies

The Norwegian synoptics may be viewed as adaptations of native material to the mode of the European chronicle. The same does not really apply to the biographies of individual kings, which perhaps begin to appear in the 1180s. If Guðnason is correct in his analysis of **Hryggjarstykki*, Eiríkr Oddsson was the founding father of this genre, which may then be linked to the 'Danish era' (1104–53) in the history of the Icelandic church, when the Icelandic bishops were under the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Lund. And yet Danish historians did not produce anything quite like the Icelandic kings' sagas. Their greatest author, Saxo, chose Latin as his language, unlike Abbot Karl Jónsson of Þingeyrar (d. 1212/13), the author of *Sverris saga*. Abbot Karl, perhaps because of the relative lack of biographical detail about him, has for long been an underestimated genius in the history of saga literature.

Dramatically different from the conciseness of the synoptics, *Sverris saga* is a lengthy biography, rich in detail and artistry, and replete with minor characters, dialogue and elaborate scenes. Unlike the synoptics, in which the king often seems to be alone on the stage, it conveys the sense of a large community surrounding the king. Among its characteristics are lengthy accounts of battles and strategic movements, and Sverrir's speeches, with their 'strange blend of gravity and humor' (Holm-Olsen 1993: 628).

It is disputed whether *Sverris saga* was composed by a single person, and some believe that the latter part of the saga may date from the years of King Hákon Hákonarson (Tómasson 1992: 392). The prologue of *Sverris saga* states that the first part was authored by Abbot Karl Jónsson, collaborating with King Sverrir himself. Abbot Karl was in Norway 1185–8, and it seems likely that the first part of the saga was written then. It is uncertain where this 'first part' ends, but it seems likely that it covers King Sverrir's career until 1178, or perhaps until the death of Earl Erlingr in 1179. Holm-Olsen (1953) and Blöndal (1982) both believe that Karl Jónsson

authored the whole saga, and that it was completed shortly after Sverrir's death. It is also uncertain whether the saga was commissioned by King Sverrir or whether the abbot was the instigator. This is a very important point, since it seems likely that *Sverris saga* brings us close to the origins of the art of the kings' saga. Blöndal believes that it was the abbot who was the pioneer, and that he drew on Icelandic rather than Norwegian traditions in the art of saga writing. However, King Sverrir was certainly a genius in his own way. It is an intriguing thought that he is a possible 'founding father' of the art of the written saga. Interestingly, that would make the sagas at least partly a Faeroese product, since Sverrir was raised in the Faeroe Islands.⁷

Many scholars have argued that *Sverris saga* is first and foremost a polemical work, and it certainly touches on some very important issues of the day, primarily the king's relationship with the church.⁸ However, the saga has many other layers, and cannot be regarded merely as a polemic. Structurally, *Sverris saga* is a diptych.⁹ The first half follows Sverrir's road to the throne and ends with the fall of King Magnús Erlingsson (1184). The second revolves around the troubles of King Sverrir in his kingship, since the death of King Magnús certainly did not bring strife to an end in Norway, and Sverrir still had to deal with countless rivals and pretenders. Of the two halves, the first is by far the more dynamic and powerful. An important issue is how God chooses Sverrir to be king, how he reveals this to Sverrir through dreams and prophecies, and how he supports Sverrir with convenient miracles. Sverrir attributes all his victories to God, and the saga text is very much on his side, although King Magnús is not demonized. It also tends to belittle King Sverrir's strife with the church.

Since the first half of the saga is concerned with the struggle between two kings for sole rulership of Norway, it is an important source for royal ideology. Constant comparison between the two kings reveals many important aspects of kingship ideology. For example, King Sverrir emphasizes that only a son of a king can be a king, since King Magnús is only the grandson of a king. He also emphasizes that Sverrir's relationship with God is direct (for instance, in taking place through dreams), whereas King Magnús has been consecrated by the church and has made it his intermediary. Last but not least, the saga shows Sverrir's superior talents: his wisdom, strength and temperance, whereas King Magnús is at first portrayed as being under the thumb of his domineering father, and later protests that he is weary of a throne he never wanted. Sverrir's claim to the throne is made not only on the basis of his royal birth and talents. He has also had to suffer and fight for his royal power. This fight is in its way also a proof of his worth (Jakobsson 1997: 268–71).

While Karl Jónsson undertook the task of relating the history of King Sverrir, his monks in the monastery of Þingeyrar were busy with the king's predecessors. Two of them turned their attention to Óláfr Tryggvason, the father of Icelandic Christianity. The *Óláfs saga* of Oddr Snorrason was composed in Latin in the late twelfth century, but is preserved in three different redactions of an Icelandic translation. Oddr is believed to have used both oral and written sources, and he is one of the main sources for Sæmundr fróði's lost historical work, although the passages he cites from Sæmundr seem to suggest a work of an encyclopedic nature rather than an actual

kings' saga. The *Óláfs saga* of Oddr the monk is a lively narrative, expanded with anecdotes modelled on the Bible and hagiographic literature. Even though the author speaks disdainfully of 'stjúpmæðra sögur' ('stepmothers' tales' or 'old wives' tales') in his prologue, his *Óláfs saga* actually contains a fair number of tales of precisely this type (Holm-Olsen 1987).

For some reason, another monk at Þingeyrar, Gunnlaugr Leifsson (d. 1218/19), also composed an *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. This saga has been lost but is believed to have been expanded with *þættir* concerning the king's missionary activity, and may thus have been more verbose than Oddr's and more strongly influenced by hagiography. It was written in Latin, and later translated into Icelandic; passages from the Icelandic version are believed to have been incorporated into the *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* which survives in *Flateyjarbók* and several other manuscripts.

After the death of St Óláfr, some hagiographies of the royal martyr were inevitable. There exist some *vitae* ('Lives') in Latin from the twelfth century, among them Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson's *Passio et miracula beati Olavi*, in both a shorter and an expanded version. These were followed by saga renditions of the history of Óláfr, the first being the so-called *Elsta saga* ('The Oldest Saga'), preserved only in six fragments (Louis-Jensen 1970). Nothing is known about the author of the *Elsta saga* of St Óláfr, but this saga may be the oldest kings' saga of which there exist fragments,¹⁰ although it remains unclear whether the *Elsta saga* was composed as early as 1160, or stems from just before 1200 (Kristjánsson 1972: 156, 167). The *Elsta saga* has been harshly criticized for its 'compositional flaws' but seems to have been interestingly similar to some later kings' sagas, being made up of anecdotes or *þættir* and skaldic strophes, and may well deserve considerably more credit for its contribution to the development of the genre than it has been given in the past.

A revised version of the *Elsta saga* has been preserved, and is commonly known as *Helgisagan* ('The Legendary Saga'), as it contains a great deal of clerical and legendary matter. *Helgisagan* appears to have abbreviated its source, the *Elsta saga*, and has consequently often been considered less 'flawed' than the *Elsta saga*. It incorporates some *þættir* and about 60 skaldic stanzas. Along with the lost **Óláfs saga helga* by the priest Styrmir Kárason, it was the principal source for Snorri Sturluson's *Óláfs saga helga*, which exists both as a separate saga, and as the middle part of *Heimskringla* (Kristjánsson 1976).

The sagas of King Sverrir and the two Óláfr namesakes are much more elaborate than the synoptics, and bear witness to a form that was already mature in the late twelfth century. Along with the oldest sagas of bishops, they demonstrate that the saga genre existed and was capable of considerable refinement in the early years of the thirteenth century, even if its major achievements were as yet unwritten.

All the necessary ingredients of a fully developed kings' saga are present in the biographies of these three kings. In *Sverris saga*, we see a depiction of a community in which the kings are shown not as solitary figures but as surrounded by their subjects and followers, and also by critics and antagonists. In all the extant sagas of the two Óláfr namesakes, we see how anecdotes are used to expand the narrative and make it

more intricate. In the sagas of St Óláfr, we also note a great deal of skaldic poetry, which was to become an integral part of the genre, in fact to such an extent that in the late thirteenth century Sturla Þórðarson chose to insert his own verses into his *Hákonar saga*, rather than do without skaldic poetry altogether. Even though the skaldic poetry in the sagas is often quoted in order to suggest that things happened in the way they are told, nobody could ever have been of the opinion that the poetry in *Hákonar saga* had any independent source value. Thus it is obvious that skaldic poetry can be included in kings' sagas for aesthetic reasons, not merely to prove the accuracy of the narrative (Einarsson 1974).

The Zenith of the Genre

The 1220s saw a marriage of the detailed and lively narrative of the biographies of individual kings with the material presented in the synoptics. The result is three great sagas which relate the history of Norway over some centuries, but in much more depth than previous authors had attempted.

Morkinskinna ('Rotten vellum') was probably the oldest of the three. Its unattractive name is drawn from its chief manuscript, which is actually a fine one from the late thirteenth century. It seems likely that *Morkinskinna* was composed around 1220, and it relates the story of Norwegian kings from the death of St Óláfr until perhaps 1177, although the last part of the saga is missing; it actually ends with 1157 in its extant form. Although scholars such as Indrebø (1939) and Jónsson (1932: introduction) argued for two versions of *Morkinskinna*, on the grounds that the so-called *Íslendingaþættir* did not form part of it from the outset, there is not enough evidence to suggest that the extant version is dramatically different from the original *Morkinskinna* which was used as a source in *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*.

The author of *Morkinskinna* was Icelandic, even though he was well versed in the history of Norway. He seems to have been preoccupied with the status of Icelanders at the Norwegian court, and his narrative is thus replete with anecdotes concerning Icelandic courtiers and poets. This might indicate that he was himself a court poet, or at least considered himself a royal biographer, the heir of previous Icelandic court poets. His name and background remain obscure.

The structure of *Morkinskinna* has been much criticized. It is rich in *þættir* and skaldic poetry. This suggests that the aesthetics of the author of *Morkinskinna* differed from those of Snorri and some of the later saga writers, and were more in tune with the structure of romances. The author's narrative is, however, in no sense a jumble, but rather an intricate web of anecdotal material intended to give a relatively circumspect description of the Norwegian kings, while also serving as a vehicle for the narration of his ideas.

Along with the status of Icelanders in the world, the author of *Morkinskinna* is extremely interested in the ideology of kingship, and in particular the necessary virtues of kings. Like the author of *Sverris saga*, he compares kings, and this

comparison seems to reflect a striving towards a general view of kingship. A good deal of his narrative deals with periods when there are two kings in Norway at the same time, thus providing an opportunity for comparison. The author seems, nevertheless, to have been a complex person in his outlook. Even though he is a moralist, his fascination with the rogue king Haraldr harðráði ('the Hardruler') is evident. He is clearly a romantic as well as a scholar (Jakobsson 2002; see also Jakobsson 2000; Andersson and Gade 2000).

Fagrskinna ('Fair Parchment') and *Heimskringla* ('The Circle of the World') followed in the wake of *Morkinskinna*. The name *Fagrskinna* is also drawn from a manuscript, but *Fagrskinna* appears to have been called *Nóregs konunga tal* ('List of the Kings of Norway') in the Middle Ages. It begins with Hálfdan the Black, father of Haraldr Finehair, and it ends, as *Heimskringla* does, as *Ágrip* probably did, and as *Morkinskinna* perhaps did, with the battle of Ré in 1177. *Fagrskinna* was probably written in the 1220s, but opinions differ as to whether the author was Icelandic or Norwegian. It has been suggested that *Fagrskinna* was commissioned by King Hákon Hákonarson in the early years of his reign. This is quite possible, though it can hardly be proven (Indrebø 1917; Jakobsen 1970; Jakobsen and Hagland 1980; Einarsson 1985).

Fagrskinna is much more compact than *Morkinskinna*. It is shorter, even though it covers twice as long a period. The author seems to have had no time for *Morkinskinna's* þættir, and he has made drastic cuts all round. The author of *Fagrskinna* was not quite as interested as that of *Morkinskinna* in the kings' relations with their subjects, or in Icelanders. He was, however, extremely interested in skaldic poetry, and includes even more of it than the *Morkinskinna* author did. It was once assumed that while *Morkinskinna* was critical of royal authority from the clerical point of view, *Fagrskinna* was the work of a staunch royalist (Koht 1914). This analysis is much too simplistic. *Morkinskinna* is definitely not anti-royal, though its author is perhaps more interested in royal ideology than the author of *Fagrskinna*, and hence more critical.

The Christianization of Norway is a recurring theme in *Fagrskinna*, and is depicted as a gradual process, with the less able kings not supporting Christendom adequately, and the people consequently reverting to paganism, and hence requiring yet another missionary king. King Hákon the Good is depicted as a precursor to the two kings named Óláfr. *Fagrskinna* may perhaps be seen as an attempt to combine the virtues of *Morkinskinna* with those of *Ágrip*, and scholars have for the most part found it successful in this respect, and have held it in higher regard than both its sources.

Whereas the authors of *Fagrskinna* and *Morkinskinna* had very different ideas on how to write a kings' saga, the author of *Heimskringla* prudently chose to emulate both and neither. As Storm remarked long ago, this author took the middle path, and very successfully (Storm 1873: 97–8). *Heimskringla* is normally dated to the years between 1220 and 1235, and Snorri Sturluson (1178–1241) has been its acknowledged author since the sixteenth century, although murmurs of dissent have been heard in recent years (Louis-Jensen 1997; Meegard 1994; Cormack 2001).

Heimskringla has a tripartite structure. The first part begins with Óðinn himself and tells of the Ynglingar, the ancestors of the kings of Sweden, before turning to

Hálfðan the Black and his offspring, the king of Norway. For the most part, the early sagas are brief, although the saga of King Óláfr Tryggvason is a notable exception. Snorri is believed to have used the saga of Oddr the monk as well as *Fagrskinna* in this first part, while in the third part, which narrates the lives of the kings of Norway from the death of St Óláfr until 1177, *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna* were his main sources.

The middle part of *Heimskringla* is *Óláfs saga belga*, which Snorri is believed to have written first as a separate saga, before succumbing to his grand ambition of composing the largest kings' saga so far. *Helgisagan* was one of his main sources, but Snorri expanded his material on a grand scale, adding not only anecdotes, but new twists in the plot and several new characters. These characters are sometimes used for an ideological purpose of his own. It is interesting to note the difference in Snorri's methods between the second and the third part of *Heimskringla*. In the second part, he is amplifying his narrative, while in the third part he is cutting down the *Morkinskinna* material. If Snorri is indeed the author of the whole of *Heimskringla*, it thus seems likely that it was a matter of importance for him that *Óláfs saga belga* should be large enough to dominate the other parts of his narrative (Jakobsson 2002: 81–6).

Snorri has often been termed a 'rationalist' but he seems actually to be no less interested in the supernatural than the author of *Helgisagan*, albeit in a different way (Tómasson 1998, 1994a). He certainly had a greater interest in the ancient past than did the authors of *Fagrskinna* and *Morkinskinna*, not least in heathendom. This is reflected in *Heimskringla*, as well as in his prose *Edda*. Another recurrent myth about Snorri is that he was an anti-royalist, or even a sort of nationalist. That would indeed make him an unusual royal biographer in any age, let alone in the thirteenth century. However, Snorri clearly has some sympathy for the views of the landed gentry and he is definitely of the opinion that kings should use their powers with moderation. But in spite of his sympathy with rebels such as Erlingr Skjálǫgsson and Einarr þambarskelfir ('Paunch-shaker' or 'Bowstring-trembler'), Snorri does not condone treason against just kings, and he is in fact an ardent user of the term *drottinsvik* ('treason towards a lord': Koht 1914: 384–93; Sandvik 1955; Jakobsson 1997: 280–6). In recent years, a relatively detailed analysis of Snorri Sturluson's political narrative has produced a picture of greatly increased complexity (Bagge 1991).

The Coda

Heimskringla was a natural model for later kings' sagas, and the author of *Knýtlinga saga* seems to have consciously modelled his own work on *Heimskringla*. *Knýtlinga saga* tells the story of the kings of Denmark from the early tenth century until the thirteenth century. The first part of the saga shows the summarizing tendency of the synoptics, but the later kings, from the sons of Sveinn Úlfsson onwards, also receive treatment. It is believed that *Knýtlinga saga* was composed in the 1250s, and Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld ('the White Poet', d. 1259), the author of the *Third*

Grammatical Treatise and Snorri Sturluson's nephew, has been suggested as the author (Guðnason 1982).

The author of *Knýtlinga saga* seems to have been very much concerned with the institution of kingship as such, and with the virtues of kings. Much in the same vein as in *Sverris saga* and *Morkinskinna*, individual kings reflect a general ideology of kingship. They fall into two categories, where some are good (mainly St Knútr and Eiríkr the Good), whereas others are inept or evil. The just kings promote peace and are diligent supporters of the church, whose union with the kings is absolute (Jakobsson 1997: 286–8).

Hákonar saga was composed by Sturla Þórðarson (1214–84), author of one version of *Landnámabók*, of the *Íslendinga saga* in the *Sturlunga* collection, and perhaps of other important historical works. For Sturla, as for the author of *Knýtlinga saga*, strong kingship equals peace. His subject, King Hákon Hákonarson (d. 1263), is praised as an almost ideal ruler who is very conscious of his duties, which are mainly to keep the peace, to improve and uphold the law, to arbitrate between his subjects and to support the church and Christendom. He puts an end to private warfare in Norway, forbids mutilations, and is clement towards those who seek his mercy. In fact, he is depicted as a king of peace, *rex pacificus*.

Sturla Þórðarson fell for a time out of the king's favour, and was summoned to Norway as a traitor to the crown. Because of this, many scholars have believed that Sturla must have been opposed to the monarchy, and that his *Hákonar saga* rather reflects, consequently, the ideas of the king rather than of Sturla himself. There is actually no reason to accept this view. All the evidence seems to suggest that, on the contrary, Sturla very quickly adapted to his new role as a royal biographer, and later as the king's top public official in Iceland. In both *Hákonar saga* and *Íslendinga saga*, a strong anti-war stance may be detected, and the solution seems to be a just king, such as Hákon Hákonarson. When Sturla composed his *Hákonar saga*, the Icelandic Commonwealth had disappeared in the wake of endless battles and killings. The only answer was for Iceland to have a king (Jakobsson 1994, 1995).

Hákonar saga has often been described as rather dull, but it is in fact an intricate and often lively narrative, even though it perhaps suffers from the comparison inevitably made between it and *Sverris saga*. Bagge (1996) has discerned a shift in political mentality between *Sverris saga* and *Hákonar saga*. Whereas King Sverrir is depicted as a charismatic leader who owes much of his power to his own abilities, King Hákon is a consecrated official. King Sverrir is a man as well as a king, whereas the person of King Hákon is hidden behind the institution of kingship.¹¹

Hákonar saga marks the end of an era. The Icelandic kings' sagas had erupted as a new and potent genre in the 1180s. They flourished for 80 years, and then they declined. But they did not disappear. Sturla Þórðarson himself went on to compose, in his old age, a saga about King Hákon's son, King Magnús the Law-giver. And the fourteenth century saw the rise of a new kind of kings' saga: huge compilations of most of the existing saga material, along with relevant sagas of Icelanders, and a good deal of other material, which could all be fitted into one voluminous saga of kings.

Flateyjarbók marks the high point of this activity. This immense book, the largest of all Icelandic parchments, was written between 1387 and 1394 by two priests, Jón Þórðarson and Magnús Þórhallsson, for the wealthy farmer Jón Hákonarson in Víðidalstunga. Originally, the basic framework of the manuscripts was four large sagas: *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, the separate *Óláfs saga helga*, *Sverris saga* and *Hákonar saga*. The first two of these are the most expanded of the four. In the fifteenth century, new sheets were inserted into *Flateyjarbók*, containing the *Morkinskinna* version of the sagas of King Magnús the Good and Haraldr Hardruler. This gives an interesting picture of which particular kings were held in the highest regard in the late fourteenth century, when Icelanders had been the subjects of Norwegian kings for over a century. A detailed study of *Flateyjarbók*'s ideology and structure remains to be done, but scholars have demonstrated that its compilation was far from haphazard (Würth 1991; Zernack 1999).

In spite of this grand epilogue of the genre, the creative height of the kings' saga was reached in the thirteenth century, in the decades before the Icelandic Commonwealth collapsed and the Icelanders became the subjects of the king of Norway. The intense literary and historical activity concerned with kings in this period can be no coincidence, but must reflect an ardent interest in the idea of kingship, with all its subtleties. It indicates that the idea of Iceland accepting the rule of a king was current long before 1262, and there is, in fact, some evidence that even the notion of an Icelandic king existed for a while. The main focus remained on the kings of Norway, who in many sagas are seen as special friends and benefactors of Icelanders (Jakobsson 1997, 1999; Andersson 1999).

While every single one of the sagas of Icelanders remains anonymous, the names of several royal biographers are known to us. This seems to suggest that being a royal biographer was a respectable profession, and that the kings' sagas were seen as belonging, to a greater extent than eddic poetry or the sagas of the Icelanders, to their authors. By their very visibility, the royal biographers were heirs of the skaldic poets. All known royal biographers were courtiers, or clerics, or both. Even though many of the authors knew how to enliven their narrative with popular tales, the kings' sagas were probably never really a popular type of saga.

See also CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; EDDIC POETRY; FAMILY SAGAS; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PSEUDO-HISTORY; LAWS; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; PROSE OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION; SAGAS OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY; SAGAS OF ICELANDIC PREHISTORY; SHORT PROSE NARRATIVE; SKALDIC POETRY; SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS.

NOTES

- 1 On Ari's kings' sagas, see Benediktsson (1968); Tómasson (1975); Mundal (1984). On Sæmundr's royal biography, see Guðnason (1977); Ulset (1983); Lange (1989). The re-
- search is summarized in Jakobsson (1997: 16–21).
- 2 See the summary in Benediktsson (1968: cvi–cxx); see also Turville-Petre (1953: 88–108).

- 3 This idea originates from Holtsmark (1966). (cf. Tómasson 1979.)
- 4 On the links between Iceland and the British Isles from the ninth to the twelfth centuries, see Guðmundsson (1997).
- 5 On Theodoricus, see, for example, Johnsen (1939); Hanssen (1949b); Guðnason (1977); Bagge (1989).
- 6 On *Historia Norwegiae*, see Steinnes (1946–8); Hanssen (1949a). For a more recent appraisal, see Ekrem (1998).
- 7 On *Sverris saga*'s origins, artistry and ideology, see Holm-Olsen (1953); Blöndal (1982); Bagge (1996).
- 8 For a view of *Sverris saga* as a propaganda piece, see Brekke (1958).
- 9 Tómasson (1994b: 792). On this type of structure, see Ryding (1971).
- 10 Turville-Petre (1953: 190) dubbed it 'the first ever' saga.
- 11 On *Hákonar saga*, see also Einarsdóttir (1995); Sprenger (2000).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Aðalbjarnarson, Bjarni (1937) *Om de norske kongers sagaer*. Oslo.
- Andersson, Theodore M. (1985) 'Kings' Sagas (*Konungasögur*).' In Carol J. Clover and John Lindow (eds.) *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*. Ithaca, NY, and London, pp. 197–238.
- Andersson, Theodore M. (1994) 'The Politics of Snorri Sturluson.' *Journal of English and German Philology* 93, 55–78.
- Andersson, Theodore M. (1999) 'The King of Iceland.' *Speculum* 74, 923–34.
- Andersson, Theodore M. and Gade, Kari Ellen (transl.) (2000) *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157)*. Ithaca, NY, and London.
- Bagge, Sverre (1989) 'Theodoricus monachus: Clerical Historiography in Twelfth-century Norway.' *Scandinavian Journal of History* 14, 113–33.
- Bagge, Sverre (1991) *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla*. Berkeley.
- Bagge, Sverre (1996) *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed: Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*. Odense.
- Benediktsson, Jakob (ed.) (1968) *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók* (Íslenzk fornrit I). Reykjavík.
- Berman, Melissa (1985) 'The Political Sagas.' *Scandinavian Studies* 57: 113–29.
- Beyschlag, Siegfried (1950) *Konungasögur: Untersuchungen zur Königssaga bis Snorri*. Copenhagen.
- Blöndal, Lárus H. (1982) *Um uppruna Sverrisögu*. Reykjavík.
- Brekke, Egil Nygaard (1958) *Sverre-sagaens opphav: tiden og forfatteren*. Oslo.
- Cormack, Margaret (2001) 'Heimskringla, Egils saga, and the Daughter of Eiríkr blóðöx.' *Alvíssmál* 10, 69–78.
- Danielsson, Tommy (2002) *Sagorna om Norges kungar från Magnús góði till Magnús Erlingsson*. Hedemora.
- Egilsdóttir, Ásdís (1994) 'Mannfræði Höllu biskupsmodur.' In Gísli Sigurðsson, Guðrún Kvaran and Sigurgeir Steingrímsson (eds.) *Sagnaþing helgæð Jónasi Kristjánssyni sjötugum*. Reykjavík, pp. 11–18.
- Einarsdóttir, Ólafía (1995) 'Om samtidssagaens kildeværdi belyst ved Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar.' *Alvíssmál* 5: 29–80.
- Einarsson, Bjarni (1974) 'On the Role of Verse in Saga-Literature.' *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 7, 118–25.
- Einarsson, Bjarni (ed.) (1985) *Ágrip af Noregskonunga sögum* (Íslenzk fornrit XXIX). Reykjavík.
- Ekrem, Inger (1998) *Nytt lys over Historia Norvegie: mot en løsning i debatten om dens alder*. Bergen.
- Ellehøj, Svend (1965) *Studier over den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*. Copenhagen.
- Guðmundsson, Helgi (1997) *Um haf innan: vestrænir menn og íslenzk menning á miðöldum*. Reykjavík.
- Guðnason, Bjarni (1963) *Um Skjöldungasögu*. Reykjavík.
- Guðnason, Bjarni (1977) 'Theodricus og íslenskir sagnaritarar.' In Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson (eds.) *Sjötú ritgerðir helgæðar Jakobi Benediktssyni*. Reykjavík, pp. 107–20.
- Guðnason, Bjarni (1978) *Fyrsta sagan*. Reykjavík.
- Guðnason, Bjarni (ed.) (1982) *Danakonunga sögur* (Íslenzk fornrit XXXV). Reykjavík.

- Gunnes, Erik (1971) *Kongens ære: kongemakt og kirke i 'En tale mot biskopen'*. Oslo.
- Hanssen, Jens S. T. (1949a) *Omkring Historia Norwegiæ*. Oslo.
- Hanssen, Jens S. T. (1949b) 'Theodoricus monachus and European Literature.' *Symbolæ Osloensis* 27, 70–127.
- Harris, Joseph (1976) 'Theme and Genre in some *Íslendinga þættir*.' *Scandinavian Studies* 48, 1–28.
- Holm-Olsen, Ludvig (1953) *Studier i Sverris saga*. Oslo.
- Holm-Olsen, Ludvig (1987) 'Forfatterinnslag i Odds munks saga om Olav Tryggvason.' In Jan Ragnar Hagland, Jan Terje Faarlund and Jarle Rønhoed (eds.) *Festskrift til Alfred Jakobsen*. Trondheim, pp. 79–90.
- Holm-Olsen, Ludvig (1993) 'Sverris saga.' In Phillip Pulsiano, Paul Acker and Kirsten Wolf (eds.) *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*. New York, pp. 628–9.
- Holtmark, Anne (1966) 'Hryggjarstykki.' *Historisk tidsskrift* 45.1, 60–4.
- Indrebø, Gustav (1917) *Fagrskinna*. Oslo.
- Indrebø, Gustav (1939) 'Nokre merknader til den norrøne kongesoga.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 54, 58–79.
- Jakobsen, Alfred (1970) 'Om Fagrskinna-forfatteren.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 85, 88–124.
- Jakobsen, Alfred and Hagland, Jan Ragnar (1980) *Fagrskinna-studier*. Trondheim.
- Jakobsson, Ármann (1994) 'Sannrödi sverða: vígaferli í Íslendinga sögu og hugmyndafræði sögunnar.' *Skáldskaparmál* 3, 42–78.
- Jakobsson, Ármann (1995) 'Hákon Hákonarson: friðarkonungur eða fúlmenni?' *Saga* 33, 166–85.
- Jakobsson, Ármann (1997) *Í leit að konungi: konungsmynd íslenskra konungasagna*. Reykjavík.
- Jakobsson, Ármann (1999) 'Royal Pretenders and Faithful Retainers: The Icelandic Vision of Kingship in Transition.' *Gardar* 30, 47–65.
- Jakobsson, Ármann (2000) 'Um uppruna Morkinskinnu: drög að rannsóknarsögu.' *Gripla* 11, 221–45.
- Jakobsson, Ármann (2002) *Staður í nýjum heimi: konungasagan Morkinskinna*. Reykjavík.
- Johnsen, Arne Odd (1939) *Om Theodoricus og hans Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*. Oslo.
- Jónsson, Finnur (ed.) (1932) *Morkinskinna*. Copenhagen.
- Knirk, James (1981) *Oratory in the Kings' Sagas*. Oslo, Bergen and Tromsø.
- Koht, Halvdan (1914) 'Sagaenes opfatning av vor gamle historie.' *Historisk tidsskrift* 5.2, 379–96.
- Krag, Claus (1991) *Ynglingetal og Ynglingesaga: En studie i historiske kilder*. Kristianssand.
- Kristjánsson, Jónas (1972) *Um Fóstbræðra sögu*. Reykjavík.
- Kristjánsson, Jónas (1976) 'The Legendary Sagas.' In Guðni Kolbeinsson (ed.) *Mínjar og menntir: afmælisrit helgað Kristjáni Eldjárn*. Reykjavík, pp. 281–93.
- Lange, Gudrun (1989) *Die Anfänge der isländisch-norwegischen Geschichtsschreibung*. Reykjavík.
- Lie, Hallvard (1937) *Studier i Heimskringlas stil: Dialogene og talene*. Oslo.
- Louis-Jensen, Jonna (1970) 'Syvende og ottende brudstykke: fragmenterne AM 325 IV α og XI, 3 4to.' *Opuscula* 4, 31–60.
- Louis-Jensen, Jonna (1977) *Kongesagastudier: Kompilationen Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*. Copenhagen.
- Louis-Jensen, Jonna (1997) 'Heimskringla: et værk af Snorri Sturluson?' *Nordica Bergensia* 14, 230–45.
- Meegard, John (1994) 'Er Snorre skrevet av Snorre?' *Historisk tidsskrift* 73, 524–31.
- Mundal, Else (1984) 'Íslendingabók, ættar tala og konunga ævi.' In Bjarne Fidjestøl et al. (eds.) *Festskrift til Ludvig Holm-Olsen på hans 70-årsdag*. Øvre Ervik, pp. 255–71.
- Ryding, William W. (1971) *Structure in Medieval Narrative*. The Hague.
- Sandvik, Gudmund (1955) *Hovding og konge i Heimskringla*. Oslo.
- Sprenger, Ulrike (2000) *Sturla Þórðarsons Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*. Frankfurt.
- Steinnes, Asgaut (1946–8) 'Ikring Historia Norvegiae.' *Historisk tidsskrift* 34, 1–61.
- Storm, Gustav (1873) *Snorre Sturlassöns Historie-skrivning: en kritisk undersøgelse*. Copenhagen.
- Tómasson, Sverrir (1975) 'Tækileg vitni.' In Björn Teitsson, Björn Þorsteinsson and Sverrir Tómasson (eds.) *Afmælisrit Björns Sigfússonar*. Reykjavík, pp. 251–87.
- Tómasson, Sverrir (1979) 'Hryggjarstykki.' *Gripla* 3, 214–20.

- Tómasson, Sverrir (1992) 'Konungasögur.' In Vésteinn Ólason (ed.) *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, vol. I. Reykjavík, pp. 358–401.
- Tómasson, Sverrir (1994a) 'The Hagiography of Snorri Sturluson Especially in the Great Saga of St Olaf.' In Hans Bekker-Nielsen and Birte Carlé (eds.) *Saints and Sagas: A Symposium. Proceedings of the Sixteenth International Symposium Organized by the Centre for the Study of Vernacular Literature in the Middle Ages. Held at Odense University on 18–19 November, 1991*. Odense, pp. 49–72.
- Tómasson, Sverrir (1994b) 'Skorið í fornsögu: þankar um byggingu Hrafnkels sögu.' In *Sagnaþing helgæð Jónasi Kristjánssyni sjötugum*. Reykjavík, pp. 787–99.
- Tómasson, Sverrir (1998) 'Snorri Sturluson als Hagiograph.' In Hans Fix (ed.) *Snorri Sturluson: Beiträge zu Werk und Rezeption*. Berlin and New York, pp. 275–86.
- Turville-Petre, Gabriel (1953) *Origins of Icelandic Literature*. Oxford.
- Ulset, Tor (1983) *Det genetiske forholdet mellom Ágrip, Historia Norwegiæ og Historia de Antiquitate Norwagiensium: en analyse med utgangspunkt i oversettelseteknikk samt en diskusjon omkring begrepet 'latinisme' i samband med norrøne tekster*. Oslo.
- Whaley, Diana (1991) *Heimskringla: An Introduction*. London.
- Würth, Stefanie (1991) *Elemente des Erzählens: die þættir der Flateyjarbók*. Basel and Frankfurt.
- Zernack, Julia (1999) 'Hyndluljóð, Flateyjarbók und die Vorgeschichte der Kalmarer Union.' *Skandinavistik* 29, 89–114.

23

Runes

Patrick Larsson

The oldest written records in the Scandinavian countries are those written, or perhaps more correctly, carved or cut, in runes. The runes, those letters of exclusively Germanic type, first emerge on loose objects such as weapons and jewellery from the second century AD, but exactly when and where they were created is not known. That one of the classical alphabets, most probably the Latin alphabet, served as a model is, however, certain. The oldest inscriptions, the so-called Proto-Scandinavian ones (c. AD 150–700), are often very brief and difficult to interpret. In many cases they consist of a single word, which could well have had a protective or magical function. One example is **alu*, which linguistically corresponds to OWN *ol* n. ‘beer’, but could also be interpreted as ‘(I) give strength, (I) keep alive’ (Elmevik 1999; abbreviations are listed below the notes to the present chapter). For all their brevity, the Proto-Scandinavian inscriptions are, because of the almost total lack of other contemporary sources, of great importance.

During the Viking Age (c. AD 750–1100), especially the eleventh century, the runic inscriptions are much more numerous and, given the fact that most of them are commemorative texts with rather strictly regulated patterns of formulation, relatively easy to interpret. From the Middle Ages (c. AD 1100–1500) we again have many inscriptions on loose objects, above all on bones and sticks of wood, but also on a variety of church-related objects, such as grave slabs, baptismal fonts, church bells, etc. Even in the plaster of church buildings runes can sometimes be found.

When it comes to runic inscriptions as sources of our knowledge of Scandinavia in the Viking Age and early Middle Ages one thing deserves to be emphasized: they are *original documents*. In this respect they are quite unique, since a text preserved in a manuscript is usually a copy at one or in most cases several removes, and not, as in the case of a runic text, a document emanating from the same time as the text was created and first recorded.

This chapter offers a survey of the runic inscriptions predominantly as literary documents, but also as sources shedding light on some other historical and cultural

phenomena, for instance the Christianization of Scandinavia and voyages to distant lands. In the text I will refer to the relevant inscriptions by using their customary abbreviations: DR 279, Sö 338, U 29, etc. These are explained in the list of editions below. The inscriptions are published mainly in national corpus editions, but are most easily accessible in the Scandinavian runic-text database, *Sammordisk runtextdatabas*, available on the internet. The English translations are generally taken from Jansson (1987), and occasionally from Moltke (1985), that is, from translations by Peter Foote, but in some cases the database and some other sources have supplied the English versions. In rendering the inscriptions, the normalized texts are given in OWN, in order to facilitate comparison with other Old Norse texts.

Runic Inscriptions as Literary Documents

When one thinks of Old Norse literature, the first thing that springs to mind is probably the sagas, those compelling stories of dramatic events and everyday life, of kings, chieftains and farmers, family feuds, friendship and rivalry, legal sophistry and much more. Then, of course, we have the poetry: the eddic, with its narrative qualities, and the skaldic, with its very complicated and riddle-like stanzas. This literature, in its various forms, is known almost exclusively from manuscripts of west Scandinavian origin, with Iceland playing the leading role. One could almost get the impression, looking at the manuscript material, that literary activity was practically unheard of in east Scandinavia during the Viking Age and early Middle Ages. This is not the case, however, because the rune-stone texts, albeit for the most part brief and stereotypically formulated, provide clear evidence of poetic aspirations in East Scandinavia as well. On the other hand, it would be unfortunate if my survey gave the impression that rune carving was an east Scandinavian occupation only. To judge from the material preserved to our days it is quite clear that the Viking-Age rune-stone custom is to a very large extent an east Scandinavian phenomenon, but this picture changes dramatically when it comes to inscriptions from the Middle Ages, the majority of which are found in Norway.

In order to give an overview of the poetry found in the runic inscriptions it is appropriate to make a distinction between the content and the form of the verses. Their content resembles skaldic poetry in being mainly praise-poetry, whereas their form has much more in common with eddic poetry (Foote 1985: 317 ff., Naumann 1998: 697 ff.). It is very rare to find carved in runes such intricate, skaldic-like stanzas as the professional poets from Norway and Iceland produced. With a few exceptions, the most prominent one being the Karlevi stone on Öland, Sweden (Öl 1; DR 411), which has a complete stanza in the favourite metre of the skalds, *dróttkvætt*, the runic verses are generally in the far less complicated metre known as *fornyrðislag*.

The form of the runic verses is thus rather simple, being based upon alliteration, or initial rhyme, the general rule being that consonants should be identical for rhyming

purposes, whereas vowels should be different (*b:b, b:b; a:e, i:u*, etc.). This can make it hard to draw the line between verse and formalized prose, which can also feature alliteration (Hübler 1996: esp. ch. 2; see also Naumann 1998: 695 ff., Herschend 2001; and, regarding the character of the runic verses, Naumann 1994). This is not the case with the examples I give below, which there can be little doubt were intended as verse.

One interesting fact is that a few persons, mainly rune carvers, bear a by-name *Skald* (cf. OWN *skáld, skald*, n. 'poet'): *Grímr* and *Þórbiörn* in Uppland, Sweden (U 951; U 29, U 532), another *Þórbiörn* in Rogaland, Norway (N 239), and *Uddr* in Västergötland, Sweden (Vg 4), the last one of whom was not necessarily the carver of the stone. Whether these men were endowed with this by-name because of their being especially talented poets is more than we can know, even though it has been assumed that the names indicate the presence of professional poets in Sweden during the Viking Age (Jansson 1967: 12 f.). This might very well be true, but it is perhaps worth mentioning that none of these inscriptions exhibits any poetic traits whatsoever,¹ and to base such a far-reaching conclusion solely on the occurrence of these by-names hardly carries conviction (see also Jesch 2001: 6, fn. 2).

An interesting title, which can probably be linked to certain literary activities, is OWN *pulr* m. 'speaker', 'wise man, sage', 'poet' (cf. OE *þyle* m. 'orator', 'spokesman', 'official entertainer'; one may note also that Óðinn is known as *fimbulþulr* 'the mighty sage'). It has been proposed that the carver of the Rök stone from Östergötland in Sweden (Ög 136) was a *pulr*, more precisely a man whose task it was to preserve the memories and legends of a certain family (Widmark 1992, 1997). In a Danish inscription from Snoldelev (DR 248), a man is described as being *pulr á Salhaugum* 'thul (speaker, reciter?) in Salløv', thus providing evidence for a *pulr* being tied to or having the responsibility for a specific region.²

It seems appropriate to start off this exposé of Viking-Age and early medieval runic inscriptions as literary documents with a closer look at the famous Rök stone (figure 23.1). In this inscription, which conveys its message for the most part in a rather literary, artistically crafted prose, there is a stanza in *fornyrðislag*.³ It states:

Réð Þjóðríkr
hinn þormóði,
stillir flotna,
ströndu Hreiðmarar
Sitr nú gorr
á gota sínum,
skildi umb fatlaðr,
skati Mæringa.

[Theodric the bold, king of sea-warriors, ruled over Reid-sea shores. Now he sits armed on his Gothic horse, shield-strapped, prince of the Mæringar.]



Figure 23.1 The Rök stone, Östergötland, with the longest runic inscription known. The stanza in *fornyrðislag* about Theodric the Great begins with two horizontal lines at the bottom of the stone (the rest of it is carved on the side of the stone). E. Brate, *Östergötlands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade*. Stockholm: 1911–18, pl. XC.

The Þjóðríkr mentioned is generally identified as Theodric the Great, the Gothic king of the early sixth century, known for, among other things, his promotion of the partly preserved copy of the Gothic Bible, the so-called Silver Bible (Codex Argenteus). In the Rök stanza we find several words with an almost exclusively poetic ring to them, for instance *stillir* m. ‘king’, ‘ruler’, *flotnar* m. pl. ‘sea-warriors’ and *goti* m. ‘horse’. Theodric is also said to have been *skati Mæringa* ‘prince of the Mæringar’, a piece of information which has an interesting counterpart in the Old English poem *Dēor* (ll. 18–19):

Ðēodric āhte
þrītīg wintra
Mæringa burg;
þæt wæs monegum cūþ.

[Theodric held for thirty winters the Mærings’ fortress; that was known to many.]

It has furthermore been pointed out that the Rök stanza has a close counterpart, structurally, in stanzas 35 and 36 of the genealogical poem *Ynglingatal* (Jansson 1967: 10; cf. Skjld B 1: 13), thought by many to be the work of the Norwegian poet Þjóðólfr ór Hvini from about the year AD 900 (cf., however, Krag 1991; the translation is taken from Lönnroth 1977: 20 f.):

Réð Óláfr
ofsa forðum
víðri grund
of Vestmari.
[...]
Nú liggr gunndiarfr
á Geirstoðum
herkonungr
haugi ausinn

[Óláfr ruled in ancient days the wide land of Vestmarr... Now the bold warrior lies at Geirstaðir, the king of the army in the burial mound.]

Because of these correspondences between the verse on the Rök stone and Old West Scandinavian poetry it has been suggested that the originator of the Þjóðríkr-stanza was a Norwegian poet. A more plausible and, I believe, generally accepted interpretation is that the Rök stone should be seen as a sign that this kind of poetry is not restricted to west Scandinavia, a suggestion which gains strength when we consider the numerous examples of verse in the inscriptions from the late Viking Age (eleventh and early twelfth century AD). The Rök inscription, with its many allusions to legends, and its possible ritual function, is a very intriguing document indeed. Unfortunately, its rather incoherent text requires, in order to be fully understood,

background knowledge that now seems to be beyond recovery. However, this very fact, namely that the precise sense and therefore also the purpose of the inscription cannot be established with certainty (Lönnroth 1977; Grønvik 1983; Widmark 1992; Reichert 1998), is doubtless one of the factors contributing to the apparently ceaseless fascination for scholars that this rune stone has held.

Almost as well known as the Rök stone is the rune stone from Karlevi on the island of Öland (Öl 1; DR 411). This is due to the fact that the stone provides the oldest record we have of the skaldic metre *dróttkvætt* – and not just a few lines, but a complete stanza (figure 23.2). The Karlevi stone is rather difficult to date precisely, but is generally considered to have been carved around AD 1000, or perhaps somewhat earlier. It nevertheless has pioneer status in preserving a commemorative message both in verse, which originates in an oral context, and in writing (Jesch 2000: 24 f.). The verse part of the inscription reads as follows (cf. Skjd B 1: 177):

Fólginn liggr, hinns fylgðu
 (flestr vissi þat) mestar
 dáðir, dólga Þrúðar
 draugr, í þeimsi haugi.
 Munat reið-Viðurr ráða
 rógstarkr í Danmörku
 Endils iormungrundar
 ørgrandari landi.

In English translation, this can be rendered: ‘Hidden lies the man whom the greatest virtues accompanied – most men knew that – tree/activator⁴ of the goddess of battles – in this mound. A more honest battle-strong god of the wagon of the mighty ground of the sea-king will not rule over land in Denmark.’

This text needs some explanatory notes to be fully appreciated. Typical of this kind of verse is the use of kennings, that is, metaphors in the form of paraphrases, here consisting of two or three words. Furthermore, the very strict rules of the metre necessitate a breaking up of the word-order, which is somewhat confusing, making it difficult to see at once which words actually belong together. With these considerations in mind, we can start to unravel the stanza. In the case of the Karlevi stanza, we see that there is a phrase *Endils iormungrundar reið-Viðurr*, the overall meaning of which is ‘leader, chieftain’. *Endill* is the name of a sea-king, while *iormungrund* f. means ‘mighty ground’, ‘vast expanse’; ‘the mighty ground of a sea-king’ is thus a kenning for ‘sea’. Óðinn is known by many names, one of them being *Viðurr*, and *reið-* means ‘wagon-’. The god of a wagon used at sea, that is, a ship, thus gives us the meaning ‘leader’, ‘chieftain’. Another kenning is *dólga Þrúðar draugr*. Here, *dólg* n. means ‘hostility, strife, battle’, while *draugr* m. can mean either ‘tree’ or ‘doer’, ‘practitioner’, ‘activator’. It is nevertheless a word that is common in kennings for ‘warrior’. *Þrúðr* is the name of a goddess, hence giving the meaning ‘tree of the goddess of battles’ or



Figure 23.2 The Karlevi stone, Öland, with the only complete *dróttkvætt* stanza recorded from the Viking Age. L. Jacobsen and E. Moltke, *Danmarks Runeindskrifter*. Copenhagen: 1941–2, fig. 1013.

‘activator of the goddess of battles’ to the whole phrase, which simply means ‘warrior, war-lord’.

Interesting also is the fact that some of the words in the stanza are well known in eddic and skaldic poetry, some even in non-Scandinavian sources. For instance, *iormungrund* f. ‘mighty ground’, ‘vast expanse’, is recorded not only in the eddic poem *Grímnismál*, where we learn that Huginn and Muninn, Óðinn’s ravens, *fljúga hverian dag | iormungrund yfir* ‘fly each day over earth’s wide surface’ (Grm. st. 20), but also in *Beowulf* (l. 859: *eormengrund*). This seems to suggest that the early poetic language was to a certain extent common currency, not only in Scandinavia, but also in some other Germanic-speaking areas (cf. the discussion below of the *iqrðl/uppheiminn*-formula in the Skarpåker and Ribe inscriptions and their Germanic counterparts).

On a copper box found in Sigtuna in Uppland (Jansson 1987: 56), we have another example of *dróttkvætt* recorded in the Viking Age (for an example from the Middle Ages, see below). After a prose passage telling us that the Sigtuna box contained a pair of scales, that is, equipment that a merchant might be expected to carry, the following pair of lines is inscribed:

Fugl velva sleit fólvan,
fann’k gauk á nás auka.

[The bird tore the pale thief. I saw how the corpse-cuckoo swelled.]

In this inscription we have a rather straightforward kenning for ‘raven’ in the phrase *nás gauker* ‘corpse’s cuckoo’. The poetic image of the bird feeding on the body of the dead thief is perfectly in keeping with other poetic descriptions of dead people becoming food for various animals (Jesch 2002). In the inscription on the Rök stone (Ög 136), for instance, we can read of a place *hvar bestr sé Gunnar etu véttvangi á* ‘where the horse of Gunnr [that is, steed of the valkyrie, the wolf] sees food on the battlefield’. In the Gripsholm inscription from Södermanland (Sö 179), one of the approximately 25 stones raised in memory of men participating in the great expedition of Yngvarr víðförlri (‘the Far-traveller’; Jesch 2001: 102 ff.),⁵ it is an eagle who gets fed. The latter part of the inscription reads:

Þeir fóru drengila
fiarri at gulli
ok austarla
erni gáfu.
Dóu sunnarla
á Serklandi.

[They fared like men far after gold and in the east gave the eagle food. They died in the south in Serkland.]

A fine example of a verse where both alliteration and assonance occur is found on the Djulefors stone in Södermanland (Sö 65):

Hann austarla
arði barði
ok á Langbarða
landi endaðist.

[He in the east ploughed with his prow and in Langobards' land met his end.]

The travelling theme is also present in the concluding words on the Mervalla stone, also from Södermanland (Sö 198):

Hann oft siglt
til Seimgala
dýrum knerri
um Dómisnes.

[He often sailed to Semgallen in a dearly prized 'knarr' round Domesnäs.]

The name Semgallen denotes a place in Latvia, and Domesnäs, the northern tip of Kurland, is a point on the way into the Gulf of Riga.

A literary parallel to the phrase *dýrum knerri* can be demonstrated, and it comes from one of the most renowned persons in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, namely Egill Skalla-Grímsson. According to *Egils saga* (ch. 40), Egill was at a very young age eager to travel off with Vikings, and in a verse he composed on the subject states that he wanted to (Skjd B 1: 42; my translation):

standa upp í stafni

[stand up in the ship's stem]

styra dýrum knerri

[steer the dearly prized 'Knorr'.]

We now turn to another subject. Of Beowulf, the famous hero of the Old English epic poem that bears his name, it is said that he was, among other things, *læodum lǣðost* 'the kindest to his people' (*Beowulf* l. 3182). On a couple of Swedish rune stones we find similar expressions. On the Ivla stone from Småland (Sm 44), a man is praised for being *mildan við sína* 'gentle towards his people', and on the Turinge stone from Södermanland (Sö 338) the same quality receives attention (see further on laudatory remarks in the section on 'Runic Inscriptions as Sources of Historical and Cultural Phenomena', below). The verse part of the latter inscription reads:

Brøðr váru þeir
 beztra manna
 á landi
 ok í liði úti,
 heldu sína húskarla vel.
 Hann fell í orrustu
 austr í Gørðum,
 liðs forungi,
 landmanna beztr.

[The brothers were among the best men on land and out in the host, treated their retainers well. He fell in action east in Garðaríki, the host's captain, of 'land-men' the best.]

On the Högby stone from Östergötland (Ög 81) we get, in 10 short lines of verse, a highly concentrated message, conveying the quintessence of the typical Viking-Age life of travel, battle and hazardous living. The inscriptions tell of the five sons – all deceased – of a man named Gulli. There are some uncertainties as to the interpretation of a few points in this stanza (see Andersson 1971, with references; Jansson 1987: 87, 90), but a probable rendition would be as follows:

Góðr karl Gulli
 gat fimm sonu:
 fell a Føri
 frøkn drengr Ásmundr,
 endaðist Qsurr
 austr í Grikkium,
 varð á Holmi
 Hálfðan drepinn
 Kári varð at Oddi(?).
 Ok dauðr Búi.

[The good man Gulli had five sons: by Fýri fell Ásmundr, the valiant 'dræng', Qzurr died out east in Greece, Halfðan was slain on Borgholm(?). Kári was at Oddr(?). Dead is Búi too.]

A couple of rune stones from Scania – the southernmost part of Sweden, which during the Viking and Middle Ages was a part of Denmark – have texts with laudatory remarks on upright behaviour in battle. On the Hällestad stone (DR 295) it says:

Sá fló eigi
 at Uppsolum.
 Settu drengiar
 eptir sinn bróður
 stein a biargi

støðan rúnum.
 Þeir Gorms Tóka
 gingu næstir.

[He fled not at Uppsala. 'Drængs' set up on the hill, in memory of their brother, the stone steadied by runes. To Tóki, Gormr's son, they marched closest.]

And on the Sjörup stone (DR 279), where the first two lines of verse correspond exactly to the Hällestad inscription, we read:

Sá fló eigi
 at Uppsölum
 en vá
 með hann vápn hafði.

[He fled not at Uppsala but struck while he had a weapon.]

There have been different opinions about these inscriptions: do they refer to the famous battle on the banks of the Fýri river at Uppsala, which, according to legend, took place sometime between AD 980 and 990, or not? (See, for example, DR: cols. 333, 349; Andersson 1971: 20 f.; Moltke 1985: 293 ff.; Snædal 1985; Jansson 1987: 85 ff.; cf. also the reference to Ásmundr in the Högby inscription, above.) If it is true that these men took part in this notorious battle, they not only participated, but lost their lives in it as well, at least if we are to believe a verse on this topic by Þórvaldr Hjaltason. He claims (Skjld B 1: 111), that *þat eitt lifir þeira . . . es rann undan* 'only those who ran away are still alive'. Such behaviour is also recorded in a runic inscription from Aspö, Södermanland (Sö 174), which states that: *Þý lét fiqr sitt, flýðu gengir* 'Because his followers fled, he lost his life'. To run away like this was certainly thought of as being cowardly and unheroic, and if we turn to the skaldic poems, we find that it is those who did not flee from battle who receive praise (Jesch 2001: 243 ff.).

Two inscriptions, one from Skarpåker in Södermanland and one from the town of Ribe in Denmark, give proof of a formulation widely attested, both geographically and chronologically, in the poetry of the Germanic world: the image of the opposition between earth and heaven. The Skarpåker inscription (Sö 154), partly in verse, begins:

Gunnarr reisti stein þenna at Lýðbiqrn, son sinn.
 [Gunnarr raised this stone in memory of Lýðbjörn, his son.]

Then come two lines in *fornyrðislag*, but the reading and interpretation of the runes representing them – **iarþsalrifnaukubhimin** (bold print indicating transliterated runes) – is not entirely clear (see Brate in Sö: 116 ff.; Kabell 1962). The most likely interpretation, given the parallels below, is:

Iqrð skal rifna
ok upphiminn.

[Earth shall be riven and heaven above.]

In the Ribe inscription (Moltke 1985: 493 ff.), on a medieval healing stick, the part that interests us here is interpreted as:

Iqrð bið ek varða
ok upphimin

[Earth I pray ward and heaven above.]

There are several parallels to the antithetic word-pair earth–heaven, found in Old English and Old High German, as well as Old Norse sources. A few examples may be given here (from Lönnroth 1981: 310 ff.; see also Hübler 1996: 155 f.):

eorðan ic bidde and upbeofon

[from *For Unfruitful Land*: ‘I beg the earth and the heaven above’]

eorðan eallgrene ond upbeofon

[from *Andreas*: ‘the earth all green and heaven above’]

ero ni uuas nob ûfbimil

[from *Wessobrunner Gebet*: ‘the earth did not exist, nor heaven above’]

erða endi uphimil

[from *Heliand*: ‘earth and heaven above’]

iqrð fannz æva né upphiminn (from *Völuspá*: ‘earth did not exist, nor heaven above’)

iqrð dúsaði oc upphiminn

[from *Oddrúnargrátr*: ‘the earth roared, and heaven above’]

As shown by Lönnroth (1981) in his exhaustive analysis, the word-pair in question does not seem to occur in arbitrary contexts, but, on the contrary, is restricted to statements of a religious-mythological character, primarily concerning the creation or the destruction of the world. It has been suggested that the occurrence of the *iqrð/upphiminn*-formula in the Skarpåker inscription could be an allusion to a well-known poem on the end of the world, OWN *ragnarök* n. pl. ‘the doom of the gods’, being a suitable way for the father to express his grief and at the same time praise his dead son.

In the Skarpåker and Ribe inscriptions we could then, perhaps, be dealing with more or less direct quotations from or allusions to other poems, but more probably the *iqrð/upphiminn*-expression is a common poetic image that had become popular throughout the Germanic world. We do, however, also have examples of what seems to be a very close connection between a runic text and a manuscript counterpart. In the saga of Egill Skalla-Grímsson, for instance, there is a well-known episode (ch. 73) where Egill helps a girl who has fallen sick, thanks to the imperfect carving of a rune

stick. After removing the incompetently carved runes and before providing the correct ones, Egill, according to the saga, composed these lines (Skjd B 1: 51; the translation is from Knirk 1994: 412):

Skalat maðr rúnar rísta,
nema ráða vel kunni;
þat verðr mǫrgum manni,
es of myrkvan staf villisk.

[One should not carve runes unless one can interpret them well; it happens to many a man, that he makes a mistake with a dark (rune-)stave.]

The lines of the saga become even more interesting when compared to a rune stick from Trondheim, Norway, where an inscription interpreted by Knirk (1994) as a reverse version of Egill's half-stanza is found:

Sá skyli rúnar rísta,
er ráða(?) vel kunni;
þat verðr mǫrgum manni,
at . . .

[He should carve runes who can understand(?) them well; it happens to many a man, that . . . (?)]

Another example of a runic text having a more or less precise counterpart in a verse preserved in a manuscript has been discovered by Fjellhammer Seim (1986). On a rune stick from Bergen (Fjellhammer Seim 1986: 31),⁶ dated to the year 1332, the following lines in the *dróttkvætt* metre occur (my translation):

Alinn var ek þar er alma
upplendingar bendu.

[I was born where the Upplanders drew their bows.]

This expression has a parallel in one of the *gamanvísur* ('jocular verses') composed by the Norwegian king Haraldr harðráði ('the Hardruler'), where the first two lines read (Skjd B 1: 329):

Føddr vas ek þars alma
Upplendingar bendu.

The meaning is exactly the same as in the Bergen rune-stick lines, 'I was born where the Upplanders drew their bows', the difference mainly being that there is another word for 'born', *føddr* (< *føða*), instead of *alinn* (< *ala*). These words are more

or less synonymous, so they do not change the principal meaning of the lines. The variation could instead be due to oral variation, and perhaps a desire to make the rhymes of these lines more distinct. We do have other stanzas or parts of stanzas in *dróttkvætt* from medieval Bergen (Fjellhammer Seim 1986: 35, with references), but this is the only one to which a parallel text exists.

Not only do we have correspondences between Norse verses and runic inscriptions, but we also find regular quotations from classical literature. One example is a rune stick from Bergen (Liestøl, Krause and Helgason 1962),⁷ on which – in addition to a complete stanza in *dróttkvætt* – the following famous words of Virgil occur: *Omnia vincit amor, et nos cedamus amori* ‘Love conquers all, let us give in to love.’ That the Scandinavians could be romantic in their native tongue as well is demonstrated by, for instance, two medieval inscriptions with almost identical texts, one from Lödöse in Sweden, and one from Bergen (Svårdström 1982: 15 f.).⁸

Mun þú mik, man [ek] þik!

{Think of me, I think of you!}

Unn þú mér, ann [ek] þér!

{Love me, I love you!}

For further examples of inscriptions with love poetry, see Marold (1998: 685 ff.).

Another aspect of runic inscriptions as literary documents is the verse form itself, and the transition from the typically Old Norse style of alliterating verse to the new poetic ideal of end rhymes. An early example of end rhyming occurring alongside alliteration is found on a rune stone from Uppland (U 214), probably carved at the beginning of the twelfth century.⁹ The relevant part reads:

Hann druknaði á Holms hafi,
skreið knorr hans í kaf,
þrír einir kvámu af.

{He drowned in the Holm’s sea. His ship sank bodily, those who survived were only three.}

The medieval inscriptions provide further examples of end rhymes, for instance on a couple of grave-slabs from Västergötland, Vg 138 and Vg 144. They read:

Hér liggja feðgar tveir. Heðinn ok Einarr hétu þeir.

{Here they both lie, father and son. They were called Heðinn and Einarr.}

Byrr liggr innan þessi þró. Guð gefi sál hans gleði ok ró.

[Byrr lies in this stone coffin. May God give his soul delight and peace.]

The two inscriptions from Bällsta in Uppland (U 225, U 226) form a coherent text. At the end of the second inscription we can read the last four out of 14 lines of verse:

Ok Gyriði
gast at veri.
Því mun í gráti
getit láta.

[Likewise Gyriðr loved her husband. So in mourning she will have it mentioned.]

The interesting thing about this text is not the verse in itself, but the fact that it perhaps provides evidence for the existence of a specific genre in east Scandinavia, namely the *grátr*-genre. Helgason (1944) has suggested that the words *í gráti* in the Bällsta inscription could mean something like ‘in a mourning song’ rather than just ‘in tears’, ‘weeping’ (see also Harris 2000). The most prominent representative of the *grátr*-genre is, according to Helgason, Egill’s famous poem *Sonatorrek* (‘The Loss of Sons’), composed after the death by drowning of his favourite son. Lönnroth (1999: 50) proposes that it is the mourning widow herself who has composed the *grátr* mentioned in the inscription, since he, in the light of poems such as *Oddrúnargrátr* and *Mariúgrátr*, regards the genre as being connected to women, a position Kress (1993: 50 ff.) rather categorically supports. This may very well be the case, but if we accept Helgason’s opinion about *Sonatorrek* being the ultimate *grátr*-poem, it cannot be regarded as a genre restricted solely to women speakers.¹⁰

In a survey such as this, it may also be worth mentioning that there is a statement about the origin of the runes themselves in a literary text, namely the eddic poem *Hávamál*. As in many oral societies, the art of enabling the words to take on a permanent form was thought to be a gift from the gods. In Norse mythology, the god connected with poetry and writing was Óðinn, and in *Hávamál* we learn that it was he who discovered the runes (Háv. st. 80):

Þat er þá reynt
er þú at rúnom spyr
inom reginkunnum,
þeim er gorðo ginregin
oc fáði fimbulþulr.

[It is then tried and tested when you ask about the runes derived from the gods, the ones which the ruling powers made and the mighty sage [that is, Óðinn] painted.]

It is an interesting fact that there are only two more examples of runes being called *reginkunnar* ‘of divine origin’: the runic inscriptions from Noleby and Sparlösa in Västergötland (Vg 63, Vg 119), dated to the seventh and ninth centuries

respectively. These inscriptions give a strong indication of a more homogeneous Old Scandinavian literary and cultural tradition than the preserved manuscript material, which is almost exclusively Old West Scandinavian, would suggest.

In the eddic poem *Sigrdrífumál* there is more to learn about runes. In this poem, the valkyrie Sigrdrífa bestows much useful knowledge upon the legendary Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, the famous slayer of Fáfnir the dragon. Among other things, she teaches him about different kinds of runes and their various qualities (Sd. st. 19):¹¹

Þat ero bótrúnar,
þat ero biargrúnar.

[These are runes of help, these are runes of protection.]

Interestingly enough, the words *bótrúnar* and *biargrúnar* are also found in a medieval runic inscription from Bergen (Liestøl 1964: 41 f.).¹² This text is at the same time representative of the protective-magical aspect of the runes, which is present above all in the Proto-Scandinavian inscriptions, but occasionally also in later ones (cf. the introductory section above; see Flowers 1986; Marold 1998: 681 ff.). The beginning of the text goes:

Ríst ek bótrúnar,
ríst ek biargrúnar,
einfalt við álfum
tvífalt við trollum
þrífalt við þursum.

[I cut runes of help, I cut runes of protection, once against the elves, twice against the trolls, thrice against the ogres.]

A final point I should like to make in this section is that the runic monuments are also objects of art-historical interest, since, during the late Viking Age in particular, they could be adorned with pictures (Moltke 1985: 245 ff.; Jansson 1987: 144 ff.). Some of these are of interest in a literary context because they show that certain myths and legends otherwise known only from west Scandinavian sources were apparently familiar in east Scandinavia as well.

A dramatic event indeed is the great fishing expedition undertaken by the god Þórr, resulting in his hooking the Miðgarðr Serpent. The episode is described by, for example, Snorri Sturluson, but is known from a variety of other sources as well (Meulengracht Sørensen 1986), including a rune stone from Altuna, Uppland (U 1161; see figure 23.3).

The most elaborate pictorial depiction of a literary motif is found on a rock at Ramsund, Södermanland (Sö 101), where episodes in the story of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani occur (see figure 23.4): the killing of the dragon, the roasting of the dragon's heart,

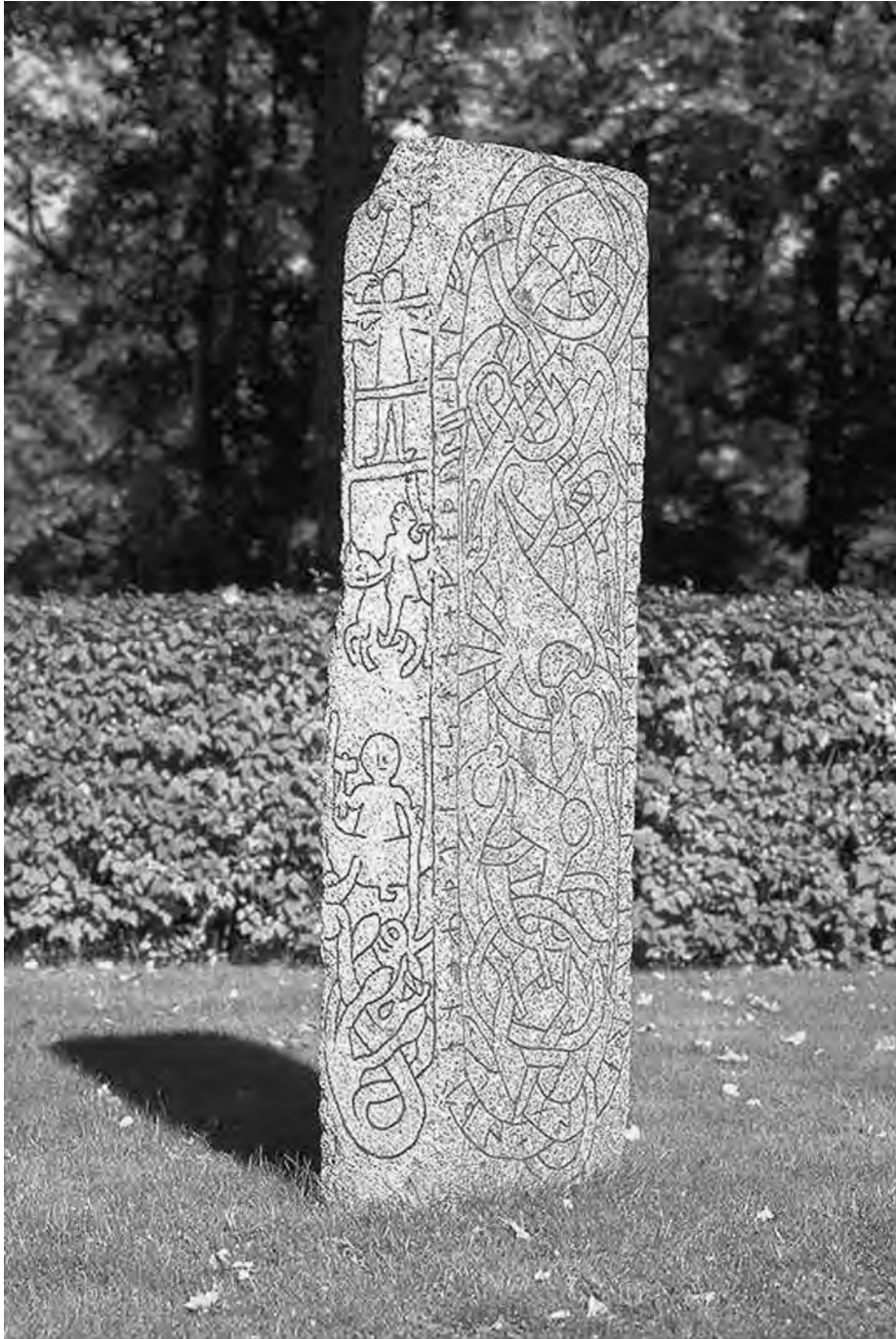


Figure 23.3 The Altuna stone, Uppland, showing Þórr fishing for the Miðgarðr Serpent. E. Wessén and S. B. F. Jansson, *Upplands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade*, vols. 1–4. Stockholm: 1940–58, pl. 139.



Figure 23.4 The Ramsund rock, Södermanland, which depicts episodes in the story of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani. E. Brate and E. Wessén, *Södermanlands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade*. Stockholm: 1924–36, pl. 48.

the birds that warn Sigurðr of Reginn's betrayal, Sigurðr's horse Grani loaded with the treasure, and so on. Sigurðr is also featured on some other runic monuments, for instance the large boulder from Näsbyholm, Södermanland (Sö 327), with a rather clumsy, naive parallel to the pictures of the Ramsund carving. On a rune stone from Drävle, Uppland (U 1163; see figure 23.5), we can see, as well as Sigurðr slaying the dragon, a woman with a drinking-horn and a man holding a ring, but the identity of these figures has not been established with certainty (Margeson 1980; Düwel 1986).

Runic Inscriptions as Sources of Historical and Cultural Phenomena

The runic inscriptions also provide information on a variety of historically interesting events, including the Christianization of Scandinavia, one of the most fundamentally revolutionary events ever to take place there (Williams 1999; Sawyer 2000: ch. 6). On two rune stones we even have explicit proclamations of Christianization: on one of them the Danish king Haraldr Blátǫnn ('Blacktooth') claims to have Christianized all of the Danes (DR 42), and on the other we find out that the province of Jämtland – now Swedish, then a part of Norway – had been Christianized by the commissioner of



Figure 23.5 The Drävle stone, Uppland, showing Sigurðr slaying the dragon Fáfnir. E. Wessén and S. B. F. Jansson, *Upplands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade*, vols. 1–4. Stockholm: 1940–58, pl. 143.

that stone (Williams 1999: 63). Most Viking-Age rune stones do, in fact, reveal themselves in one way or another as being Christian, for instance by the presence of crosses and/or prayers (the most common of these being *Guð hialpi sál(u)ǫnd hans/bennar/þeira* ‘God help his/her/their soul/spirit’).

Runic inscriptions are rather generally considered to be commemorative monuments, but many of them could very well have fulfilled several duties. According to Sawyer (2000), the rune-stone texts are primarily to be seen as legal documents, stipulating who is entitled to inheritance. In some cases, above all the Hillersjö inscription in Uppland (U 29), the inscriptions explicitly state that a certain person or persons have come into possession of riches or land by inheritance, or that they are heirs of the person commemorated.

The inscriptions also give us an opportunity to get a glimpse of what people during the Viking Age and early Middle Ages thought were commendable qualities (Hübler 1996: 127 ff.; Sawyer 2000: 101 ff.). Among the obvious ones are courageous behaviour in battle, represented for instance by the Hällestad and Sörup stones (DR 295, DR 279), raised in memory of men who did not flee at Uppsala (see the section on ‘Runic Inscriptions as Literary Documents’ above). However, there is also a variety of other, more peaceful activities that receive commendation.

On a few rune stones, men are praised for being generous with food, in expressions like *yndr matar* (Sm 37), *mildr/mildastr matar* (U 739, DR 291) and *matar góðan/góðr* (Sö 130, Sm 39, Sm 44, U 703, U 805). The last phrase, *matar góðan* (acc.), also occurs in the eddic poem *Hávamál* (st. 39), and the idea that a chieftain, in order to act in a suitable manner, should be generous is widely attested. There are numerous words alluding to kings or chieftains indicating this, such as OWN *baugbroti* m. and *bringbroti* m. ‘ring-breaker’, *gullsendir* m. and *gullvörpuðr* m. ‘gold-distributor’ and *slongvandbaugi* m. ‘ring-thrower’ (cf. OE *bēaggyfa* m. and OS *bōggeþo* m. ‘ring-giver’). It could also be mentioned that a personal name *Ósníkinn*, which literally means ‘the un-greedy’, is recorded in five inscriptions (Sö 335, U 333, U 645, U 1042, U 1092), and furthermore that the retainers of Beowulf refer to him as being *manna mildust* ‘the most munificent of men’ (*Beowulf* l. 3181).

Another praiseworthy quality was apparently eloquence, judging by inscriptions such as U 1146, where a man is said to have been *málsþakr*, and also U 703 and U 739, where the phrase *máls risinn* occurs, both expressions meaning ‘eloquent’. On two stones, Sö 130 and Sm 39, each of the commemorated men is characterized as being *mildan orða* ‘gentle in speech’; cf. *Beowulf* (l. 1172), where the advice is given to speak *mildum wordum, swā sceal man dōn*, ‘with gentle words, as a man should do’.

Women, too, were commemorated in runic inscriptions, although by no means as frequently as men. A fine example of a rune-stone text praising a woman is the Hassmyra stone from Västmanland, Sweden (Vs 24), raised in memory of a woman called Óðin-Dísa. A part of the inscription is in verse, including these lines:

Kemr hýfreyja
til Hqsumýra

eigi betri,
en býi ráðr.

[There will come to Hǫsumýrar no better housewife, who will arrange the estate.]

In the sagas there are some pretty extensive and detailed descriptions of events taking place at the thing or assembly, the place where legal matters were settled and the laws were put forward by the *logsogumaðr*, that is, the reciter of the laws. If we turn to the runic inscriptions such detailed records are naturally missing, but a few things can be noted that are of great interest. For instance, on an iron ring from Forsa in Hälsingland, Sweden, dated to the early Viking Age, an inscription that has been referred to as the oldest legal document in Scandinavia occurs (Widmark 1999, with references), and in the more or less contemporary inscription from Oklunda, in Östergötland, there is an explicit reference to a man seeking refuge at a pre-Christian cult-site (OWN *vé n.*), that is, a sanctuary (Lönnquist and Widmark 1996–7, with references).

To conclude this survey, it is hard to avoid mentioning one of the best-known themes in the runic inscriptions, namely the extensive travelling of the Vikings. Above, in the section on 'Runic Inscriptions as Literary Documents', this aspect receives attention in the inscriptions from Gripsholm (Sö 179), Djulefors (Sö 65), Mervalla (Sö 198), Turinge (Sö 338) and Högby (Ög 81); for further details on this matter, see, for instance, Jesch (2001: esp. ch. 3).

See also ARCHAEOLOGY; EDDIC POETRY; FAMILY SAGAS; GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL; LANGUAGE; LATE SECULAR POETRY; LAWS; METRE AND METRICS; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; SAGAS OF ICELANDIC PREHISTORY; SKALDIC POETRY; SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS; WOMEN IN OLD NORSE POETRY AND SAGAS.

NOTES

- 1 It has been assumed that the Swedish Þórbiörn skáld could have been the carver of the Turinge stone in Södermanland, Sweden (Sö 338), on which verse occurs (for example, Jansson 1967: 23). Even though there are some similarities between this stone and Þórbiörn's carvings there are at the same time differences, and it is therefore uncertain that the Turinge stone can be attributed to Þórbiörn (cf. Wessén in Sö: xxviii).
- 2 It should also be mentioned that *þulr* could apparently be recorded as a personal name, to judge from an inscription from Tumbo, Södermanland (Sö 82; the interpretation is, however, uncertain). Cf. OE *þyle*, which occurs as a personal name (*Widsið* l. 24).
- 3 The first two lines in fact meet the requirements of the skaldic metre *kvíðuhátt*, but according to Jansson (1967: 7 f.) this is purely accidental. See also Naumann (1998: 700 with reference).
- 4 See Moltke (1985: 320, 326 note 13) and Jansson (1987: 134 ff.); cf. Jesch (2001: 2), who favours the latter interpretation.
- 5 In addition to being mentioned in these inscriptions, the expedition is also known from a saga about Yngvarr, *Yngvars saga víðforla*.
- 6 N B88 in *Sammordisk runtextdatabas*.
- 7 N B145 in *Sammordisk runtextdatabas*.
- 8 The only difference is the word *ek* 'I', which is (twice) present in the latter inscription, but

- not in the former. In *Sammordisk runtextdatabas*, see Vg 279 and N B645 respectively.
- 9 A considerably older example originates from Egill Skalla-Grímsson, who in his poem *Hofuðlausn* (the title referring to a poem presented to a king in order to save one's life) uses end rhymes throughout (see Skjd B 1: 30 ff.). According to the chronology of *Egils saga*, this took place in the year AD 936.
- 10 According to Kress (1993: 77 f.), this is a matter of chronology, since the genre in her opinion is originally female and anonymous. With *Sonatorrek*, however, in which 'the female voice of the *grátr*' (Sw. *{g}råtens kvinnliga röst*) is present, it becomes associated with skaldic poetry – where the poets are for the most part male and known by name – and disappears as a female expression.
- 11 The manuscript actually has *boc-*, that is, *bók-* ('beech-'), but this must be an error, which, as Liestøl (1964: 43 ff. with fig. 11) has shown convincingly, is easy to understand: the two letters in question are very similar in this manuscript.
- 12 N B257 in *Sammordisk runtextdatabas*.

ABBREVIATIONS

acc.	accusative	OS	Old Saxon
<i>Dēor</i>	Old English poem published in appendix 4 of <i>Beowulf</i>	OWN	Old West Norse; Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian seen as one
f.	feminine	pl.	plural
Grm.	<i>Grímnismál</i> ; poem in the Edda	Sd.	<i>Sigrdrífumál</i> ; poem in the Edda
Háv.	<i>Hávamál</i> ; poem in the Edda	st.	stanza
m.	masculine	Sw.	Swedish
n.	neuter	<i>Widsið</i>	Old English poem published in appendix 4 of <i>Beowulf</i>
OE	Old English		

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Editions

- Beowulf = *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. Frederick Klaeber. 3rd edn. with 1st and 2nd supplements. Boston, New York, etc.: 1950.
- DR = Jacobsen, Lis and Moltke, Erik (1941–2) *Danmarks Runeindskrifter*. With the assistance of Anders Bæksted and Karl Martin Nielsen. Copenhagen.
- Edda = *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, ed. Gustav Neckel, rev. Hans Kuhn. Vol.1: *Text*. (Germanische Bibliothek. Vierte Reihe. Texte). Heidelberg: 1983.
- Egils saga* = *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ed. Sigurður Nordal (Íslensk fornrit II). Reykjavík: 1933.
- Liestøl, Aslak, Krause, Wolfgang and Helgason, Jón (1962) 'Drottkvætt-vers fra Bryggen i Bergen.' *Maal og minne*, 98–108.
- N = Olsen, Magnus (1954) *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer*. 3 vols. With the assistance of Aslak Liestøl (Norsk historisk kjeldeskrift-institutt. Norges indskrifter indtil reformationen 2). Oslo.
- Sammordisk runtextdatabas*. Uppsala. www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm
- Skjd = Jónsson, Finnur (1912–15) *Den norske-islandske skjaldedigtning*, vols. A 1–2: *Tekst efter håndskrifterna*, vols. B 1–2: *Rettet tekst*. Copenhagen and Christiania.
- Sm = Kinander, Ragnar (1935–61) *Smålands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade* (Sveriges runinskrifter 4). Stockholm.
- Svärdström, Elisabeth (1982) *Runfynden i Gamla Lödöse* (Lödöse – Västsvensk medeltidsstad 4:5). Stockholm.
- Sö = Brate, Erik and Wessén, Elias (1924–36) *Södermanlands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade* (Sveriges runinskrifter 3). Stockholm.

- U = Wessén, Elias and Jansson, Sven B. F. (1940–58) *Upplands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade*, vols. 1–4 (Sveriges runinskrifter 6–9). Stockholm.
- Vg = Jungner, Hugo and Svärdström, Elisabeth (1940–70) *Västergötlands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade* (Sveriges runinskrifter 5). Stockholm.
- Vs = Jansson, Sven B. F. (1964) *Västmanlands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade* (Sveriges runinskrifter 13). Stockholm.
- Yngvars saga víðforla* = *Yngvars saga víðforla: Jämt ett bibang om Ingvarsinskrifterna*, ed. Emil Olson (Samfund til Udgivelse af gammel nordisk Litteratur 39). Copenhagen: 1912.
- Ög = Brate, Erik (1911–18) *Östergötlands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade* (Sveriges runinskrifter 2). Stockholm.
- Öl = Söderberg, Sven and Brate, Erik (1900–6) *Ölands runinskrifter granskade och tolkade* (Sveriges runinskrifter 1). Stockholm.
- Secondary Literature*
- Andersson, Thorsten (1971) 'Högbystenens runinskrift.' In Lars Huldén and Carl Eric Thors (eds.) *Festskrift till Olav Ahlbäck 28.3. 1971* (Studier i nordisk filologi 58). Helsingfors, pp. 17–48.
- Düwel, Klaus (1986) 'Zur Ikonographie und Ikonologie der Sigurddarstellungen.' In Helmut Roth (ed.) *Zum Problem der Deutung frühmittelalterlicher Bildinhalte: Akten des 1. Internationalen Kolloquiums in Marburg a. d. Lahn, 15. bis 19. Februar 1983* (Veröffentlichung des Vorgesichtlichen Seminars der Philipps-Universität Marburg a. d. Lahn 4). Sigmaringen, pp. 221–71.
- Elmevik, Lennart (1999) 'De urnordiska runinskrifternas alu.' In Lennart Elmevik et al. (eds.) *Runor och namn. Hyllningskrift till Lena Peterson den 27 januari 1999* (Namn och samhälle 10). Uppsala, pp. 21–8.
- Fjellhammer Seim, Karin (1986) 'Fragment av Harald Hardrådes gamanvisur överlevt i runer på Bryggen i Bergen.' *Maal og minne*, 30–41.
- Flowers, Stephen E. (1986) *Runes and Magic: Magical Formulaic Elements in the Older Runic Tradition* (American University Studies. Series 1. Germanic Languages and Literature 53). New York, Berne and Frankfurt.
- Foote, Peter (1985) 'Skandinavische Dichtung der Wikingerzeit.' In Klaus von See (ed.) *Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft*, vol. 6: *Europäisches Frühmittelalter*. Frankfurt and Wiesbaden, pp. 317–57.
- Grønvik, Ottar (1983) 'Runeinnskriften på Röksteinen.' *Maal og minne*, 101–49.
- Harris, Joseph (2000) 'The Ballsta-Inscriptions and Old Norse Literary History.' In Michael Dallapiazza et al. (eds.) *International Scandinavian and Medieval Studies in Memory of Gerd Wolfgang Weber: Ein runder Knäuel, so rollt' es uns leicht aus den Händen* (Hesperides. Letterature e culture Occidentali 12). Trieste, pp. 223–39.
- Helgason, Jón (1944) 'Bällsta-inskriftens "i grati".' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 59, 159–62.
- Herschend, Frands (2001) 'Pegas på tusentalet: attityder till runstensdiktning.' *Forvännen: Journal of Swedish Antiquarian Research* 96, 23–33.
- Hübler, Frank (1996) *Schwedische Runendichtung der Wikingerzeit* (Runrön 10). Uppsala.
- Jansson, Sven B. F. (1967) 'Forntidens litteratur.' In Eugène Napoleon Tigerstedt (ed.) *Ny illustrerad svensk litteraturhistoria*, vol. 1: *Forntiden. Medeltiden. Vasatiden*. 2nd edn. Stockholm, pp. 3–32.
- Jansson, Sven B. F. (1987) *Runes in Sweden*, transl. Peter Foote. Stockholm. Original work pub. 1984.
- Jesch, Judith (2000) 'The Power of Poetry.' In Else Roesdahl and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (eds.) *Beretning fra nittende tværfaglige vikingesymposium*. Aarhus, pp. 21–39.
- Jesch, Judith (2001) *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age: The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse*. Woodbridge.
- Jesch, Judith (2002) 'Eagles, Ravens and Wolves: Beasts of Battle, Symbols of Victory and Death.' In Judith Jesch (ed.) *The Scandinavians from the Vendel Period to the Tenth Century: An Ethnographical Perspective* (Studies in Historical Archaeoethnology 5). Woodbridge, pp. 251–80.
- Kabell, Aage (1962) 'Apokalypsen i Skarpåker.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 77, 53–5.
- Knirk, James E. (1994) 'Runes from Trondheim and a Stanza by Egill Skalla-Grímsson.' In Heiko Uecker (ed.) *Studien zum Altgermanischen: Festschrift für Heinrich Beck* (Ergänzungsbände

- zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 11). Berlin and New York, pp. 411–20.
- Krag, Claus (1991) *Ynglingatal og Ynglingesaga: En studie i historiske kilder* (Studia Humaniora 2). Oslo.
- Kress, Helga (1993) 'Vad kvinnor kväder: Kultur och kön på Island i fornnordisk medeltid.' In Elisabeth Møller Jensen, with Eva Hættner Aurelius and Anne-Marie Mai (eds.) *Nordisk kvinnolitteraturhistoria*, vol. 1: *I Guds namn: 1000–1800*. Höganäs, pp. 22–81.
- Liestøl, Aslak (1964) 'Runer frå Bryggen.' Bergen. Off-print from *Viking: Tidskrift for norrøn arkeologi* 27, 5–53.
- Lönnqvist, Olov and Widmark, Gun (1996–7) 'Den fredlöse och Oklendaristningens band.' *Saga och sed*, 145–59.
- Lönnroth, Lars (1977) 'The Riddles of the Rökstone: A Structural Approach.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 92, 1–57.
- Lönnroth, Lars (1981) 'Iorð fannz æva né uppbiminn: a formula analysis.' In Ursula Dronke et al. (eds.) *Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*. Odense, pp. 310–27.
- Lönnroth, Lars (1999) 'Ättesamhällets textvärld.' In Lars Lönnroth and Sven Delblanc (eds.) *Den svenska litteraturen*, vol. 1: *Från runor till romanistik*. Rev. edn. Stockholm, pp. 33–56.
- Margeson, Sue (1980) 'The Volsung Legend in Medieval Art.' In Flemming G. Andersen et al. (eds.) *Medieval Iconography and Narrative: A Symposium*. Odense, pp. 183–211.
- Marold, Edith (1998) 'Runeninschriften als Quelle zur Geschichte der Skaldendichtung.' In Klaus Düwel, with Sean Nowak (eds.) *Runeninschriften als Quellen interdisziplinärer Forschung: Abhandlungen des Vierten Internationalen Symposiums über Runen und Runeninschriften in Göttingen vom 4.–9. August 1995* (Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 15). Berlin and New York, pp. 667–93.
- Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben (1986) 'Thor's Fishing Expedition.' In Gro Steinsland (ed.) *Words and Objects: Towards a Dialogue between Archaeology and History of Religion* (Instituttet for sammenlignende kulturforskning. Series B. Skrifter 71). Oslo, pp. 257–78.
- Moltke, Erik (1985) *Runes and their Origin: Denmark and Elsewhere*, transl. P. Foote. Copenhagen. Original work pub. 1976.
- Naumann, Hans-Peter (1994) 'Hann var manna mestr óníðingr: Zur Poetizität metrischer Runeninschriften.' In Heiko Uecker (ed.) *Studien zum Altgermanischen: Festschrift für Heinrich Beck* (Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 11). Berlin and New York, pp. 490–502.
- Naumann, Hans-Peter (1998) 'Runeninschriften als Quelle der Versgeschichte.' In Klaus Düwel with Sean Nowak (eds.) *Runeninschriften als Quellen interdisziplinärer Forschung: Abhandlungen des Vierten Internationalen Symposiums über Runen und Runeninschriften in Göttingen vom 4.–9. August 1995* (Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 15). Berlin and New York, pp. 694–714.
- Reichert, Hermann (1998) 'Runeninschriften als Quellen der Heldensagenforschung.' In Klaus Düwel with Sean Nowak (eds.) *Runeninschriften als Quellen interdisziplinärer Forschung: Abhandlungen des Vierten Internationalen Symposiums über Runen und Runeninschriften in Göttingen vom 4.–9. August 1995* (Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 15). Berlin and New York, pp. 66–102.
- Sawyer, Birgit (2000) *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones: Custom and Commemoration in Early Medieval Scandinavia*. Oxford.
- Snædal, Thorgunn (1985) "'Han flydde inte vid Uppsala...': Slaget på Fyrisvallarna och några skånska runstenar.' *Ale* 2, 13–23.
- Widmark, Gun (1992) 'Varför ristade Varin runor? Tankar kring Rökstenen.' *Saga och sed*, 25–44.
- Widmark, Gun (1997) 'Tolkningen som social konstruktion: Rökstenens inskrift.' In Staffan Nyström (ed.) *Runor och ABC: Elva föreläsningar från ett symposium i Stockholm våren 1995* (Sällskapet Runica et Mediaevalia. Opuscula 4). Stockholm, pp. 165–75.
- Widmark, Gun (1999) 'Till tolkningen av Forsaringens inskrift.' In Lennart Elmevik et al. (eds.) *Runor och namn: Hyllningskrift till Lena Peterson den 27 januari 1999* (Namn och samhälle 10). Uppsala, pp. 117–24.
- Williams, Henrik (1999) 'Runestones and the Conversion of Sweden.' In Carole M. Cusack and Peter Oldmeadow (eds.) *This Immense Panorama: Studies in Honour of Eric J. Sharpe* (Sydney Studies in Religion 2). Sydney, pp. 59–78.

Sagas of Contemporary History (*Sturlunga saga*): Texts and Research

Úlfar Bragason

Sturlunga saga is a compilation of many sagas by different authors. The sagas deal with events which took place in Iceland in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These sagas have been termed secular contemporary sagas, in contradistinction to the sagas of Icelandic bishops, which are set in the same period. They are distinguished from the Icelandic family sagas, on the other hand, by the fact that they were put into writing shortly after the events they recount. It is thus fair to say that the sagas of the *Sturlunga saga* compilation are differentiated by the period of their events, and by their secular content, from other sagas set in Iceland. The distinction between secular contemporary sagas and sagas of bishops is not clear cut in *Sturlunga saga*, however, as *Prestsaga Guðmundar góða*, which is the first part of a saga of a bishop, is included. *Árna saga biskups Þorlákssonar* is included in one of the principal manuscripts of the compilation, as is *Jarteinasaga Guðmundar biskups*, but *Arons saga*, which recounts events of the thirteenth century, is not a part of the compilation. *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns* takes place in the Age of Settlement, and *Haukdæla þáttur* begins with the settlement of Iceland. As the sagas were not defined in separate categories during the Middle Ages, and as they have many similarities, the different types of saga should be regarded as sub-genres in a generic system, rather than as separate genres.

The title *Sturlunga saga* can be traced back to the seventeenth century, when the compilation came to be known by the name of the Sturlung clan, who are influential participants in the events recounted. The compilation as a whole is now always called *Sturlunga saga*, or simply *Sturlunga*. The period covered by *Sturlunga*, and especially the years 1220 to 1262–4, when the compilation concludes with the Icelandic chieftains swearing allegiance to the king of Norway, has been called the Sturlung Age in Icelandic historical writing.

Research on *Sturlunga* has mainly been philological. Scholars have addressed problems concerning the composition of the compilation, its origins, preservation

and age, and those of the sagas it includes. *Sturlunga* has also been used as one of the main sources for Icelandic history of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, without its source value being seriously questioned. Until recently, however, *Sturlunga* and its component sagas have received relatively little attention as works of literature. *Sturlunga* has indeed been generally viewed as a work of history, and few have been aware of its literary value. No attempt will be made here to mention all that has been written on the subject; some account will, however, be given of the preservation of *Sturlunga*, of studies of it as literature, and of its source value for the period it describes.

Preservation

Scholars first turned their attention to *Sturlunga* in the mid-seventeenth century. By this time the original manuscript was lost, but the compilation was preserved in two vellum manuscripts which were at that time almost complete (Kålund 1901). At that period copies of both manuscripts were made on paper. But by the time the manuscripts came into the hands of manuscript collector Árni Magnússon around 1700, they had deteriorated considerably. They are numbered 122a fol. and 122b fol. in the Árni Magnússon collection. Kristian Kålund, the Danish philologist who first made a detailed study of the *Sturlunga* manuscripts, called the former manuscript *Króksfjarðarbók* and marked it as no. I. This vellum manuscript was probably penned shortly after 1360. This large manuscript is said to have comprised 141 pages originally, of which only 110 are now extant, some of them damaged. The latter manuscript was called *Reykjarfjarðarbók* by Kålund, who marked it as no. II. This manuscript was probably written in the last quarter of the fourteenth century. Only 30 pages or fragments of pages of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* are now extant, of a manuscript that probably numbered about 180 pages originally.

About 40 paper manuscripts derived from manuscripts I and II are extant, some dating from the seventeenth century, others from the nineteenth. References are made to these paper manuscripts as Ip or IIp, according to which vellum manuscript is the main source. None of them contains solely the text of one of the vellum manuscripts, with no additions from the other.

AM 114 fol. is the oldest copy of *Króksfjarðarbók*. This copy was made by Jón Gissurarson of Núpur in Dýrafjörður before 1645. The copy is not precise, and material from *Reykjarfjarðarbók* is sometimes silently added. Hence some parts of I have been lost. AM 437–438 4to, which was written just after the middle of the seventeenth century, is copied from AM 114 fol. Parts of it, however, are taken directly from *Króksfjarðarbók*. But I is still preserved in these places. All other Ip manuscripts are derived from these two copies.

Björn Jónsson of Skarðsá made a copy of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* around 1635. He also made use of I, but explained which sections were taken from each manuscript. This manuscript is now lost, but all extant copies of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* are derived from it.

In addition, a summary of *Sturlunga* is extant from the first half of the seventeenth century, in Björn Jónsson's hand (AM 439 4to).

BL Add. 11. 127 (previously British Museum Add. 11. 127, abbreviated Br) is regarded as the only complete, and also the best, copy of Björn of Skarðsá's manuscript copy. It was written in 1696. Stock. papp. 4to nr. 8 (H) dates from the mid-seventeenth century. The text is considerably abridged. AM 440 4to (440) is believed to be derived from the same original as H. It was written in 1656. The manuscript survives only in part, containing only the first third of the saga. Br and the common source for H and 440 are believed to have been comparably accurate copies of the manuscript of Björn of Skarðsá.

Vallabók (Adv. 21.3.17), which dates from the eighteenth century, and a closely related copy comprise a special sub-category of Iip manuscripts. They are derived from Br, a Ip manuscript, and one other unknown copy.

AM 204 fol. (204) is a direct copy of the passages about Bishop Guðmundr Arason in *Reykjarfjarðarbók*. 204 was written in the mid-seventeenth century or before.

Knowledge and understanding of the preservation, origins, age and form of *Sturlunga saga* have improved greatly since the saga was first published in Copenhagen in two volumes by Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag (the Icelandic Literary Society) in the years 1817–20. This edition was based upon a considerable number of paper manuscripts, though principally *Vallabók*. This and more recent editions of the whole or parts of *Sturlunga*, as well as translations, are listed at the end of the chapter.

Many judgements have to be made regarding the text of *Sturlunga*, as the vellum manuscripts are in poor condition, and the paper copies conflate the two texts. It is often hard to tell what is derived from each manuscript, and impossible to resurrect the original text. While each of the existing editions has its own undoubted merit, it is clear that a new scholarly edition is required (see Brown 1952b; Jacqueline Simpson and Hare 1960; Einarsdóttir 1968). Because of the way in which the compilation has been preserved, such an edition would have to be based upon many different manuscripts. It should not, however, seek only to indicate the original form of the text, but also how the text has evolved, since recent work has shown that the manuscripts of *Sturlunga saga* differ considerably from each other in style, orientation and content (Viljoen 1994; Grímsdóttir 1982: 56).

The Composition of *Sturlunga*

In former times scholars believed that Sturla Þórðarson the historian (d. 1284) had written all of *Sturlunga saga*, or at least those parts of the compilation which take place after the death of Bishop Brandr Sæmundarson in 1201 (see Ólsen 1902: 198–204; also Sveinsson 1965: 63–6). This inference was drawn from a vague and misleading statement in the so-called prologue to *Sturlunga* in *Króksfjarðarbók*. This reads: 'Almost all the sagas concerning events which took place here in Iceland were written before Bishop Brandr Sæmundarson died; but those sagas which concern events which

took place later were little written (*litt ritaðar*) before the skald Sturla Þórðarson dictated the sagas of Icelanders.' Some people concluded that the phrase 'Almost all the sagas . . .' referred to the part of *Sturlunga* which takes place before the death of Bishop Brandr in 1201, and that Brandr had written those sagas, while Sturla was the author of the parts of the compilation which took place after the bishop's death. Others were of the view that 'Almost all the sagas . . .' referred not to *Sturlunga*, but to the Icelandic family sagas, and inferred from this statement that they had been written before Brandr's death. These scholars were of the view, however, that Sturla Þórðarson was the author of all of *Sturlunga*, or at least the bulk of it. None the less, they realized that Sturla could not have completed the task, since the foreword says of him: 'for I know him to be a very wise and a most temperate man. May God allow his experience to prove better for him than praise.' A compiler other than Sturla must therefore have brought the work to completion.

Vigfússon (1878: civ) held the view that the *Sturlunga* compiler had been under the tutelage of Sturla Þórðarson, and suggested he was lawman Þórðr Narfason of Skarð (d. 1308). Ólsen (1902: 383–5, 391–3) believed that in his work the compiler had made use of a manuscript of Sturla's, which included genealogies, a copy of *Sturlu saga*, Sturla's foreword to *Íslendinga saga* and *Íslendinga saga* itself. Jóhannesson's view (1946: xxxviii) was that *Íslendinga saga* had been an incomplete work. He believed that Sturla had intended to write a great compilation, including this saga and others, about the history of Iceland. Hence the *Sturlunga* compiler is seen as having followed Sturla's example to some extent in his work.

In the prologue to *Sturlunga* the compiler explains his method of linking together many different sagas about events which took place at the same time, placing them more or less in chronological order. He specifies here some of the sagas he used. The compiler also mentions here Sturla Þórðarson's sources for *Íslendinga saga*. Ólsen, as indicated above, was of the view that the prologue had been based on an existing one, written by Sturla Þórðarson for *Íslendinga saga*. Later scholars have been in agreement with this opinion (Sigurðsson 1933–5: 155–62).

The *Sturlunga* prologue names Sturla Þórðarson as the author of *Íslendinga saga*. Scholars have suggested possible authors for other contemporary sagas, and sometimes more than one, as in the case of *Porgils saga skarða*. These attributions are usually based on such criteria as certain areas of knowledge which are exhibited in the saga, the narrator's viewpoint, attitudes in the narrative, and style. But an attribution based upon such factors is often, truth to tell, no more than guesswork, as the assumption is made that medieval writers worked like authors today. This has, however, often been questioned in more recent years, for instance by Lönnroth (1964: esp. 78–97). He points out that scribes and copyists played an important role in medieval literature. The 'authors' often gave them only a broad outline of the story to be written. This must be borne in mind when working with medieval writings.

It is also difficult to deduce when the sagas were originally written. Dates are not given in the manuscripts, and extant manuscripts are often in poor condition, in addition to which these manuscripts are probably of much later date than the sagas

themselves. Copyists also often made changes to the text as they worked. When one considers the dates of the various sagas in *Sturlunga*, one must first ascertain when the compilation was put together. The age of the two vellum manuscripts (although not precisely determined), the relationship between *Sturlunga* and annals of the period, and the text itself – for instance, the wording of the prologue – indicate that the compilation dates from around 1300. According to the foreword, *Þorgils saga ok Haflíða*, *Sturlu saga*, *Prestssaga*, *Guðmundar saga dýra* and (probably) *Hrafn saga* pre-date *Íslendinga saga*. If Jóhannesson (1946: xxxiv–viii) is correct in his view that Sturla Þórðarson was familiar with *Þórðar saga kakala* and *Þorgils saga skarða* when he compiled *Íslendinga saga*, these two sagas are also of older date. But it is unclear when *Íslendinga saga* was written, and over how long a period. Stefán Karlsson (1988) has postulated that Sturla Þórðarson wrote the manuscript he calls *Membrana Reseniana 6*, now lost, mainly during the period 1250–84, and that this was his ‘encyclopedia’. This could have included Sturla’s notes for his history, not least *Íslendinga saga*, and the saga may have been many years in the making (see also Þorláksson 2002).

The dating of the individual sagas comprising *Sturlunga* will be discussed below (see also Jóhannesson 1946: xxi–xlvi). The arguments which have been advanced as to the dating of the sagas, apart from the *Sturlunga* prologue, are principally historical; that is, references are made in the sagas to later events, or to aspects of antiquity and cultural history. Arguments are also made on the basis of language, the authors’ knowledge of the subject, *rittensl* (textual links between sagas) and artistic aspects of the sagas (see Sveinsson 1965; also Brown 1952a: ix–xxix; Helgadóttir 1987: lxxxi–xci). But the uncertainty which prevails regarding the dating of individual sagas, and the differences of opinion among scholars as to when, for example, *Þorgils saga ok Haflíða* and *Íslendinga saga* were written (Jóhannesson 1946: xxiii–xxiv, xxxviii–xxxix), indicate how inadequate such arguments are; and indeed the sagas are not extant in their original form. On the other hand, developments in saga writing, and the changes which have been made to the individual sagas over the centuries, can hardly be explained without determining their date of writing, at least approximately.

The philological studies that have been made of *Sturlunga* have revealed that the compilation was originally put together from the following separate works (Jóhannesson 1946: xvi–xix):

- 1 *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns* takes place during the Age of Settlement. The compiler of *Sturlunga* is believed to have composed the tale (around 1300) as an introduction of sorts to his work.
- 2 *Þorgils saga ok Haflíða* recounts the conflict between chieftains Þorgils Oddason and Haflíði Másson in 1117–21. Some scholars believe that the saga was written in the late twelfth century, others around 1240 (Brown 1952a: x–xxix).
- 3 *Genealogies*. Some are originally of early date, perhaps even the work of Sturla Þórðarson, while the compiler has added to them.

- 4 *Sturlu saga* recounts the rise of Hvamms-Sturla Þórðarson and his disputes with neighbouring chieftains. The events of the saga take place in 1148–83; it was probably written in the first quarter of the thirteenth century.
- 5 The *Sturlunga* prologue in its present form was put together by the compiler of *Sturlunga*, as discussed above.
- 6 *Prestssaga* tells of the life of Guðmundr Arason from his birth in 1161 until he sailed to Norway in 1202 to be ordained bishop. It is unclear whether the saga was written shortly after Guðmundr became bishop, or after his death in 1237 (Jóhannesson 1952: 92–3)
- 7 *Guðmundar saga dýra* recounts disputes between the chieftains of Eyjafjörðr, principally in 1186–1200. The saga is believed to have been written shortly after Guðmundr's death in 1212.
- 8 *Íslendinga saga* by Sturla Þórðarson, which comprises the bulk of the compilation, begins in 1183, when *Sturlu saga* ends, and continues, in the view of Jóhannesson (1946: xxxiv–viii), until 1262 or 1264. Differing views have been expressed by scholars on the dating of the saga, but the consensus now is that Sturla wrote it towards the end of his life. He died in 1284.
- 9 *Haukdæla þáttir* was written by the compiler. It consists of a summary of the history of the Haukadallr clan from the Settlement until around 1200.
- 10 *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* recounts the life story of the eponymous chieftain and healer, who was slain in 1213 on the orders of Þorvaldr of Vatnsfjörðr. Only the latter part of the saga is included in the compilation, but the saga survives separately. It is now generally dated to 1230–60 (Helgadóttir 1987: lxxxi–xc1).
- 11 *Þórðar saga kakala*, as preserved in *Sturlunga*, tells of its protagonist's years in power in Iceland, 1242–9. The saga was probably written after 1270.
- 12 *Svínfellinga saga* recounts the disputes between Ögmundur Helgason of Kirkjubær and the brothers Sæmundr and Guðmundr Ormsson of Svínafell in the period 1248–52. This saga is believed to have been written after *Íslendinga saga*, probably around 1300.

Until recently scholars agreed that the compiler of *Sturlunga* had not made major changes to the material, and that his additions were minor, relative to the scale of the compilation. In the view of Jóhannesson (1946: xvi–xvii), the compiler worked to two principles: (1) he arranged the content of the separate sagas in chronological order, and (2) where two sagas recounted the same events he generally used only the fuller account. For this reason it is not feasible to reconstruct the content of many of the separate sagas, without lacunae in the account. The author of the present chapter, on the other hand, has contended that more should be ascribed to the compiler of *Sturlunga* than has been believed; and that from a comparison of the sagas which have survived separately it is possible to deduce his interpretation of the form and content of the secular contemporary sagas (Bragason 1986b: 124–81). Tranter (1987) has independently demonstrated that the author of the compilation did far more with

the material than has hitherto been believed – selected, changed the order of episodes, and linked them together to create a semantic whole.

The compiler of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* appears to have applied principles similar to those of the compiler of *Sturlunga*, when he added four more works to the original compilation (Jóhannesson 1946: xix–xxi, xlvi–xlix). These are:

- 1 *Þorgils saga skarða*, which recounts the story of Þorgils's life, mainly in the period 1252–8. The saga was probably written after 1275.
- 2 *Sturlu þáttr*, which is a summary of the life of Sturla Þórðarson from 1262 until his death in 1284. Jóhannesson is of the view that the tale comprises two stages; that the first part is probably an old addition to *Þorgils saga skarða*, while the writer of II composed the latter part.
- 3 *Jarteinasaga Guðmundar biskups*, which was compiled in the first half of the fourteenth century (Magerøy 1959: 22–6).
- 4 *Árna saga biskups*, which in its extant form tells the bishop's life story until the winter of 1290–1. Bishop Árni died in 1298, and the last part of his saga is lost. It is believed to have been written in the early fourteenth century (Hauksson 1972: civ–cvii).

Sturlunga as a Subject of Literary Research

The *Sturlunga* prologue is incontestable evidence that the compilation was seen as a historical text, and *Sturlunga* is still viewed as one of the principal sources for Icelandic history in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The sagas of the compilation, not least *Íslendinga saga*, have been regarded as reliable because they were written shortly after the events took place, and were based on the evidence of contemporaries or eye- or ear-witnesses. Also, the authors, not least Sturla himself, may even have been involved in the events, or witnessed them. Some scholars, however, have drawn attention to the dual nature of *Sturlunga* as a narrative source. On the one hand, it is a collection of accounts of events which have taken place; on the other it is a source of information on its authors and their times. And indeed the word *saga* spans both these meanings: a story, and a discourse. Jóhannesson (1946: xii–xiii) lamented in his introduction to *Sturlunga* that the authors had been more interested in individuals than in national history, and expressed a wish that they had told us more of peaceful activity: government, customs of work, trade, literary work and daily life. He maintained that the sagas in the compilation were not impartial, as many believed, but bore witness to their authors' views and attitudes. Jóhannesson's introduction typifies the source criticism of *Sturlunga* in recent decades.

In fact, few of those scholars who have used the secular contemporary sagas as historical sources have made any attempt to consider their narrative art, or its influence upon their subject matter, let alone its influence in society. It makes no difference whether their purpose is to discuss people and affairs of the twelfth and

thirteenth centuries, or to explain the social customs and cosmology of the people of that time. Many do not even make a distinction between an account based on factual reality, and the events and individuals as they are portrayed in a saga – for they have viewed the sagas of the compilation as a direct, rather than as a mediated, representation of reality. But, as Meulengracht Sørensen (1989) has pointed out, it must be obvious to anyone that the source value of the sagas, including *Sturlunga*, cannot be sensibly evaluated without studying the nature of their narrative.

Some scholars have emphasized the narrative bias of *Sturlunga* in exploring the origins of the sagas and their authors. Ólsen (1902), for instance, argued from the detailed accounts of Gizurr Þorvaldsson and the Skagafjörðr people in *Sturlunga*, and from viewpoints and attitudes in the saga, that a separate *Gizurar saga ok Skagfirðinga* had existed. He employs similar arguments to suggest authors of the sagas in the compilation. Since then, other scholars have employed comparable methods to seek out the authors of the contemporary sagas. In addition, Hallberg (1968: 97–104) made a statistical study of some stylistic features of the sagas in order to determine the identity of the authors. He has, for instance, compared *Þorgils saga skarða* and *Sturlu þátrr* in this manner, and deduced that common features in the styles of these writings supported the old theory that both were written by the same person. Doubt has been cast upon such methods, however, as mentioned above, because medieval writers did not work in the same way as the authors of today, and their notions of originality and authorship were quite different.

It is clear from the work of the above-mentioned scholars that they focused primarily on the literary characteristics of *Sturlunga* from a philological or historical point of view. Few scholars have, on the other hand, studied the narrative art of *Sturlunga* from the viewpoint of narrative theory, and no one has studied the narrative form of the compilation as a whole until recently. This is clearly indicated by a series of lectures delivered at the Ninth International Saga Conference in 1994, which was on the theme of the so-called contemporary sagas, including the sagas of the *Sturlunga* compilation. Only a handful of the scholars approached the sagas of the compilation as literature. But the British literary scholar W. P. Ker (1897, 1957: 246–74) discussed the artistic character of the narratives in *Sturlunga* more than a century ago, judging them as equal to the family sagas. His work should have encouraged more scholars to follow in his footsteps. In the *Sturlustefna* collection (Grímsdóttir and Kristjánsson 1988), the proceedings of a conference on Sturla Þórðarson and his writings, held in 1984, several of the papers did, it is true, discuss Sturla's *Íslendinga saga* as literature – both the narrative approach of the saga and its ideology.

The Norwegian folklorist Knut Liestøl (1929: 56–96) pointed out that the sagas of *Sturlunga* were recounted in the same manner as the family sagas, while containing more material, and devoting less space to individual events. Thus far more characters were mentioned in the secular contemporary sagas than in the family sagas, although direct speech was rarely reported. Liestøl attributed this difference to the sagas having been passed down orally for differing periods of time. Hallberg (1976) has made a comparison of the accounts of the burning of Flugumýrr in *Íslendinga saga* and that of

Njáll and his family at Bergþórshváll in *Njáls saga*. Hallberg points out that in general both are written in the same objective style. But he maintains that there is a fundamental difference between the two accounts, which he attributes to Sturla's *Íslendinga saga* being a documentary work, while *Njáls saga* is literary fiction. Thus Sturla's account is extensive, sometimes inconsistent, and complex, with less clear characterization than the one in *Njáls saga*.

Kristjánsson (1988b) has compared the structure or composition of the family sagas and those of the contemporary sagas, especially *Íslendinga saga*: genealogies, dreams, visions and portents, ball games, horse fights, skirmishes and battles, and the characters' composure and courage. He reaches the conclusion that the composition of the sagas varies from one to another, and hence that they are not composed to a formula, and indeed he is of the view that the structure and ordering of the contemporary sagas reflect the recounting of real events in chronological order, in accordance with accounts by eyewitnesses or other informants; thus he appears not to consider the possibility of a saga taking shape while still in oral form, or that literary conventions may affect how a saga is recorded in written form. The two forms of saga are consistent, however, according to Jónas, in their descriptions of the characters' stoicism and bravery at the hour of death, while there is a considerable difference between the contemporary sagas and family sagas in the frequency of individual events and motifs.

Heller (1977), on the other hand, believes that *rittensl* (relations between works of literature that develop in a written rather than an oral tradition) exist between the family sagas and the secular contemporary sagas. He has pointed out, for instance, that *Fóstbræðra saga*, *Gísla saga* and *Laxdæla saga* borrow from *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*. He is also of the view (Heller 1961) that the author of *Laxdæla* was familiar with *Sturlu saga*. Heller (1964) has further argued that the author of *Svínfellinga saga* used *Vápnfirðinga saga* and perhaps also *Laxdæla saga* for his writing. Other scholars have drawn attention to *rittensl* between contemporary sagas and other sagas. This should serve to prove that distinctions between different types of saga were far from clear in the medieval literary system.

Sigurður Nordal (1953: esp. 180–2, 214–16, 226–8, 267) believed that the contemporary sagas were the result of a gradual process: that information had first been collected, and that this material had then been recounted in individual sagas. The *Sturlunga* compilation was thus the final stage of this process. Vogt (1913) wrote about the composition of *Sturlu saga* and *Guðmundar saga dýra*. As in his other studies of the sagas, he assumed that the authors had shaped their narratives from oral accounts they had collected. He saw *Sturlu saga* as a form of collection of three different accounts, which were linked together on the basis of chronology, although there was little else to connect them. Foote (1950–1), on the contrary, was of the view that the character description of Hvamms-Sturla was consistent throughout *Sturlu saga*, and contended that the saga had been conceived in its entirety. While Vogt (1913) considered that *Guðmundar saga dýra* formed a consistent entity with regard to its structure as a biography, its theme being the burning of Langahlíð, and the

background and consequences of that event, Magnús Jónsson (1940) maintained that *Guðmundar saga dýra* was a collection of 12 separate tales, which had been arranged in chronological order by its author or compiler.

Jacqueline Simpson (1960, 1961), who has made an extensive study of *Guðmundar saga dýra*, disagrees with Magnús Jónsson's findings. She shows how the 'facts' are presented artistically in the saga, and argues that the composition of the saga, and its characterization, content, narrative method and wording serve to vindicate Guðmundr. Helgadóttir (1987; see also Bragason 1988; Tranter 1989) has explained how the choice of material, presentation, characterization and structure of *Hrafn saga* serve the author's purpose as stated in the foreword; that is, to justify Hrafn and compare him to the saints. Hreinsson (1994) has discussed the narrative nature of *Sturlu saga* and described how it uses events which are supposed to have taken place in history. He sees the saga as recounting the rise of the chieftain Sturla to become one of the country's magnates.

Meulengracht Sørensen (1988b) has explained the narrative method of *Íslendinga saga*, especially how events are staged in the account of the Orlygsstaðir battle, and the background to it. He points out that the method of staging is the same as that used in the family sagas. He also demonstrates that the author selected and interpreted the material in order to create a consistent narrative, contrary to what has generally been maintained. These studies of the narratives of the contemporary sagas show that they have an artistic form, although they originate in 'external reality'. This reality is mainly known to us from *Sturlunga*, and we rarely have any other independent sources for these events.

Benediktsson (1961) discussed the Icelanders' interest in dreams, supernatural events and prophecies. He showed that these factors were expertly used in the saga to build suspense in the narrative, and to keep the audience on tenterhooks, waiting to hear about important events. Glendinning (1974) has also discussed the dreams and prophecies in the saga. His conclusion is that the saga uses dreams and prophecies both to foreshadow fateful events and draw attention to them, as was customary in medieval Icelandic literature, and also to explain these events indirectly, and to make ethical judgements of both people and causes. He contends that in this manner most of the dreams are connected to the main theme of the first half of *Íslendinga saga*: the rise and fall of the Sturlung clan.

Meulengracht Sørensen (1988a) takes the view that the dream of Jóreiðr in *Íslendinga saga*, in which Guðrún Gjúkadóttir appears (see chapters 5 and 25 of the present volume), serves to indicate the problems arising from ties of friendship and family, which are a recurrent theme of thirteenth-century Icelandic literature. Pálsson (1983) has drawn attention to learned ideas in a dream-verse in *Íslendinga saga*. Foote (1986) explains the symbolism of three dream-verses in *Hrafn saga*, and points out parallel instances, for example in *Sólarljóð* (see chapter 3 above). Guðrún Nordal (1990) has discussed dream-verses in *Íslendinga saga*, which she links to medieval visionary poetry (cf. chapter 19 above), and Kristjánsdóttir (1990) discerns a connection between Jóreiðr's dreams and such poetry. Both are in agreement with

Glendinning's view that dreams are used in the saga to advance the author's moral views. From these dreams it is clear that the sagas of the compilation are not as realistic as they may appear at first sight, but blend the fantastic and mythic with the mode of the realistic, as Clunies Ross (1998: 14–17) has pointed out.

Pálsson (1988) has studied poetry attributed to Sturla Þórðarson, including fragments of poetry and individual verses preserved in *Sturlunga*, and pointed out that the author speaks more clearly in verse than in prose when he discusses his own problems. Guðrún Nordal (1992a) has also argued that it is possible to infer Sturla's views on people and issues from the verses.

Ciklamini (1983) believes that the character descriptions of *Íslendinga saga* reveal the moral principle that people are responsible for their own deeds. Ciklamini (1988; cf. Bragason 1986a) also believes that the life of Sturla Sighvatsson is recounted with Christian sympathy and theological understanding in the saga. She argues that by God's grace, Sturla changes and renounces his prior violence and overweening pride, and that his actions at the hour of his death indicate that he repents his earlier deeds. Gunnar Karlsson (1988: 206) says that *Íslendinga saga* reveals tension 'between two forms of moral imperative: on the one hand the principle of bravery, heroism, strength, vengeance, and on the other the principle of peace, conciliation, respect for human life and even submission'. That conflict is, however, condemned in the saga. From this Gunnar draws the conclusion that the saga was written in, and about, a society which glorified the martial, while Sturla himself lamented the warlike times. Guðrún Nordal (1989) takes a similar view; she believes that Sturla displays the most respect for those who were least involved in armed conflict. Jakobsson (1994), too, sees *Íslendinga saga* as a saga extolling peace, and as a condemnation of those leaders in society who instigated slaughter and conflict (see also Þorláksson 2002).

Guðrún Nordal (1998) has discussed how loyalty, marital fidelity, disloyalty and disregard for human life appear in Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga*, and compares these with matters relating to kinship, sexual conduct, motivation and personal conscience in the Icelandic family sagas, in order to reveal how the ethics of *Íslendinga saga* differ from those of the family sagas, even though the society described may have been subject to the same rules. She stresses that the ethics of the saga must be considered in relation to the narrative method and overall presentation of the content, and that the complex ethics exemplified in the saga should teach scholars not to generalize about Icelandic society in the thirteenth century.

Joseph (1971) has discussed *Haukdæla þáttur*, which he sees as a natural introduction to the content of *Sturlunga*. He maintains that the tale explains how a trick of fate led to the existence of Gizurr Þorvaldsson, the enemy of the Sturlungar. Heinrichs (1995) is in agreement with Joseph's view that the tale illustrates the importance of fate in the compilation's descriptions of human life. Ciklamini (1981) contends, on the other hand, that divine providence is the leitmotif of *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns*. She takes the view that the message of the tale is significant for *Sturlunga* as a whole, and that it is intended to demonstrate that the bloodshed and human cruelty in the sagas of the compilation are determined by providence. By the same token, Ciklamini (1984)

believes that the intention of the author of *Sturlu þáttur* was to convince the audience that moral strength makes people's lives more tolerable and comprehensible in an uncertain world. These widely varying views on the ideas of the compilation indicate both that the compiler did not present a consistent message, and that the moral messages of the individual sagas are multi-faceted, as Guðrún Nordal (1998) has pointed out with regard to *Íslendinga saga*.

Krömmelbein (1994), too, has discussed *Geirmundar þáttur*, which he sees as an introduction to an interpretation of the civil warfare recounted in the compilation, dealing with disequilibrium and change in the religious and social order. Guðrún Nordal (2000: 222) has also used the tale as a key to the ideas of the compilation on 'the myth of the settlement, the aristocratic background of the ruling class, the importance of kinship and Christian values, and the role of the poet and writer in this society'.

Andersson (1967) studied the form of the Icelandic family sagas, and Harris (1972) the form of the *Íslendingaþættir* (tales of Icelanders) in the sagas of kings, in order to try to define more clearly the classifications of Old Icelandic literature. They reached the conclusion that the story followed a certain formula in each of the two categories. Andersson analysed a pattern of conflict or vengeance in the narratives of the Icelandic family sagas, comprising six narrative stages, always in the same order: (1) introduction of the protagonists, (2) development of a conflict, (3) violent climax of the conflict, (4) revenge, (5) reconciliation, and (6) aftermath or concluding remarks (cf. chapter 6 above). Harris discerned in the tales of Icelanders a pattern of travels abroad, whose main feature is a dispute with a foreign leader, usually a king of Norway, followed by a reconciliation. It has been pointed out, however, that these narrative patterns are not specific to the family sagas and tales of Icelanders, but also appear in other sagas, such as the contemporary sagas (Lönnroth 1976: 71; Bragason 1986b: 56–68).

Clunies Ross (1993) has discussed genealogical structure as a principle of literary organization in early Iceland, for instance in the contemporary sagas; the basis of the literary and historiographical tradition is the conception of history as family-generated and family-linked. She has also sought (Clunies Ross 1998) to demonstrate how societal myth functions as an interpretative tool and presupposes certain thought processes peculiar to the medieval Icelandic mind. She has stressed that in the contemporary sagas history is combined with literature, which enables them to express complex meanings, including mythic ones. By examining the sagas in this way, it is possible to explain such factors as predictions and dreams, which have posed a problem to scholars who have seen them solely as historical writings.

Meulengracht Sørensen (1977: 165–9) has argued that medieval saga writers used historical material in order to describe and explain common ideas about historical development and life itself. He points to the author of *Sturlu þáttur* as an example: the author, he says, set out with the idea that the events he intended to recount expressed ideas about the hero who travels abroad, finds himself and returns home rich and famous. The author then chose the material of the narrative in accordance with these

ideas and the appropriate narrative pattern. The audience in their turn understood the tale by connection with other narratives based on the same idea, and having the same narrative form.

Byock (1982) is of the view that the narratives of disputes and power blocs in the family sagas and the secular contemporary sagas reflect the major problem of medieval Icelandic society, namely that of subduing troublemakers and resolving disputes. The progress of the narratives, according to Byock, gives a true picture of how disputes developed in society. His study is, however, mainly concerned with the form of the sagas rather than with medieval society. He analyses three main factors in accounts of conflict: quarrel, mediation and resolution (see also chapter 6 above). These, he says, are put together into larger units, not necessarily in the order stated. The units of narrative are then linked together in a series of accounts of alliances and disputes. Byock's formal analysis differs from Andersson's study of the family sagas mainly in assigning major significance to mediation in the narrative. This may probably be attributed to Byock's including the secular contemporary sagas in his study. Heusler (1912) had pointed out that efforts to reach agreement were more complex in *Sturlunga* than in the family sagas, and that mediation was more common in the former.

Tranter (1987) focuses on the intentions of the compiler in writing the compilation, and demonstrates how his intentions may be discerned in the saga. Tranter shows how the compiler conflates the sagas, cuts and adapts them, as may be seen by comparing *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* and the parts of it extant in the compilation. He says that the manner in which the compiler of *Sturlunga* handles *Hrafn saga* may be seen in the compiler's interest in disputes, their causes and their solution; that the sagas in the compilation, from and including *Þorgils saga ok Haflíða* to the end of *Hrafn saga*, demonstrate that the less well prepared national leaders were to resolve disputes, the longer and more severe the conflict; that the latter part of the work goes on to show the evil consequences for the Icelanders when permanent conciliation was not achieved; and that *Sturlunga* is a parable, compiled as a warning to Iceland's fourteenth-century leaders (see also Tranter 1989).

The author of the present chapter has, in several articles and in his unpublished doctoral thesis (Bragason 1986a, 1986b, 1988, 1990), sought in the first place to demonstrate that the distinction drawn between family sagas and secular contemporary sagas as different categories of saga is largely unfounded, as the narratives of the sagas of both types are subject to the same rules. Second, he has stressed the need to take account of the narrative form, bias and theme when the sagas of *Sturlunga* are used as historical sources. Third, he has demonstrated that the compiler was very familiar with the narrative principles of the sagas, and brought out certain ideas in the sagas he had collected, by means of interpolations, omissions and connections, as Tranter (1987, 1989) has explained.

Sigurður Nordal deemed it important to examine the evolution of Icelandic saga writing as a whole, and not only specific categories of saga. In his 'Sagalitteraturen' (1953), he placed the sagas of *Sturlunga* and the compilation in such a literary context. While Nordal stressed the need to consider the sagas as a whole and in context, saga

research in recent decades has concentrated far more on the differences between categories of sagas than on their common features. *Sturlunga saga* has been studied principally as a source for contemporary events, the family sagas as artistic narratives. It would undoubtedly be far more correct to focus on intertextuality and dialogue between sagas, and between categories of saga, as Clunies Ross (1997: 451–2) has pointed out. Account should also be taken, in considering *Sturlunga saga*, of studies made in recent years of the narrative theory of the sagas. Ker (1897, 1957: 265–6) long ago pointed out, with insight and profound understanding, that Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga* was on the one hand tied to fact, and on the other confined to a narrative form which relied relatively little on historical fact and recounted events that were relatively remote in time, that is, the family-saga form. Clover's study (1982) of the narrative form of the sagas makes available the possibility of interpreting them as open compositions with multiple meaning, and examining them in the context of medieval narrative principles. Attention should also be paid to the manner in which they have changed in transmission, both in memory and in writing and copying, through being 'adjusted to the needs of a particular story or the whims of an individual narrator' (Clover 1982: 27); they should not be seen as closed texts tied to specific authors.

Sturlunga as a Historical Source

Only by studying the laws of the narrative in *Sturlunga* is it possible to ascertain what kind of interpretation of contemporary events is contained in the sagas and the compilation, and why. The source value of the compilation cannot be determined without taking account of the sagas' narratology. Clover (1985: 255) has pointed out that there is no guarantee of the veracity of the secular contemporary sagas, even though they recount recent events. It is arguable that political and social pressure during the Sturlung Age made falsifications inevitable. She has also stressed that the contemporary sagas are more literary in their presentation than the dry chronicles compiled elsewhere in Europe at that time. Jóhannesson (1946: xiii), in fact, thought that the minutiae in the narrative of *Dorgils saga ok Hafliða* had misled those scholars who believed that the saga had been written shortly after the events it describes. It should indeed be obvious that a 'realistic' tone in a story is no guarantee that it is true. Jóhannesson also stated that many people had misinterpreted the objective narrative method of *Sturlunga*, and inferred that the sagas in the compilation were impartial. He himself made no attempt, however, to explain the rules applying to the sagas regarding choice of material, structure, narrative method and composition.

The secular contemporary sagas were histories, in the view of their writers and of their contemporaries. As Bagge (1986: 56–7) has pointed out, history was one of the main literary forms in Iceland and Norway in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and the principal forum of the intelligentsia. He is of the view that writing history helped develop their minds. John M. Simpson (1976) has also maintained that Sturla Þórðarson's political activities are marked by his writing and the objectivity of the

sagas. Thus it is necessary, in order to determine both the source value of the contemporary sagas and the effects of the saga tradition in society, to take account of their narrative art.

The widely differing views on the veracity of the secular contemporary sagas on the one hand, and the sagas set in more remote periods on the other, emerge clearly in studies which use *Sturlunga* as a source for the time in which the family sagas were written. In the first place, many scholars claim to have seen indications that the authors of the family sagas used subject matter from their own time in their sagas. Second, the family sagas have been compared with *Sturlunga*, and have been treated as *romans à clef* by scholars seeking to identify their authors. Thirdly, some scholars have believed that the family sagas reflect, or offer parallels to, the period in which they were written.

Sveinsson's book *Sturlungaöld* (1940; translated as *The Age of the Sturlungs*, 1953) is largely based upon the *Sturlunga* account. Sveinsson saw the Sturlung Age as a time of struggle between conventional and acquired values, between Icelandic attitudes and the policy of the church and the king of Norway, between Icelandic culture and foreign influences. His view was that the best in the culture of the century had its roots in Icelandic tradition and attitudes, and belief in the values of the individual. Boyer (1975), on the other hand, has argued that the so-called 'heathen remnants' in the contemporary sagas are an invention of the authors, perhaps even based on foreign prototypes. None the less, he has drawn inferences about medieval Icelanders from these sagas. Like Sveinsson, Boyer (1967) emphasizes their respect for the nature of the individual, and their realistic attitude to life. But Pálsson (2001) has warned against using the contemporary sagas as a source for twelfth- and thirteenth-century moral ideals, while at the same time pointing out that *Íslendinga saga* is an important source for thirteenth-century Icelandic cosmology.

Although historians have discovered faults in the narratives of the sagas in the *Sturlunga* compilation, and believed that they display a narrative bias, credence in the veracity of the sagas is still strong, especially in the case of *Íslendinga saga*. The compiler of *Sturlunga* has, however, been severely criticized for his work as a historian. Finnur Jónsson (1923: 721) was censorious, saying that the compiler's only objective had been to pile up historical material, regardless of whether there was any connection between events. Ólsen, on the other hand (1902: 508; see also Sigurðsson 1933–5: 6–7), had deemed the author very well informed about the history of Iceland, and said that the author had made special efforts to understand the chronology of the sagas he included in the compilation. Whereas Jóhannesson (1946: xiii) nevertheless maintained that the chronology of *Sturlunga* was unclear, Einarsdóttir (1964: 253–326) has shown that the author of *Prestsaga* dated events specifically with reference to the years of Guðmundr Arason's life in which they took place, and that the composition of *Íslendinga saga* is based on a firm chronology, with events dated by the old seasonal calendar, or by reference to saints' days or other important ecclesiastical festivals. It is, indeed, precisely these two sagas which form the basis of the chronology of the compilation, as witness the *Sturlunga* prologue.

Ólason (1994: 801) has discerned three methods of approaching contemporary events in Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga*: 'an epic or heroic mode of interpretation inherent in the narrative tradition of the community, a Christian mode of interpretation referring to the myth or the master narrative of the Fall and Redemption of Man, and finally, a political mode of interpretation which is called forth by the text's status as history'. This analysis of modes of interpretation may to some extent be applied to the way in which scholars have approached the compilation as a whole, and the sagas it contains. As already noted, the last-mentioned mode of interpretation has been predominant in studies of *Sturlunga*. In recent years the sagas of the compilation have largely been used as cultural case studies, and seen as providing evidence for the norms and rules of medieval Icelandic society (see, for example, Byock 1982; Miller 1990; Jochens 1995). But Lönnroth (1994) has criticized this approach, on the grounds that it does not take sufficient account of the literary effect of the sagas, and allows little space for the mythic in the overall interpretation. The author of the present chapter has criticized historians for not understanding the narrative nature of the contemporary sagas, and pointed out that the narrative method and attitudes of the *Sturlunga* sagas resemble those of the family sagas (see, for example, Bragason 1986b, 1992). Guðrún Nordal (2000) has drawn attention to the mythical overlay in the compilation.

Sturlunga saga, like other sagas, is a medium of cultural memory. Hence it may be approached from the viewpoint of literary anthropology (see Bragason 1993). As the medievalist R. Howard Bloch (1983: 15–16) has pointed out, medieval writing 'both reflects its cultural moment, thus enabling anthropological description, and is a prime vehicle for the change of that which it reflects'. For Bloch, the medieval text 'is a "generator of public consciousness", which [latter] can be said to exist *through* it [that is, through the text] just as society can be said to exist through language'. The narrative form of the contemporary sagas must be so considered, before they are used as sources for their time. The sagas are an artefact that is textual in nature, and the 'historically real' may be discerned only by examining the processes of the text, which create its meaning. If the compilation is examined in its entirety as a textual production, and if a distinction is made between the signified of the signifier and its referent, the *Sturlunga* compilation in all its complexity can be a mine of information on the culture and mindset of the century that created it, whether with regard to honour, vengeance, mediation, blood ties, friendship, marriage or concubinage, to mention but a few of the subjects on which historians and literary scholars have drawn conclusions from the compilation in recent decades.

See also CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; EDDIC POETRY; FAMILY SAGAS; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PSEUDO-HISTORY; MANUSCRIPTS AND PALAEOGRAPHY; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; PROSE OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; SAGAS OF ICELANDIC PREHISTORY; SHORT PROSE NARRATIVE; SKALDIC POETRY; SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Editions and Translations

- Guðmundar sögur biskups*, ed. Stefán Karlsson (Editiones Arnarnagæanæ B: 6). Copenhagen: 1983.
- Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, ed. Guðrún P. Helgadóttir. Oxford: 1987.
- Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar: B-redaktionen*, ed. Annette Hasle (Editiones Arnarnagæanæ B: 25). Copenhagen: 1967.
- Membrana Regia Deperdita*, ed. Agnete Loth (Editiones Arnarnagæanæ A: 5). Copenhagen: 1960.
- The Saga of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson: The Life of an Icelandic Physician of the Thirteenth Century*, transl. Anne Tjomslund (Islandica 35). Ithaca, NY: 1951.
- 'The Saga of the Men on Svínafell: An Episode from the Age of the Sturlungs', transl. Richard Ringler. In John M. Weinstock (ed.) *Saga og Språk: Studies in Languages and Literature. Presented to Lee M. Hollander*. Austin, TX: 1972, pp. 9–30.
- Sturlunga saga*, eds. Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason and Kristján Eldjárn. 2 vols. Reykjavík: 1946.
- Sturlunga saga*, ed. Kristian Kålund. 2 vols. Copenhagen: 1906–11.
- Sturlunga saga*, transl. Kristian Kålund. 2 vols. Copenhagen: 1904.
- Sturlunga saga*, transls. Julia H. McGrew and R. George Thomas. 2 vols. (Library of Scandinavian Literature 9–10). New York: 1970–4.
- Sturlunga saga*, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson. 3 vols. Reykjavík: 1988.
- Sturlunga saga*, ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon. 2 vols. Oxford: 1878.
- Sturlunga-Saga eðr Íslendinga-Saga bin mikla*. 2 vols. Copenhagen: 1817–20.
- Sturlunga saga: Manuscript No. 122 A Fol. in the Arnarnagæan Collection*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson (Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile 1). Copenhagen: 1958.
- Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, ed. Ursula Brown. London: 1952.

Secondary Literature

- Andersson, Theodore M. (1967) *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading* (Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 28). Cambridge, MA.
- Bagge, Sverre (1986) 'The Formation of the State and Concepts of Society in 13th Century Norway.' In Elisabeth Vestergaard (ed.) *Continuity and Change: Political Institutions and Literary Monuments in the Middle Ages*. Odense, pp. 43–59.
- Benediktsson, Gunnar (1961) *Sagnameistarinn Sturla*. Reykjavík.
- Bloch, R. Howard (1983) *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages*. Chicago. Paperback edn. 1986.
- Boyer, Régis (1967) *L'Islandais des sagas d'après les 'sagas de contemporain'* (Contributions du Centre d'Études Arctiques et Finno-Scandinaves 6). Paris.
- Boyer, Régis (1975) 'Paganism and Literature: The So-Called "Pagan Survivals" in the *samtíðarsögur*.' *Gripla* 1, 135–67 (Rit Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar 7). Reykjavík.
- Bragason, Úlfar (1986a) 'Hetjudauði Sturlu Sighvattssonar.' *Skírnir* 160, 64–78.
- Bragason, Úlfar (1986b) 'On the Poetics of *Sturlunga*.' Doctoral dissertation, Berkeley.
- Bragason, Úlfar (1988) 'The Structure and Meaning of *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*.' *Scandinavian Studies* 60, 267–92.
- Bragason, Úlfar (1990) 'Sturlunga saga: Atburðir og frásögn.' *Skáldskaparmál* 1, 73–88.
- Bragason, Úlfar (1992) 'Sturlunga: Textar and rannsóknir.' *Skáldskaparmál* 2, 176–206.
- Bragason, Úlfar (1993) 'Um ættartölur í *Sturlungu*.' *Tímarit Máls og menningar* 54.1, 27–35.
- Brown, Ursula (1952a) 'Introduction.' In Ursula Brown (ed.) *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*. London, pp. ix–lxii.
- Brown, Ursula (1952b) 'A Note on the Manuscripts of *Sturlunga saga*.' *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* 22, 33–40.

- Byock, Jesse L. (1982) *Feud in the Icelandic Saga*. Berkeley.
- Ciklamini, Marlene (1981) 'Divine Will and the Guises of Truth in *Geirmundar þáttur beljar-skinns*.' *Skandinavistik* 11, 81–8.
- Ciklamini, Marlene (1983) 'Biographical Reflections in *Íslendinga saga*: A Mirror of Personal Values.' *Scandinavian Studies* 55, 205–21.
- Ciklamini, Marlene (1984) 'Veiled Meaning and Narrative Modes in *Sturlu þáttur*.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 99, 139–50.
- Ciklamini, Marlene (1988) 'Sturla Sighvatsson's Chieftaincy: A Moral Probe.' *Sturlustefna*, 222–41.
- Clover, Carol J. (1982) *The Medieval Saga*. Ithaca, NY.
- Clover, Carol J. (1985) 'Icelandic Family Sagas.' In Carol J. Clover and John Lindow (eds.) *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide* (Icelandica 45). Ithaca, NY, pp. 239–315.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret (1993) 'The Development of Old Norse Textual Worlds: Genealogical Structure as a Principle of Literary Organisation in Early Iceland.' *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 92, 372–85.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret (1997) 'The Intellectual Complexion of the Icelandic Middle Ages: Toward a New Profile of Old Icelandic Saga Literature.' *Scandinavian Studies* 69, 443–53.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret (1998) *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, vol. 2 (Viking Collection 10). Odense.
- Einarsdóttir, Ólafía (1964) *Studier i kronologisk metode i tidlig islandske historieskrivning* (Bibliotheca Historica Lundensis 13). Lund.
- Einarsdóttir, Ólafía (1968) 'Om de to håndskrifter af Sturlunga saga.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 83, 44–80.
- Foote, Peter G. (1950–1) 'Sturlusaga and its background.' *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 13, 207–37.
- Foote, Peter G. (1986) 'Three Dream-Stanzas in *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*.' In Rudolf Simek, Jónas Kristjánsson and Hans Bekker-Nielsen (eds.) *Sagnaskemmtun: Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson*. Vienna, pp. 99–109.
- Glendinning, Robert J. (1974) *Träume und Vorbedeutung in der Íslendinga saga Sturla Thordarsons: Eine Form- und Stiluntersuchung* (Kanadische Studien zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur 8). Bern.
- Grímsdóttir, Guðrún Ása (1982) 'Um afskipti erkibiskupa af íslenskum málefnum á 12. og 13. öld.' *Saga* 20, 28–62.
- Grímsdóttir, Guðrún Ása and Kristjánsson, Jónas (eds.) (1988) *Sturlustefna* (Rit Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar 32). Reykjavík.
- Hallberg, Peter (1968) *Stilsignalement och författarskap i norrön sagalitteratur: Synpunkter och exempel* (Nordistica Gothoburgensia 3). Gothenburg.
- Hallberg, Peter (1976) 'Två mordbränder i det medeltida Island.' *Gardar* 7, 25–45.
- Harris, Joseph C. (1972) 'Genre and Narrative Structure in Some *Íslendinga þættir*.' *Scandinavian Studies* 44, 1–27.
- Hauksson, Þorleifur (1972) 'Introduction.' In Þorleifur Hauksson (ed.) *Árna saga biskups* (Rit Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar 2). Reykjavík, pp. vii–cix.
- Heinrichs, Anne (1995) 'Die jüngere und die ältere Þóra: Form und Bedeutung einer Episode in *Haukdæla þáttur*.' *Alvísmál* 5, 3–28.
- Helgadóttir, Guðrún P. (1987) 'Introduction.' In Guðrún P. Helgadóttir (ed.) *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*. Oxford, pp. xi–cxvi.
- Heller, Rolf (1961) '*Laxdæla saga* und *Sturlunga saga*.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 76, 112–33.
- Heller, Rolf (1964) 'Studien zur *Svinfellingja saga*.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 79, 105–16.
- Heller, Rolf (1977) '*Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* und Isländersagas.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 92, 98–105.
- Heusler, Andreas (1912) *Zum isländischen Fehdewesen in der Sturlungenzeit* (Abhandlung der königl. preuss. Akademie der Wissenschaften. Offprint). Berlin.
- Hreinsson, Viðar (1994) 'Frásagnaraðferð Sturlu sögu.' In *Samtíðarsögur: The Contemporary Sagas: Preprints*, vol. 2. 2 vols. Akureyri, pp. 803–17.
- Jakobsson, Ármann (1994) 'Sannyrði sverða: Vígaferli í Íslendinga sögu og hugmyndafræði sögunnar.' *Skáldskaparmál* 3, 42–78.
- Jochens, Jenny M. (1995) *Women in Old Norse Society*. Ithaca, NY.
- Jóhannesson, Jón (1946) 'Um Sturlunga sögu.' In Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason and Kristján Eldjárn (eds.) *Sturlunga saga*, vol. 2. 2 vols. Reykjavík, pp. vii–lvi.

- Jóhannesson, Jón (1952) 'Tímatál Gerlands í íslenskum ritum frá Þjóðveldisöld.' *Skírnir* 126, 76–93.
- Jónsson, Finnur (1923) *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, vol. 2. 2nd rev. edn. 3 vols. Copenhagen.
- Jónsson, Magnús (1940) *Guðmundar saga dyra: Nokkrar aþbúgarnir um uppruna bennar og samsetning* (Studia Islandica 8). Reykjavík.
- Joseph, Herbert S. (1971) 'Chronology and Persona Voice in the Haukdale Þátr.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 86, 66–71.
- Karlsson, Gunnar (1988) 'Siðamat Íslendingasögu.' In Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir and Jónas Kristjánsson (eds.) *Sturlustefna* (Rit Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar 32). Reykjavík, pp. 204–21.
- Karlsson, Stefán (1988) 'Alfræði Sturlu Þórðarsonar.' In Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir and Jónas Kristjánsson (eds.) *Sturlustefna* (Rit Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar 32). Reykjavík, pp. 37–60.
- Ker, W. P. (1897) *Epic and Romance: Essays on Medieval Literature*. Rev. edn. 1908. Rpt New York, 1957.
- Kristjánssdóttir, Bergljót (1990) '“Hvorki er eg fjölkunnig né vísindakona...”' *Skáldskaparmál* 1, 241–54.
- Kristjánsson, Jónas (1988a) *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature*, transl. Peter Foote. Reykjavík, pp. 187–202.
- Kristjánsson, Jónas (1988b) 'Íslendingasögur og Sturlunga: Samanburður nokkurra einkenna og efnisatriða.' In Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir and Jónas Kristjánsson (eds.) *Sturlustefna* (Rit Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar 32). Reykjavík, pp. 94–111.
- Krömmelbein, Thomas (1994) 'Die Spitzenstellung des *Geirmundar þátr heljatskinns* innerhalb der Kompilation *Sturlunga saga*.' *Alvissmál* 4, 33–50.
- Kålund, Kristian (1901) 'Om håndskrifterne af *Sturlunga saga* og dennes enkelte bestanddele.' *Aarbøger for nordisk oldkyndighed og historie*, 259–300.
- Liestøl, Knut (1929) *Upphavet til den isleandske ættesaga*. Oslo.
- Lönnroth, Lars (1964) 'Tesen om de två kulturerne: Kritiska studier i den isländska sagaskrivningens sociala förutsättningar.' *Scripta Islandica* 15, 1–97.
- Lönnroth, Lars (1976) *Njáls saga: A Critical Introduction*. Berkeley.
- Lönnroth, Lars (1994) 'Sagan som dikt och samhällspegel: Aktuell forskning om fornisländsk litteratur.' *Samlaren* 115, 95–105.
- Magerøy, Hallvard (1959) 'Guðmundr góði og Guðmundr ríki.' *Maal og minne*, 22–34.
- McGrew, Julia H. (1988) 'Sturlunga saga.' In Joseph R. Strayer (ed.) *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, vol. 11. New York, pp. 497–501.
- Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben (1977) *Saga og samfund: En indføring i oldislandske litteratur*. Copenhagen.
- Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben (1988a) 'Guðrún Gjúkadóttir in Miðjumdalr: Zur Aktualität nordischer Heldensage im Island des 13. Jahrhunderts.' In Heinrich Beck (ed.) *Heldensage und Heldendichtung im Germanischen* (Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 2). Berlin, pp. 183–96.
- Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben (1988b) 'Historiefortælleren Sturla Þórðarson.' In Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir and Jónas Kristjánsson (eds.) *Sturlustefna* (Rit Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar 32). Reykjavík, pp. 112–26.
- Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben (1989) 'Den norrøne litteratur og virkeligheden.' *Collegium Medievale* 2, 135–46.
- Miller, William Ian (1990) *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland*. Chicago.
- Nordal, Guðrún (1989) '“Eitt sinn skal hvern deyja”: Dráp og dauðalýsingar í Íslendingasögu.' *Skírnir* 163, 72–94.
- Nordal, Guðrún (1990) '“Nú er hin skarpa skálmöld komin.”' *Skáldskaparmál* 1, 211–25.
- Nordal, Guðrún (1992a) 'Freyr fifldur.' *Skírnir* 167, 271–94.
- Nordal, Guðrún (1992b) 'Sagnarit um innlend efni: Sturlunga saga.' In Guðrún Nordal, Sverrir Tómasson and Vésteinn Ólason (eds.) *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, vol. 1. Reykjavík, pp. 309–44.
- Nordal, Guðrún (1998) *Ethics and Actions in Thirteenth-Century Iceland* (Viking Collection 11). Odense.
- Nordal, Guðrún (2000) 'The Contemporary Sagas and their Social Context.' In Margaret Clunies Ross (ed.) *Old Icelandic Literature and Society* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 42). Cambridge, pp. 221–41.

- Nordal, Sigurður (1953) 'Sagalitterturen.' In Sigurður Nordal (ed.) *Litteraturhistorie B: Norge og Island* (Nordisk kultur 8B). Stockholm, pp. 180–288.
- Ólason, Vésteinn (1994) 'The Political Element in Íslendinga saga: A Summary.' In *Samtíðarsögur: The Contemporary Sagas: Preprints*, vol. 2. 2 vols. Akureyri, pp. 799–802.
- Ólsen, Björn M. (1902) 'Um Sturlungu.' In *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenzkra bókmennta* 3. Copenhagen, pp. 193–510.
- Ólsen, Björn M. (1910) *Om den saakaldte Sturlunga-prolog og dens formodede vidnesbyrd om de islandske slægtsagaers alder* (Christiania videnskabs-selskabs forhandling 6). Christiania [Oslo].
- Pálsson, Hermann (1983) 'Draumvísa í Sturlungu.' *Tímarit Máls og menningar* 44, 565–8.
- Pálsson, Hermann (1988) 'Kveðskapur Sturlu Þórðarsonar.' In Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir and Jónas Kristjánsson (eds.) *Sturlustefna* (Rit Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar 32). Reykjavík, pp. 61–85.
- Pálsson, Hermann (2001) 'Á Örlygsstöðum: Grafist fyrir um eðli Íslendinga sögu.' *Saga* 39, 169–206.
- Sigurðsson, Pétur (1933–5) *Um Íslendinga sögu Sturlu Þórðarsonar* (Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenzkra bókmennta 6). Reykjavík.
- Simpson, Jacqueline (1960) 'Samfellan í Guðmundar sögu dýra.' *Skírnir* 134, 152–76.
- Simpson, Jacqueline (1961) 'Advocacy and Art in Guðmundar saga dýra.' *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 15, 327–45.
- Simpson, Jacqueline and Hare, Ian R. (1960) 'Some Observations on the Relationship of the II-Class Paper MSS of *Sturlunga saga*.' *Opuscula* 1, 190–200 (Bibliotheca Arnarnagæana 20). Copenhagen.
- Simpson, John M. (1976) 'Sturla Þórðarson as Politician and Writer.' Paper given at the Third International Saga Conference Oslo 26–31 júlí 1976. Photocopy.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur (1940) *Sturlungaöld: Drög um íslenzka menningu á 13. öld*. Reykjavík.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur (1965) *Ritunartími Íslendingasagna: Röð og rannsóknaraðferð*. Reykjavík.
- Tranter, Stephen N. (1987) *Sturlunga saga: The Role of the Creative Compiler*. Frankfurt.
- Tranter, Stephen N. (1989) "'Trúa því margir, er logit er, en tortryggja þat satt er": Aussageabsichten der *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*.' In Otmar Werner (ed.) *Arbeiten zur Skandinavistik*. Frankfurt, pp. 137–61.
- Þorláksson, Helgi (2002) 'Sturla Þórðarson, minni og vald.' In *Íslenska söguþingið: Proceedings*, vol. 2. 2 vols. Reykjavík, pp. 319–41.
- Vigfússon, Guðbrandur (1878) 'Prolegomena.' In Guðbrandur Vigfússon (ed.) *Sturlunga saga*, vol. 1. 2 vols. Oxford, pp. xv–ccxiv.
- Viljoen, Leonie (1994) 'The British Text of *Svínfellinga saga*: Bad Copy or Creative Compilation?' In *Samtíðarsögur: The Contemporary Sagas: Proceedings*, vol. 2. 2 vols. Akureyri, pp. 818–31.
- Vogt, Walther H. (1913) 'Charakteristiken aus der Sturlungasaga.' *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 56, 376–409.

Sagas of Icelandic Prehistory

(*fornaldarsögur*)

Torfi H. Tulinius

Description

The term *fornaldarsaga Norðurlanda* (pl. *fornaldarsögur*) means ‘a tale of the Nordic countries in ancient times’. It is not a medieval concept, but was created by the Danish philologist Carl Christian Rafn (1795–1864), who first collected these sagas from different manuscripts and published them under this blanket title in his three-volume edition of 1829–30. Time has proved it an apt term for this group of sagas, since it is still in use in Iceland and is commonly used by specialists in other countries. In English they have also been referred to as ‘legendary sagas’ and ‘mythical-heroic sagas’. Of these two the latter term seems preferable from a literary perspective, telling us that they are tales of heroes steeped in a world of legends and myths. However, Rafn’s original name tells us more about their relationship to the rest of the saga literature: what distinguishes them from other sagas is their chronological and geographical setting. Unlike the contemporary sagas or sagas of Icelanders, they take place in the Nordic (or Germanic) world and not in Iceland; and unlike the kings’ sagas, they are set in the period before the unification of Norway by Haraldr Finehair, a turn of events which the saga writers believed was contemporaneous with the settlement of Iceland. It can therefore be said that the *fornaldarsögur* reflect the way the past of the Nordic world was constructed through the development of literature in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iceland. The social world in which the saga writers lived was seen as having its origin in the period of the settlement of Iceland and the beginnings of the Norwegian royal dynasty. What happened or was imagined to have happened before was treated as legendary prehistory, and became material for works such as those collected and edited by Rafn. The term is thus a useful one in the context of literary history.

This does not mean that it is fully satisfying in the context of genre. As we will see in the following sections, the texts found in Rafn’s or later editions of the

fornaldarsögur differ significantly from each other from a generic perspective, which raises questions about both the origin and the development of this group of sagas.

There are 25 *fornaldarsögur*. Among the most famous of them is without doubt *Völsunga saga* ('The Saga of the Völsungar'), based largely on the heroic lays of the Poetic Edda concerning Sigurðr the slayer of Fáfnir, and used extensively by Wagner in his *Ring of the Nibelung*. Other widely known *fornaldarsögur* are *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* ('The Saga of Ragnarr Hairy-breeches'), an account of the deeds and heroic death of the Danish Viking king of that name; *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* ('The Saga of Hervör and Heiðrekr'), the history of several generations of heroes connected by the possession of the cursed sword Tyrfingr; and finally *Orvar-Odds saga* ('The Saga of Arrow-Oddr', that is, 'of Oddr the Archer'), the story of the Norwegian Viking hero Oddr who was blessed with a life-span three times the length of a normal man but tragically had to suffer the loss of all those who were dearest to him.

In addition to the 25 sagas, eight shorter texts or fragments are associated with the *fornaldarsögur*. These are either fragments of lost older texts, such as *Sögubrot af fornkonungum* ('Fragments about Kings of Ancient Times'), or short narratives concerning Nordic prehistory that have been interpolated into narratives of historical times. One of the most interesting of these texts is *Nornagests þáttur* ('The Tale of Nornagestr'), which tells of the arrival of a mysterious character at the court of the missionary king Óláfr Tryggvason. He turns out to be over 300 years old and to have been a follower of the Völsungar. He is still a pagan, though prime-signed (that is, signed with the cross as a preliminary to baptism), and the story gives interesting insights into the medieval Icelanders' view of their pagan past (Harris and Hill 1989).

The main vehicle of expression of the *fornaldarsögur* is prose. However, many of them have in common with other saga genres the fact that they contain significant amounts of verse, albeit in varying degrees. The metre employed is in most cases (though not all) *fornyrðislag*, one of the eddic metres, which suggests a special relationship between this particular group of sagas and the eddic tradition, similar to the connection between skaldic poetry and the sagas of kings and of Icelanders. Indeed, most of the preserved eddic poetry not contained in the Codex Regius manuscript comes from the *fornaldarsögur*, as can be seen in *Eddica minora*, Heusler's and Ranisch's 1903 edition of this poetry.

Several attempts have been made to introduce generic distinctions within the corpus. Among the most noteworthy, it is necessary to mention Reuschel's 1933 division of *fornaldarsögur* into three sub-groups: heroic sagas, Viking sagas and adventure sagas. While the boundaries between the sub-groups are, as she recognizes, unstable, this distinction is useful because it brings to light important aspects of the material found in the *fornaldarsögur*: they are based on a tradition of heroic narrative. They reflect the Viking experience of travel, naval battles, and the plundering of foreign countries. Finally, they exploit a rich treasure-hoard of myth and folklore.

Another more recent attempt is Pálsson's suggestion that the *fornaldarsögur* can be divided into two groups: 'hero legends' and 'adventure tales' (Pálsson 1985: 138). The basic characteristics of the former group are their links to an ancient heroic tradition

transmitted, at least in part, through poetry. Quite often parallels to this tradition can be found in the oldest preserved poetry of other Germanic peoples, in Old English (*Beowulf*, *Widsið*) and in Old and Middle High German (*Das Hildebrandslied*, *Das Nibelungenlied*). The 'hero legends' tend to end tragically and, more often than in the sagas of the other group, the narrative stretches over several generations of the same family, usually a royal one. The major representatives of the group are *Völsunga saga*, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* and *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*.

The 'adventure tales', which Pálsson would also like to label 'Viking romances' because they often take place in a world of seafaring Vikings, are none the less closer to a continental romance tradition than the 'heroic legends'. They usually end well for the hero, who is not necessarily of royal or aristocratic background. Though they sometimes portray more than one generation of heroes, this is by no means as common as in the former group. The adventure tales resort to other types of narrative technique in order to augment their subject matter and lengthen their stories.

I believe that Pálsson's taxonomy is a useful one, not only because it aptly describes the corpus but also because it makes sense in terms of understanding how the *fornaldarsögur* came into existence as a type of saga. Note should also be taken, however, of Lönnroth's alternative opinion that it is best not to attempt generic distinctions within the corpus of *fornaldarsögur*, but rather to view the whole of the group as a hybrid genre in which the authors blend in various degrees borrowings from heroic tradition, myth, folklore and continental romance (Lönnroth 2003: 44).

Origins

The oldest manuscripts containing *fornaldarsögur* are from c.1300. *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* was copied into the famous *Hauksbók* manuscript, which has been dated to the first decade of the fourteenth century (Karlsson 1964); a short version of part of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, the *þáttur af Ragnars sonum*, is also preserved in *Hauksbók*. *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* and a version of *Orvar-Odds saga* are to be found in manuscripts dating from the early fourteenth century. Other *fornaldarsögur* are usually found in younger manuscripts. The young age of the manuscripts containing *fornaldarsögur* creates a difficulty. If we had only these to rely upon we could hardly date the appearance of these sagas in medieval Icelandic literature to much earlier than the late thirteenth century, even taking account of the fact that the oldest manuscripts are manifestly copies of earlier ones. An explanation of the lack of older manuscripts may, however, lie in the high entertainment value of this particular type of saga, the popularity of which may have increased the likelihood of manuscript deterioration. However this may be, a variety of facts suggests that the *fornaldarsögur* could have appeared as literature at an earlier date than indicated by the manuscript evidence.

The contemporary sagas record at least two accounts of oral entertainment with material found in *fornaldarsögur*. The first one is the famous description of the wedding-feast at Reykjahólar in 1119. *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, which is dated to the

fourth decade of the thirteenth century, tells how the guests were entertained with stories that are manifestly the same as in a *fornaldarsaga* of which we have only a seventeenth-century version, *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar* (Brown 1952: 17–18). This suggests that stories of this type were considered to be entertaining, certainly in the first third of the thirteenth century, and probably earlier, since the author of *Þorgils saga* claims that the same story was appreciated by King Sverrir of Norway, who died in 1202. It is, however, open to debate whether this saga can be considered a valid source of information about what really happened at the wedding-feast in 1119, since it seems to have been composed so much later (Foote 1953–6; Pálsson 1962; von See 1981; Tómasson 1988: 214–15, 316–17).

Þorgils saga does at least indicate that *fornaldarsaga* material was used for oral entertainment, and as early as the beginning of the thirteenth century. Given the relationship of this material to traditions concerning the past it can however be safely assumed that something similar had been the stuff of oral storytelling for even longer.

The question arises as to whether the type of entertainment described was only oral or had some kind of written basis. Another account suggests that the latter may have been the case. It is also from a contemporary saga, the so-called *Sturlu þátrr*, probably composed in the late thirteenth century. It portrays an incident in the life of the Icelandic chieftain and saga writer Sturla Þórðarson (1214–84). He is in disgrace at the court of the Norwegian king. The king refuses to see him, but the queen hears that he tells stories better than others and asks him to perform. The story he tells about the troll-woman Hulð is obviously a *fornaldarsaga*. His talent earns him the king's friendship and a commission to write the history of his father's reign. Particularly interesting for the present discussion of *fornaldarsaga* origins is the way his invitation to come and tell the story is put into words by the author of the account. Sturla is asked to 'bring the story with him' (Thorsson et al. 1988: 765–6), which implies that it existed in material form, that is, in writing, even though the rest of the account rather suggests that the performance was oral.

The Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus, writing in Latin around 1200, is a frequently cited witness to the Icelanders' reputation as storytellers among other Nordic peoples. The material he gathered from Icelandic sources he mentions is assumed to deal mostly with prehistoric Nordic kings as well as mythology, and can be viewed as an indication of an already flourishing tradition of narrative on these subjects in Iceland at the end of the twelfth century. It is difficult to say whether this tradition was oral or written, or both. An indication that it may have been written is the word *industria* ('diligence') used by Saxo to characterize the Icelanders' activities (Ollrik and Raeder 1931: 1–9). This word seems particularly appropriate for written literature, and Guðnason (1981) has pointed to the fact that by the time Saxo was composing his great work, the now lost Icelandic history of Danish kings known as *Skjöldunga saga* was already in existence and may have been one of Saxo's written sources. Though it belonged to the genre of the kings' sagas and therefore was not precisely a *fornaldarsaga*, the surviving fragments tell us that it was a history of the legendary Danish dynasty and used material that we find in the *fornaldarsögur*.

Sveinsson (1959) thought it most likely that the *fornaldarsögur* were an offshoot of the kings' sagas, and this would be quite in keeping with the development of vernacular literature in the rest of Europe slightly earlier – with, for example, the probable importance of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia de regum Britanniae* (c.1136) in bringing the Arthurian material into literary circles, and thus paving the way for the composition of romance in the second half of the twelfth century in England and France.

Interest in the legendary past, and the expression of this interest through the writing of history and the composition of literary fiction, seem indeed to have been a result of the strengthening of European kingdoms and the rise of aristocratic culture in the twelfth century. It is not surprising that the same developments should occur in the Nordic countries, since the Danish and Norwegian kings were also becoming increasingly powerful and the ruling class was adapting to models of aristocratic behaviour that were in fashion further south. It is quite possible to view the appearance of *fornaldarsögur* in this context and to consider the heroic, legendary and mythical traditions exploited in the sagas as a 'matter of the north', akin to the three 'matières' of Rome, France and Britain exploited by romance authors in the twelfth century (Leach 1921; Tulinius 2002).

The parallel between Old Icelandic literature and the rest of European literature is quite pertinent when it comes to the *fornaldarsögur*. Indeed, like Geoffrey's *Historia* for England, at least some of them represent an attempt to reconstruct a distant past of the Nordic countries. Their genealogical form and the fact that they commonly inform the reader about the descendants of their characters in historical Scandinavia suggest this. Examples of *fornaldarsögur* that would fit into this category are *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* and *Völsunga saga*, as has been argued recently by Andersson (1999: 98–9).

It seems most probable that the *fornaldarsögur* slowly emerged during the last decades of the twelfth century and in the early thirteenth. Given the importance of eddic verse in the sagas of the group that appear oldest, it is likely that Holtsmark was right in 1965 when she proposed that the *fornaldarsögur* might have had their origin in the amplification of prose passages of the kind that accompany some of the poems in the Codex Regius, and which provide readers with an often much-needed context for individual eddic poems. This development could have been simultaneous with that of eddic poetry itself, which seems to show courtly influence in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries (Andersson 1986). It would therefore be part of a tendency in Old Icelandic literature parallel to the general trend in Europe. This would be true not only of the appearance of literary narrative adapted to the needs of the aristocratic laity, but also of the preponderance of prose in this literature from the beginning of the thirteenth century (Zink 1992: 175–99).

Further indications of the link between scholarly learning and aristocratic entertainment in the *fornaldarsögur* can be found in a recent study of 'the rhetoric of *Völsunga saga*'. Würth (2003: 110) suggests that this saga occupies something of an intermediate position between orality and literature. Though obviously the product of

a textual culture, it seems to have been crafted, at least in part, for oral performance. This would fit rather neatly with the already mentioned account of Sturla Þórðarson's performance of a saga that he was to 'bring with him'.

It is quite possible that the *fornaldarsögur* may already have been established as a form of aristocratic entertainment as early as 1180–90. Additional support for this can be inferred from the above-mentioned remark made by King Sverrir and reported in *Þorgils saga*, telling us that tales such as those of Hrómundr Gripsson were considered by him to be 'lygisögur' (lying tales) and 'skemtiligastar' (most enjoyable). Moreover, there is some evidence for at least a few of them having been in existence at least in the first third of the thirteenth century, since the author of *Egils saga*, composed at the latest before 1250, seems to have known *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* (Tulinius 2002) and *Ketils saga hængs* (Hafstað 1995).

As a conclusion to this section on the origins of the *fornaldarsögur*, it seems safe to say that this group of sagas is likely to have appeared at the same time as or even slightly earlier than the sagas of Icelanders. Like them it is an offshoot of the writing of kings' sagas, and like the whole of lay literature in Iceland it is to be understood in the general context of the development of western European culture and of the medieval Icelanders' participation in that culture.

Characteristics

A closer look at four of the *fornaldarsögur* – *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, *Völsunga saga*, *Orvar-Odds saga* and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* – will give a general idea of their principal features as literature.

Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks

Hervarar saga is an interesting example from many points of view. It contains a large number of verses of various types, some of them thought to be quite old. It also shows evidence of courtly influence, and it seems to have been quite carefully thought out by whoever composed it.

It tells the story of several generations linked together genealogically, and also through the possession of the sword Tyrfingr, which has been cursed by the dwarfs who made it. The first generation is represented by a band of 12 brothers who are also berserkers (that is, ferocious warriors). Their leader, Angantýr, is in possession of the magical sword. He and all his brothers die in a battle against Hjálmar and Orvar-Oddr, an episode also narrated in *Orvar-Odds saga*, with more or less the same sequence of verses. The sword is buried with Angantýr in a grave mound. Several years later, his daughter Hervör, who dresses as a man and lives the life of a Viking, comes to his mound, breaks into it, and takes the sword after a dialogue in stanza form between the girl and her dead father. Later, she returns to a more feminine lifestyle and marries Höfundr, king of Glasisvellir, bearing him two sons, Angantýr and Heiðrekr, of

whom Heiðrekr is the younger and the less well behaved. One evening, in a fit of anger, he throws a stone out into the darkness. Unluckily for him, it hits and kills his elder brother Angantýr, and Heiðrekr is banned from his father's kingdom, receiving from his mother the family's sword, Tyrfingr. From his father, however, he receives just six pieces of good advice, which Heiðrekr makes a point of disregarding during his lifetime.

Heiðrekr's subsequent adventures form the central part of the saga. He acquires his own kingdom through marriage and has to cope with, among other things, unfaithful wives and treacherous in-laws. He is finally reconciled with his father but after that he engages in a riddle-contest with Óðinn, which leads to his own death. The fourth generation, and the last to be dealt with in the saga, is that of the children of Heiðrekr. His illegitimate son, Hlǫðr, refuses to accept only one-third of his father's kingdom and to leave the remainder to his legitimate brother, Angantýr. Hlǫðr invades the kingdom, killing his sister, Hervǫr. In the great battle of Dúnheiðr, Hlǫðr is killed. The material for this part of the saga is provided by the poem *Hlǫðskviða*, thought by some to be considerably older than the saga itself, while others are more cautious (Tolkien 1960: xxi; Heusler and Ranisch 1903: vi–xvii; Helgason 1967: 147–216).

There is a scholarly consensus that whoever composed the saga is not the author of the poetry contained in it, which in fact provides all parts of the saga, except the part about King Heiðrekr, with its main subject matter. This raises the interesting question of how the author worked, especially since the saga has recently been shown to have a greater degree of coherence than previous commentators had granted it (Tulinius 2002: 60–3, 73–114). With its use of material known from elsewhere in European medieval literature, such as the motif of the good counsels, and with its reminiscences of learned accounts of Greek and Roman mythology as taught in medieval schools, the saga as a whole gives indications not only of a compositional design on the part of the author, but also of preoccupations which would have been relevant to Icelandic society in the thirteenth century as it is portrayed in the contemporary sagas. More than most sagas, *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* seems particularly to revolve around questions of legitimacy of birth and access to inheritance, questions of pressing interest at a time when the rights of children born out of wedlock were undergoing considerable transformation. Whoever composed the saga may have wanted to show how strife between siblings of differing legal status could cause nothing but trouble to all concerned. However, he could also have chosen to highlight these particular themes without conscious intent, his interest in them being awakened by the influence of changes of this kind on his own life and/or that of his contemporaries.

Hervarar saga has been transmitted to us in rather poor condition: the manuscripts are incomplete and there are significant discrepancies between the different versions they contain. The literary value of the saga resides not only in the way its different parts are arranged in a meaningful whole, but also in the intrinsic value of the poetry it contains. Of particular interest are not only the riddle contest, which is the oldest

single riddle collection in Nordic literature, but also the versified dialogue between Hervör and her dead father, *Hervararbrjótt*. Hervör's temporary adoption of the male gender is not unique in this saga. Indeed, this motif appears in several other *fornaldarsögur* as well as in indigenous romance. It has been convincingly argued on the basis of comparative anthropology and social practice as reflected in medieval law collections that this is not a purely literary motif but also has roots in medieval Icelandic society (Clover 1986a).

Völsunga saga

The saga of the Völsungar is also organized genealogically, as its title indicates, the subject matter being a dynasty of descendants of Óðinn, whose most illustrious figure is Sigurðr, the slayer of Fáfnir, and also, according to *Ragnars saga* (which forms a sequel to *Völsunga saga*), an ancestor of the reigning Norwegian dynasty in the thirteenth century, through Sigurðr's grandson and namesake, Sigurðr ormr-í-auga ('Snake-in-eye'). Like *Hervarar saga*, *Völsunga saga* is based on pre-existing eddic poetry. Its author obviously had to hand a collection of such poetry similar to the one reflected in the Codex Regius. For some reason he decided to use this poetry as the basis for a mainly prose saga, albeit interspersed with excerpts from eddic lays. About the earliest generations of the dynasty little or no poetry seems to have existed, however, and in order to tell their story the author of *Völsunga saga* used material from various mythical and legendary sources as well as from European romance (Clover 1986b), while he relies on the poetry to tell the tragic story of Sigurðr and Brynhildr and their dealings with the family of the Gjúkungar, as well as of the latter's demise at the hand of their brother-in-law Atli, king of the Huns.

A recent study concludes that it is quite legitimate to speak of an author in the case of this saga, since it is considerably more than just a prose rendering of a story already existing in verse (Tulinius 2002: 139–52). Indeed, not only does this author seem to have gathered and arranged a variety of material in order to tell the story of the first generations of the dynasty; he has also crafted it in such a way that it would serve as an introduction to the story told in the heroic eddic poetry, and would emphasize his interpretation of that story while preparing the way for it. This is quite similar to the way Chrétien de Troyes describes his method in his introduction to *Érec et Énide*. From a body of material (*matière*) he draws a meaning (*sen*) by arranging it in a certain way (*conjointure*).

The themes that are highlighted by the author in the saga are on the one hand the conflict of loyalty to blood-ties and/or to contractual obligations, such as bonds of marriage or sworn brotherhood, and on the other the difference between the intentional and unintentional commission of wrongful deeds. Moreover, these themes are enhanced by a particular attention paid by the author of the saga to oaths and other performative utterances, as can be seen in the detailed way he reports dialogue and how he chooses 'verse quotations which focus on the efficacy of speech' (Quinn 2003: 100). This is rendered quite clearly in the story of Sigmundr and Signý, which takes

up some of the introductory chapters, and appears to receive more extensive narrative elaboration than other parts of the saga. Signý is set on taking revenge upon her husband, Siggeirr, who has betrayed his in-laws by killing her father and imprisoning her brothers, all of whom die except for Sigmundr. She achieves this by sleeping with her surviving brother and bearing him a child, Sinfjötli, who will not only kill his half-brothers, the sons of Signý and her husband, but will also aid his father in the battle against Siggeirr and his men. Having thus committed incest and prepared the way for her children to be killed, Signý comes to the conclusion that she has no right to live any more, and so walks into her husband's burning house and perishes there. In Lévi-Straussian terms, she has overprivileged blood-ties at the expense of contractual ties.

Sigmundr's story, on the other hand, emphasizes the theme of intentionality. It does so through an original treatment of the werewolf motif (which may have been suggested to the author by 'Bisclavret', one of the *lais* of Marie de France). Having escaped from his confinement by Siggeirr, Sigmundr wanders in the forest with Sinfjötli. They come upon some wolf-hides, put them on, and are thereby transformed into wolves. While they are in their wolf-shapes, Sigmundr attacks his son in a fit of rage and mortally wounds him. A raven, possibly sent by Óðinn, brings him a magical cure, and Sinfjötli is saved. Later, however, Sigmundr allows Sinfjötli to drink a poisonous beverage, thus causing his death. Here, intention is also an issue, since the text explains this behaviour by stating explicitly that the reason for this was that he was drunk. He has therefore let something happen that he had no intention of allowing to happen. We can see here that the author of *Völsunga saga* adds to what seems to have been his source, since the corresponding passage in the Codex Regius does not mention Sigmundr's intoxication (Tulinius 2002: 147).

The same two themes seem to govern the way the author chooses to compose a coherent story on the basis of the different versions of it found in the surviving eddic poems dealing with relations between Sigurðr, Brynhildr and the Gjúkungar. Sigurðr and Brynhildr both have deep respect for contractual obligations, especially oaths. What makes Sigurðr's and Brynhildr's destinies tragic is that circumstances force them to break some of the oaths they have made. This was never their intention, however; it results partly from the potion of oblivion that Queen Grímhildr has tricked Sigurðr into drinking, and partly from the subterfuge of Sigurðr's assuming the appearance of his brother-in-law Gunnarr before riding over the wall of flames surrounding Brynhildr's hall. On the other hand, the Gjúkungar are *eiðrofa*, that is, oath-breakers, and that is why their lineage comes to an end, whereas that of Brynhildr and Sigurðr continues through their daughter Áslaug and the sons she has by the Danish king Ragnarr loðbrók, as told in *Ragnars saga*.

It is interesting to compare the roles played by Óðinn in *Hervarar saga* on the one hand and in *Völsunga saga* on the other. In the former, Óðinn is a troublemaker, exciting the anger of brothers against each other. In the latter, he is the ancestor of the Völsungar and their protector, intervening to ensure the continuity of their lineage and to cause the deaths of those who have turned against their own kin (Tulinius

2002: 151). This is an indication of the plasticity of the figure of Óðinn, both as a symbol of paganism and as a link to the past. Indeed, as a recent study has shown, the *fornaldarsaga* is the narrative genre which makes the most frequent use of him, casting him in a variety of roles (Lassen 2003).

Qrvar-Odds saga

The saga of Qrvar-Oddr ('Arrow-Odd') undoubtedly was, and still is, one of the most popular of the *fornaldarsögur*, as is attested by the number of medieval manuscripts that have survived of the saga, though none is from before the fourteenth century. There are significant differences between them, the saga having been reworked by copyists to such an extent that it is perfectly legitimate to regard the younger manuscripts as reflecting new versions of the saga. The scholarly edition by Boer (1888) is well over a century old, though not as old as Rafn's edition of the corpus as a whole. Later editions of the saga have not used the results of Boer's analysis of the manuscript tradition, which is regrettable, because it gives interesting information on the evolution of the saga in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Tulinius 2002: 27–8, 159–64, 321–6).

Despite the late date of the manuscripts, there are indications that the story of Qrvar-Oddr existed significantly earlier, at least in oral form, since Saxo makes use of it in book V of his *Gesta Danorum*. As it is told in manuscripts dating from the fourteenth century, the saga is in many ways different from the *fornaldarsögur* that have been described up to now. Instead of being organized genealogically, it concentrates on the destiny of a single hero who is not of royal blood. Instead, the saga makes him a grandson of Ketill hæng, a legendary hero from northern Norway, whose saga belongs to the *fornaldarsaga* corpus and who was also believed to be the ancestor of numerous prominent families in the early stages of Iceland's history.

Qrvar-Oddr is an example of a type of hero in the saga literature, the 'noble heathen', described by Lönnroth (1969). Though born in pagan times, he has an innate dislike of heathenism. A sibyl comes to the farm where he lives as a youth and prophesies the future for each member of the household, except for Oddr, who refuses to have anything to do with her. She therefore lays a curse on him, to the effect that his life-span will be three times that of a normal man, but he will lose everyone he loves best. After he has lived a life of wandering, his own horse, Faxi, will bring about his death. Oddr tries to circumvent this destiny by killing his horse, burying it in a deep grave and leaving home, vowing never to return. However, at the end of his long life, he comes back to the place where he buried the horse. The wind has blown away all the soil over his horse's grave and a snake crawls out of its skull to bite and kill Oddr. He does not die right away, but orders his men to hollow out a sarcophagus for him to lie in, and while he waits he composes a poem about his life that he recites for them before dying.

The narrative structure created by the prophecy is highly productive, since it conveys in advance the ending to Oddr's story, while creating at the same time

suspense in relation to whether Oddr will manage to escape his destiny or not. The time frame of his exceptionally long life allows the narrator to multiply his adventures, and this is probably the reason for the significant differences between the versions, since it was always possible to add new adventures to those already narrated. The saga probably served as oral entertainment in medieval Icelandic households, as Lönnroth has argued convincingly. In his important article on the 'double scene' (1979), he shows how the drinking contest narrated in chapter 27 of the saga is designed to resonate with the situation in which it was most likely to have been narrated; that is, a feast – or at least some kind of gathering – on a medieval farm where sagas such as *Qrvar-Odds saga* were probably either told or read aloud.

Unlike most of the *fornaldarsögur*, this saga deals with a theme found more often in kings' sagas and sagas of Icelanders, namely conversion to Christianity. *Normagests þáttur*, which provides another example from the saga literature of an individual who lives three times as long as other mortals, deals with the same theme. This is quite understandable, since only an exceptionally long life-span can allow the same person to live in legendary as well as historical times. It is striking that the saga relates this theme of conversion to a certain kind of ethic the saga seems to be promoting, one which encourages warriors to seek legitimacy through royal service (Tulinus 2002: 161–3). It may be noted in addition that *Qrvar-Oddr* is not of royal blood himself; and his story is not integrated into that of a dynasty. This gives an indication of the kind of public this saga was intended for: most probably the households of Icelandic aristocrats of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, many of whom were members of the Norwegian court and who themselves had at their service men whom they could ask to fight for them.

Also apparent in this focus on the individual destiny is an increased interest in the darker aspects of the human soul. This is particularly noteworthy in the story of Oddr's dealings with his undefeatable foe, the semi-human and demonic *Qgmundr Eyþjófsbani*. As Pálsson and Edwards (1971) have noticed, this reminds the reader of Grettir's dealings with *Glámr* in *Grettis saga*. It is no coincidence that this late saga of Icelanders is often found in manuscripts which also contain *fornaldarsögur*. Like *Qrvar-Odds saga*, it exploits the uncanny in order to give its audience an enlarged sense of the spiritual isolation and unquiet mind of its hero. Interestingly, these aspects of *Qrvar-Odds saga* are enhanced in the later additions to the saga.

Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar

This saga differs considerably from the tragic tone of the other sagas that have been discussed in this chapter. The saga of King *Hrólfr* ends happily and in this respect, as in most others, it is much closer to romance than they are. It does not seem to be a coincidence that it is completely devoid of the eddic verses that grace the other sagas, and which they seem to have been at least partly based on. Instead, it plays intricately and astutely with the motif of the bridal quest, as has been carefully studied by Marianne E. Kalinke (1990), who has written that *Hrólfs saga* is 'the acme of Icelandic

bridal-quest romance'. Indeed, in the same scholar's words, it 'evinces a skillful blending of foreign and indigenous motifs and strikingly modifies certain topoi associated with romance on the continent. The author was well acquainted with native as well as foreign traditions, which he combined to fashion a tale characterized by a remarkable lucidity of structure' (1990: 25).

Indeed, it is possible to say that the saga, which probably dates from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries, inaugurated a sub-genre of both the *fornaldarsögur* and translated romances or *riddarasögur*, which proved hugely popular; Kalinke studies over 20 of them in her book on the subject. In her thorough analysis of the saga (1990: 25–65), she uncovers the intricacies of a narrative structure based on four bridal quests, those of Gautrekr, his two sons Hrólfr and Ketill, and Hrólfr's friend Ásmundr.

One of the main qualities of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* is the vividness with which it describes scenes (Tulinius 2002: 165–7). Here indeed, more than in the previously mentioned sagas, the author takes pains to bring to life the situations in which his characters find themselves. Examples of this abound, for instance in the section of the saga dealing with Hrólfr's wooing of Þornbjörg, the daughter and heir of the king of Sweden who stubbornly refuses to marry, preferring to dress as a man and live the life of a warrior. The two episodes in which Hrólfr asks first her father, and then herself, for her hand, are described in detail, while the dialogues are composed in such a way as to bring out the comic aspects of the situation.

As in the case of *Orvar-Odds saga*, though even more so given how obviously *Hrólfs saga* relies on an already established literary tradition containing both *fornaldarsögur* such as *Völsunga saga* and the *riddarasögur*, it is tempting to try to understand how an Icelandic audience of the late thirteenth or fourteenth centuries would have responded to this saga. The character of Hrólfr seems to embody the ideal of the ruler blessed with the qualities of temperance and wisdom as well as fortitude. He is patient, and cautiously ponders any decision he is called upon to make. As soon as he has made up his mind, however, he does not rest until he has attained his goals. In this respect *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* resolutely promotes an ideology of royalty, which probably found a favourable response in the aristocratic society of Iceland from the thirteenth century onwards. Indeed, the members of the royal court of Norway, who were numerous in Iceland both before and after the country's becoming an official part of the Norwegian kingdom in 1262–4, would have easily identified with the values that Hrólfr stands for.

Despite this, the saga should principally be noted for its artistry and, related to this, its entertainment value. An explanation for the popularity of the bridal-quest motif is perhaps to be found in social practices in medieval Icelandic society. Wooing seems to have been a quite formal and obviously pleasant process, though not without its anxious moments, since the suitor could never be sure of being accepted and would have had to prepare himself for all kinds of humiliation. The saga plays with this anxiety in a particularly effective way.

Conclusion: Future Research on the *fornaldarsögur*

The present chapter has endeavoured to show how rich and varied the *fornaldarsögur* are, both as specifically Icelandic, or Nordic, medieval literature and as part of a common European romance tradition. Despite this, the interest taken in *fornaldarsögur* has been marginal in recent decades when compared to the interest in kings' sagas or sagas of Icelanders. The historical value of *fornaldarsögur* is practically non-existent, and the limit to which they can be studied as carriers of a tradition older than themselves has probably already been reached (McTurk 1981, 2003). The most pronounced recent tendency in *fornaldarsaga* research has been to emphasize the literary and ideological aspects of these sagas, as can be seen in the recent publication of papers given at a conference on 'structure and ideology in the *fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*' (Jakobsson, Lassen and Ney 2003). It is not overoptimistic to state that there are still many possibilities of furthering our understanding of the saga literature by approaching the *fornaldarsögur* from the point of view reflected in the conference's title.

An indication of the vitality of this approach is the ongoing discussion on the saga of Hrólfr kraki (*Hrólfs saga kraka*; not one of those discussed here) in four recent articles. Jakobsson (1999) has analysed this saga in terms of medieval thinking about kingship, to which Kalinke (2003) has added insights concerning the ethical values that were associated with monarchy in the Middle Ages, and which she finds reflected in the saga. Taking another point of view, Brynjólfssdóttir (2003) has insisted on the parodic elements present in the saga, while Phelpstead (2003) has attempted to uncover its 'sexual ideology'.

See also EDDIC POETRY; FAMILY SAGAS; GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; HISTORY AND PSEUDO-HISTORY; LATE PROSE FICTION; LAWS; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; ROMANCE; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; SAGAS OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY; SHORT PROSE NARRATIVE; SKALDIC POETRY; SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS; WOMEN IN OLD NORSE POETRY AND SAGAS.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Editions and Translations

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>Boer, Richard Constant (ed.) (1888) <i>Örvar-Odds saga</i>. Leiden.</p> <p>Brown, Ursula (ed.) (1952) <i>Þorgils saga ok Hafliða</i> (Oxford English Monographs). London.</p> <p>Finch, Ronald G. (ed. and transl.) (1965) <i>The Saga of the Volsungs</i>. London.</p> <p>Helgason, Jón (ed.) (1967) <i>Kviður af Gotum og Húnum: Hamðismál, Guðrúnarvöit, Hlöðskeiða</i>. Reykjavík.</p> | <p>Heusler, Andreas and Ranisch, Wilhelm (eds.) (1903) <i>Eddica minora: Dichtungen eddischer Art aus den Fornaldarsögur und anderen Prosawerken</i>. Dortmund.</p> <p>Jónsson, Guðni (ed.) (1954) <i>Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda</i>, vols. I–IV. Reykjavík.</p> <p>Olrik, Jørgen and Ræder, Hans (eds.) (1931) <i>Saxo Grammaticus: Gesta Danorum</i>. Copenhagen.</p> <p>Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul (transl.) (1970) <i>Arrow-Odd: A Medieval Novel</i>. New York.</p> |
|---|--|

- Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul (transls.) (1972) *Hrolf Gautreksson: A Viking Romance*. Edinburgh.
- Rafn, Carl Christian (ed.) (1829–30) *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, vols. I–III. Copenhagen.
- Thorsson, Örnólfur et al. (eds.) (1988) *Sturlunga saga, Árna saga biskups, Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka*. Reykjavík.
- Tolkien, Christopher (ed. and transl.) (1960) *The Saga of King Heiðrek the Wise*. London and New York.
- Secondary Sources*
- Andersson, Theodore M. (1986) 'Beyond Epic and Romance: *Sigurðarkviða in meiri*.' In Rudolf Simek et al. (eds.) *Sagnaskemmtun: Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson*. Vienna, pp. 1–12.
- Andersson, Theodore M. (1999) 'Goðafraði eða sagnfraði? Dæmi Völsunga sögu.' In Haraldur Bessason and Baldur Hafstað (eds.) *Heiðin minni: Greinar um fornar bókmenntir*. Reykjavík, pp. 91–102.
- Brynjólfsdóttir, Valgerður (2003) 'A Valiant King or a Coward? The Changing Image of King Hrólfur kraki from the Oldest Sources to *Hrólf's saga kraka*.' In Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen and Agneta Ney (eds.) *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi: Handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8–2.9 2001* (Nordiska texter och undersökningar 28). Uppsala, pp. 141–56.
- Clover, Carol J. (1986a) 'Maiden-Warriors and Other Sons.' *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 85, 35–49.
- Clover, Carol J. (1986b) 'Völsunga saga and the Missing Lai of Marie de France.' In Rudolf Simek et al. (eds.) *Sagnaskemmtun: Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson*. Vienna, pp. 79–84.
- Foote, Peter G. (1953–6) 'Sagnaskemmtun: Reykjahólar 1119.' *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* XIV, 226–39.
- Guðnason, Bjarni (1981) 'The Icelandic Sources of Saxo Grammaticus.' In Karsten Friis-Jensen (ed.) *Saxo Grammaticus: A Medieval Author Between Norse and Latin Culture*. Copenhagen, pp. 79–93.
- Hafstað, Baldur (1995) *Die Egils saga und ihr Verhältnis zu anderen Werken des nordischen Mittelalters*. Reykjavík.
- Harris, Joseph and Hill, Thomas D. (1989) 'Gestr's "Prime-Sign": Source and Signification in *Norna-Gests þátrr*.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 104, 103–22.
- Holtmark, Anne (1965) 'Heroic Poetry and Legendary Sagas.' *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Studies*, 9–21.
- Hreinsson, Viðar (1990) 'Göngu-Hrólfur á galeiðunni.' *Skáldskaparmál* 1, 131–41.
- Jakobsson, Ármann (1999) 'Le Roi Chevalier: The Royal Ideology and Genre of *Hrólf's saga kraka*.' *Scandinavian Studies* 71.2, 139–66.
- Jakobsson, Ármann, Lassen, Annette and Ney, Agneta (eds.) (2003) *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi: Handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8–2.9 2001* (Nordiska texter och undersökningar 28). Uppsala.
- Kalinke, Marianne E. (1990) *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland* (Islandica XLVI). Ithaca, NY, and London.
- Kalinke, Marianne E. (2003) 'Transgression in *Hrólf's saga kraka*.' In Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen and Agneta Ney (eds.) *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi: Handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8–2.9 2001* (Nordiska texter och undersökningar 28). Uppsala, pp. 157–71.
- Karlsson, Stefán (1964) 'Aldur Hauksbókar.' *Fróðskaparrit: Annales Societatis Scientiarum Faeroensis* 13, 114–21.
- Lassen, Annette (2003) 'Den prosaiske Odin: Fortidssagaerne som mytografi.' In Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen and Agneta Ney (eds.) *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi: Handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8–2.9 2001* (Nordiska texter och undersökningar 28). Uppsala, pp. 205–19.
- Leach, Henry Goddard (1921) *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia* (Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 6). Cambridge, MA.
- Lönnroth, Lars (1969) 'The Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas.' *Scandinavian Studies* 41, 1–29.
- Lönnroth, Lars (1979) 'The Double Scene of Arrow-Odd's Drinking Contest.' In Hans Bekker-Nielsen et al. (eds.) *Medieval Narrative: A Symposium*. Odense, pp. 94–119.
- Lönnroth, Lars (2003) 'Fornaldarsagans genremässiga metamorfoser: mellan Edda-myt och riddarroman.' In Ármann Jakobsson, Annette

- Lassen and Agneta Ney (eds.) *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi: Handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8–2.9 2001* (Nordiska texter och undersökningar 28). Uppsala, pp. 37–45.
- McTurk, Rory (1981) *Studies in Ragnars saga loðbrókar and its Major Scandinavian Analogues* (Medium Ævum Monographs, New Series 15). Oxford.
- McTurk, Rory (2003) 'Recent and Projected Work on *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*'. In Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen and Agneta Ney (eds.) *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi: Handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8–2.9 2001* (Nordiska texter och undersökningar 28). Uppsala, pp. 123–40.
- Pálsson, Hermann (1962) *Sagnaskemmtun Íslandinga*. Reykjavík.
- Pálsson, Hermann (1985) 'Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda.' In Joseph R. Strayer (ed. in chief) *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, vol. 6. New York, pp. 137–43.
- Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul (1971) *Legendary Fiction in Medieval Iceland* (Studia Islandica 30). Reykjavík.
- Phelpstead, Carl (2003) 'The Sexual Ideology of *Hrólfs saga kraka*.' *Scandinavian Studies* 75.1, 1–24.
- Quinn, Judy (2003) 'Trust in Words: Verse Quotation and Dialogue in *Völsunga saga*.' In Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen and Agneta Ney (eds.) *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi: Handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8–2.9 2001* (Nordiska texter och undersökningar 28). Uppsala, pp. 89–100.
- Reuschel, Helga (1933) *Untersuchungen über Stoff und Stil der Fornaldarsaga* (Bausteine zur Volkskunde und Religionswissenschaft 7). Bühl-Baden.
- Schlauch, Margaret (1934) *Romance in Iceland*. London.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur (1959) 'Fornaldarsögur.' In *Kulturbhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*, vol. 4. Copenhagen, pp. 500–8.
- Tómasson, Sverrir (1988) *Formálar íslenskra sagnaritara á miðöldum*. Reykjavík.
- Tulinus, Torfi H. (2002) *The Matter of the North: The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-Century Iceland* (Viking Collection XIII), transl. Randi C. Eldevik. Odense.
- von See, Klaus (1981) 'Das problem der mündlichen Erzählprosa im Altnordischen: Der Prolog der Þiðreks saga und der Bericht von der Hochzeit in Reykjahólar.' In Klaus von See, *Edda, Saga, Skaldendichtung*. Heidelberg, pp. 506–10.
- Würth, Stefanie (2003) 'The Rhetoric of *Völsunga saga*.' In Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen and Agneta Ney (eds.) *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi: Handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8–2.9 2001* (Nordiska texter och undersökningar 28). Uppsala, pp. 101–11.
- Zink, Michel (1992) *Littérature française du Moyen Age*. Paris.

Short Prose Narrative (*þáttir*)

Elizabeth Ashman Rowe and Joseph Harris

Þáttir (pl. *þættir*) is the modern (and also *one* medieval) designation for short narratives in medieval Icelandic prose. Some *þættir* are preserved in the medieval equivalent of short-story collections, but many are found as parts of much longer composite narratives. For example, *Geirmundar þáttir heljarskinns* forms the introduction to the compilation of sagas collectively known as *Sturlunga saga*, and *Nornagests þáttir* was interpolated into the D redaction of the king's saga *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* by an anonymous mid-fourteenth-century scribe. Because such short narratives are not always clearly labelled, whether with '*þáttir*' or another term, and because other criteria for their recognition can be subjective, their exact number will always be a matter of controversy. We feel, however, that a conservative estimate would recognize between 75 and 100 short narratives as *þættir*.

Early scholarship on the saga literature largely ignored these stories or took their literary-historical status for granted, and modern scholarship begins effectively with a brief survey by Wolfgang Lange in 1957. This is reflected in Kurt Schier's admirable guide, *Sagaliteratur*, from 1970, which nevertheless treats *þættir* only in passing. By contrast Jónas Kristjánsson's *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature*, from 1988, devotes a separate chapter to the most prominent group of *þættir*, effectively ranking them alongside other genres of the saga literature. The change is clearly due to the early phase of *þáttir* scholarship and criticism. This phase has, however, been reviewed by Harris (1989), and the present survey treats that period of scholarship relatively briefly, concentrating on developments since 1989.¹

Summary of Research Before 1989

In the early *þáttir* scholarship a significant amount of effort was devoted to classification: the identification of groups of *þættir* that seem to share significant characteristics. Obviously literary taxonomy is not a scientific enterprise, but its results are

useful in various ways. For one, a literary taxonomy suggests, but makes no claim to fix, the range of the phenomena and their variation. In addition, it facilitates nuanced critical considerations and offers a rudimentary identification of utility in a survey such as ours, where we relate each *þáttir* mentioned to one or more groups (including that most useful one of all, ‘miscellaneous’) to give readers unfamiliar with that text some idea of its narrative type. Various classificatory principles, not always made explicit, have been employed in the early scholarship; Harris (1989) uses theme and narrative structure as the primary criteria for assigning *þættir* to one of seven groups. We will adapt this arrangement for the present chapter, along with designations for each group. We concede that such group titles, with their attendant thumbnail characterizations, can become tedious and are not a substitute for close reading, but we believe the titles used are initially convenient and not overly misleading.

- ‘King-and-Icelander *þættir*’ (*Íslendingaþættir*) deal with a commoner’s relationship with the king of Norway or another powerful aristocrat. The narrative structure of this kind of *þáttir* has six parts: an introduction, the hero’s journey to Norway, his alienation from the king, his reconciliation with the king, his return to Iceland, and a conclusion. Most of these *þættir* have a humanistic theme, but some use the form for Christian didactic purposes. In general, they embody a high-medieval comic ethos that stands in contrast to the heroic and tragic ethos of the sagas. We assign 30-odd *þættir* to this group; well-known examples are: *Auðunar þáttir vestfirzka*, *Brands þáttir orva*, *Halldórs þáttir Snorrasonar II*, *Ívars þáttir Ingimundarsonar*, *Sneglu-Halla þáttir*, *Þorsteins þáttir Austfirðings*, and *Qgmundar þáttir dytts*.
- ‘Conversion *þættir*’ showcase a moment of conflict between Christianity and paganism. Most are set in Norway, including *Rognvalds þáttir ok Rauðs*, *Þáttir Eindriða ilbreiðs*, *Völsa þáttir*, *Sveins þáttir ok Finns* and *Helga þáttir ok Úlfs*. In a closely related sub-group, ‘pagan-contact *þættir*’, the confrontation between Christianity and paganism occurs when a Christian Norwegian king or his representative is brought face to face with some aspect of the pre-Christian era, as, for example, in *Nornagests þáttir*, *Tóka þáttir*, *Sqrla þáttir* and *Þorsteins þáttir skelks*.
- ‘Feud *þættir*’ take place in Iceland and resemble small-scale family sagas. *Hrómundar þáttir halta*, *Þorsteins þáttir stangarhoggs* and *Bolla þáttir* are among those that fall into this category.
- ‘Skald *þættir*’ contain brief anecdotes having to do with skaldic poetry and perhaps grow out of contextualizing reports that accompanied verses. These stories are preserved in kings’ sagas but seem self-contained and little relevant to the larger narratives. *Einars þáttir Skúlasonar* and *Mána þáttir Íslendinga* are examples that also show some resemblance to the *Íslendingaþættir*.
- ‘Dream *þættir*’ narrate the circumstances of a significant dream, often one in which a figure appears to an Icelandic dreamer and communicates with him in verse. Examples include *Kumblbúa þáttir*, *Bergbúa þáttir* and *Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar*.

- *Þættir* of a ‘journey to the other world’ contain analogues of the European medieval romances and lays describing human visits to Elfland and other supernatural realms. *Helga þáttir Þórissonar* and *Þorsteins þáttir bæjarmagns* comprise this group.
- ‘Mytho-heroic *þættir*’ (*fornaldarþættir*) describe the lives of heroes whose adventures include battles with monsters and feats of remarkable strength; they are biographical in structure, with protagonists modelled on figures of legend. *Orms þáttir Stórolfssonar* and *Þorsteins þáttir uxafóts* comprise this group.

In addition to the *þættir* that fall into these seven groups, there are a number of ‘miscellaneous *þættir*’ that cannot be easily categorized.

Older research dealt especially with questions of age and authorship. Like the sagas, the *þættir* often cannot be conclusively dated. But *þættir* were composed before 1220 and apparently continued to be written in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Datings were proposed on the basis of style, language, manuscript transmission, literary relations, and dateable references (such as laws). Attributions of authorship are few and based purely on circumstantial evidence: *Auðunar þáttir vestfirzka*, for example, has been credited to the prolific pen of Snorri Sturluson, and *Helga þáttir ok Úlfs* tentatively assigned to Magnús Þórhallsson, the priest who copied the work into the manuscript *Flateyjarbók* in the early 1390s.

A third area of research has investigated the sources and reliability of these texts. A few *þættir* treat material known from family sagas (for example, *Bolla þáttir*, whose protagonist appears in *Laxdæla saga*), but it is often unclear whether the relationship depends on oral or textual tradition. *Qgmundar þáttir dytts*, for example, seems to have been influenced by the written version of *Víga-Glúms saga*. A few *þættir* preserve very old information about pagan practices, such as the cult of Freyr described in the second half of *Qgmundar þáttir* and the phallic cult that appears in *Völsa þáttir*. Some *þættir* are based on poetic sources. In addition to the skald *þættir*, *Sneglu-Halla þáttir* is largely a string of anecdotes presenting Sneglu-Halli’s verses, and part of *Nornagests þáttir* is drawn from a heroic poem like those in the Poetic Edda. A number of *þættir*, including *Auðunar þáttir*, *Þorsteins þáttir Austfirðings* and *Hróa þáttir heimska* (miscellaneous), make use of folklore motifs and tale types. *Þættir* may even be based on other *þættir*: *Tóka þáttir* is evidently an imitation of *Nornagests þáttir*.

Yet in a larger sense, these disparate sources are transformed into narratives that deal with the same range of historical concerns as the various kinds of sagas. The *Íslendingaþættir* that describe the interactions of Icelanders with the eleventh-century kings of Norway are realistic in style, but like the kings’ sagas in which they are found, their ‘historicity’ is not that of an accurate report of past events, but rather takes contemporary thirteenth-century concerns about the relationship between Norwegian royal authority and Icelandic independence and projects them onto the past. To the extent that the conversion *þættir* relate events that happened at all, their account is controlled by Christian views of the past that map the secular history of Scandinavia to the universal sequence of prefiguration and fulfilment that is the

manifestation of God's plan for the salvation of souls. The feud *þættir* possess the same historical value as the family sagas, whatever that may be, and the skald *þættir*, because of their association with specific verses believed to be historical, may be relatively trustworthy. The events recounted in the dream *þættir*, journeys to the other world, and the *fornaldarþættir* are most probably fictitious.

A fourth area of research has focused on the degree to which *þættir* can be considered *independent* texts. Despite the fact that most *þættir* are found as a single chapter or a sequence of chapters within a saga, they are generally assumed to have been composed by someone other than the saga author or editor who interpolated the *þáttr* into his copy of the saga; in fact, 'interpolation' itself takes separate origin for granted. The chief support for this position is the independent existence of *þættir* such as *Þorsteins þáttr Austfirðings* and the dream *þættir*, which have never been inserted into a longer narrative. In addition, where there are two versions of a *þáttr*, one longer and independent and the other shorter and interpolated, the independent version turns out to be the more original. Further evidence of the independence of *þættir* has been drawn from the manuscript transmission of the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson, for *þættir* were copied into them not all at once, early in their textual history, but rather gradually, with more *þættir* being added perhaps as often as each time the saga was copied. Moreover, an interpolated *þáttr* can contain forms of the language that are much older than the forms found in its host saga, its style can clash with the style of the surrounding prose, and the information it presents can contradict that of its matrix. As Harris (1989) points out, however, each *þáttr* has its own history, and certainly some *þættir* were conceived from the beginning within the context of a longer work.

A fifth area of research has concerned the meaning and use of the word '*þáttr*' itself. Meaning 'a strand' or 'a loop', it is cognate with the Latin *texere* ('to weave'). Metaphorical usages, with meanings such as 'a part' or 'a (narrative) thread' (cf. 'a yarn'), arose early on. The use of the term to refer to an independent short narrative is not attested until the fourteenth century, much later than the development of the narratives themselves. Also, '*þáttr*' was not the only medieval label applied to what we now call *þættir*. Usually the narrative begins as a new chapter that is given a descriptive rubric such as '*Þáttr Þorleifs*' ('The Story of Þorleifr'), but other words meaning 'story' or 'tale', such as *saga*, *frásögn* and *sögn*, could be used. The rubric could also take the form of a phrase such as *af*... or *frá*... ('about...' or 'concerning...'), could say merely *capitulum* ('chapter'), or could be omitted altogether. Finally, the term '*þáttr*' had multiple uses in medieval rubrics; as well as indicating the start of a short narrative, it could also signal the beginning of other kinds of interpolated texts or a new development in the main narrative.

Recent Scholarship

Since 1989, *þáttr* scholarship has continued to investigate the major problems outlined above. However, research in these areas has been influenced by new

assumptions and methodologies, with the following major developments emerging as a result.

Compilation studies

The most important recent development in *þáttir* research is the investigation of the role that *þættir* play in the long narratives in which medieval Icelandic authors and editors placed them. Such investigations rely on the assumption that the *þættir* were included for some reason other than an absent-minded tendency towards digression or a belief that, when it comes to narrative, bigger is better. This assumption was not always held by earlier scholars of Old Norse literature, who were not afraid to assert that a particular *þáttir* had no perceptible relationship to its host saga. The recuperation of the medieval Icelandic compilation owes a debt to the 'new' or 'materialist' philology of the 1980s. This approach to medieval literature, itself a development of postmodern literary theory, asserts that each manuscript contextualizes the texts it contains in specific ways. Refusing to privilege the authorial texts over the illuminations, rubrics, glosses, supplements and other 'secondary' systems of meaning found in the manuscript, the new philology recognizes that each manuscript is the site of multiple collaborating and contesting meanings, the result of scribes, illuminators, annotators and even patrons deliberately rewriting or processing the text before them according to their own perspectives and proclivities. After all, the vast majority of literary efforts in the Middle Ages was expended not on the creation of new works, but rather on the various activities by which people transformed one manuscript into another, such as commentary, translation, adaptation and copying. To ignore this work is to ignore a significant aspect of the medieval Icelandic production of meaning.

Sturlunga saga, whose scholars have long tended to regard its distinct shorter components as functionally integral to the textual complex, led compilation studies in the treatment of *þættir*. But Tranter (1987) was the first to argue that the compiler of *Sturlunga saga* had a comprehensive editorial programme in mind for his work, in which all the *þættir* played an important role, particularly in highlighting the moral reading of the material as a negative exemplum. Bragason (2000), while agreeing that the compiler had a programme, disagreed as to its substance and the methods the compiler used to implement it. His argument attributes a more dynamic structure to the compilation as a whole; for example, interpreting *Geirmundar þáttir beljarskinns* as establishing a 'Golden Age' whose decline and fall is traced in the body of the compilation. This opening *þáttir* therefore suggests the larger significance of the entire work.

Another compilation receiving a significant amount of attention is the history of the kings of Norway found in the manuscript *Morkinskinna*. In their analysis of the sources of *Morkinskinna*, Andersson and Gade (2000) argue that the text was characterized by anecdotal digressions and *þættir* from the beginning. Given the large number of these, Andersson and Gade also suggest that it is unnecessarily complicated

to assume that the *þáttir* transcriptions were made by someone other than the saga author, especially as he seems to have been given to episodic composition in general. In any case, *Auðunar þáttir*, *Sneglu-Halla þáttir* and a few others are found in other manuscripts, and these, at least, seem to have had an independent origin and to have been edited for inclusion in *Morkinskinna*.

The role of the *þættir* within this compilation has been several times taken up by Jakobsson, who makes the important observation that *þættir*, taken out of context and read as independent narratives by early critics, gain a great deal from being restored to the textual matrix for which they were designed or adapted. He argues that the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna* fit perfectly into their context, rather than being pointless digressions or unassimilated additions. They function as *exempla* that illuminate the role of the king in society and show Icelanders how to behave at court (Jakobsson 1997, 1998). He characterizes *Morkinskinna*'s view of the relationship between a king and his men as one in which kings ought to accept advice, for they need their subjects' support (Jakobsson 1997). *Morkinskinna* contains many examples of subjects speaking up when a king does not act as he should and leading him back to the right path. To be the teacher of a king was a difficult job, requiring much cleverness, and it was often Icelanders who took on this role. The remoteness of their homeland may have encouraged Icelanders to be less dependent on the king than his other subjects and thus bolder in speaking truth to power.

Further support for the validity of categorizing these texts as 'king-and-Icelander *þættir*' comes from their rubrics in *Morkinskinna*. For example, the text known today as *Ívars þáttir Ingimundarsonar* has the heading 'Frá Eysteini konungi ok Ívari' ('About King Eysteinn and Ívarr'). For their part, Andersson and Gade (2000) concentrate on the role that the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna* play in conveying the character of a particular king, pointing out that the host sagas present the kings' careers in terms of character studies rather than political history. They also suggest that a later redactor of *Morkinskinna* may have omitted some *þættir* that were found in his exemplar, which is interesting because the general tendency of Icelanders copying kings' sagas was to add material rather than to remove it. Omission, however, like interpolation, testifies to a medieval reader's sense of the independence of the omitted story.

Classic examples of the ever-expanding king's saga are found in the manuscript *Flateyjarbók*, which was created in two stages by two scribes who worked on it sequentially from 1389 to 1395. The first part of the manuscript contains the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson, which had already been lengthened by the addition of numerous *þættir* by the time that the priest Jón Þórðarson started to copy them, and he took the liberty of adding six further *þættir* to each saga, as well as supplementary material from other sources. The second scribe on the project, the priest Magnús Þórhallsson, copied the sagas of King Sverrir and King Hákon Hákonarson into the manuscript without interpolating any *þættir* into them, but he did include *Helga þáttir ok Úlfs* among the texts that he added to *Flateyjarbók* later on.

The *þættir* of *Flateyjarbók* have been the subject of two book-length studies. Würth (1991) surveys the *þættir* without regard to when they entered the textual tradition;

her aims are to understand the meaning of the term '*þáttir*' as it is used in this one manuscript and to investigate the role that the *þáttir* play in the sagas of the two kings named Óláfr. Like the *þáttir* of *Morkinskinna*, the *þáttir* in the Óláfr sagas illustrate the characters of the kings and depict the relationship between the king and his men as a personal one (Würth 1991). Rowe (2004a) takes a different approach, identifying the *þáttir* that were added by Jón Þórðarson and interpreting them in the widest possible context. Following the suggestion of the Icelandic scholar Ólafur Halldórsson that *Flateyjarbók* may have originally been intended as a gift for the young King Óláfr Hákonarson of Norway, Rowe proposes that Jón Þórðarson's editorial project involved adding *þáttir* that would provide his king with examples of the generosity shown to their Icelandic retainers by his two royal namesakes. In a far-reaching and at times speculative analysis, she finds intertextual relationships not only between the six *þáttir* added to each saga, but also between these *þáttir* and the main narrative, and between these *þáttir* and the *þáttir* that had been interpolated earlier in the textual tradition. Her context-sensitive interpretation yields insights about one cleric's Augustinian view of the Scandinavian past and the changing relationship between Iceland and Norway as members of Christendom.

Studies of individual texts

Not all recent scholarship is dedicated to reading *þáttir* within their codicological context. The contributions to the study of individual *þáttir* vary with the stories themselves, although as the dominant newer trend, contextual readings will creep even into consideration of individual stories. One can perhaps recognize among the most important individual studies an acknowledgement of the same cultural and political motivations that scholars now routinely find in the rest of Old Icelandic literature. We attempt in the next paragraphs to sketch some of these diverse contributions.

King and Icelander

The best-known of Old Icelandic short stories, this group has come in for the most interpretative attention. Using six famous texts as his examples, Ólason (1989) suggests that the *Íslendingaþáttir* are relevant to the relationship between the free farmers and chieftains of the Commonwealth period. It had been generally assumed that these *þáttir* provided models for the behaviour of great men for a readership of Icelandic chieftains, but Ólason argues for a different audience, concluding that the contemporary purpose of the tales was to help free farmers find a way to serve their chieftains and yet still think of themselves as free men. The gap between ostensible subject matter and latent reader response in this interpretation has, however, left some contemporary admirers of Ólason's criticism unconvinced in this instance; and indeed most scholars take different approaches in interpreting the *þáttir* of this group.

Pálsson (1990) concludes of *Brands þáttir orva* that it was composed by a man of Christian learning; in addition to showing the influence of scripture and saints' lives,

the text borrows a motif from the bishops' lives of *Hungrvaka*. Pálsson regards the events related in *Brand's þáttir* as wholly fictional, so that, for example, attempts to calculate Brand's age in the *þáttir* are pointless. Njarðvík (1994) likewise detects a Christian theme in *Auðunar þáttir*, arguing that King Haraldr uses Auðunn as a means of indirectly communicating to his enemy King Sveinn his willingness to cease hostilities. Auðunn thus becomes one of the blessed peacemakers who, according to the Sermon on the Mount, will be called the children of God. By contrast Harris (1991) includes five *Íslendingaþættir* in a broad argument relating genre and gender in the saga literature. The interpretative result emphasizes the male homosocial relations of the warrior king with his retainer and the *Männerbund* of the court; as in many *þættir* embedded in kings' sagas, 'fulfilment' arises from the relationship with the king rather than a relationship with a woman.

Although these particular narratives do not show this relationship taken to its logical if tragic end, with the retainer giving his life in battle for his lord, such self-sacrifice is a feature of other *þættir*. Jakobsson (1997, 1998) considers the *Íslendingaþættir* to be historiographical texts and detects three ideological aims: they describe individual kings, illustrate the function of the royal characteristics, and show the important position of Icelanders at the Norwegian court. Brünger (1999) reaches a similar conclusion, suggesting that these *þættir* provide a way of demonstrating the superiority of the Icelandic character and indirectly criticizing particular kings.

These six scholars offer what at first glance seem very different readings; yet we suggest that they all fall within the broad parameters sketched in the pre-1989 criticism, parameters not of particular meaning but of ethos. It would be hard to deny the historiographical interpretations, which adhere so closely to manifest content, but we would add that the nature of medieval Icelandic historiography is shaped and often explicitly coloured by Christian theology, so that the Christian elements found in these *þættir* should be understood as both contributing to the 'secular' purposes of the tale (for example, when an Icelander is recognized at court for a Christian virtue such as generosity) and also constituting an ethical interpretative framework (for instance, when a king's generosity serves as a model for the audience). We feel that, if anything, the Christian intellectual substrata of these stories continue to be undervalued – a suggestion not contradicted by Harris's (1991) sociological speculations.

Conversion group

Perhaps because the conversion *þættir* (and the related pagan-contact sub-group) are almost entirely found in kings' sagas, they share a number of structural features with the stories of the king-and-Icelander group; in some cases, group adherence (genre) is best seen as a function of readerly focus. For example, Þorláksson (1992) uses *Qgmundar þáttir dytts*, which Harris classed among the *Íslendingaþættir*, as evidence for thirteenth-century Icelandic views about merchants and the profit motive, and undoubtedly it does illustrate the traditional chieftains' scorn for those who pursue wealth for its own sake. His treatment of the first part of the story is therefore secular

and anthropological. Meanwhile, McKinnell (2001) modifies Harris's conclusions on *Qgmundar þáttir*, arguing that, although the two halves of the narrative are indeed structurally parallel, they form a contrast on the moral plane, with the first part undermining heathen ethics and the second part demonstrating the workings of repentance and forgiveness. We agree to the extent that the *þáttir* as a whole probably yields better to a religious exegesis than to one oriented towards secular power. In a somewhat similar way, Lindow's (1986) folkloristic reading of *Þorsteins þáttir skelks* as based on a 'memorate' (that is, a first-hand account of an encounter with the supernatural) seems to resonate better with the pagan-contact group than with Harris's earlier classification among the *Íslendingaþættir*.

Harris (1991) found the same male-oriented lord-and-warrior relationship in the *þættir* that describe the king's conversion of the man who becomes his retainer as he does in *þættir* whose protagonists are already Christians (that is, *Íslendingaþættir*). This development is not surprising, for the homosocial model of conversion, in which one man submits to the spiritual authority of another, is easily mapped onto the homosocial model of service to a lord (Rowe 2004a). In addition Harris (1991) notes the Christian application of misogyny in conversion and pagan-contact *þættir*: in *Völsa þáttir*, it is a woman who is the most enthusiastic devotee of the pagan cult, and in *Sorla þáttir*, the goddess Freyja is cast as the malevolent agent of Óðinn.

Conversion and pagan-contact *þættir* are also rich subjects for source analysis. Steinsland and Vogt (1981) argue that *Völsa þáttir* preserves traces of an authentic pre-Christian tradition in which the worship of Óðinn prevails over that of giantesses. Perkins (2001) suggests, bringing massive documentation to bear, that the incident in *Rognvalds þáttir ok Rauðs* in which Þórr produces a wind by blowing into his beard is a genuine pagan survival. Rowe (1990) discerns elements of the legend of St Christopher in *Sveins þáttir ok Finns*, and Harris and Hill (1989) identify a motif from the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great in *Nornagests þáttir*. Rowe (2002) proposes that the author of *Sorla þáttir* drew on *Snorra Edda* but deliberately inverted the traditional material found there in order to show that the pagan gods were malevolent and that Christianity came as a welcome relief to the heathen Scandinavians. More strictly literary interpretations of these *þættir* are not lacking, either. Kaplan (2000) provides a political reading of *Þiðrandi þáttir ok Þórballs*, suggesting that its emphasis on prophecy and prefiguration allows its Christian Icelandic audience to identify with their pagan ancestors rather than with the Norwegian missionaries who converted them.

Finally, the resituation of the conversion and pagan-contact *þættir* within the contexts of their host sagas and manuscripts has yielded significant results. Harris and Hill (1989) explore in isolation *Nornagests þáttir's* assessment of the compatibility of Christian and heroic values while Rowe (2004b) reads it in tandem with *Helga þáttir Þórissonar*, which immediately follows it in its manuscript context. Whereas the first of the paired texts uses Germanic legend to show how certain heroic qualities can be accepted as good by Christians, the second employs a Celtic fairy story to demonstrate the negative side of paganism and apostasy without undercutting the positive

examples just given. Rowe (2004a) notes that *Sǫrla þáttir*, *Tóka þáttir*, *Þorsteins þáttir skelks* and *Vǫlsa þáttir* are found only in *Flateyjarbók*, where they are used to illustrate the changing nature of reality in Scandinavia as the pagan age was succeeded by the Christian era. *Helga þáttir ok Úlfs* is also found only in this manuscript, but as an addition by its second scribe, Magnús Þórhallsson. He evidently had a view of the conversion and the Norwegian missionary kings that was different from his predecessor's, for this *þáttir* is an independent text that is unusual in showing conversion as effected by revelation rather than royal threats. It also does not subscribe to the Augustinian view of salvation history as bipartite, instead depicting the transition to Christianity as taking place over three generations.

Feud stories

Þorsteins þáttir stangarhöggs, perhaps the quintessential feud *þáttir*, has been analysed repeatedly by those seeking to understand the structure of the *Íslendinga sögur* (references in Richardson 1995). Richardson's meticulous application of the principles of pragmatics to a linguistic analysis of the *þáttir's* verb tenses, with the goal of testing earlier analyses, discovers a strong correlation between tense alternation and modern models of saga structure.

But the *þáttir* as laboratory for saga studies can extend to the contextual readings as well. *Grœnlendinga þáttir* (*Einars þáttir Sökkasonar*), less well known but considered a very good historical source in all its main points, takes place late in the first third of the twelfth century and tells of how the Greenlanders' initial harmony is ultimately disrupted by their desire for a bishop. It is preserved only in *Flateyjarbók*, added by the second scribe, Magnús Þórhallsson. Ebel (1999) uses changes in the laws governing the rights of salvage to argue that it must have been written in the mid-thirteenth century rather than around 1200, as previously supposed, and she adduces further evidence of this date from the text's classic style and its treatment of the issue of the nomination of bishops. It is generally considered that *Grœnlendinga þáttir* was included because *Flateyjarbók* had other information about the Greenlanders in it, but Rowe (2004a) observes that after *Grœnlendinga þáttir*, Magnús adds a list of the bishops and churches of Greenland. In contrast to *Grœnlendinga saga*, which the first scribe of *Flateyjarbók* interlaced with a king's saga meant to be understood in an ethical or moral sense, *Grœnlendinga þáttir* is given an objective context, that of the ecclesiastical history of Greenland.

Rowe (2004a) argues that another feud *þáttir*, *Hrómundar þáttir halta*, provides an interesting variation on the secular lord–retainer relationship discussed by Harris (1991). Preserved only in *Flateyjarbók*, it is one of several narratives the first scribe interpolated that relate the loss of the protagonist's Icelandic natural father and his replacement by King Óláfr Tryggvason. In this story, Hallsteinn Hrómundarson receives no compensation for the slaying of his father and brother, but the special blessing of becoming King Óláfr's man and being killed in his service. As in the conversion *þættir*, the biological father is replaced by the Norwegian king, although *Hrómundar þáttir* does not depict King Óláfr as Hallsteinn's spiritual father. In contrast

to the *Íslendingaþættir*, however, this story ends tragically, with the Icelander giving his life for his lord.

Journeys to the other world

Comprising only two texts, *Helga þátr Þórissonar* and *Þorsteins þátr bæjarmagns*, this group has nevertheless long attracted the interest of scholars. For example, Hamer (1973) anticipated future critical directions with a Christian and numerological reading of *Helga þátr*, suggesting that it is an Everyman story about spiritual blindness. These two *þættir* have been grouped together because they share the motif of the journey to Glasisvellir and involve Óláfr Tryggvason, but as Rowe (2003) argues, they diverge considerably in terms of their structure and purpose. *Helga þátr* was added to *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* by its D redactor as a pair with *Nornagests þátr*, and Helgi's journey to the other world is merely the introductory adventure that establishes the basic conflict between the evil supernatural being Guðmundr of Glasisvellir and the good Christian King Óláfr. This didactic tale shows the mortal danger of submitting to the attractions of paganism. *Þorsteins þátr bæjarmagns*, however, is an independent narrative that employs the journey to the other world as the central mechanism for its entertaining account of how a retainer is able to leave the Norwegian court and acquire a domain of his own.

Although they do share traditional material, it might be more useful to assign the two to categories on the basis of other criteria. *Helga þátr* could be grouped with the didactic *þættir* of the Óláfr sagas, probably with the pagan-contact *þættir*, although it is unusual in being a negative *exemplum* rather than a positive one. *Þorsteins þátr* could be considered a kind of adventure tale, although its identification of the realm of the supernatural as chronologically contemporary with but geographically distinct from Christian Scandinavia distinguishes it from earlier *fornaldarsögur*.

Mytho-heroic þættir

This is a problematic group of texts, for the *þættir* that have been seen as having some relationship to the *fornaldarsögur*, whether with the heroic-legend branch or with the adventure-tale branch of that saga genre, seem to have no common theme or structure. *Nornagests þátr*, *Toka þátr* and *Sqrla þátr* have been excluded from this group because, although they contain legendary or pseudo-legendary material, the narratives as a whole are constructed for didactic purposes. For example, Rowe (2004b) argues that in *Þorsteins þátr uxafóts* the hero's encounters with trolls are the narrative's chief *fornaldarsaga*-like plot elements; also suggestive of the *fornaldarsögur* is its biographical structure, which features serial adventures in the manner of a *fornaldarsaga* like *Qrvar-Odds saga*. Undermining the relationship with the *fornaldarsögur* are the nationality of the hero and the fact that the whole of the story takes place after the settlement of Iceland. Because Þorsteinn is an Icelander of extraordinary strength who kills trolls and visits with *jarðbúar* ('dwellers underground'), his *þátr* is aligned with the narrative tradition exemplified by *Grettis saga*. However, the *þátr* as we have it now is far more comparable to typologically inflected stories such as *Sqrla þátr*.

Preserved only in *Flateyjarbók*, it is another one of Jón's narratives in which an Icelander takes Óláfr Tryggvason as his spiritual father, although the illegitimate Þorsteinn is able to win the acknowledgement of his Norwegian biological father (the protagonist of *Sorla þáttur*) as well. Þorsteinn joins his father in the king's service, and both die defending him at the battle of Svölðr.

Orms þáttur Stórolfssonar, also found only in *Flateyjarbók*, is another biography of a monster-killing Icelander. Unlike Þorsteinn, Ormr is baptized in Iceland and is not present at the battle of Svölðr, because (like the historical poet Sigvatr, who missed St Óláfr's last fight) he is on a pilgrimage to Rome, although when he returns to Norway it is agreed that Óláfr's long-ship would not have been taken if Ormr had been on it. The story seems to be included in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* to show that Iceland had developed to the point where it no longer required the missionary services of Norwegian kings and indeed could have saved the agent of salvation himself (Rowe 2004a). Despite the *fornaldarsaga* elements in the beginning and despite being structured in biographical serial adventures, the text as we have it is deployed as a kind of *Íslendingaþáttur*, using an unusual Icelander's interactions with powerful men in Norway to make a particular point about a king and an Icelander. *Þáttur af Ragnars sonum*, at least, seems to be an authentic reflex of a Viking Age legend, whose sources and literary relationships have been extensively explored by McTurk (1991).

Miscellaneous þættir

Of the *þættir* that resist the categories employed by Harris (1989), all that have been studied recently are preserved in the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason and St Óláfr, and thus are susceptible to the same kinds of contextualization and interpretation that have been applied to the other groups discussed. Versions of *Þorleifs þáttur jarlaskálds* have been edited by Österholm (1987, 1991), and Wiktorsson (1987) has also investigated the relationship between its manuscripts. Rowe (2004a) reads the *Flateyjarbók* version – another interpolation of Jón Þórðarson's – in tandem with *Hrómundar þáttur halta*. These *þættir* depict the wretchedness that prevailed in Óláfr Tryggvason's absence, describing Icelandic resistance to economic oppression by evil Norwegian pagans and the unjust suffering that results from it.

Taking place before the Christianization of Norway, *Þorleifs þáttur* is not a conversion *þáttur per se*, but its negative portrayal of the pagan jarl Hákon and his treatment of the Icelanders inverts the conventions of the *Íslendingaþáttur* for didactic purposes. Conversely, *Óláfs þáttur Geirstaðaálfs*, the account of a legendary Norwegian district-king, depicts Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr as a good pagan prefiguration of St Óláfr; the sources and variants of this story have been thoroughly investigated by Heinrichs (1989). *Eindriða þáttur ok Erlings*, *Eymundar þáttur Hringssonar*, *Hróa þáttur heimska* and *Styrbjarnar þáttur Sviakappa* are found only in *Flateyjarbók*, interpolated by Jón Þórðarson into *Óláfs saga hins belga*. The last two seem to be paired narratives, for they are set side by side and linked by the figure of Þorgnýr the lawman, who appears to be a late addition to *Styrbjarnar þáttur* (Rowe 2004a). They illustrate the importance of Óláfr's mission of

conversion, with *Styrbjarnar þáttur* showing that paganism was to be rejected because of its literally human toll, and *Hróa þáttur* showing how justice and prosperity flourish under the protection of a Christian king.

Eindriða þáttur ok Erlings and *Eymundar þáttur Hringssonar* continue to explore the benefits of Christian society. Like *Hróa þáttur*, *Eymundar þáttur* shows how a king's generosity is repaid many times over by the subject who benefits from it. There may also be a literary-historical relationship between *Styrbjarnar þáttur* and *Eymundar þáttur*, as the latter is thought to have borrowed from *Yngvars saga víðforla*, which compares Yngvarr to Styrbjörn (Pálsson and Edwards 1989). *Eindriða þáttur* shows that feuds can be averted and the bond between families strengthened by the judicial mechanisms offered by the church. Again, these narratives are not conversion *þættir per se*, but their positive view of Christian kingship is moulded by the same Augustinian perspective on salvation history that led to the depiction of Scandinavia's pagan era as a period of horror and oppression.

Conclusions for Future Research

Interpretation, whether in or out of manuscript context, is likely to remain the most common approach to *þáttur* studies in the foreseeable future. The interpretative space allowed to any given *þáttur* would seem to exist at the intersection of its reading as an independent story and its use by a saga compiler or author; since neither of these variables can ever be fully fixed, their possible combinations cannot be exhausted. We are convinced that the Christian mentality of these stories is one dimension of both intrinsic and contextual reading that should be further developed. Contextualists so far (such as Jakobsson and Rowe) have attempted to approximate a medieval reader's interpretation through his employment or, more strictly, placement of a *þáttur*, but the resulting textual mosaic, which is almost our only clue to a compiler/author's intentions, is susceptible to a range (not infinite) of reasonable explications. Even in the rare cases where medieval commentary exists (for example, in *Dorsteins þáttur jarlaskálds*), its authority is itself finally limited as simply an early stage of reception. Pre-contextual interpretations are freer and will continue to evolve (as for example in Brünger's refinements of narrative conception), and the contexts an intrinsic critic cites are bounded only by his or her ability to make them relevant – the situation of literature generally. Still, historical readings of the stories ought not to ignore their more proximate contexts.

Genre is famously a critic's first 'horizon of expectations', and the group affinities of *þættir* must continue to exert a strong influence even though the critic is caught up in the hermeneutic circle: groupings are hardly perceptible in medieval sources and so must be found or constructed according to the very affinities that offer themselves to the critic of the individual story. Some of the issues associated with genre seem too bluntly positivistic to continue to interest the field after the pioneer period – how many types of *þættir* are there, what is their relationship to saga genres? Even these

flat-footed questions lead, however, to less arbitrary ones such as, how do we recognize a *þáttir* in the textual continuum, and how important is structure as a marker of genre?

Þorsteins þáttir uxafóts (Rowe 2004b) presents a suggestive example for the latter question. Its biographical structure of action as a whole appears to resist the pigeon-hole of ‘conversion *þáttir*’; yet its inclusion of a well-formed ‘pagan-contact’ episode and use of conversion thematics are examples of generic modulation or selections from a generic repertoire. Perhaps *Þorsteins þáttir* can be considered literary-historically a secondary development of the conversion *þættir*, now expanded (after saga models) to encompass the entire life of the protagonist. This broader scope allows for a larger complex of themes than can be handled by the more focused texts of the conversion group. In addition to illustrating the historical gulf between the Old and New Dispensations, as the pagan-contact *þættir* do, *Þorsteins þáttir* exhibits various affinities with both the personal drama of conversion and the ethical conflict of Christianity and paganism. Moreover, the narrative trajectory from Iceland to the battle of Svǫldr adds a political dimension that establishes links with other non-conversion *þættir* added to *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* by Jón Þórðarson, such as *Hrómundar þáttir balta* and *Orms þáttir Stórolfssonar* (Rowe 2004a: 78–84). Thus local, embedded elements of genre repertory can be more significant than overall form even in a short narrative form, and taxonomy regains its intellectual dignity when employed in the arsenal of the critic faced with literary works which are never exhausted by simple genre ‘expectations’.

The question of genres and how they change over time leads, finally, to literary history, which minimally proposes answers to six W-questions, Who Wrote What, When, Where and Why? No separate history of the short narrative in Old Norse-Icelandic has been attempted (Kristjánsson’s chapter [1988: 299–309], for example, is a synchronic appreciation of selected stories from one group), nor should such an account ignore the rest of the saga literature. Many of the components of such a literary history have been assembled in the pre- and post-1989 studies, especially analyses of literary structures, themes, genre affiliations, literary relations and reception. The continuation of the ‘old’ philology could make possible a chronology, partly absolute (but inexact), partly relative; for example, if Andersson and Gade (2000) are correct, then 12 of the king-and-Icelander *þættir* of *Morkinskinna* pre-date the compilation, believed to be composed between 1217 and 1222, and the rest were written as part of the process of creating the compilation. This would make this group a particularly early genre of medieval Icelandic literature.

On the other hand, the ‘new’ philology could contribute for the first time a panorama of the literary life of *þættir*, their medieval interpretations and use, through examination of the preserving contexts. Although interlacing (as in Clover’s *The Medieval Saga* from 1982) still seems to be a good model for the *Íslendingasögur*, in which principal actions that take place at the same time are told in alternating sections and the reader knows from the beginning of the new thread why the narrative has split into parallel tracks, it no longer seems appropriate for the kings’ sagas, where the embedded texts relate the activities of minor characters and the thematic relationship of the embedded text to the main narrative thread can only be understood

retrospectively. This construction of meaning was not an unconscious effect of other editorial practices; the first scribe of *Flateyjarbók* describes it explicitly in his introduction to *Þáttur Ásbjarnar selsbana*:

But although there are many exempla here in the saga that do not clearly seem to pertain to the saga at the beginning, they nevertheless all arrive at one place before the saga ends because they all wend and wind toward the glory and virtues of the holy Olaf, either because of his miracle-working or fame and exploits, boldness or fearlessness, as will yet be shown in the following material and exempla. (Rowe 2004a: 48)

That is, it is not obvious from the beginning how a particular *þáttur* comes into the story of St Óláfr, but by the end of the saga its thematic relevance is plain. Until then the audience must have faith and trust that the relevance of the *þáttur* will be revealed in the fullness of time. These ideas about saga compilation seem to be derived from the Augustinian view of providence: the host saga must be read in the same manner as the book of God's creation, where God's plan will be revealed at some future time. The same strategy of reading is assumed for secular compilations such as *Morkinskinna*, so it seems likely that, although it was first taught as part of a Christian's education in his religion, it became internalized as a 'natural' way of organizing any kind of large or complex narrative.

The telos of such a history of the short story might appear to be hybridization – including the demotion of *þættir* to the level of anecdote, the mixture of multiple *þáttur* genres within a single text, and the promotion of *þættir* to saga equivalents – and consequent disintegration of the object of the history. For their part, contextual studies end up replacing the study of a *þáttur* with the study of a saga, and the study of a saga with that of a codex. Although this seems unavoidable for the *þættir* preserved only in compilations, independent compositions and pre-contextual considerations of incorporated *þættir* would balance the history as a whole. But whether dependent or independent, this great hoard of medieval short narrative also deserves a place in European short-story histories that take in, especially, the Italian *novelle*, and equally our imagined literary history of the *þáttur* requires its European chapter.

See also CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; EDDIC POETRY; FAMILY SAGAS; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PSEUDO-HISTORY; LATE PROSE FICTION; LAWS; MANUSCRIPTS AND PALAEOGRAPHY; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; PROSE OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION; ROMANCE; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; SAGAS OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY; SAGAS OF ICELANDIC PREHISTORY; SKALDIC POETRY; WOMEN IN OLD NORSE POETRY AND SAGAS.

NOTE

- 1 The present, necessarily selective, bibliography builds on the (also limited) bibliography in Harris (1989), where most of the early work synthesized but not cited in our chapter can be traced.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Editions and Translations

- Andersson, Theodore M. and Gade, Kari Ellen (transl.) (2000) *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157)* (Islandica 51). Ithaca, NY.
- Cipolla, Adele (ed. and transl.) (1996) *Il racconto di Nornagestr: Edizione critica, traduzione e commento* (Medioevi, Testi 1). Verona.
- Halldórsson, Ólafur (ed.) (2000) *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (Editiones Arnarnagæanæ, Series A, vol. 3). Copenhagen.
- Hreinsson, Viðar et al. (transl.) (1997) *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders Including 49 Tales*. 5 vols. Reykjavík.
- Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul (transl.) (1989) *Vikings in Russia: Yngvar's Saga and Eymund's Saga*. Edinburgh.
- Vilmundarson, Þórhallur and Vilhjálmsson, Bjarni (eds.) (1991) *Harðar saga* (Íslensk fornrit XIII). Reykjavík.
- Wyatt, Ian and Cook, Jessie (eds.) (1993) *Two Tales of Icelanders: Ögmundar þátr dytts og Gunnars helmings: Ölkofra þátr* (Durham Medieval Texts 10). Durham.
- Österholm, Nils (1987) *Þorleifs þátr jarlaskálds: Handskriftsstudier i en isländsk kortsaga* (Nordiska texter och undersökningar 26). Stockholm.
- Österholm, Nils (1991) 'Torleiftäten i handskriften Add 4867 fol.' *Scripta Islandica* 42, 67–90.
- Secondary Literature*
- Bragason, Úlfar (2000) 'In the Scriptorium of *Sturlunga's* Compiler.' In Michael Dallapiazza et al. (eds.) *International Scandinavian and Medieval Studies in Memory of Gerd Wolfgang Weber*. Trieste, pp. 471–82.
- Brünger, Tanja (1999) "'Hugkvæmir ok höfðingjadjarfir": Urteile und Vorurteile über Isländer in zwei Kurzerzählungen des 13. Jahrhunderts.' *Skandinavistik* 29, 36–52.
- Clover, Carol J. (1982) *The Medieval Saga*. Ithaca, NY, and London.
- Ebel, Else (1999) 'Der Grœnlandinga þátr: aktuelle oder antiquarische Gesichtsperspektive?' In Stig Toftgaard Andersen (ed.) *Die Aktualität der Saga: Festschrift für Hans Sebottmann* (Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde, Band 21). Berlin, pp. 13–25.
- Hamer, Andrew (1973) 'Legendary Fiction in *Flatteyjarbók*.' In Peter Foote et al. (eds.) *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference, University of Edinburgh 1971*. London, pp. 184–211.
- Harris, Joseph (1989) 'Þættir.' In Joseph R. Strayer (ed.) *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, vol. 12. New York, pp. 1–6.
- Harris, Joseph (1991) 'Gender and Genre: Short and Long Forms in the Saga Literature.' In Flemming G. Andersen and Morten Nøygård (eds.) *The Making of the Couple: The Social Function of Short-Form Medieval Narrative*. Odense, pp. 43–66.
- Harris, Joseph and Hill, Thomas D. (1989) 'Gestr's "Prime Sign": Source and Signification in *Norna-Gests þátr*.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 104, 103–22.
- Heinrichs, Anne (1989) *Der Óláfs þátr Geirstaðaálfs: eine variantenstudie*. Heidelberg.
- Jakobsson, Ármann (1997) *Í leit að konungi: konungsmynd íslenskra konungasagna*. Reykjavík.
- Jakobsson, Ármann (1998) 'King and Subject in *Morkinskinna*.' *Skandinavistik* 28, 101–17.
- Kaplan, Merrill (2000) 'Prefiguration and the Writing of History in *Þiðranda þátr ok Þorbjalls*.' *JEGP* 99, 379–94.
- Kristjánsson, Jónas (1988) *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature*, transl. Peter Foote. Reykjavík.
- Lange, Wolfgang (1957) 'Einige Bemerkungen zur altnordischen Novelle.' *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 88, 150–9.
- Lindow, John (1986) '*Þorsteins þátr skelks* and the Verisimilitude of Supernatural Experience in Saga Literature.' In John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth and Gerd Wolfgang Weber (eds.) *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism* (Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization 3). Odense, pp. 264–80.
- McKinnell, John (2001) '*Ögmundar þátr*: Versions, Structure, and Ideology.' In Ásdís Egilsdóttir

- and Rudolf Simek (eds.) *Sagnabeimur: Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson on his 80th birthday, 26th May 2001*. Vienna, pp. 159–74.
- McTurk, Rory (1991) *Studies in Ragnars saga loðbrókar and its Major Scandinavian Analogues* (Medium Ævum Monographs, New Series 15). Oxford.
- Njarðvík, Njörður P. (1994) 'Maður hét Auðun.' In Gísli Sigurðsson et al. (eds.) *Sagnaþing helgað Jónasi Kristjánssyni sjötugum 10. apríl 1994*, vol. 2. Reykjavík, pp. 611–16.
- Ólason, Vésteinn (1989) 'Den frie mannens selvforståelse i islandske sagaer og dikt.' In Anders Andrén (ed.) *Medeltidens fødsel* (Symposier på Krappereps Borg 1). Lund, pp. 277–86.
- Pálsson, Hermann (1990) 'Brands þáttur örva.' *Gripla* 7, 117–30.
- Perkins, Richard (2001) *Thor the Wind-Raiser and the Eyrarland Image* (Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series 15). London.
- Richardson, Peter (1995) 'Tense, Structure, and Reception in *Þorsteins þáttur stangarbögs*.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 110, 41–55.
- Rowe, Elizabeth Ashman (1990) 'Searching for the Highest King: St Christopher and *Sveins þáttur ok Finns*.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 105, 131–9.
- Rowe, Elizabeth Ashman (2002) '*Sqrla þáttur*: The Literary Adaptation of Myth and Legend.' *Saga-Book* 26, 38–66.
- Rowe, Elizabeth Ashman (2003) '*Fornaldarsögur and Flateyjarbók*.' *Gripla* 14, 93–105.
- Rowe, Elizabeth Ashman (2004a) *The Development of Flateyjarbók: Iceland and the Norwegian Dynastic Crisis of 1389* (Viking Collection 15). Odense.
- Rowe, Elizabeth Ashman (2004b) '*Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts, Helga þáttur Þórissonar*, and the Conversion þættir.' *Scandinavian Studies*.
- Schier, Kurt (1970) *Sagaliteratur* (Sammlung Metzler, M78). Stuttgart.
- Steinsland, Gro and Vogt, Kari (1981) '“Aukinn ertu Uolse ok vpp vm tekinn”': En religionshistorisk analyse av *Vqlsaþáttur* i *Flateyjarbók*.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 96, 87–106.
- Tranter, Stephen Norman (1987) *Sturlunga saga: The Role of the Creative Compiler* (European University Studies Series I, German Language and Literature, vol. 941). Frankfurt.
- Þorláksson, Helgi (1992) 'Social Ideals and the Concept of Profit in 13th-century Iceland.' In Gísli Pálsson (ed.) *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*. Enfield Lock, pp. 231–45.
- Wiktorsson, Per-Axel (1987) 'Om *Torleiftáten*.' *Scripta Islandica* 38, 51–71.
- Würth, Stephanie (1991) *Elemente des Erzählens: Die þættir der Flateyjarbók* (Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie 20). Basel.

Skaldic Poetry

Diana Whaley

Over 5,000 verses, most of them eight-line stanzas composed between the late ninth and fourteenth centuries, are traditionally counted as 'skaldic', an adjective constructed from Old Norse *skáld* 'poet'.¹ The best insights into this remarkable genre are gained simply by reading verses aloud or silently, or by memorizing them, and hence this chapter combines a brief survey of the salient aspects of the poetry with a selection rather grandly headed 'A Skaldic Anthology', but necessarily somewhat arbitrary. The two main sections may be read in either order.

Aspects of Skaldic Poetry

The skalds

The poem traditionally regarded as the earliest to survive is the *Ragnarsdrápa* of Bragi inn gamli ('the Old'), though its confident panache could suggest that a wealth of lost work went before it, and the names of predecessors are recorded in *Skáldatal* ('List of Poets'), albeit legendary ones.² Skaldic poetry was composed throughout the Scandinavian-speaking world, and by poets of diverse origin, but mainly Norwegian in the first phase, then Norwegian or Icelandic in the tenth century. After c.1000, most skalds seem to have come from Iceland (especially the west or northwest) or Orkney, though some Norwegian kings are credited with poetry. How poets were trained is unknown, but the gifts of the greatest of them were recognized as special. Egill Skalla-Grímsson is credited with a fine stanza containing the boast, 'you will not find a three-year-old poem-smith better than me' (*Egils saga* ch. 31), while according to a story attributed to Styrmir Kárason, Sigvatr Þórðarson's prodigious fluency in poetry came after catching and eating an extraordinary fish, head first, on the advice of a Norwegian. Some skalds were related to one another: Þórðr Kolbeinsson and his son Arnórr, for instance, in the early eleventh century, or Snorri Sturluson and his

nephews Sturla and Óláfr in the thirteenth. We also have a fascinating account, whether literally true or not, of animated skaldic discussions between Egill Skalla-Grímsson and Einarr skálaglamm ('Scale-tinkle') (*Egils saga* ch. 78).

Several hundred individuals are credited with verse utterances, some 250 of them named. Some bore the by-name 'skáld' or a more specific nickname referring to poetic activity, such as Eyvindr skáldaspillir ('Poet-spoiler', ? 'Plagiarist'), Jórunn skáldmær ('Skald-maid'), representing a handful of female poets, or the curiously named Þóroddr dráputúfr ('Poem-stump'). Poetic composition was never, however, a full-time, life long occupation, and though the functionary skalds who served Nordic rulers were well rewarded they also farmed, traded and fought. Many people who speak verse in the sagas are otherwise not foregrounded as poets at all and may be regarded as 'accidental' poets or even fictitious ones. The titular hero of the late 'bridal-quest' saga *Víglundar saga*, for instance, almost certainly did not exist and hence joins the company of unlikely poets which also includes troll-wives and dream-figures. These extreme examples may cast doubt on apparently more credible attributions, though context and genre can guide our expectations as to the seriousness of the claims. The encomiastic poetry of the *konungasögur* (kings' sagas) seems in general reliably attributed, though there are gaps and contradictions in the evidence. The authenticity of poetry attributed to protagonists in the *Íslendingasögur* (sagas of Icelanders) is generally less secure, and the whole range of possibility seems to be realized, from correct attribution (though the circumstances of composition may be fabricated), through composition of verse during the later evolution of traditions, to simultaneous composition of poetry and prose by a saga author at two or three centuries' remove from the period depicted.³

Status of poetry

Poetry was of old associated with Óðinn, god of war and magic, and an elaborate myth frequently alluded to in verses, and articulated in prose by Snorri Sturluson, traces the transformation of the blood of the wise god Kvasir by dwarfs into the 'mead of poetry', and its acquisition by giants and then Óðinn (see 'A Skaldic Anthology' [hereafter 'Anthology'], verse C, and Faulkes 1998: I, 3–5). Bragi, the symbolic first skald, shares a name with a god and may have given rise to the divinity.

Aside from any mystic associations, poetry was a precious commodity in medieval Scandinavia, able to confer or destroy honour and hence a potent agent in the dynamic of political and social relations. Princes might reward a eulogy with a gold arm-ring or a ship, or a poet in bad odour might buy back his head by praise. In Iceland, where music and the visual arts lacked economic stimulus on the scale associated elsewhere with royal patronage or massive ecclesiastical wealth, poetry was prized yet attainable.

Characteristics of skaldic poetry

Skaldic poetry is customarily defined by modern scholars, though notably not by medieval ones, in opposition to eddic poetry and to some extent *rímur* (see

chapter 12).⁴ Whereas the poems of the Poetic Edda are uniformly anonymous, often of uncertain date and provenance, and concerned chiefly with mythical and legendary themes, most secular skaldic poetry is credited to named poets and concerned with persons and events that are anchored in a particular time and place, hence approximately historical. Where this is not the case the poetry itself may nevertheless arise from a known historical context, as when Úlfr Uggason's *Húsdrápa* depicts mythological scenes in a poem explicitly composed for Óláfr pái ('the Peacock'), c.983. The preservation of secular skaldic poetry mainly as fragments within prosimetrum works (discussed below) is also distinctive. Although several of the *Edda* poems also have accompanying prose, they are preserved for their own sake in continuous and more or less complete form, most of them in Codex Regius, GKS 2365 4to.

In metre and style, skaldic poetry again tends to differ from eddic. Some five-sixths of the skaldic corpus is composed in the intricate *dróttkvætt* metre, with all that entails (see chapter 15), and its diction is typically more ornate and specialized, more distanced from the everyday language, than that of eddic poetry.

The notion of a 'skaldic' poetics is helpful in so far as it highlights common characteristics, balanced by a recognition that it is far from monolithic or homogeneous. Certainly some poems blend 'skaldic' and 'eddic' attributes. The tenth-century *Hákonarmál* and *Eiríksmál*, for instance, were composed in a blend of the eddic metres *fornyrðislag* and *ljóðabáttir* and cast at least in part as conversations in Valhalla between gods, valkyries and heroes; *Eiríksmál* is anonymous. Yet alongside these typically 'eddic' features we must note that these poems commemorate Norwegian kings and are preserved mainly in the *konungasögur*.

Subject matter and social function

During the edgy power-sharing of Kings Magnús and Haraldr in mid-eleventh-century Norway, they summon the poet Arnórr jarlaskáld ('Earls' poet'), having heard that he has composed in their honour (according to a tale in *Morkinskinna* ch. 12). Leaving his newly tarred ship at the harbour without pausing to wash his hands, Arnórr flounces into the royal hall and proceeds to impress Magnús with the resounding *Hryn benda*, whose opening includes the line 'Magnús, hear a mighty poem'. Haraldr's poem is less distinguished, but like Magnús's well rewarded. Thus performance is foregrounded both in the poetry itself and in the prose narrative, and there are many more examples of both.

Royal eulogies or panegyrics are indeed a classic and enduring manifestation of the skaldic art. Fidjestøl's great survey, *Det norrøne fyrstediktet* (1982), begins with the *Glymdrápa* of Þorbjörn hornklofi (c.900) for Haraldr hárfagri and ends with a poem for Magnús Hákonarson lagabœtir by Sturla Þórðarson (d. 1284) and a *kviðubáttir* fragment (see chapter 15) for his son Eiríkr. Most such poems praise the deeds of Norwegian kings or earls, including the mighty Hákon jarl (see 'Anthology', verse C) and King Haraldr harðráði ('Hardruler'; verse D). Non-Norwegian dedicatees included Knútr inn ríki ('the Powerful') of Denmark and England, Óláfr of Sweden, and

earls of Orkney. A few outstanding Icelanders were also graced with poems. Some formal panegyrics directly address a living prince, while others refer to the ruler's demise and hence are clearly memorial poems or *erfidrápur*, but other differences between the two types are elusive (for instance, Fidjestøl 1982: 193–8) and would repay further investigation.

The earliest encomiastic poems are in general both more indirect and more inventive than later examples – they flatter by describing pictures on a royal gift (as in *Ragnarsdrápa*) or by enumerating ancestors (as in Eyvindr skáldaspillir's *Háleygjatal*). Still more obliquely, the bizarre contests of gods with giants in Eilífr Goðrúnarson's *Þórsdrápa* have been convincingly interpreted as political allegory ('Anthology', verse B). However, grandiloquent descriptions of heroic battles and voyages, seasoned with allusions to the justice and generosity of the ruler in question, and reminders of the poet's relationship to him, became established as the panegyric norm. The skalds' favourite subject, battle, is depicted both at long range, as troops or fleets advance or retreat, or through close-up shots of missiles flying, swords crashing on skulls or helmets, blood flowing and finally beasts of battle feasting on human carrion. Another common mode, illustrated in verse D, is the synoptic overview. All types of presentation may be laced with a moderate amount of factual detail, but since many skaldic verses do not even name the hero in question, their attachment to a particular event or particular poem often rests on the prose context in which they are preserved. Many scholars believe that verses were transmitted with accompanying explanatory prose (for instance, Beyschlag 1953 on *Begleitprosa*).

The panegyric poetry is propagandist in the sense that, with rare exceptions,⁵ it propounds a military ideology, glorifies the dedicatee and his men, and sometimes supports specific territorial claims. Opponents are not generally demonized, though they may, for instance, be labelled as heathen, so that it is left to syntax and context to distinguish vanquishing subject from defeated object.

Although most extended skaldic poems are concerned with the recent past, the twelfth century saw a burgeoning of historical interest which expressed itself in retrospective poems such as *Rekstefja* (in praise of Óláfr Tryggvason, 995–1000), *Íslendingadrápa* and *Jómsvíkingadrápa* (about heroic Icelanders or the Jómsvíkingar, respectively).

Conflict is also a major theme of the verses inspired by local events in Iceland and preserved chiefly in *Landnámabók* ('The Book of Settlements'), the *Íslendingasögur* (set in the period from the late ninth century to the early eleventh; see 'Anthology', verses G and H) or in *Sturlunga saga* (set in the later twelfth or earlier thirteenth centuries; see verses I and J). The majority are free-standing occasional verses or *lausavísur* anticipating combat, speaking from the heat of the action, or reporting, commenting or bragging afterwards. Also striking is the poetry composed by Kormákr and others in unsanctioned wooing of a beautiful woman (*mansongr*, literally 'woman-song'), and it too was combative, constituting a threat to her marital prospects and family honour and hence a challenge to her menfolk. Like versified slander of an enemy (*níð*, *níðkvæði*), it was illegal, and both are a frequent source of social discord in the

Íslendingasögur. A man could pay with his life even for repeating malicious verse, as happens in ch. 20 of *Bjarnar saga Hítödelakappa*, a saga whose protagonists, Björn Arngestsson and Þórðr Kolbeinsson, produce some pre-eminent examples of sustained *níð*. Verse G in the ‘Anthology’ counterpoints love and hate within eight lines.

The devastating mobility of the Viking Age depended on advanced nautical technology, and voyages and sea-battles are a favourite topic of the skalds, occasioning rich diction and imagery, both technical and poetic (Jesch 2001; Fidjestøl 1982: 206–9). Some love verses counterpoint sexual longing with the miseries of seafaring. Other modes of travel are also represented, most famously in Sigvatr’s *Austrfararvísur* (for example, ‘Anthology’, verses E and F).

Nordic mythology forms a major source of skaldic diction well into the Christian period, but it also provides the core subject matter of a small group of magnificent poems from the late pagan period: *Haustlög*, *Þórsdrápa* (extracted in ‘Anthology’, verse B) and *Húsdrápa*. It seems unlikely that the earliest skalds had a specifically priestly function, perhaps comparable with that of the Irish *filid* ‘poets’, though further research on this point could be worthwhile. The deployment of skaldic forms for Christian themes, often by clerics, is surveyed in chapter 3.

Whatever the subject matter, the art of the skalds – in both composition and performance – is always an intensely self-conscious one, and many stanzas are laced with statements amounting to ‘Hear my poem / I brew the mead of poetry / I swell the verse’ (see Kreutzer 1977; Clover 1978; and ‘Anthology’, verse C). An impulse to codify skaldic lore emerges in the poems composed by sophisticated, literate authors to illustrate metrical and stylistic points: the *Háttalykill* (‘Key to Metres’, *Clavis metrica*), composed c.1142 by Earl Rognvaldr kali and the Icelander Hallr Þórarinsson,⁶ and the early thirteenth-century *Háttatal* (‘List of Metres’), an illustrative poem (or strictly two poems) with commentary. This concludes Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda*, whose second part, *Skáldskaparmál* (‘The Language of Poetry’), is explicitly educational in intent (Faulkes 1998: I, 5). See also Nordal (2001) on the learned response to skaldic poetry.

The various kinds of skaldic subject matter are not segregated or mutually exclusive, and within individual stanzas the richly allusive diction can allow a multiplicity of worlds to be represented simultaneously. This may be illustrated by ‘Anthology’, verse D, by Þjóðólfr Arnórsson. The primary content is a past-tense sketch of events in a particular location: 80 strongholds in Serkland were captured as the ruler put himself in danger before waging war in Sicily. This is elaborated with a few details: the ruler is young (*ungr*) and (by implication from the ‘ruler’ kenning) generous, he fought with a shield (*und skildi*), the war was fierce (*barðan*) and Sicily is – allegedly – flat (*sléttir*). The performance context is represented, albeit lightly, by the impersonal phrase *má... segja* ‘one can say, it can be told’. Meanwhile, the particular diction selected opens up further vistas.⁷ The expression for ‘(generous) ruler’ is *tandrauðs... ormtorgs hǫtuðr* ‘hater of the flame-red dragon-plaza [of GOLD]’ (a kenning: see the subsection on ‘Diction’ below). The compound *ormtorg* alludes to belief in dragons as guardians of mounds containing treasure-hoards, the most famous

being Fáfnir in the Nibelung story, slain by the legendary hero Sigurðr. The kenning *Hildar leik* hints at Norse myth, for *bilðr* / *Hilðr* is both a *beiti* meaning ‘battle’ and the name of a valkyrie, a ‘chooser of the slain’, and her grim sport (*leikr*) is battle. (*Heiti* and kennings are explained below.)

These remote and barely glimpsed spheres of legend and myth are arguably not merely decorative but connect with the more historically located worlds of the poem’s primary content and its performance. *Torg(s)* in *ormtorg(s)* both rhymes with *borga* ‘strongholds’ and, meaning as it does ‘market-place, square, plaza’, resonates with it semantically. To praise Haraldr through references to dragons and gold imparts some legendary glamour to the lines, and may hint that he is an equal of the dragon-slayer Sigurðr, in the way that the court poet or *scop* in the Old English *Beowulf* implicitly equates Beowulf’s triumph over Grendel with the dragon-slaying of the hero he calls Sigemund. To depict Haraldr as a hater (*hǫtuðr*) of gold conventionally suggests how vigorously he gives it away, and tactfully reminds him that he has a reputation for generosity to maintain (an interesting contrast with the prose sources, which present Haraldr as mean and mercenary). The specific choice of the aggressive agent noun *hǫtuðr*, meanwhile, reinforces the bellicose tenor of the lines, and the epithet *tandrauðs* ‘flame-red’, though primarily describing the gold, hints at the burning of cities. There is, of course, a risk of overinterpretation, but Þjóðólfr is so much a master of his medium in this stanza that each one of the couplets contains an additional pair of alliterating syllables, so his choice of diction hardly seems forced by metrical considerations. He loads every rift with ore, to borrow a phrase from Keats. The general question as to the limits of interpretation remains, however, and will be briefly revisited below.

Skaldic structures

The basic skaldic unit is the eight-line stanza, but stanzas can stand alone or configure in various ways. Any consideration of the larger compositional structures is hampered by the fact that complete or even near-complete skaldic secular poems are the exception rather than the rule in the manuscript transmission. Nevertheless, some tentative generalizations can be made, partly assisted by the evidence of the more complete Christian poems covered in chapter 3.

The most prestigious and most characteristic form was the *drápa*, a long, formal praise-poem. The opening or introduction (*upphaf*), often containing a call for a hearing, would herald the main body of the poem, the refrain section (*stefjabálkr*). This consisted of sections called *stefjamél*, each marked out by the use of a particular *stef* or refrain. Poems close with the ending (*slæmr*), as when the twelfth-century poet Hallar-Steinn announces his *slæmr*, adding *hefk þar lokit stefjum* ‘I have closed the refrains there’ in his *Rekstefja* (st. 24). The same skald, reviewing the poems composed for Óláfr Tryggvason, clearly regards the *drápa* as a superior form to the *flokkur* ‘group’ (st. 34). It is not surprising that most royal praise is cast in this form, 42 *drápur* being preserved, at least in part, within the sagas (Fidjestøl 1982: 183), or that Þórarinn

loftunga ('Praise-tongue') nearly lost his head when he composed a mere *flokkr* for King Knútr (*Óláfs saga helga* in *Heimskringla* ch. 172). Some rulers, however, were content to have *flokkar* dedicated to them, and some examples probably differed little from *drápur* except by the absence of *stef*.

At the other extreme from these extended compositions are the *lausavísur*, literally 'loose verses', free-standing occasional stanzas. These are attributed to protagonists in the prose sources with words such as 'Then Kormákr said', in contrast with tags such as 'So says Sigvatr' which introduce authenticating quotations from extended poems, especially in the kings' sagas. As a whole the *lausavísur* range more freely than the formal poems do in subject, addressee, attitude to subject and style. They may well report or comment as the longer poems do, but in so far as they are (actually or fictively) often uttered from the midst of a highly charged situation, they may also fulfil other communicative or illocutionary functions such as requesting, commanding, threatening or vowing (Whaley 1993: 256–60). Above all, the skald himself is more in evidence – his actions, opinions and emotions. Grammatically, *lausavísur* may be characterized by present- and future-tense verbs, imperatives, first person references and deictic adverbs such as *nú* 'now', *hér* 'here' or *hingat* '(to) here, hither' (for instance, 'Anthology', verse H). These cannot, however, be regarded as safe diagnostic tools, and some supposed *lausavísur* may in fact be extracts from longer poems which have effectively been turned into *lausavísur* by saga writers or their predecessors providing dramatic contexts for them (see, for instance, Poole 1991).

In addition to such uncertainties as these, a good deal of middle ground lies between the poles of extended, formal poems and *lausavísur*. Three major sets of verses by Sigvatr Þórðarson, for instance, are preserved mainly in Snorri Sturluson's *Óláfs saga helga* (*Separate* and *Heimskringla* versions) and labelled there as *flokkar* but referred to by titles in *-vísur* 'verses'. The reconstruction of the *Austrfaravísur* (represented by 'Anthology', verses E and F) is highly problematic, but it seems to combine the attributes of formal eulogy with an assemblage of *lausavísur*. Another type of structural hybrid is postulated by the suggestion that formal poems might have been flanked by more loosely connected stanzas (Fidjestøl 1982: 84).

Clause arrangement and word-order

The highly inflected nature of the Old Norse language means that syntactic relations can usually be made clear by grammatical endings (as when *bugstóran . . . foldar vqrð* in 'Anthology', verse C, clearly belong together) and depend less on predictable word-order than in languages such as modern English. The skalds exploit this potential flexibility to an often quite extraordinary extent. Within clauses there are frequent departures from the 'normal', 'prose' order, though because the syntax is usually quite straightforward this rarely causes real difficulties. It is in the arrangement of clauses within the half-stanza that skaldic style differs most from everyday language. Although skalds frequently use a straightforward sequential pattern, each clause finishing before the next starts (pattern *ab*, or *abc* etc.), they also play with

clause boundaries, suspending a clause while intercalating another and hence making what can be termed ‘frame’ patterns (*aba*), ‘interlace’ patterns (*abab* etc.) or combinations of these (Reichardt 1928; Edwards 1983).

Whether the use of discontinuous clauses was forced on the skalds by the demands of the metre or whether it was a desideratum in itself is a moot point, and different answers could doubtless be given in relation to different poets and periods. It must have taxed the alertness of the audience, whether or not clauses were acoustically marked out by difference of pitch, volume or tone (this remains unknown: see Gade 1994). What is clear is that discontinuous syntax can have positive aesthetic effects. By breaking the linear flow of language, the skalds can allow phrases to float free, resonating semantically with more than one clause in the *belmingr* or half-stanza, and they can also produce special effects, for instance mimicking simultaneous action or expressing the brokenness of intense emotion.

Diction

The remark – or complaint – has often been made that, if boiled down into prose, the import of many skaldic verses would amount to ‘the prince fought a battle; I compose a verse’ or similar, and it is certainly true that much skaldic ingenuity goes into elaborate, constantly varied phrasing rather than hard content. To paraphrase Snorri Sturluson, poets have three main choices: to call things by their everyday names, to use poetic appellations, and to use figures known as kennings (Faulkes 1998: I, 5).

Heiti (or *ókennd heiti* in Snorri’s terminology) are single words which are rare or non-occurring in prose, or which have different senses in poetry and prose. They are often imbued with connotations in addition to the main concepts to which they refer, as when *brandr* ‘sword’ also carries its prose meaning of ‘fire’, or when the ‘sea’ term *brim* has the specific connotation of ‘surf’.

Kennings are highly systematized, often more or less figurative, periphrases consisting of at least two elements, often *heiti*. They can be thought of as standing for straightforward nominal concepts such as ‘man, woman, ruler, battle, shield, sword, raven, gold, ship’ (see Meissner’s 1921 compendium). These are designated ‘referents’ and shown in the format ‘[MAN]’ below. In a standard kenning, one element functions as the ‘base word’ and the other as the ‘determinant’ or qualifier. There are two main formal types: the two-part phrase with determinant in genitive case, such as *leggjar íss* ‘limb’s ice/ice of the limb [SILVER]’, and the compound, with determinant first, such as *skýrann* ‘cloud-hall [SKY]’. The base word is in whatever grammatical case is required by the syntax.

Confronted by *leggjar íss* (which occurs in ‘Anthology’, verse G), a skaldically aware audience would recognize this as a realization of the formula ‘snow/ice of the hand/arm’, and hence a reference to silver jewellery: compare Meissner (1921: 224) for examples, and Snorri’s dictum *silfr {er kallat í kenningum} snær eða svell eða hēla, þvíat þat er hvítt* ‘silver is called snow or ice or frost in kennings, because it is white’ (Faulkes 1998: I, 61). In verse G this kenning is in turn the determinant to another kenning,

(*lýsi*)*brekku leggjar íss* ‘(bright) slope of arm-ice [WOMAN]’, again in accordance with a familiar pattern, and hence the figure is known as *tvíkennt* ‘doubly designated, having a double determinant’. Where this device is repeated, the kenning is ‘extended’ or ‘driven’ (*rekit*). By contrast, some kennings are incomplete, ‘half-kennings’, as when the goddess name *Hlín* alone refers to a woman in verse G. There are still other variations on the basic two-part kenning pattern. The *Vellekla* verse (‘Anthology’, verse C), for example, refers to POETRY as ‘mead of dwarfs’, both elements being expressed not directly but by a kenning. Additionally, some kennings incorporate an adjectival element, such as *lýsi-* ‘bright’ in the kenning above, or verb-derived *beiði-* in *beiði-Týr* ‘demanding Týr [a god]’ in verse H; and of course many kennings are qualified by adjectives which are not so integrally attached.

Morphological attributes apart, the figures called kennings realize a whole range of semantic possibilities. Most literal and transparent – so much so that some scholars would not regard them as kennings – are those which designate persons through a distinctive relationship; for example, *sonr Tryggva* for Óláfr Tryggvason or *Hǫrða gramr* ‘lord of Hordalanders’ and similar for various Norwegian kings. Others are only moderately figurative: those which refer metonymically to a whole person by highlighting one attribute, such as *foldar vǫrð(r)* ‘land’s guardian [RULER, Hákon]’ in ‘Anthology’, verse C, and agent noun or *nomen agentis* expressions such as ‘raven-feeder’ or ‘gold-strewer’ that are effectively distilled versions of statements also employed by the skalds (‘He fed the raven’ etc.). More clearly metaphorical are kennings in which the base word shares a characteristic with the referent but otherwise is semantically distant from it. It is pulled back, as it were, in the direction of the referent by the determinant; hence the term ‘corrected metaphor’ has occasionally been used. Thus in the prolific pattern ‘wind/storm of weapons = BATTLE’, the determinant ‘(of) weapons’ directs the meaning towards ‘battle’ rather than a natural storm. The ‘ice of the arm’ pattern illustrated above is a more extreme example, the common factor being whiteness.

The fact that many kennings have their roots in myth or legend rather than the observable world puts them partly beyond considerations of literal or metaphorical truth, and shows that naturalistic images are irrelevant to the understanding of at least some kennings. ‘Hamðir’s shirt’ is CORSELET, ARMOUR, but only presuming the audience know either that Hamðir was a hero in the Nibelung legend or that this is a possible kenning type; ‘valkyrie’s sport = BATTLE’ similarly draws on either mythological or poetic knowledge.

The kennings are, then, simultaneously extremely mechanistic and richly suggestive, and this poses fascinating questions which can only be touched upon here. Even if we side-step the thorny issue of intentionality, how can we respond to the individual lexical choices in skaldic texts? Are kenning elements chosen merely or mainly for metrical utility and as random counters in a formula ‘X of Y = Z’? Snorri Sturluson, perhaps inadvertently, encouraged the mechanistic view, for in his *Skáldskaparmál* he envisaged the metaphorical ‘tree of weapons/battle = MAN’ as arising from accidental homophony: *reynir* ‘trier, wielder’, for instance of weapons, also means ‘rowan tree’,

and *viðr* 'doer, achiever', for instance of battles, also means 'tree' (Faulkes 1998: I, 40). Yet in some contexts at least, the poetic imagination seems to be fired by this metaphor (Frank 1978: 43), and the images and resonances latent in the words are activated by details of the poetic context such as accompanying epithets or other kennings. I would argue that something of this is going on in the Þjóðólfr verse discussed above. Hence a provisional conclusion might be that the skaldic stanza, eminently memorizable and therefore portable, gives ample opportunity for 'reader-response' readings which may reveal unexpected juxtapositions and resonances, not only internally but also intertextually, and that such opportunities are richest in stanzas by the best poets. A different problem arises with kenning-like constructions that do not conform to known patterns. Should editors interpret or, more drastically, emend them in line with perceived skaldic norms, or accept them as *ad hoc* pieces of skaldic enterprise? Clearly the latter in the case of an Egill Skalla-Grímsson, but what of the verse-makers who only caught the dregs of the mead of poetry and whose only spark of originality may in reality be a scribal error?

Transmission, preservation and reconstruction

The extant skaldic corpus is exceptional in its size and variety, but many poems are incompletely preserved, and others are entirely lost. According to one text of *Skáldatal*, for instance, 10 poets composed for King Óláfr helgi, yet substantial fragments remain from only two, Sigvatr Þórðarson and Óttarr svarti ('the Black'). As for the poetry that survives, its transmission history is difficult and complex, and the apparent solidity of the edited texts is partly illusory.

We have virtually no direct, contemporary testimony to the skaldic poetry of the Viking Age, not even from England, where skalds performed within highly literate, Christian circles at the court of King Knútr. The stanza carved in runes on the Karlevi stone in Öland c.1000 (see p. 409) is exceptional. In the main, the earlier poetry was transmitted orally, whether in Iceland, Norway or elsewhere (Faulkes 1993; Gade 2000), before being written down from the late twelfth century onwards, on vellum or later on paper. Over 500 manuscripts contain skaldic poetry, and it is on them that skaldic scholarship must build. However, there can be a temporal gap of as much as four centuries between the putative date of composition and the earliest manuscript text of a given verse, and that earliest manuscript is always a copy at least at one remove from a written archetype. Most verses are preserved in two or more manuscripts, whose relationships may be obscure (and whose copyists may also have known the stanzas from other oral or written sources), and many appear in manuscripts representing a number of different prose works and textual traditions. Although the tight, intricate metrical rules favoured the accurate memorization and passing down of skaldic stanzas, the manuscripts give plentiful evidence of corruption and variation. In all these circumstances, assigning priority among the various texts of the same stanza can therefore be an extremely challenging task, and we can never, in principle,

be certain of being able to recapture the poet's original utterance. To despair of an attempt in that direction would, however, be unduly pessimistic.

Turning to the larger poetic structures, a few poems are preserved in continuous sequences, though not necessarily as complete texts. *Merlínússpá*, a two-part translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's 'Prophecies of Merlin' attributed to Gunnlaugr Leifsson in the early thirteenth century, is preserved complete and uninterrupted in the extraordinary early fourteenth-century compilation *Hauksbók*. Earlier poems preserved in substantial sequences include Egill Skalla-Grímsson's *Hofuðlausn*, *Arinbjarnarkviða* and *Sonatorrek*, and Eilífr Goðrúnarson's *Þórsdrápa* (the last two represented by 'Anthology', verses A and B). However, most of the poetry covered in this chapter was preserved as single stanzas or half-stanzas (*helmingar*) within prosimetrum works, that is, literary works incorporating verse as well as prose (cf. chapter 2 above). The question posed by these is whether these verses were free-standing singletons (*lausavísur*) from the outset or whether they have been excerpted from longer poems, as seems true of many of the stanzas used for purposes of authentication in the *konungasögur* or for illustration in poetological works. Where the verses seem to have been excerpted, editors are then faced with the problem of reconstructing extended poems from the fragments.

Modern editions

The standard edition of the skaldic corpus is Finnur Jónsson's *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning* (hereafter *Skjaldedigtning*: 4 volumes, 1912–15). It is presented in two parts, each covered by an 'A' volume giving manuscript text and select variants and a 'B' volume with text edited in normalized spelling, text reordered as prose, and Danish translation. In response to (or in combat with) the edited texts of *Skjaldedigtning*, Ernst A. Kock published over 3,000 individual notes under the title *Notationes Norrœnæ* (1923–41), incorporating his findings in his re-edition of the corpus (1946–9, normalized text only). Like all edited texts, those of Jónsson and Kock reflect the predilections and resources of the scholars and their era, and magnificent as it is, *Skjaldedigtning* is especially marred by some mechanical prioritizing of certain manuscripts and a readiness to emend the manuscript texts that is not considered acceptable nowadays. Meanwhile the arrangement of the volumes in *Skjaldedigtning* (retained in Kock's edition) embodies a myriad of decisions about the assignment of stanzas to poets, the reconstruction of poems, and the probable chronological sequence of the whole. Much of this is doubtless right, but any impression of canonical status would be misleading, and some decisions do not stand up to detailed scrutiny (as in Fidjestøl 1982). Other than the two editions mentioned, major contributions to skaldic scholarship include *Lexicon Poeticum* (Jónsson 1931b) and Meissner's invaluable 1921 compendium of kennings (though these depend heavily on the B text of *Skjaldedigtning*), as well as specialized monographs, anthologies and articles, and editions of prose works containing skaldic poetry.

The urgent need for re-editing the entire corpus has been widely recognized since the 1950s, but it was not until the turn of the millennium that a major effort towards a complete modern edition was launched. In the international project 'Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages', over 40 scholars are working to produce an edition in print and electronic form. Based on a fresh evaluation of the whole manuscript evidence, this will reconsider the text of every surviving stanza, the reconstruction of stanzas into poems, and questions of authorship and date.

Certainly a great deal of skaldic territory remains to be explored. Questions need to be asked, for instance, about style, diction, metre and syntax, the aesthetics and social function of the poetry, and problems of dating, attribution and reconstruction. Tools from linguistics have been successfully applied to topics such as the kenning or to the analysis of the poetry as discourse, and there is more scope here, while electronic texts and aids open up new possibilities. The role of the skaldic stanzas in the evolution of prose sagas and in their overall poetic has proved a fertile topic in recent decades, and still has much potential, and there are enticing comparative and interdisciplinary possibilities for further work on the 'murky rain of dwarfs' (*dvergregn . . . dimt, Rekstefja* 31). In sum, the study of skaldic poetry, textual obscurities and all, is immensely rewarding. It is one of the most distinctive branches of Nordic verbal art and, with the possible exception of runic inscriptions, it is the nearest we can approach to datable voices from the Viking Age.

A Skaldic Anthology

For each stanza, the following is given:

- **Descriptive heading; name of skald; title of poem and number of verse; date of poem:** All following *Skjaldedigtning* with any difficulties mentioned in subsequent sections.
- **Text:** With normalized spelling and modern punctuation;⁸ emendations shown in italics, and readings from other manuscripts than the main one silently incorporated where necessary. Based on readings from diplomatic texts in *Skjaldedigtning* A or facsimiles on the website of Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages.
- **Source:** Prose work and (where helpful) chapter; main manuscript used for the text, with date following 'Registre' ('Index') to *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* ('Dictionary of Old Norse Prose') (Copenhagen: Det arnamagnæanske kommission, 1989); other prose sources; main printed editions.
- **Prose context:** A paraphrase, following the source for the main text.
- **Prose word-order:** If necessary.
- **Translation:** As an aid to comprehension – not designed to be elegant as poetry. Referents of kennings are indicated in capitals within square brackets.
- **Notes:** On major manuscript variants; points of interest or difficulty in the stanza.

- **Poem to which assigned/Associated verses:** Brief note on the remainder of the poem, or on related verses if *lausavísa*.

A Lament: Egill Skalla-Grímsson, Sonatorrek 6 (later tenth century)

Grimmt vorum hlið,
 þat's hrönn of braut
 fǫður míns
 á frændagarði.
 Veitk ófullt
 ok opit standa
 sonar skarð,
 es mér sær of vann.

Source: *Egils saga* ch. 78: AM 453 4to (*Ketilsbók*), seventeenth century. Printed in *Skjaldedigtning* (AI: 40, BI: 34); Kock (1946–9: I, 22); Nordal (1933: 248).

Prose context: Having learned of the drowning of his beloved son Bǫðvarr, Egill is bent on starving himself to death. His daughter Þorgerðr, first using a trick, persuades him to live and compose a poem in memory of Bǫðvarr.

Translation: Grim to me was (*vorum*) the breach which the wave battered in the kin-wall of my father. I know (*veitk = ek veit*) that the gap of a son which the sea inflicted on me stands/will stand empty and open.

Notes: Representing the work of arguably the most brilliant of the skalds, this stanza also provides an example of skaldic poetry in metres other than *dróttkvætt*, in this case *kviðuhátt*.

In line [8], *of* is an expletive particle which needs no translation.

Poem to which assigned: The 25 stanzas of *Sonatorrek* ('The Dire Loss of Sons') lament the death not only of Bǫðvarr but also of another son, Gunnarr, and of parents and brother. The ageing speaker rails against the loss dealt him by the sea and the gods, which cannot be avenged or compensated; yet Óðinn's gift of poetry gives some solace. Robbed of those who would fight alongside him, Egill nevertheless looks 'untroubled' towards death.

B Pagan myth: Eilífr Goðrúnarson, Þórsdrápa 15⁹ (late tenth century)

Fátíða nam fræði
 (fjarðeplis) konr Jarðar
 (mærar legs né mýgðu
 menn qlteiti) kenna.
 Almtaugar laust ægir
 angrþjóf sega *tangar*
 Óðins afli soðnum,
 áttuðr, í gin, Suðra.

Source: *Snorra Edda (Skáldskaparmál)*: GKS 2367 4to (Codex Regius), c.1300–50. Printed in *Skjaldedigtning* (AI: 151, BI: 142–3); Kock (1946–9: I, 78); Davidson (1983: 635); Jónsson (1931a: 109); Faulkes (1998: I, 29, 176).

Prose context: The poem follows a prose résumé of Þórr's journey through surging rivers to defeat the giant Geirrøðr and his two daughters.

Prose word-order: Konr Jarðar nam kenna fátíða frœði; menn mærar legs fjarðeplis né mýgðu ǫlteiti. Ægir almtaugar, áttuðr Suðra, laust tangar sega, afli soðnum, í gin angrþjóf Óðins.

Translation: The son of Jǫrð [ÞÓRR] started to experience/demonstrate a rare lesson in wisdom; the men of the land of the fjord-apple's lair [GIANTS] did not suppress their ale-inspired mirth. The terrifier of the bow-string [WARRIOR, here the giant Geirrøðr], kin of Suðri, rammed the tong-morsel, cooked on the forge, into the jowl of Óðinn's sorrow-thief [ÞÓRR].

Notes: In this stanza, as part of a throwing contest, the giant Geirrøðr throws a glowing iron bar at Þórr.

[2] *Konr* is a necessary emendation from *kon*, as are [6] *tangar* (MS *tongv*) and [7] *Óðins* (ms. *oðnis*). [2–4] *Fjarðeplis . . . mærar legs . . . menn* 'men of the land of the lair of the fjord-apple': In this interpretation, the 'fjord-apple' (*fjarðeplis*) is ROCK, its 'lair' (*legs*) a CAVE, the 'land' (*mærar*, a Norwegian region whose name comes to stand for land in general) of the cave a MOUNTAIN, and the *menn* of the mountain GIANTS. [4] *Kenna* here could mean either 'experience' or 'teach, demonstrate', yielding sharply contrasted views of the action. [6–7] *Angrþjóf . . . Óðins* 'Óðinn's sorrow-thief' is an unparalleled expression for Þórr. The thought may be generally that Þórr is the joy of his father Óðinn, or there may be a specific reference to his giant-quelling expeditions. [8] *Áttuðr . . . Suðra* 'kin (literally kin-bush or stem) of Suðri' is a curious expression for a giant, since Suðri was one of the four dwarfs who supported the sky, but the giant here shares with dwarfs the property of living among rocks.

Poem to which assigned: *Þórsdrápa* is preserved only in *Snorra Edda*, where 20 stanzas are cited continuously, and two further *helmingar* (half-stanzas) appear in a set of verses illustrating kennings for Þórr. The poem has been seen as a political allegory or as presenting Þórr's expedition as a counterpart to Christ's harrowing of hell.

C *Opening (upphaf) of a eulogy: Einarr Helgason skálaglamm, Vellekla 1 (c.986)*

Hugstóran biðk heyra
– heyr, jarl, Kvasis dreyra –
foldar vǫrð á fyrða
fjarðleggjar brim dreggjar.

Source: *Snorra Edda (Skáldskaparmál)*: GKS 2367 4to (Codex Regius), c.1300–50. Printed in *Skjaldedigtning* (AI: 122, BI: 117); Kock (1946–9: I, 66); Jónsson (1931a: 92); Faulkes (1998: I, 12).

Prose context: This *belmingr* is the first of a number of citations illustrating kennings for poetry. It is introduced with the words *Svá sem hér er kveðit er orti Einarr skálaglamm* ‘As it is said here, in a composition of Einarr skálaglamm’.

Prose word-order: Biðk (= ek bið) hugstóran foldar vörð heyra á dreggjjar brim fyrða fjarðleggjar. Heyr Kvasis dreyra, jarl.

Translation: I bid the great-minded land’s guardian hear the dreg-surf of the men of fjord-bone [POEM]. Hear Kvasir’s blood [POEM], earl!

Notes: It will be noted that 12 of the 24 syllables are occupied by the two ‘poetry’ kennings, and this exuberantly ornate diction and particular emphasis on poetry are typical of the poem as a whole. The ‘call for a hearing’ is a standard feature of skaldic panegyrics, made all the more compelling here by the extra assonance, as *beyra|beyr* chime together.

[2] *Kvasis dreyra:* In myth, the blood of the god Kvasir became the mead of poetry, hence POETRY. Again in [3–4], ‘fjord-bone’ (*fjarðleggjar*) is ROCK, the ‘men’ (*fyrða*) of rock are traditionally DWARFS, and their MEAD or ‘dreg-surf, surf of dregs’ (*brim dreggjjar*), POETRY.

Poem to which assigned: The *belmingr* opens a poem praising the deeds of the mighty Hákon jarl (‘Earl’) Sigurðarson, and linking his success with piety to the gods. Its exact date of composition is uncertain, partly because its scope is unclear – especially whether or not stanzas concerning the defeat of the Jomsvíkingar belong here. The title *Vellekla* ‘Lack of Gold’ is given in *Heimskringla* (*Haralds saga gráfeldar* ch. 6) and *Egils saga* ch. 78; this seems likely to be an appeal to the patron’s generosity, and according to *Egils saga* the poem was rewarded with a magnificent shield. The remaining verses ascribed to the poem are preserved in *Snorra Edda*, *Heimskringla*, *Fagrskinna* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*.

D Eulogistic battle poetry: Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, Sexstefja 2 (c.1065)

Tøgu má tekna segja
 (tandrauðs) á Serklandi
 (ungr hætti sér) átta
 (ormtorgs hǫtuðr) borga,
 áðr herskrǫðuðr harðan
 Hildar leik und skildi,
 Serkjum hætttr, í sléttri
 Sikileyju gekk heyja.

Source: *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* in *Heimskringla*, ch. 5: AM 63 fol., c.1675–1700. Also in *Fagrskinna*, *Flateyjarbók* and *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*. Printed in *Skjaldedigtning* (AI: 369, BI: 339); Kock (1946–9: I, 171); Aðalbjarnarson (1941–51: III, 75).

Prose context: The verse is introduced to back up the statement that, in the course of his exploits in the Mediterranean, Haraldr harðráði Sigurðarson went to Africa, known as *Serkland*, and conquered eighty strongholds by force or by securing their surrender before proceeding to Sicily.

Prose word-order: Má segja átta tǫgu borga tekna á Serklandi – ungr hǫtuðr tandrauðs ormtorgs hætti sér – áðr herskǫrðuðr, Serkjum hættr, gekk heyja harðan Hildar leik und skildi í sléttri Sikileyju.

Translation: One can say that 80 strongholds were captured in Serkland – the young hater of flame-red dragon-plaza [hater of GOLD, (generous) RULER] put himself in danger – before the troop-depleter [WARRIOR], dangerous to the Serkir (Saracens), advanced to wage Hildr's harsh sport [BATTLE] behind his shield in level Sicily.

Notes: As in many skaldic stanzas, the content is deftly structured within the two *belmingar*. Each covers a discrete campaign, the conjunction *áðr* 'before' links them while marking chronological progress from one to the other, and the phrases *á Serklandi* and *hætti sér* in the first *belmingr* are echoed and transformed in the second. See also 'Subject matter and social function', above, on the literary effects and supplementary alliteration in this stanza.

[2] *Serkland*, the land of the Saracens, is somewhat elusive, but has been equated with Asia Minor, where the Væringjar (mainly Norse mercenaries) are known to have fought in the mid-1030s. The reference to Africa in the prose context may be erroneous. [4] *Ormtorgs hǫtuðr* 'hater of dragon-plaza, of GOLD, (generous) RULER': In the highly conventionalized system of templates and substitutions through which kennings are generated, any noun referring to a bed, resting-place or level place in general can be associated with a noun referring to a dragon, snake or other reptile to signify gold. [5] *Herskǫrðuðr* could mean 'troop-depleter', the one who cuts a *skarð* or cleft in (enemy) troops; the alternative (majority) reading *berskǫrðuðr* could mean 'supporter of (his own) troops', from *skorða* 'to prop'. Both would be partially paralleled elsewhere.

Poem to which assigned: Thirty-five stanzas, some incomplete, are printed as belonging to *Sexstefja* ('Six Refrains') in *Skjaldedigting*, but only the first is explicitly cited from *Sexstefja* in the sources, and there is a good deal of uncertainty about the composition and ordering of the poem (Fidjestøl 1982: 134–42). Nevertheless, it seems to have covered Haraldr's youthful campaigns in the Mediterranean, partly in the service of the emperor of Byzantium, and Haraldr's wars against the Danes, ending shortly before the campaign of 1066 which culminated in his death at Stamford Bridge.

*E, F Travelogue and satire: Sigvatr Þórðarson, Austrfararvísur 5 and 11
(c.1019)*

'Gakkat inn,' kvað ekkja,
'armi drengr, en lengra;

hræðumk ek við Óðins
 – erum heiðin hér – reiði.
 Rýgr kvazk inni eiga
 óþekk, sús mér hnekkði,
 alfa blót, sem ulfi
 ótvín ór bæ sínum.

Source: *Óláfs saga belga* in *Heimskringla*, ch. 91: AM 36 fol. (c.1675–1700); also in MSS of the *Separate Óláfs saga belga*. Printed in *Skjaldedigtning* (AI: 234, BI: 221); Kock (1946–9: I, 115); Aðalbjarnarson (1941–51: II, 137); Kristjánssdóttir et al. (1991: I, 347).

Prose context: The stanza appears as the second of five which, articulated by brief prose comments, documents Sigvatr’s ignominious encounters with the heathen farmers of Gautland (part of present-day Sweden), in this case with a housewife standing in a doorway.

Prose word-order: ‘Gakkat inn en lengra, armi drengr,’ kvað ekkja; ‘hræðumk ek við Óðins reiði; erum heiðin hér’. Óþekk rýgr, sú (e)s mér hnekkði ótvín sem ulfi ór bæ sínum, kvazk eiga alfa blót inni.

Translation: ‘Don’t go any further in, wretched man’, said the widow; ‘I fear Óðinn’s wrath; we are heathen here.’ The disagreeable lady, who drove me out, unhesitating, like a wolf from her farm, said she had a sacrifice to elves inside.

Notes: The stanza illustrates the occasional use of direct speech within *dróttkvætt* lines. As frequently in *Austrfararvísur*, there is play here on the elevated and heroic. The nouns *drengr* and *rýgr* are often thoroughly complimentary, and *ótvín(n)* can denote the single-minded valour of a warrior, but here they are comically associated with the shrill dismissal of a royal envoy.

[4] *Heiðin* is the reading of most MSS; 36 has *heiðinir*. [7] The exact nature of *álfa blót* ‘sacrifice to elves’ is unknown.

Poem to which assigned: Witty, versatile and full of life, the *Austrfararvísur* depict the progress of Sigvatr and companions, by boat, on foot and on horseback, to meet with Earl Rognvaldr in Gautland. The verses embrace a range of styles, including some colloquial language and picaresque scenes rare in the skaldic canon. Verse F illustrates a more lyrical tone, as well as Sigvatr’s fluent, kenning-free style.

The verses are embedded in narratives of two separate missions to Rognvaldr jarl in both versions of Snorri Sturluson’s *Óláfs saga belga*, with verse E in the later journey and verse F in the earlier, but there is scepticism about two separate journeys (for example, Aðalbjarnarson 1941–5: II, xxxi–xxxii). There are radical differences in the constitution and ordering of the poem envisaged by Vigfússon and York Powell (1883: II, 129–33), Jónsson (*Skjaldedigtning* AI: 233–40, BI: 220–5) and Aðalbjarnarson (1941–51: II, xxxi–xxxvi, esp. xxxvi).

Jór renn aptanskæru
 allsvangr gøtur langar
 (vøll kná hófr) til hallar
 – hōfum lítinn dag – (slíta).
 Nú þats blakkr of bekki
 berr mik Dønum ferri;
 fákr laust drengs í díki
 – dœgr mœtask nú – fœti.

Source: *Óláfs saga helga* in *Heimskringla*, ch. 71: AM 36 fol. (c.1675–1700); also in MSS of the *Separate Óláfs saga helga*. Printed in *Skjaldedigtning* (AI: 236, BI: 223); Kock (1946–9: I, 116); Aðalbjarnarson (1941–51: II, 93–4); Kristjánsdóttir et al. (1991: I, 315).

Prose context: Sigvatr accompanies his fellow skald Bjørn stallari on a horseback journey to Rognvaldr jarl in Gautland.

Prose word-order: Allsvangr jór renn gøtur langar aptanskæru til hallar; hófr kná slíta vøll; hōfum lítinn dag. Nú (e)s þat (e)s blakkr berr mik of bekki Dønum ferri; drengs fákr laust fœti í díki. Dœgr mœtask nú.

Translation: The most hungry stallion gallops in evening twilight on the long tracks to the hall; its hoof tears the ground; we have little daylight. Now it is that the steed carries me across streams far from the Danes; the warrior's mount dashed its foot in a ditch. Day and night meet now.

Notes: [3] *Til hallar* 'to the hall' is here taken with the first clause, but, in a way typical of skaldic adverbials, it could also qualify the second. [6] Why *Dønum ferri* 'far from the Danes' is unclear. Kristjánsdóttir suggests an implication that the Swedes and their king might prove even more troublesome to the Norwegian Óláfr than the Danes (Kristjánsdóttir et al. 1991: I, 315). [8] The same editor takes *fœti* with *drengs* rather than *fákr*, hence 'dashed the warrior's [my] foot'.

Poem to which assigned: See verse E above.

G Love and spite: Hallfredr, Lausavísa 15¹⁰ (1000)

Leggr at lýsibrekku
 leggjar íss af Grísi
 – kvøll þolir Hlín hjá hōnum –
 heitr ofremmðar sveiti;
 en dreyopilig drúpir
 dýnu Rōn hjá hōnum
 – leyfik ljóssa vífa
 lund – sem ølpt á sundi.

Source: *Hallfreðar saga* ch. 9: AM 132 fol. (*Möðruvallabók*), c.1330–70; also in *Flateyjarbók*. Printed in *Skjaldedigtning* (AI: 170, BI: 160); Kock (1946–9: I, 87); Sveinsson (1939: 181); Bragi Halldórsson et al. (1987: I, 1213).

Prose context: Returned to Iceland, Hallfreðr visits his former love Kolfinna at some shieling huts and spends the night with her. Discussing her relationship with her husband Gríss, Hallfreðr recites some abusive verses about Gríss which he claims to have heard attributed to Kolfinna.

Prose word-order: Heitr ofremmdar sveiti leggur at lýsibrekku leggjar íss af Grísi – Hlín þolir kvöl hjá hönnum – en dýnu Rön drúpir dreypilig hjá hönnum, sem qlpt á sundi. Leyfik (= ek leyfi) ljóssa vífa lund.

Translation: Hot, most rank, sweat streams onto the bright slope of arm's ice [SILVER, whose 'slope' is a WOMAN] from Gríss – Hlín suffers anguish beside him – while the eiderdown-Rön [a sea-goddess, hence WOMAN] droops, gloomy, beside him, like a swan in a bay. I praise the bright lady's nature.

Notes: The use of the two *belmingar* here points up the contrast between the toiling husband Gríss (described in another verse as lumbering to bed like a herring-stuffed fulmar) and the lovely, suffering Kolfinna, while line [3] by introducing her into the first *belmingr* integrates the two.

[3] *Hlín*, a name for the goddess Frigg, may here stand alone as a half-kenning meaning 'woman', that is, Kolfinna, though if the verse truly belongs to the time of Hallfreðr this would be an exceptionally early example of a half-kenning. Alternatively, the reading could be *bon* 'she', which the *Flateyjarbók* scribe has corrected to *blin*. [7–8] *Ljóssa vífa lund* 'bright lady's nature': This assumes a (well-paralleled) plural standing for singular; Bragi Halldórsson et al. (1987: I, 1213) take it as plural. [8] *Sem qlpt á sundi* 'like a swan in a bay': Alternatively, 'like a swan swimming'. Either way, there is simile, a figure rare in skaldic poetry.

Associated verses: The stanza is presented in *Hallfreðar saga* as part of a loose collection of separate verses. It is conceivable that these are from the *Gríssvísur* over which Gríss sues Hallfreðr in ch. 10, though the saga does not make this equation.

H Occasional poetry from Vinland: Þórbhallr veiðimaðr, Lausavísa 1 (1003)

Hafa kvóðu mik meiðar
 malmþings, es komk hingat,
 – mér samir land fyr lýðum
 lasta – drykk enn bazta.
 Bílds hattar verðr byttu
 beiði-Týr at stýra;

heldr's svát krýp'k at keldu;
komat vín á grön mína.

Source: *Eiríks saga rauða* ch. 9: AM 544, 4to, *Hauksbók*, c.1300–25. Printed in *Skjaldedigtning* (AI: 192, BI: 182); Kock (1946–9: I, 97); Sveinsson and Þórðarson (1935: 225); Ólafur Halldórsson (1985: 426).

Prose context: Among the 160 voyagers who in the *Eiríks saga rauða* account travelled in search of Vínland with Þorfinnr karlsefni is Þórhallr veiðimaðr ('the Hunter'), the surly, troll-like man who is a bad Christian but an expert on hunting in the wilderness. Ch. 9 relates that Þórhallr wants to seek Vínland to the north, while Karlsefni wants to sail south. Þórhallr utters the stanza as he pauses to drink while loading water onto the ship.

Prose word-order: Meiðar malmþings kvóðu mik hafa drykk enn bazta es komk (= ek kom) hingat. Mér samir lasta land fýr lýðum. Beiði-Týr Bílds hattar verðr at stýra byttu; heldr (e)s svá (a)t krýpk (= ek krýp) at keldu; vín komat á grön mína.

Translation: The poles of the steel-assembly [BATTLE, its 'poles' WARRIORS, MEN] said I would have the finest drink when I came here. It's fitting for me to condemn the land in front of men. The demanding-Týr (god) of Bíldr's hood [HELMET, whose 'god' is a WARRIOR, here the poet] has to wield a bucket. I'm crawling somewhat to the spring. No wine has touched my whiskers.

Notes: Though not aspiring to heights of artistry, the stanza plays wittily on skaldic conventions. The skald's prerogative of praising or blaming is here adapted to damning the land which failed to live up to promises, while the high alcoholic expectations and the military and divine allusions embedded in the kennings contrast bathetically with the skald's stooping for spring water. It is striking that as one of only four verses in the 'Vínland sagas', this should complain about the lack of wine (*vín*) in Vínland.

[1] *Kvóðu* ... 'they said ...': In *Eiríks saga* ch. 5 Leifr Eiríksson discovers a land where wheat, maple and vines grow, and in ch. 8 *Vínlands ins góða* 'Wineland the Good' is named as the desirable target when a new voyage is planned in Brattahlíð, Greenland. This conversation, if anything, is what the stanza refers to. [3] Since the line lacks the necessary half-rhyme with *lýðum*, *landlítt* is emended to *láð* 'land' by some editors.¹¹ [5–6] *Bílds hattar* ... *beiði-Týr*: The rare *Bíldr* otherwise occurs as a name for a dwarf or a legendary hero (Jónsson 1931b). Here combined with *hattar* 'hood' and attached to *beiði-Týr* 'demanding Týr (god)', it must – judging from comparable skaldic examples – form a 'helmet' kenning, and be qualified by a name of Óðinn or of a legendary hero (Meissner 1921: 164). The fact that we do not know which is not an obstacle to guessing the overall sense.

Associated verses: This, and the verse urging a return home which follows it, are presented in the saga not as extracts from a longer poem but as extemporized

comments on the immediate situation, and the deictic *hingat*, the first-person pronouns, verbs and possessive adjectives, and the present-tense (as well as preterite) verbs are all compatible with this. The prose context seems somewhat contrived, however, and we cannot now recover the original context (poetic or circumstantial) of the lines.

I, J Dream poetry from the Age of the Sturlungar: anonymous lausavísur connected with historical events, 33 and 48 (1238)

Þornar heimr ok hrørnar;
 hríðeflir ferr víða;
 þjóð es hǫrð á heiði
 heldr, en vér erum feldir.
 Því varðk norðr með Njǫrðum
 – náir fellu þar sárir,
 spjót drifu grǫn á gauta –
 geirhríðar hel bíða,
 geirhríðar hel bíða.

Source: *Sturlunga saga* ch. 136 (141): AM 122 a fol (c.1350–70). Printed in *Skjalde-digtning* (AII: 145, BII: 154); Kock (1946–9: II, 82); Jóhannesson et al. (1946: I, 424); Thórsson et al. 1988: 410).

Prose context: This stanza is one of several portents of the catastrophic battle of Örlygsstaðir between rival chieftainly factions, which are reported as having been spoken by male or female figures appearing in dreams or apparitions. In this case Brynjólfur of Kjalarnes dreams that a man with a severed neck speaks the verse.

Prose word-order (second *belmingr* only): Því varðk (= ek varð) bíða hel norðr með Njǫrðum geirhríðar; náir fellu þar sárir; grǫn spjót drifu á gauta.

Translation: The world is shrivelling and withering; the strife-maker travels widely; the troop on the heath is rather hard, and we are cut down. And so I had to take my death in the north with the Nirðir (= gods; pl. of *Njǫrðr*) of lance-blizzard [BATTLE, hence WARRIORS, MEN]; corpses fell there wounded; grey spears sped through men.

Notes: [2] *Hríðeflir* 'strife-maker': *Hríð* 'snow-storm' is used both as a base word to battle kennings and alone in reference to a phase or attack within a battle. [5] *Varðk* 'I had to' is a slight emendation required by the syntax, since *vark* in the MSS leaves *bíða* [8] unaccounted for. Thórsson et al. retain *vark* and construe the second *belmingr* differently (1988: 410). [7] *Gauta* means 'men', either as an extension of *Gautar*, the Gauts of what is now Sweden, or as a half-kennings using Gautr, a name of Óðinn. [8] Note the repetition of this final line, for which there is clear manuscript authority; see *Skjaldedigtning* AII: 145.

Associated verses: See 'Prose context'.

Hverir munu birni beitask?
 Hverr býsk mest við rómu?
 Hverr mun falla inn frækni,
 faðir Kolbeins eða Sturla?
 Brátt kómur bǫðvar ótti;
 beit egg í tvau leggi;
 menn gera, mest þeirs unnu
 mannsPELL, í styr falla.

Source: *Sturlunga saga* ch. 136 (141): AM 122 a fol (c.1350–70). Printed in *Skjalde-
 digtning* (AII: 147, BII: 157); Kock (1946–9: II, 84); Jóhannesson et al. (1946: I, 428);
 Þórsson et al. (1988: 415).

Prose context: As for verse I. Sigurðr Styrbjarnarson dreams of two ravens who recite
 this verse, speaking alternate lines (*orð*).

Translation: Who are going to fight the bear? Who most expects battle? Which valiant
 one will fall – Kolbeinn's father or Sturla? Soon the terror of battle will come; blade bit
 limbs in two; men, the ones who did most man-harm, will come to fall in the mêlée.

See also CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; CHRISTIAN POETRY; EDDIC POETRY; FAMILY SAGAS; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND;
 LANGUAGE; LATE PROSE FICTION; LATE SECULAR POETRY; MANUSCRIPTS AND PALAEOGRAPHY; METRE AND
 METRICS; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; RHETORIC AND STYLE; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY;
 RUNES; SAGAS OF ICELANDIC PREHISTORY; SAGAS OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY; WOMEN IN OLD NORSE POETRY
 AND SAGAS.

NOTES

- 1 Cf. Norwegian *skaldediktning*, Swedish *skalde-
 dikning*, Danish *Skjaldedigtning*, German
Skaldendichtung. In Icelandic, this poetry is
 generally referred to as *dróttkvæði* 'court poetry'
 or 'poetry in *dróttkvætt* metre'.
- 2 Starkaðr inn gamli ('the Old'), Ragnarr
 loðbrók and his wife and sons. The processes
 by which the genre evolved are obscure. For
 various approaches to possible origins, see, for
 example, Lie (1952); Gade (1995: 7–12); Per-
 kins (1984–5).
- 3 See Perkins (1976: 62–3) for a useful review of
 the categories of possibility proposed by Hel-
 gason (1953).
- 4 Though see Pálsson (1990) for the view
 that 'the conventional binary division of
 early Icelandic verse into "skaldic" and
- 5 From the eleventh century, for instance, Sig-
 vatr's *Bersǫglisvísur* ('Plain-speaking Verses')
 counsel Magnús against violent retribution
 against former enemies, six verses commem-
 orate peace negotiations between Haraldr of
 Norway and Sveinn of Denmark, and others
 express foreboding about Haraldr's ill-fated
 English campaign of 1066.
- 6 According to *Orkneyinga saga* ch. 81.
- 7 Cf. Fidjestøl's notion of denotative and con-
 notative import, or historical and poetical
 content (1982: 210).

- 8 I am grateful to Kari Ellen Gade for advice on some points of normalization.
- 9 The text and interpretation of this difficult stanza are especially indebted to Davidson (1983: 635–41).
- 10 The text and interpretation of this stanza are partly based on Whaley et al. (2002: 67).
- 11 Sveinsson and Þórðarson (1935: 225); Ólafur Halldórsson (1985: 426).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Editions

- Aðalbjarnarson, Bjarni (ed.) (1941–51) *Snorri Sturluson: Heimskringla* (Íslenzk fornrit XXVI–XXVIII). 3 vols. Reykjavík.
- Faulkes, Anthony (ed.) (1998) *Snorri Sturluson: Edda, Skáldskaparmál*. 2 vols. London.
- Halldórsson, Bragi et al. (eds.) (1987) *Íslendinga sögur*. 3 vols. Reykjavík.
- Halldórsson, Ólafur (ed.) (1985) *Eiríks saga rauða: Texti Skáldsbókvar AM 557 4°* (Íslenzk fornrit IV, Viðauki). Reykjavík.
- Jóhannesson, Jón et al. (eds.) (1946) *Sturlunga saga*. 2 vols. Reykjavík.
- Jónsson, Finnur (ed.) (1931a) *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*. Copenhagen.
- Kock, Ernst A. (ed.) (1946–9) *Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen*. 2 vols. Lund.
- Kristjánsdóttir, Bergljót et al. (eds.) (1991) *Snorri Sturluson: Heimskringla*. 3 vols. Reykjavík.
- Nordal, Sigurður (ed.) (1933) *Egils saga* (Íslenzk fornrit II). Reykjavík.
- Skjaldedigtning* = Finnur Jónsson (ed.) (1912–15) *Den norsk-isländske Skjaldedigtning*. 4 vols. Copenhagen. Rpt Copenhagen: 1967, vols. AI–II; 1973, vols. BI–II.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur (ed.) (1939) *Vatnsdæla saga, Hallfreðar saga...* (Íslenzk fornrit VIII). Reykjavík.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur and Þórðarson, Matthías (eds.) (1935) *Eyrbyggja saga... Eiríks saga rauða...* (Íslenzk fornrit IV). Reykjavík.
- Thórsson, Örnólfur et al. (eds.) (1988) *Sturlunga saga*. 2 vols. Reykjavík.
- Clover, Carol J. (1978) 'Skaldic Sensibility'. *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 93, 63–81.
- Davidson, Daphne L. (1983) 'Earl Hákon and his Poets'. Oxford DPhil thesis.
- Edwards, Diana C. (1983) 'Clause Arrangement in Skaldic Poetry'. *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 98, 123–75.
- Faulkes, Anthony (1993) 'What was Viking Poetry for?' Inaugural lecture. University of Birmingham.
- Fidjestøl, Bjarne (1982) *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*. Øvre Ervik.
- Fidjestøl, Bjarne (1997) *Selected Papers*, eds. Odd Einar Haugen and Else Mundal, trans. Peter Foote. Odense.
- Frank, Roberta (1978) *Old Norse Court Poetry* (Islandica XLII). Ithaca, NY, and London.
- Frank, Roberta (1985) 'Skaldic Poetry'. In Carol J. Clover and John Lindow (eds.) *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide* (Islandica XLV). Ithaca, NY, and London, pp. 157–96.
- Gade, Kari Ellen (1994) 'On the Recitation of Old Norse Skaldic Poetry'. In Heiko Uecker (ed.) *Festschrift für Heinrich Beck*. Berlin and New York, pp. 126–51.
- Gade, Kari Ellen (1995) *The Structure of Old Norse Dróttkvætt Poetry* (Islandica XLIX). Ithaca, NY, and London.
- Gade, Kari Ellen (2000) 'Poetry and its Changing Importance in Medieval Icelandic Culture'. In Margaret Clunies Ross (ed.) *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*. Cambridge, pp. 61–95.
- Helgason, Jón (1953) 'Norges og Islands digtning.' In Sigurður Nordal (ed.) *Litteraturhistorie B: Norge og Island* (Nordisk kultur 8B). Stockholm, pp. 3–179.
- Jesch, Judith (2001) *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age: The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse*. Woodbridge.

Secondary Literature

- Beyschlag, Siegfried (1953) 'Möglichkeiten mündlicher Überlieferung in der Königssaga.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 68, 109–39.

- Jónsson, Finnur (1931b) *Lexicon Poeticum Antiquæ Linguae Septentrionalis*. 2nd edn. Copenhagen. 1st edn by Sveinbjörn Egilsson (1913–16).
- Kock, Ernst A. (1923–41) *Notationes norrœnæ*. *Lunds universitets årsskrift* n.s. XIX, 2–XXXVII, 5.
- Kreutzer, Gert (1977) *Die Dichtungslehre der Skalden*. 2nd edn. Meisenheim.
- Lie, Hallvard (1952) 'Skaldestil-studier'. *Maal og Minne*, 1–92. Rpt in his *Om sagakunst og skaldskap*. Øvre Ervik: 1982, pp. 109–200.
- Meissner, Rudolf (1921) *Die Kenningar der Skalden*. Bonn. Rpt Hildesheim etc.: 1984.
- Nordal, Guðrún (2001) *Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. Toronto.
- Pálsson, Hermann (1990) 'Towards a Classification of Early Icelandic Poetry'. In Teresa Pàroli (ed.) *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages: The 7th International Saga Conference*. Spoleto, pp. 59–65.
- Perkins, Richard (1976) 'The Furðustrandir of *Eiríks saga rauða*.' *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 9, 51–98.
- Perkins, Richard (1984–5) 'Rowing Chants and the Origins of *dróttkvæðr hátt*'. *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* XXI, 155–221.
- Poole, Russell G. (1991) *Viking Poems on War and Peace: A Study in Skaldic Narrative*. Toronto.
- Reichardt, Konstantin (1928) *Studien zu den Skalden des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts* (Palaestra 159). Leipzig.
- Turville-Petre, E. O. G. (1976) *Scaldic Poetry*. Oxford.
- Vigfússon, Gudbrand and York Powell, F. (1883) *Corpus Poeticum Boreale: The Poetry of the Old Northern Tongue*. 2 vols. Oxford. Rpt New York: 1965.
- von See, Klaus (1980) *Skaldendichtung: Eine Einführung*. Munich and Zurich.
- Whaley, Diana (1993) 'Skalds and Situational Verses in Heimskringla'. In Alois Wolf (ed.) *Snorri Sturluson*. Tübingen, pp. 245–66.
- Whaley, Diana et al. (2002) *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages: Editors' Manual*. 2nd edn. Sydney.

Website

Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages
www.skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au

Social Institutions

Gunnar Karlsson

Kings and *þing* in the Nordic World

There is little reason to doubt that, from their first appearance on the scene of history, Germanic tribes normally lived under the rule of kings. By the end of the pagan period in Scandinavia, kings seem to have been so numerous there, at least in Norway, that they can hardly have had more than a few thousand subjects each. According to Sigvatr Þórðarson, court poet of King Óláfr Haraldsson of Norway, the province of Upplönd alone was ruled over by 11 men before Óláfr had it converted to Christianity in the early eleventh century.¹

However, by the end of the Viking Age in the eleventh century the whole of Scandinavia had been united into the three kingdoms of Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Since the formation of these relatively large kingdoms coincides with the adoption of Christianity in the area, it seems overwhelmingly likely that ambitious kings made use of Christendom as a weapon in subduing old, traditional petty kingdoms. In the case of Norway this can be deduced from the kings' sagas. Here Scandinavia seems to have followed common European practice in the early Middle Ages (Stancliffe 1980: 59–63, 70–7).

As well as being subject to kings, the Germanic peoples held regular assemblies, which were called *þing* (in sg. as well as pl.) in Old Norse, and were probably attended by all able-bodied, free males. The Roman author Tacitus describes assemblies of this kind among his contemporary Germans around AD 100. In the Nordic world local *þing* were held not only in Scandinavia itself, but also in the Norse Viking-Age colonies, in Faeroe, Iceland, Greenland, Shetland, Orkney, Lewis, the Isle of Man, in mainland Scotland and Ireland, and at a number of places in England (Barnes 1974: 382–7; Fellows-Jensen 1993: 53–9).

Although *þing* were originally attended by free, adult males in general, the earliest Norwegian laws prescribe systems for nominating a limited number of farmers to the *þing*. At a time when scholars were more optimistic than we are now about the

possibility of discovering the history of pre-Christian Scandinavia, the Norwegian historian Absalon Taranger suggested that the representative assembly had been invented for use in the extensive and impassable area of western Norway in the tenth century by King Hákon the Good (c.935–c.960), who is said to have established the *þing* at Gula and Frosta in that region. King Hákon had been brought up by King Athelstan of England, and according to Taranger his representative assemblies partly imitated the English *witenagemōt* (council of greater nobles and higher clergy), although his arrangement was more democratic (Taranger 1924: 36–8). However that may have been, it is a fact that the earliest version of the Norwegian Gulatingslög (see below) contains a clause on the number of farmers who are supposed to attend the *þing* from each part of the district (*Gulatingslova* 33; Bøe 1965: 179).

Little is known about the organization of the *þing* in the eastern part of Scandinavia, that is, Sweden, Denmark and eastern Norway. The same applies to the North Atlantic colonies, apart from Iceland, which will be returned to later. In western Norway, on the other hand, legal codes, originally written down in the eleventh or twelfth centuries, are preserved from two law districts. These are the Frostuþingslög ('Frostuþing law'), which were valid in the Trondheim area, and the Gulatingslög ('Gulaping law') from the more southerly part of the west coast.

The local *þing* covered different districts with different appellations and formed a hierarchy of some kind. In the Gulatingslög district, for instance, quarter assemblies (*fjórðungsþing*) were subsidiary to county assemblies (*fylkisþing*), which were in turn subsidiary to the central law assembly (*logþing*) at Gula. The law assemblies contained an institution called *logrétt*, a law council, or literally a 'law rectifier'. It is disputed whether all farmers who had been summoned to a *þing*, numbering a few hundreds, originally formed the law council, or whether only 36 of them did, as was the case after a thorough revision of Norwegian law under King Magnús Hákonarson (1263–80). The name *logrétt* indicates that its initial role was primarily that of restoring the law in times when legislation was based on ancient customs and when the 'original' law was considered the best one. In that way, and probably in other ways also, the law council was vested with legislative power. It also had a judicial role, as it passed sentences in cases between individuals. Apart from that, the exact sphere of activity for the law councils is nowhere clearly defined, but about the *þing* in general it is known that they also dealt with administrative affairs, such as the common defence system of the district (Andersen 1974: 346–53).

At lower stages, before a case was sent to a *þing* in Norway, it was dealt with at an institution called *dómr*, composed of men nominated by the litigants, usually six men by each. In the Frostuþingslög district the *dómr* seems to have had a special place to meet, perhaps the place where the *þing* of the district also met. In the Gulatingslög district, at least in some cases, a *dómr* met at the door of the defendant's home (Halvorsen 1958: 215–16). It was only if a valid sentence could not be passed by a *dómr* of this kind, as might happen, for instance, if both parties brought sufficient witnesses to confirm their standpoint, that the case would go up through the *þing*

hierarchy until ultimately, if no final judgement could be reached, it ended up before the law council at Guláping (*Gulatingslova* 147–8).

It is not clear who originally had the role of summoning farmers to the *þing* in Norway or nominating them to the law councils, but according to the written law codes this was the mandate of royal representatives, the *lendir menn* ('landed noblemen'), *ármenn* ('king's messengers') and *sýslumenn* ('sheriffs') (Andersen 1974: 352). There is thus no evidence of who held the key to power at the Scandinavian *þing* before the emergence of unified kingdoms there.

In Norway, as in most of the Germanic world, the *þing* gradually lost their political significance during the Christian Middle Ages. Iceland was no exception to this rule. However, no country has preserved as much evidence about a Germanic *þing* organization as Iceland has. Since this evidence provides important background knowledge for understanding the Icelandic saga literature, the bulk of this chapter will be devoted to the Althing (*Alþing*) and the local *þing* system in Iceland. First, however, two kinds of social institution in Iceland should be discussed briefly. One of these, the *hreppr* (pl. *hreppar*), deserves discussion for its importance as an institution; for the purposes of this discussion it must be emphasized that the *þing* districts were not units of local government of the kind which are called communal nowadays. The other kind of institution, those which will here be called *ad hoc* courts,² bring to the fore the close relationship between the court systems in Norway and Iceland.

Hreppar

The basic source for *hreppar* in Iceland in the Commonwealth period is the law code *Grágás* (*Laws* 2: 185; cf. *Grágás* 1992: 180–1)

There shall be established communes [*hreppar*] here in the country, and an established commune is one in which there are twenty householders or more. . . . Communes shall be so established that householders in them live each bordering the next. All communes shall be established as they now are.

In each commune five landowners are to be selected to prosecute all men who fail to meet their obligations in the commune, and also to allocate people's tithes and food gifts, and to oversee the oaths men swear. It is lawful that these prosecutors in a commune should not be landowners if the men of the commune all agreed on that.

The actual existence of the *hreppar* is confirmed by several accounts in the sagas, for instance in the secular contemporary sagas of *Sturlunga saga*.³ An even stronger confirmation is the fact that *hreppar* have remained the basic communal units in the rural areas of Iceland up to the present day.

As indicated in the quotation from *Grágás* above, the most important task of the *hreppar* was to deal with the problem of poverty. On the one hand the *hreppr* organized the support of those who were unable to support themselves within the commune

without becoming a liability to their relatives or others. The support was of two kinds. Individuals were allowed to wander around the *breppr* and receive food and lodging at the farms, allocated in accordance with the means of each farmer. Households that could not support themselves received an allocation, partly from the one-quarter of the tithe that was intended for that purpose, and partly from food which the farmers saved when their households fasted (*Laws* 1: 46; 2: 37, 185–6, 191–2, 222, 224; cf. *Grágás* 1992: 28, 36, 38, 180–1, 185–6). On the other hand the *breppr* attempted to prevent people from becoming reliant on its help. This could be done in the pre-emptive way of refusing poor people with many dependants permission to settle in the *breppr* (*Laws* 2: 264, 351; *Grágás* 1992: 104, 187). In a more positive way, prevention of poverty was organized by insurance. One of the two manuscripts of *Grágás*, *Staðarhólsbók*, contains a clause which states that a farmer is to receive compensation from other farmers in his *breppr*, half the value of his loss, if he loses a quarter of his livestock through epizootic disease or if his house burns down (*Laws* 2: 352–3; *Grágás* 1992: 188–9). There is no evidence in the sagas for this insurance system; perhaps it was never more than a clever idea which an original thinker, or someone who was acquainted with the *brandstuf* (that is, indemnity for loss by fire) in Scandinavian guilds, came up with (cf. Ljung 1957: 206–11). Nevertheless, the law text shows that the idea was attached to the activity of the Icelandic *breppr*.

To arrange for the work of the *breppr*, choose prosecutors, grant or refuse residence permits and declare their property for the assessment of tithe, the farmers were supposed to hold general meetings three times a year, each winter during Lent, after the spring assembly and in the autumn (Magnús Már Lárusson 1962: 18). The division into *breppar* only occasionally coincided with the division into parishes; mainly where there were natural borders, like major rivers. It thus seems likely that the *breppar* originated earlier than the organized parish system. Further support for this early origin of *breppar* is the fact that they became the forum for the payment of the tithe, not only for the distribution of the one-quarter of the tithe that was given to paupers, but for the very allocation of the tithe and its division into four parts (*Laws* 2: 222–4; *Grágás* 1992: 36–8). This seems to prove that the *breppar* were already well established on a regular basis when the tithe was introduced, just before 1100.

It seems likely that the original settlers brought the concept of *breppr* with them from Norway. Words that sound as if they are of the same origin, with related meanings, occur in a number of Nordic dialects; for instance, *repp* means a group of farms in some parts of Norway (Magnús Már Lárusson 1962: 19). But nowhere outside Iceland did the *breppr* develop into a viable administrative unit in historical times.

Different answers have been given to the question of how and why the *breppar* acquired such status in Iceland. Perhaps the most convincing explanation is that the family ties between neighbours, to which the settlers had been accustomed in the old country, became undone with the move to Iceland. The settlers may therefore have made the *breppr* a substitute for the mutual support formerly provided by relatives (Blöndal 1948: 52–4).

Ad Hoc Courts in Iceland

Courts of law similar to the Norwegian *dómar*, unconnected to the *þing*, occurred in Iceland. Courts that met at the door of the defendant are not mentioned in Icelandic law, but in *Eyrbyggja saga* a ‘door court’, *dyradómur*, is mentioned twice (ÍF 4: 35–6, 151–2; *Complete Sagas* 5: 145–6, 202–3). It is tempting to see these instances as genuine evidence of the application of door courts at a stage earlier than that of preserved law. If it is fair to do so, these courts were among the institutions which the settlers brought with them from Norway, without, however, giving them permanent status in the court system of the new country.

Other *ad hoc* courts are mentioned in *Grágás*, called *afréttardómar* (communal pasture courts), *engidómar* (meadowland courts), *féránsdómar* (confiscation courts), *béraðsdómar* (district courts), *breppadómar* (communal courts), *sáttardómar* (settlement courts) and *skuldadómar* (debt courts).⁴ The term *béraðsdómur* clearly includes *engidómar* in some cases, and either includes or is synonymous with *breppadómar*. It probably would not contradict any preserved sources to take *béraðsdómur* as a comprehensive concept including all the others.

The spheres of activity of these courts are sufficiently indicated by their names, though some further discussion of them is necessary. All of them were supposed to be held somewhere at or near the place of action or the place in dispute, if the issue was of that kind. They were never held at regular *þing*, and the term *þingadómar* (assembly court) was used as an antonym of them. The members of the court were nominated by the litigants, three or six by each; occasionally all 12 were nominated by the plaintiff, if, for example, a charge was brought against foreigners, or if the defendant refused to nominate to the court (Karlsson 2002: 19). According to the law, as it has been understood, the confiscation court in cases of men who had been sentenced to outlawry, *féránsdómur*, is an exception here, because in normal cases the plaintiff was supposed to ask the *goði* of the defendant to nominate men to the court (*Laws* 1: 89, 112; *Grágás* 1992: 405, 424–5). On the other hand, the sagas almost unanimously present the *féránsdómur* as being held by the plaintiff alone, without the participation of any *goði* (Heusler 1911: 148; Ingvarsson 1970: 138–9). It may be that *féránsdómur* was originally and perhaps, formally, always nominated by both the litigants, like most *ad hoc* courts, the exception from the normal practice only being that the defendant’s *goði* (‘chieftain’: see the section below on ‘Chieftains, Farmers and the Question of Democracy’) represented him. The law does not state explicitly that the *goði* is to be asked to nominate *all* the judges, although the text has been understood in that way. It may then have become customary for the defendant’s *goði* not to make the nominations, and for the plaintiff to nominate all the judges instead, in accordance with a general rule relating to *ad hoc* courts. Thus it is possible to say about the above-mentioned courts in general that they were nominated by the litigants, and only for one occasion each time.

Apart from *féránsdómur*, there is not much mention of *ad hoc* courts in the sagas. The only instance seems to be a story which is told in two of the sagas included in

Sturlunga saga. Sighvatr Sturluson, chieftain in Eyjafjörðr, was slain by the followers of Kolbeinn Arnórsson the Young, chieftain in Skagafjörðr, in the battle of Qrlygsstaðir in 1238. In the following year, Kolbeinn had a *skuldadómr* held at which the proper heirs of Sighvatr were deprived of his properties. It is clear that this act is seen as reprehensible in the sagas (*Sturlunga saga* 1946: 1, 440; 2: 4; *Sturlunga Saga* 1970–4: 1: 345; 2: 233). One might conclude from the sagas that courts of this type were no more than obsolete features of the law code, resorted to by Kolbeinn in order to uproot the rule of the Sturlungar in Eyjafjörðr, but strong arguments militate against that idea. The terms *béraðsdómr* and *breppadómr* occur in legislation which has been dated convincingly to the period around 1200 or the early thirteenth century (Karlsson 2002: 20). It seems right, therefore, to assume that the *ad hoc* courts were a reality in Iceland throughout the Commonwealth period, alongside the system of courts which were held at the *þing*.

The Contours of the Icelandic *þing* Organization

Þing are mentioned frequently in the genres of saga literature in which the action takes place within the lay society of Iceland, both in the family sagas set in the Viking Age and in the secular contemporary sagas set in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. However, these narratives are mostly written for an audience that is supposed to be familiar with the organization of the *þing* and therefore in no need of explanations. This means that our knowledge of the origin, development and organization of the Althing and local *þing* in Iceland is mainly based on two sources. One of them is the Codex Regius (*Konungsbók*) of *Grágás*. It contains three sections on constitutional matters which are missing from the other main manuscript, *Staðarhólsbók*. These are the Assembly Procedures Section (*Þingskapapátttr*), the Law-speaker's Section (*Loðsoðumannspátttr*) and the Law Council Section (*Loðréttuþátttr*; *Laws* 1: 53–138, 187–93; *Grágás* 1992: 371–446, 459–66). The other basic source on this issue is Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* ('Book of Icelanders'), written in the early twelfth century. These sources supplement each other, as *Grágás* prescribes the system mostly as it is meant to have been at a specific time, probably for the most part the time of the first codification of the legislation, namely the early twelfth century. Ari, on the other hand, traces the development of the constitution from its emergence by the end of the settlement period until his own time, which coincides with the codification period of the laws.

Both these sources have been subjected to criticism. Around the middle of the twentieth century the book-prose theory of saga studies lowered the status of sagas as historical sources, which made scholars more reliant on *Grágás* than at any time before. Half a century later the tables were turned in the sagas' favour, with Jón Viðar Sigurðsson putting forward a radical criticism of the evidence of Codex Regius, mostly based on comparison with sagas (Sigurðsson 1999: 39–62, 170–9). Space does not allow any discussion of these views here, but Karlsson (forthcoming) argues

the case that the discrepancies between *Grágás* and the narrative literature have been overestimated. On all main points these two genres of sources form a unified picture, which, while there are inevitably some lacunae and uncertainties, is on the whole convincing.

Ari's *Íslendingabók* is the primary source on the origin of the Icelandic constitution (Jones 1986: 144–5; ÍF 1):

And when Iceland had become settled far and wide a Norwegian named Ulfljot first brought law out here from Norway . . . this was called Ulfljot's Law . . . For the most part these laws were modelled upon the then Gulathing Law . . . Ulfljot lived east in Lon. It is said that Grim Geitskor was his foster-brother, he who at Ulfljot's direction explored the whole of Iceland before the Althing was established.

[. . .]

The Althing was established where it now is at the instance of Ulfljot and all the people of Iceland.

The story of Ulfljótr is reminiscent of a number of origin myths of nations and states, which frequently involve an author of the laws (Líndal 1969: 21–4), though this of course does not preclude Ulfljótr's historical existence. The dating of the establishment of the Althing does not emerge altogether clearly from Ari's account. For the purposes of celebrating the anniversary of this event, however, Ari's evidence has been understood as saying that the Althing was established in the year 930. As for 'where it now is', there can be no doubt as to its location; until 1800 it was held at Þingvellir, a place in the western part of the country's southern quarter.

It has sometimes been suggested that the establishment of the Althing was a unique event and a great novelty, since nowhere else in northern Europe had one assembly been established or one set of laws been enacted for a whole nation (for instance, Jóhannesson 1974: 36–7; Benediktsson 1974: 170). This is, to say the least, questionable, since there is little reason to see the population of Iceland as a nation around 930. What was to become unique about the Icelandic Althing was that it would survive for centuries and develop into a complex institution without the interference of royal power.

According to Ari, the first major amendment to the constitution was made in the 960s (Jones 1986: 147; ÍF 1: 12):

The land was then divided into Quarters, so that there were three Things in each Quarter . . . save that in the Northerners' Quarter there were four, because they could not reach any other agreement . . . Still, the nomination of judges and the constitution of the Logretta [law council] should be the same from this Quarter as from any other. But later the Quarter Things were established.

The existence of this system is to a considerable extent confirmed by *Grágás*, where we find a regulation relating to the local *þing*, called *várþing* 'spring assemblies' (*Laws* 1: 98; *Grágás* 1992: 413): 'We shall hold spring assemblies in our country. Three

chieftains together are to hold an assembly.' The spring assemblies were partly held to settle debts between people, and were partly courts of law, at which cases arising between inhabitants of the *þing* district were dealt with by 36 farmers, nominated by the chieftains (*Laws* 1: 101–4; *Grágás* 1992: 415–17).

If we multiply what from Ari we may deduce was the number of spring assemblies, namely 13, by the number, as given by *Grágás*, of chieftains holding each assembly, namely 3, we may conclude that the total number of chieftains was 39, with 12 in the northern quarter and nine in each of the three others. This accords with the regulation relating to the law council in *Grágás* (*Laws* 1: 189; *Grágás* 1992: 461):

We shall also have a Law Council and hold it here at the General Assembly [*Alþing*, Althing] each summer, and it is always to sit in the place where it has been long since. There are to be three benches around the Law Council place, long enough for four dozen men to sit commodiously on each. That is twelve men from each Quarter who have seats on the Law Council to decide there on laws and licences and the Lawspeaker in addition. They are all to sit on the middle bench, and there our bishops rightly have places too.

The twelve men from the Northern Quarter who have seats on the Law Council are those who act in the twelve chieftaincies which were had there when they had four assemblies and three chieftains to each assembly. But from all other Quarters those nine from each have seats on the Law Council who act in the full and ancient chieftaincies, of which there were three to every [spring] assembly when there were three assemblies in each of those three Quarters. However, these are all to have one man with them from each ancient assembly, so that nevertheless twelve men from each Quarter get a seat on the Law Council. In nominations at the General Assembly the powers of the ancient chieftaincies of the Northerners are all reduced by one-fourth compared with all the other full chieftaincies here in the country.

It is also prescribed that each one of all the men with seats on the Law Council as now rehearsed must appoint two men, assembly men of his, to join the Law Council for discussion with him, one in front of him and one behind him. Then the benches are fully manned, with four dozen men on each bench.

About the tasks of the law council, *Grágás* states succinctly (*Laws* 1: 190; *Grágás* 1992: 462): 'Men are to frame [*rétta*] their laws there and make new laws if they will. All licenses for mitigation of penalty and all licenses for settlements for which special leave must be asked and many other licenses . . . are to be asked for there.'

The quarter *þing*, which according to Ari were established after the division of the country into quarters,⁵ did not last long. They are mentioned only once in *Grágás*, and a few times in other sources, in a way that indicates clearly that they are no longer held regularly. Evidence is preserved about the locations of three of these assemblies, which confirms that they were held in each quarter and not as special courts at the Althing (*Laws* 1: 222; *Grágás* 1992: 249; Ólafur Lárússon 1926: 4–17). This is relevant because, at the time of the codification of the laws, the quarter assemblies

had been replaced by four quarter courts at the Althing. On these *Grágás* states (*Laws* 1: 53; *Grágás* 1992: 371):

It is prescribed in our laws that we shall have four Quarter Courts. Each chieftain who has an ancient and full chieftaincy shall nominate a man to join a court. And those are full and ancient chieftaincies which existed when there were three assemblies in each Quarter and three chieftains in each assembly.

From what follows in *Grágás* it is clear – and this finds ample confirmation in the sagas – that the quarter courts were a part of the Althing. The chieftains who nominated farmers to the courts were 36 in number, but scholars have disagreed as to how the sources should be understood with regard to the process of nomination; that is, whether the nomination was of 36 men to each court, or of only nine to each (*Grágás* 3: 607–8).

The strongest evidence for a court of 36 is a clause in *Grágás* which seems to state that if no fewer than six judges disagreed with the others the result was a divided judgement, which was not a final verdict (*Laws* 1: 82; *Grágás* 1992: 399). It is not known how cases were handled after the introduction of the quarter courts until the fifth court (*fimmtardómr*) was established in the early eleventh century. Ari mentions its foundation only by saying that the law-speaker Skapti Þóroddsson (in office 1004–30) ‘established’ (*setti*) the law relating to it (Jones 1986: 151; ÍF 1: 19). According to *Grágás*, the judges of the fifth court were to be nominated both by all holders of the ancient chieftaincies, nine from each quarter, and by ‘chieftains who have the new chieftaincies [who] are to nominate one dozen men to join the court’. That makes, says *Grágás*, a court of four dozens, 12 men from each quarter. The question of the origin of the new chieftaincies will be taken up in the next section. During the process one dozen was to be dismissed by the litigants, so that 36 judges were to give a judgement. Along with cases that had received divided judgements at the quarter courts, the fifth court was supposed to deal with cases involving false panel verdicts, false witnesses, bribes etc. A simple majority was sufficient to pass a judgement, so that no divided judgements were possible at the fifth court (*Laws* 1: 83–8; *Grágás* 1992: 400–4).

Two more institutions at the Althing deserve to be touched on here. One of them is the law-speaker, *logsgumaðr*, who has already been mentioned. He was elected by the law council for a term of three years at a time and had a number of duties of the kind that we would attribute to the president of an assembly. According to *Grágás*, he had to recite all parts of the law at the Althing, the assembly procedure section every summer and other parts during his term, amounting to one-third of the law each year. It is not known if the recital continued after the law had been written down; there is no mention of this in the sagas (*Laws* 1: 187–8; *Grágás* 1992: 459–60; *Grágás* 3: 649–50).

Finally there is the law rock, *Logberg*, a place at Þingvellir which formed the centre of the assembly. On the third day of the two-week-long assembly, the first Saturday of

the *þing*, the participants had to process to the law rock, led by the law-speaker and followed by the chieftains and the men whom they had nominated to sit in the courts. The law-speaker's recital of the laws had to take place at the law rock or in the law council, or, if the weather was bad, in the church. At the law rock many public announcements were made, about treaties between individuals, for example (*Laws* 1: 59; *Grágás* 1992: 377; *Grágás* 3: 644–5).

Origin and Development

How was it possible to create an organization of *þing* and courts with a fixed number of chieftains, a number which had to fit into the system of dozens, a recurrent feature of Germanic courts? How was it decided who were to assume the status of chieftains in a newly settled country? Local leaders of some kind were probably in existence before the establishment of the Althing, not least if it is true, as I believe and will indicate later, that the Icelandic chieftains were originally religious leaders. Some sources maintain that originally there were 12 local assemblies with three chieftains in each, which makes 36 chieftains in all.⁶ Is it possible that such a neat number of chieftains, for a division into quarters and nomination of dozens of judges, was upset by local demands when the country was divided into quarters in the 960s, as Ari seems to indicate? Scholars have given several different answers to these questions, none of which can be confirmed or refuted. It is not possible to recount them all here; instead I shall put forward one interpretation, which I see as the most likely one.⁷

Before the establishment of the Althing, said Ari, 'there had been a Thing at Kjalarnes, which Thorstein, son of Ingolf the Settler, . . . held there together with those chieftains who allied themselves with it' (Jones 1986: 145; ÍF 1:1 8). In *Eyrbyggja saga* ('The Saga of the People of Eyr') it is said that the first settler on the northern part of Snæfellsnes established a district assembly (*béraðsþing*) near his farm (ÍF 4: 10; *Complete Sagas* 5: 134). When these or some other chieftains decided to establish a super-assembly for the whole country, it seems most likely that they looked for, and instigated the establishment of, similar district assemblies, until they had found the right number, 12. At the same time they must have decided that each assembly district was to be made up of three chieftaincies, an arrangement which was made easier by a rule, well known both from laws and sagas, that two or more men could share a chieftaincy (*Laws* 1: 53, 107, 136; *Grágás* 1992: 371, 420, 444; *Sturlunga Saga* 1970–4: 1: 200, 207, 212, 352; *Sturlunga saga* 1946: 1: 303, 310, 315, 447). Thus the Althing may have been composed of the chieftains who 'allied themselves with it', as Ari said about the Kjalarnesþing. Those who did not, or were ignored, may well have continued acting as independent chieftains on a local basis. To support this interpretation it can be pointed out that in *Grágás* chieftaincies are sometimes spoken of as *þriðjungar* 'thirds', and their members as *þriðjungsmenn*, men of 'a chieftain's assembly third'.⁸ Since a *third* must be a third of something, these words indicate that the creation of the system started at the local assemblies.

The men who explored the country to prepare the establishment of the Althing, among whom Ari specifies Grímr Geitskǫr, had of course no map of Iceland. If they travelled between the eastern and northern parts of the country not far from where the main road is now, for example, they may have failed to discover the large area of inhabited land in the northeastern part of the country, most of the area that later came to be called Þingeyjarsýsla. There may have been a local assembly there which was not included in the regular system of 12. When the country was divided into quarters in the 960s, and people had acquired better knowledge of its shape, it would then have been deemed necessary to adapt the system to geographical reality. This may explain the emergence of what Ari describes; that is, the fact that the northern quarter was allowed to have four spring assemblies, while other quarters had only three each. In order to compensate for this, the chieftains of these quarters were allowed to take with them three extra men from each quarter to the middle bench of the law council.

The quarter assemblies were, according to Ari, established in consequence of the division into quarters in the 960s. Their transformation into quarter courts at the Althing must have taken place before 1030, because that is the last year that Skapti Þóroddsson, the instigator of the fifth court, was in office. It is difficult to imagine that it would have been called the fifth court for any other reason than that there were already four courts at the assembly. This is also indicated by *Grágás* (*Laws* 1: 83; *Grágás* 1992: 400): ‘We are to have a fifth court; and its name is the Fifth Court.’

Scholars have disagreed as to whether there was a special court of justice at the Althing before the introduction of the quarter courts, or whether, as seems more likely, the law council served as a court there in a way similar to that in which it appears to have functioned in Norway, as shown above. If the former possibility may be discounted, then the replacement of quarter assemblies by quarter courts at the Althing may be said to have created for the first time an Althing composed of different fora. This is in my view the most likely origin of the separation of legislative power, vested in the law council, and judicial power, vested in the courts, which has been considered one of the most remarkable features of the Icelandic constitution. If so, the separation was not caused by any consideration for justice and human rights, as it was when it was introduced in western states in modern times (Karlsson 2002).

It has been maintained here that the right to participate in the actions of the Althing was initially restricted to the holders of the 36 chieftaincies. After the establishment (or rather, perhaps, the acknowledgement) of the fourth spring assembly in the northern quarter, and at the time when the clause in *Grágás* on the law council took form, the number of chieftaincies seems to have increased to 39. When the fifth court was established, 48 chieftaincies were represented at the Althing, 36 of them ancient and 12 new. Different explanations have been given for the origin of these new chieftaincies, but the one which has the merit of being simpler than any other was put forward by Barði Guðmundsson (1937: 56–63) and later adopted by the influential scholar Jón Jóhannesson (1974: 71–2). According to them, the 12 new chieftains were, first, the three chieftains added in the north at the division into quarters and, second, the nine men who sat together with the chieftains from the

underprivileged quarters on the middle bench of the law court. It may have been considered natural to call these men chieftains, because they owned parts of chieftaincies, or perhaps (though this was not the idea of either of the two scholars mentioned) owned chieftaincies that had not hitherto been admitted into the central administration of the country.

Chieftains, Farmers and the Question of Democracy

The Old Norse term for the Icelandic chieftain is *goði* (pl. *goðar*), which is obviously related to *goð* ‘god’; their office was called *goðorð* (pl. *goðorð*), which seems to mean ‘the word of the god(s)’. It is also a common opinion among thirteenth-century authors, at least, that the *goðar* served as religious leaders in pagan times (for instance, ÍF 1: 315). Throughout the twentieth century many scholars denied that this was possible, partly because the idea that they were priests – even pagan priests – did not fit the image of heroic saga-age Icelanders, and partly because it was considered impossible that the office of *goði* could have survived the adoption of Christianity if it had been connected with pagan ritual. I believe that this view is based on the misconception that heathendom and Christianity were seen as major opposites in the northern countries around 1000. It is in fact no more surprising that the Icelandic *goði* institution survived the adoption of Christianity than that the kings of other European countries did so. Both of them were concerned with religious rituals before the conversion (cf. McTurk 1974–7: 139–69), and both of them, the kings in most European countries and the *goðar* in Iceland, took the lead in converting to Christianity.

However the relationship between the *goðar* and *bændr* (farmers) may have been understood in pagan times, after the introduction of Christianity it was defined in terms of the farmers’ duty to ride with their chieftains to the assemblies. Farmers were legally obliged to belong to a *goðorð*, which meant being the *þingmaðr* ‘assembly man’ or *þriðjungmaðr* of the *goði*, or *að vera í þingi með* or *þriðjungu með* him (‘to be in his assembly’ or ‘third’). Every household was supposed to belong to a *goðorð* in this way. According to a count of self-sustaining farmers around 1100, they numbered some 4,560 (ÍF 1: 23; Jones 1986: 153), which means that the following of each chieftain averaged around 100 households.

The farmers themselves were legally free to choose which *goðorð* they belonged to, while *goðar* too were free to refuse to accept a farmer and to expel a farmer from their *goðorð*. All members of the household of a farmer were supposed to belong to the same *goðorð* as he. This is stated clearly in, for example, the Assembly Procedures Section of *Grágás* (*Laws* 1: 132; *Grágás* 1992: 441; see also *Laws* 1: 135–6; *Grágás* 1992: 444):

A man may say he is joining the assembly group of what chieftain he pleases. Both he and the chieftain are to name witnesses to witness that he says he is joining his assembly

group along with his household people and his household stock and that the other accepts him.

Many scholars have taken this to mean that the Icelandic Commonwealth was a democracy, similar to representative democracies of our times, where the choice of chieftains was analogous to general elections.⁹ But one institution was missing, which in our times has the role of ensuring that the democratic system works properly: central government. No one in the Commonwealth had the role of monitoring the chieftains in such a way that they did not oppress individual farmers in their neighbourhood. We also have the relatively reliable narrative of a twelfth-century chieftain, Sturla Þórðarson of Hvammr, who expelled a neighbouring farmer from his farm because a chieftain hostile to Sturla had stayed with him overnight (*Sturlunga Saga* 1970–4: 1: 93; *Sturlunga saga* 1946: 1: 96). It thus seems likely that the chieftains tended to form around them a neighbourhood which they could trust. The farmers were also in most cases dependent on the nearest chieftain for protection against robbers and bullies. To draw a rough analogy, the chieftain was an MP and a police inspector at the same time, unrestricted by control from above. It must also be noted that democratic rights were available only to farmers and landowners, and then only the male ones. Women were not allowed to act in a chieftaincy, although they could own one; they were not nominated to the courts; and they do not even seem to have been recognized as valid witnesses (*Grágás* 1992: 220, 371, 445; *Laws* 1: 145–6, 53, 137).

On the other hand, there was no doubt a germ of democracy in this system. There is at least one example of a farmer who changed his allegiance to another chieftain, in fact to the above-mentioned Sturla of Hvammr, because his chieftain had failed him in his struggle against his neighbour (*Sturlunga Saga* 1970–4: 1: 99–100; *Sturlunga saga* 1946: 1: 102). This story shows that the law relating to choice of chieftains was not a dead letter. More important for the farmers, though, may have been the fact that the chieftains had to rely on their neighbours for active support in order to be able to carry out their tasks in their districts. The Icelandic Commonwealth is thus one of those early societies, described by Gellner (1991: 22), of ‘pastoralists or mountain peasants’, who ‘maintain internal order on the balance-of-power principle, with widespread political participation, and without the emergence of any outright internal domination’. Iceland enjoyed freedom from domination of the usual medieval kind for almost four centuries, until it succumbed to the rule of the Norwegian king in 1262–4. Since it managed to adopt literary culture and produce so much highly informative literature, it offers us a unique insight into a society of this kind.

See also ARCHAEOLOGY; FAMILY SAGAS; GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL; HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; LAWS; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; SAGAS OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY; SKALDIC POETRY; WOMEN IN OLD NORSE POETRY AND SAGAS.

NOTES

- 1 *Skjaldedigtning* (A 1: 257, B 1: 239). This tale is vaguely confirmed by the 'Legendary Saga of Óláfr', which relates that he had 11 kings 'or men of royal ancestry' captured in Upplönd in one morning (see *Olafs saga* 72–3).
- 2 In Icelandic I have called courts of this type *vettvangsdómar* (Karlsson 2002: 19–21), which would be translated accurately as *place-of-action courts*, which I find too clumsy a term.
- 3 *Sturlunga saga* (1946: 1, 211, 258, 378, 386). The terms are translated differently in *Sturlunga saga* (1970–4), and in one case not at all, but the occurrences are at vol. 2, 204; vol. 1, 150, 280, 290.
- 4 The original terms can be found in the index of *Grágás* (1992: 515–67). The English translations are found in *Laws*, mostly in the list of terms in 2: 414–23.
- 5 The original, 'En síðan váru sett fjórðungarþing', seems to me to mean 'After that quarter assemblies were established', rather than 'But later . . .', as Jones has translated.
- 6 See in the section above quotations from *Laws* 1: 53, 83; cf. ÍF 1: 315 (*Landnámabók*, *Hauksbók* ch. 268), a text that claims to be a part of the original, pagan law.
- 7 Many individual items here are based on the findings of other scholars, but as far as I am aware no one has put forward exactly the same ideas. This one and other interpretations are discussed thoroughly, with references to sources, in Karlsson (forthcoming).
- 8 See for instance *Laws* 1: 135–6; *Grágás* (1992: 444). All occurrences of these words in *Grágás* can be found in the index of *Grágás* (1992: 566–7).
- 9 For references to expressions of this opinion see Karlsson (1972: 18–22).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Editions and Translations

- Complete Sagas* = *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders: Including 49 Tales*, general ed. Viðar Hreinsson. Vol. 5. Reykjavík: 1997.
- Grágás* 3 = *Grágás* [3]: *Stykker, som findes i det Arnamagnæanske Haandskrift Nr. 351 fol., Skálholtsbók, og en Række andre Haandskrifter, tilligemed et Ordregister til Grágás* . . . Copenhagen: 1883.
- Grágás* (1992) = *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, eds. Gunnar Karlsson, Kristján Sveinsson and Möður Árnason. Reykjavík: 1992.
- Gulatingsslova* = *Den eldre Gulatingsslova*, eds. Bjørn Eithun, Magnus Rindal and Tor Ulset (Norrøne tekster 6). Oslo: 1994.
- ÍF 1 = *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson (Íslenzk fornrit I). Reykjavík: 1968.
- ÍF 2 = *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ed. Sigurður Nordal (Íslenzk fornrit II). Reykjavík: 1933.
- ÍF 4 = *Eyrbyggja saga, Grœnlendinga sögur*, eds. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson (Íslenzk fornrit IV). Reykjavík: 1935.
- Laws* = *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás: The Codex Regius of Grágás with Material from Other Manuscripts*, transl. and eds. Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote and Richard Perkins. Vols. 1–2. Winnipeg: 1980–2000.
- Olafs saga* = *Olafs saga hins helga: Die 'Legendarische Saga' über Olaf den Heiligen (Hs. Delagard. saml. nr. 8II)*, eds. Anne Heinrichs, Doris Janshen, Elke Radicke and Hartmut Röhn. Heidelberg: 1982
- Skjaldedigtning* = *Den norsk-isländske Skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson. Vol. A 1: *Tekst efter håndskrifterne*. Vol. B 1 *Rettet tekst*. (Udgiven af Kommissionen for det Arnamagnæanske Legat.) Copenhagen: 1912–15.
- Sturlunga saga* (1946) = *Sturlunga saga*, eds. Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason and Kristján Eldjárn. Vols. 1–2. Reykjavík: 1946.
- Sturlunga Saga* (1970–4) = *Sturlunga Saga*, transl. Julia H. McGrew and R. George Thomas. Vols. 1–2. New York: 1970–4.

Secondary Literature

- Andersen, Per Sveaas (1974) 'Ting. Norge.' In *Kulturbistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*, vol. 18. Reykjavík, cols. 346–59.
- Barnes, Michael (1974) 'Tingsted. Vesterhavsoyene for øvrig.' In *Kulturbistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*, vol. 18. Reykjavík, cols. 382–7.
- Benediktsson, Jakob (1974) 'Landnám og upphaf allsherjarríkis.' In Sigurður Línadal (ed.) *Saga Íslands*, vol. 1. Reykjavík, pp. 153–96.
- Blöndal, Lárus H. (1948) 'Skipun framfærslu- og sveitarstjórnarmálaáþjóðveldisöld.' *Sveitarstjórnarmál* 8.2–3, 41–54.
- Bøe, Arne (1965) 'Lagting. Noreg og Færoyane.' In *Kulturbistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*, vol. 10. Reykjavík, cols. 178–84.
- Fellows-Jensen, Gillian (1993) 'Tingwall, Dingwall and Thingwall.' In *Twenty-eight Papers Presented to Hans Bekker-Nielsen on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday 28 April 1993*. Odense, pp. 53–67.
- Gellner, Ernest (1991) *Plough, Sword and Book: The Structure of Human History*. London.
- Guðmundsson, Barði (1937) 'Goðorð forn og ný.' *Skírnir* 111, 56–83.
- Halvorsen, Eyvind Fjeld (1958) 'Dómr.' In *Kulturbistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*, vol. 3. Reykjavík, cols. 214–18.
- Heusler, Andreas (1911) *Das Strafrecht der Isländersagas*. Leipzig.
- Ingvarsson, Lúðvík (1970) *Refsingar á Íslandi á þjóðveldistímanum*. Reykjavík.
- Jóhannesson, Jón (1974) *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, transl. Haraldur Bessason. Winnipeg.
- Jones, Gwyn (1986) *The Norse Atlantic Saga: Being the Norse Voyages of Discovery and Settlement to Iceland, Greenland, and North America*. 2nd edn. Oxford.
- Karlsson, Gunnar (1972) 'Goðar og bændur.' *Saga* 10, 5–57.
- Karlsson, Gunnar (2002) 'Aðgreining löggjafarvalds og dómsvalds í íslenska þjóðveldinu.' *Gripla* 13, 7–32.
- Karlsson, Gunnar (forthcoming). *Goðamenning: Staða og ábrif goðorðsmanna í þjóðveldi Íslendinga*.
- Lárusson, Magnús Már (1962) 'Hreppr.' In *Kulturbistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*, vol. 7. Reykjavík, cols. 17–22.
- Lárusson, Ólafur (1926) 'Nokkrar athugasemdir um fjórðungþingin.' *Árbók Hins íslenska fornleifaffélags* 1925–6, 4–17.
- Línadal, Sigurður (1969) 'Sendiför Úlfhjóts: Ásamt nokkrum athugasemdum um landnám Ingólfs Arnarsonar.' *Skírnir* 143, 5–26.
- Ljung, Sven (1957) 'Brandstod.' In *Kulturbistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*, vol. 2. Reykjavík, cols. 206–11.
- McTurk, Rory W. (1974–7) 'Sacral Kingship in Ancient Scandinavia: A Review of Some Recent Writings.' *Saga-Book* 19, 139–69.
- Sigurðsson, Jón Viðar (1999) *Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth*, transl. Jean Lundskaer-Nielsen. Odense.
- Stancliffe, Clare E. (1980) 'Kings and Conversion: Some Comparisons between the Roman Mission to England and Patrick's to Ireland.' *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 14, 59–94.
- Taranger, Absalon (1924) 'Alting og lagting.' *Historisk tidskrift (norsk)* Femte Række 5, 1–45.

Women in Old Norse Poetry and Sagas

Judy Quinn

Abiding curiosity about the social position of women in Scandinavia before and after the conversion to Christianity, and about the degree to which their representation in literary works might have been affected by the Christian context of textualization, has long underpinned research on women in Old Norse literature. Increasingly in recent years that research has also engaged with gender theory more broadly, resulting in a flourishing field of study which has produced a number of book-length studies in the last decade or so (Jesch 1991; Kress 1993; Jochens 1996; Anderson with Swenson 2002) as well as numerous articles and book chapters. In tandem with work on masculinity in the Old Norse world, scholars have begun to investigate deeper conceptualizations of the female in mythology, laws, poetry and saga literature. There is not space here for a detailed engagement with the new perspectives this work has thrown up or with recent readings of particular texts, and the list of references cannot provide anything but the principal markers to the field: it is hoped this chapter may serve instead as a companionable guide to some of the sources and some emergent ideas about what ‘femaleness’ might have meant in Old Norse skaldic and eddic poetry and saga literature.

A One-Gender Model?

Prompted by Laqueur’s work on the one-sex model of sexual difference in western Europe, Carol Clover has speculated that a ‘one gender model with a vengeance’ operated in the Norse world (1993: 84), where social and sexual impotence were synonymous with effeminacy, which as a category seems to have embraced cowardly men, old men, and most women most of the time. The focus of this chapter is naturally drawn to some of the exceptions – the intriguing heroines of the Icelandic family sagas whose behaviour and dialogue set them apart from the women represented in mainstream medieval European literature – and to the mythological and legendary female figures who stood behind them. The fact that in certain

circumstances in Old Norse literature a woman could assume the social powers of a man, and be praised for her vigour and assertiveness, is the cultural obverse of the process that saw men losing their 'maleness' through various forms of humiliation (see Meulengracht Sørensen 1983 on the robust tradition of sexual insult attested in the north). Clover suggests 'it may be just that ever-present possibility that gives Norse maleness its desperate edge' (1993: 79); 'the frantic machismo of Norse males, at least as they are portrayed in the literature, [suggesting] a society in which being born male precisely did not confer automatic superiority, . . . in which distinction had to be acquired, and constantly reacquired, by wresting it from others' (p. 78).

In much Old Norse literature, the performance of males is monitored not just by competitive males, but by women who did not stand by silently when male performance failed to pass muster, indeed whose words were what made the social gears shift. Even the most self-confident of males seem to have been conscious of this, many skaldic poets turning their verses for the approval of an observing woman (Frank 1990; Jesch 1991), a woman whose voice is seldom heard in the genre but whose approving countenance must have served as social muse. '[The] "O lady" apostrophe [in skaldic poetry] is not so much a greeting as a kind of shorthand, a mnemonic of masculinity', Frank observes (1990: 69): 'When he says "O lady" he really means "Notice me. Admire me, advise me, advertise me. Look lady, how good I am at being a man."' '

When he reports his deadly retribution against men who have mocked his bravery, one poet makes explicit the social mechanism this kind of apostrophe was meant to set in motion: 'I have cleared myself of calumny, no matter what the warrior tells his girlfriend' (Ebs 44).¹ Although women usually did not take an active part in the physical violence accompanying feuds, they were active in motivating and judging its outcome, and part of their role was clearly to ensure that the prowess of their men was noised about and their enemies' reputations sunk. The way this was effected is revealed in often chilling detail in the domestic conversations of the family sagas. Being a decidedly non-conversational form, skaldic poetry offers little insight into that; the representations of women it furnishes are static images of glamour and domestic wealth, albeit of a peculiarly northern kind: tree of the linen head-dress, field of gold jewellery, seat of treasures or, most bluntly, prop of valuables. The following examples, all from verse quoted in *Eyrbyggja saga*, indicate both the conventionality and inventiveness of kenning formation, combining base words drawn from the landscape and the pagan pantheon with words or further kennings denoting finery of one kind or another:

en mjóva aðalbjóra þöll

[slender fir-tree of the fine tapestry] (Ebs 108)

hǫr-Gerðr

[Gerðr [a goddess] of linen] (47)

alnar leiptra jörð

[land of the wrist's lightning [> silver]] (48)

armlinns þella

[pine-tree of the arm's serpent [> arm-ring]] (78)

auða þopta

[treasure seat] (173)

hafleygjar Hlín

[Hlín [a goddess] of the sea's flame [> gold]] (110)

Gunnr gjalfrelða

[Gunnr [a valkyrie] of the breakers' fire [> gold]] (109)

fannhvít fólðu fold

[snow-white land of the head-dress] (108)

These ornate circumlocutions by no means render a woman's presence purely decorative: the wealth she bears signifies a silent power, as the following verses from the same saga demonstrate. They are spoken by two berserks (that is, ferocious warriors), one of whom, the strong but impecunious Hallr, has asked to marry the addressee of the stanzas, Ásdís Styrsdóttir. Her father, clearly appalled at the prospect of a berserk son-in-law, hatches a plan with the shrewd politician Snorri goði which sees a more prosperous match made between Ásdís and Snorri himself and both berserks murdered – though at the point when these verses are spoken Hallr believes he will win Ásdís once he has finished some strenuous construction work on her father's farm.

Hvert hafið, Gerðr, of gǫrva,
gangfǫgr liðar hanga,
ljúg vætr at mér, leygjar,
línbundin, fǫr þína;
því í vetr, en vitra
vangs, sákat þik ganga,
hirðidís, frá húsi,
húns, skrautligar búna.

Sólgrund Siggjar linda
sjaldan hefr of faldit

jafnhátt; øglis stéttar
 elds nú's skart á þellu;
 hoddgrund, hvat býr undir,
 Hlín, oflæti þínu,
 hýrmælt, hóti fleira
 hvítings, an vér lítum.

[Where are you going, Gerðr of the forearm's fire [gold > woman], walking past so elegantly? – never lie to me, linen-decked one; for I have never seen you dressed in more splendour, walking from the house this winter, wise court-goddess of the board-game [> woman].

Seldom has the field of the sun of the belt of islands [sea > gold > woman] been seen with a head-dress so high; the pine-tree of the fire of the hawk's rest [wrist > gold > woman] is finely attired today. Field of treasure [> woman], what more is there than we see beneath your conceit, Hlín of the drinking-horn [> woman], smiling-voiced one?] (73–4)

Despite the small credit they might have earned with their mastery of skaldic kennings, the unspoken answer to the berserks' question is that Ásdís's head-dress remains too high for them. Ásdís's unattainability is conveyed not just by her parading of wealth and status, but by her inscrutability, which in its reiteration bespeaks the hopelessness of berserk-love: this lady will never be a berserk's wife, whatever else she, or her father, has in mind. (From the distance at which we must read her thoughts, they seem consonant with her father's.) And presuming that she will respond to him, let alone respond without lying, underlines how socially if not rhetorically out of his depth the berserk is, addressing a woman who is wise, a goddess of the court as much as the farm, and the mistress of strategic play. Following the recitation of their verses, Ásdís walks away.

In Old Norse literature the berserk is a figure of overstated masculinity whose prowess is critically limited to the physical and whose prospects of moving into a socially modulated role, as husband and farmer, are therefore slight. When such figures cause social tension, as they almost inevitably do, they are usually overpowered by force – an extreme form of masculine behaviour extinguishing itself. So overdetermined are the berserk's traits that the encounter is usually comic: in *Eyrbyggja saga* the berserks are rewarded for their hard labour with the use of the farmer's new bathhouse, which Ásdís's father then seals off and heats up until they can bear it no longer, at which point they break out only to slip on a wet ox-hide placed outside the door, allowing the farmer to spear each in turn. The reflective interlude the verses provide, as Ásdís mocks their aspirations by her attire and the berserks give voice to their insecurity as wooing males, also allows the full social meaning of the skaldic conventions for describing a woman to be sounded. Her field of reference is as broad as it is prestigious, the possessions she is denoted by signalling that she is not easily possessed.

And whatever potency is bound up in her conventional attributes, she does occasionally unfurl, as another episode involving a head-dress reveals. Using an encounter in *Orkneyinga saga* between a woman farmer named Ragna and Earl Rognvaldr, Clunies Ross (1992) has analysed the social meanings the style of a head-dress could convey. In an audience with the earl, Ragna wore a highly unconventional red head-dress made of horse-hair which offended him. Her offence is deliberate: contrary to his assumption, she had not used a mare's tail to fashion her outlandish head-gear, but the tail of a stallion, knowingly subverting gender types in order to wrong-foot him and to make her point that he does not know everything, inclining him to listen to her counsel. In *Laxdæla saga*, too, a purloined head-dress becomes emblematic of Guðrún's destructive desire to carry her head higher than any other woman in the district – no matter what the cost, material or human. Finely calibrated as finery might have been in social competitions of one kind or another, not all women were satisfied with gambling only in that coin.

Skaldic Poetry

If being good at being a man was not the sole preserve of biological males, as Clover and others have argued and the case of the shield-maiden amply illustrates (Clover 1986a), we might expect to find the occasional female who ventured into other cultural fields that were dominantly masculine. Such is indeed the case with skaldic poetry, with verse by four pre-Christian women poets preserved (see Jesch 1991: 161–8), as well as evidence of two female professional poets, Vilborg skáldkona and Steinvör Sighvatsdóttir, from the eleventh and thirteenth centuries (see Straubhaar 1993: 595, who includes in her count of women skalds verse recited by women within sagas, which swells the numbers considerably). Although the quantity of the evidence is slight, its drift in sociological terms is significant, with all the recorded skaldic compositions by women representing a form of political critique (Clunies Ross 2000). The skaldic idiom was not, however, one that would have tripped off the tongue spontaneously: it was a studied art, and even if a meagre number of verses by women have been preserved on vellum, we can surmise that many more might have been uttered. The early verses that survive are by Jörunn skáldmær, Hildir Hrólfsdóttir, the Norwegian Queen Gunnhildr – who is also known to have commissioned poetic compositions – and Steinunn Refsdóttir, who taunted the Christian missionary Þangbrandr with spirited verses celebrating the wreck of his ship, a disaster Steinunn attributed to the intervention of the god Þórr, proving him more powerful than the missionary's god.

Since no anthologies of skaldic poetry survive from the medieval period, its preservation depends on the quotation of verses within sagas (and to a lesser extent within treatises on poetry). The amount of verse quoted varies dramatically between sagas, with each saga having its own distinctive literary form, some sagas quoting very little and others being supplemented by quotations added by later scribes. While

verse preserved within sagas has provided a bountiful corpus of quotations, many of them are explicitly marked as fragments, making it plain that this mode of recording has by no means fully documented the range and quantity of orally transmitted verse that was known across the centuries after the settlement of Iceland. Only one conventional praise poem addressed to a woman has survived (Jesch 1994) and one kind of poetry that we know has not been preserved is the *mansongsvísur*, erotic verses exchanged between a man and a woman that were banned by the Icelandic Bishop Jón Ógmundarson; and there may have been other casualties of censorship. Some love poetry, of a sort, does survive within the sagas of poets (see Jochens 2001) – though it is as much about male rivalry as seduction, the energy of the triangular relationship held taut by the exchanges along just one side. Another poetic genre in which women appear to have been both productive and recorded is the prophetic dream-verse, with a significant amount of verse by women quoted in the contemporary sagas, pointing up an association between the female mind and subconscious perception which, as we shall see, occurs in other genres as well.

Eddic Poetry

In contradistinction to the fame-seeking mode of skaldic poetry, most verse in eddic metres is anonymous, and perhaps paradoxically, eddic poetry is anthologized in two medieval collections (see chapter 5). The main collection, the Codex Regius (GKS 2365 4to), contains both mythological and heroic poetry, both of which contain female figures of great interest: the *volva*, or seeress, who is sought out by the god Óðinn to reveal detailed information about the history of the cosmos (*Völuspá*);² goddesses involved in counsel, strategic discussion and warnings (*Vafþrúðnismál*, *Þrymskviða*, *Lokasenna*); valkyries flirting with heroes and warding off malevolent underwater ogresses (the Helgi poems); a valkyrie teaching the hero Sigurðr esoteric lore (*Sigrdrífumál*); the uncompromising heroine Brynhildr, driven by treacherous deceit to prefer the death of the man she loved to life, his and hers; and the murderous wife and mother Guðrún, drawn through three tragic marriages and steeped so deep in vengeance that it is the depletion of son-avengers that eventually quiets her voice rather than any satisfaction in retaliatory atonement.

In the pared down, more starkly defined interactions between mythological ‘men’ and ‘women’, the one-gender model posited for saga literature holds only limited sway: ‘femaleness’ as it is represented by the *volva* (seeress) and the *valkyria* (literally, ‘chooser of the slain’) embodies knowledge of fate and power over life respectively, primal identifications that separate female from male in an essentialist way. The conceptualization of fate in Old Norse mythology is coded feminine through the identification of its operatives as *nornir*, *dísir* and *fylgjur* (see Jochens 1996: 37–41). And in a structuralist analysis of Old Norse myth, Clunies Ross has observed that ‘females tend to be strongly linked with the natural, the unconfined, the giant, and the mortal’ (1994: 84). These identifications often pit female against male in a

mythological dynamic of appropriation: the knowledge which is exclusive to the *volva*; the magical powers that the Vanir goddess Freyja brings with her into the world of the Æsir; the poetic mead that is in the guardianship of a giantess; even the god Baldr, tragically killed and cast into the realm of the goddess Hel – all of these are the objects of quests of one sort or another by the male god Óðinn, who tries to wrest them away from females, with mixed success.

Commerce is not always begrudged by the female: the giantess Gunnlǫð falls for Óðinn's seductive talk before he leaves her in tears, his gullet full of the mead of poetry (*Hávamál* 104–10), or, at the level of interaction between gods and heroes, Sigrdrífa gifts Sigurðr a drink of beer full of powerful spells and charms (*Sigrdrífumál* 5). Others are more resistant, and more suspicious of Óðinn and his beguiling ways, methods he has apparently learnt by assuming a female role, dressing up as a *volva* and performing her mysterious rites on an island (*Lokasenna* 24).³ The god Loki also had occasion to abandon his masculine form in order to be mythologically productive, dwelling beneath the earth and giving birth to children (*Lokasenna* 23). Such manifestations of femaleness suggest that it was imagined both as a valuable asset to be acquired and exploited and as a force to be feared and brought under control, the latter aspect made apparent in the bizarre imagining of female-to-female reproduction in *Hyndluljóð* 41, where Loki is said to have been made pregnant by an evil woman and given birth to every *flagð* on earth, a term that is difficult to translate but approximates to ogress or witch (see chapter 12 above). This conception of femaleness redoubled is equated with all that is out of the gods' control – the tremendous power of inimical forces, the alterity of giants, female sexuality – projected as the awful spectre of a monstrous woman ramifying into a race.

Even within their own cultivated space, the gods suspect the females in their midst of having an unsettling power, the foreknowledge of everyone's fates. In the mêlée of revealing vituperation that is *Lokasenna*, a series of goddesses intervenes to suppress argument, and in their defence, Gefion and Frigg are said to have extensive knowledge of individuals' fates which it is dangerous to provoke into expression (sts 21, 29). (Freyja makes this claim on behalf of Frigg, Óðinn on behalf of Gefion, noting that her knowledge is equal to his own, possibly an indication of the fruits of his dedicated intelligence-gathering from women or his assumption of their prophetic powers.) The goddesses are otherwise accused of all manner of sexual indiscretion, stemming from their apparently unbridled sexual desire, an idea comically troped in *Þrymskviða* (st. 13) when Freyja refuses to go to giant-land as hostage to the lust of the giant Þrymr lest she be known as the most-eager-for-men ('vergiarnasta'), and played out in grotesque detail in *Skírnismál*, where the giantess Gerðr is threatened and cursed until she capitulates to Freyr's desire (Larrington 1992). In *Lokasenna*, Skaði, the giantess among the goddesses, is alone in taunting Loki with her knowledge of his fate, specifically denying him profitable counsel (*Lokasenna* 51) and charging him instead with her 'kǫld ráð' (cold counsel), a term the sagas will bring us back to. Although it is negatively put here, there are other clues that goddesses served as beneficent advisors to the gods, a role certainly taken up by Frigg in *Vafþrúðnismál* (st. 1).

Given the characteristic turn in eddic dialogue of malicious charge and vengeful counter-charge, foreknowledge would presumably have given female speakers an unsporting advantage or led narrative poems into *culs-de-sac*, so in most mythological poems women are silent – their knowledge latent – unless, as in *Völuspá*, the feminine voice of omniscience is specifically summoned to recitation. The prose frame to *Grímnismál* presents an interesting instance of feminine foreknowledge pitted against masculine intervention, when Óðinn and Frigg enter into a wager about their respective foster-children: Geirrøðr, the male-fostered second son of a king who treacherously abandoned his older brother at sea in order to succeed to the crown, and Agnarr, the female-fostered older brother who was cast adrift and found refuge with a giantess in a cave. The wager is spurred by Frigg's claim that Geirrøðr was stingy with food and tortured his guests – a domestically couched expression of improper or unnatural behaviour – an accusation Óðinn denies and sets out to refute. Of course Frigg is right, as the poem quickly confirms: Geirrøðr is deposed, Agnarr returns to his rightful place in the social order, and Óðinn returns home tortured and a loser, though that storyline is subordinated in the poem to the triumphant, and terrifying, revelation of Odinic knowledge and identity to a male human subject.

The dominant form of many eddic poems is dialogue, a form which increases the complexity of interaction between actors – making their encounters 'live', as it were – and it has the potential to yield important insights into female and male relations in a range of mythological and legendary situations. *Völuspá* is one of three poems which represent dialogue with a *völva*, the female figure associated both with the dead and with the otherness of giants (see Quinn 2002), associations which invest her with prized knowledge otherwise inaccessible to the gods. Her knowledge spans the primeval past and the distant future, including the manner of Óðinn's own death, escalating the tension in the recitation he commissions from her which, it appears, was not without animosity to begin with (*Völuspá* 28–9):

Ein sat hon úti, þá er inn aldni kom
 Yggiungr ása, oc í augo leit:
 'Hvers fregnit mic, hví freistið mín?
 Alt veit ec, Óðinn, hvar þú auga falt
 í inom mæra Mímis brunni.
 Dreccr miðð Mímir morgin hverian
 af veði Valføðrs – vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?'
 Valði henni Herføðr hringa oc men,
 fé,⁴ spíoll spaclig oc spáganda;
 sá hon vítt oc um vítt of verold hveria.

[She sat outside, alone, when the old one came, Frightening One of the Æsir, and looked into her eyes: 'What do you ask me, why do you test me? I know everything, Óðinn, where you hid your eye in the famous well of Mímir. Every morning Mímir drinks mead from Father-of-the-Slain's pledge – do you know yet, or what?']

War-Father chose for her rings and necklaces, money, wise spells and prophecy-wands; she saw widely and more widely throughout every world.]

What she goes on to see is the gathering of valkyries – a portent of male death – prefacing the killing of Óðinn’s son Baldr. The information he so anxiously seeks is given, but the irascible tone of the *volva* indicates her proleptic weariness at his agitation: his son will die and he will die, no matter how he flexes his skill in contestation. Moreover the *volva* knows everything, even that which Óðinn presumed to be his own secret compromise at Mímir’s well. Though he be frightening (Yggiungr) and patriarch of war and the slain (Valföðr, Herföðr), the only resource that avails him when he comes up against female resistance here is that commonplace of male-to-female persuasion: bribery and temporary compliance. She will prophesy in return for jewellery and Óðinn’s enabling provision of spells and wands; just as in a saga encounter I shall turn to shortly, the *volva* requires others’ engagement in the ritual for it to be effective. In the negotiation between Óðinn and the unnamed *volva*, women’s penchant for finery is again the characterizing idiom, but finery is symbolic of cultural power, not social frippery.

While the eddic mythological poems are unquestionably forged from the point of view of the male gods, they none the less reveal a great deal about the cultural construction of the feminine: the goddess may be reserved but her advice is valuable and her foresight potentially destabilizing. And the sexual allure of mythological women, whether goddess or giantess, coupled with their own desire for self-determination, makes for some intense power-play. The image of the violent and bullying male always able to assert his dominance – an image consonant with the popular notion of the raping and pillaging Viking – only appears to be imaginable in the far reaches of the world, whether mythological or earthly. Frightful bullying may work in giant-land against Gerðr, but it needs to be set against Óðinn’s experience with another giantess, ‘Billings mey’ (*Hávamál* 97–100), who outsmarts him by arranging a mock-tryst for him in her bed with a dog, an anecdote which puts the misogynist maxim ‘only when she is burnt should a woman be praised’ (‘scal leyfa kono, er brend er’) (*Hávamál* 81) into a less earnest frame.

Women’s desire for self-determination, especially in sexual relations, courses through much Old Norse literature and is given expression in myriad forms: Ásdís’s smiling silence in the face of her berserk wooer, Billings mey’s entertaining foxing of the smitten Óðinn, or Gerðr’s twin statements – ‘I shall never endure coercion for any man’s desire’ and ‘yet I had thought I would never love a vanir-god well’ (‘Ánauð þola ec vil aldregi at manncis munom’; ‘þó hafða ec þat ætlað, at myndac aldregi unna vaningia vel’: *Skírnismál* sts 24 and 37) – which frame Skírnir’s malicious curse condemning her to life-long frustration and madness. Most moving, however, are the extraordinary testimonies of Brynhildr and Guðrún which dominate the sequence of eddic heroic poems. There is not space in this short chapter to cover the poems devoted to them, or to trace their impact on the representation of women generally in

Old Norse literature; two short quotations will, however, provide a sense of their presence as powerful and uncompromising women.

The first is part of Brynhildr's soliloquy in response to a giantess who accosts her on her journey to the world of the dead, accusing her of visiting another woman's husband (*Helreið Brynhildar* 13):

því brá mér Guðrún, Gíuca dóttir,
at ec Sigurði svæfac á armi;
þá varð ec þess vís, er ec vildigac,
at þau véltu mic í verfangi.

[Thus Guðrún, Gíuci's daughter, accused me, that I had slept in Sigurðr's arms; then I became aware of what I wished I hadn't known, that they had deceived me in the taking of a husband.]

Knowing that, her only course of action was to goad her duplicitous husband Gunnarr to murder Sigurðr (who had previously wooed Brynhildr in disguise and on Gunnarr's behalf, an arrangement at which Gunnarr had connived); she could then have the tragic satisfaction of joining Sigurðr – the man she believed was hers by right – in the grave.

The grief this causes Sigurðr's wife (and Gunnarr's sister), Guðrún, is almost beyond measure: having estimated herself higher than the valkyries ('hærri Herians dísi'), she now feels as little as a leaf ('nú em ec svá lítil sem lauf sé': *Guðrúnarqviða* I, 19). Against her family's strenuous entreaties, Guðrún refuses to marry the prince next chosen for her by her family to mend dynastic bridges (*Guðrúnarqviða* II, 27):

Vilc eigi ec með veri ganga
né Brynhildar bróður eiga;
samir eigi mér, við son Buðla
ætt at auca né una lífi.

[I do not wish to go with a man or to marry Brynhildr's brother; it is not fitting for me to have children with the son of Buðli, nor to enjoy life.]

But her family prevails and horrific events ensue; the voice of lamentation encodes a call to vengeance and, in the Old Norse literary world, grief quickly turns to incitement to kill (see Clover 1986b). Suffice here to say that a simple implication to be drawn from the tangled plots of the eddic heroic poems is that a marriage arranged by deception or against a woman's will does not bode well for wife, husband, or the children that will be sacrificed, directly or indirectly, to the vengeance imperative.

A similar theme can also be drawn out of the Helgi poems in the interactions between heroes and valkyrie-princesses, women who move between service to Óðinn

in Valhöll, from where they fly down to battlefields and choose the slain, and life as dynastic princesses, where they are expected to follow their fathers' will in marrying a prince selected by him. In eddic poems about valkyries (to the three Helgi poems can be added *Sigrdrífumál* and sections of other poems about Brynhildr), the princess (and sometime valkyrie) strives against the decision of her father (or of Óðinn) and chooses the hero she wants as her husband even though this causes grief to her family, her lover and, ultimately, herself. Her power to determine a warrior's death is transmuted into the will for her chosen warrior to live, and live with her. The reiteration of this contradiction in three poems suggests a fascination with the valkyrie's power of choice, with the idea that the mechanism of fate was embodied and able to be seduced. When Sigrún and her dazzling flock of valkyries alight on the battlefield in *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana I*, Helgi asks her if they want to go home with them that evening, only to be told by the valkyrie that they have more important business than drinking beer, and that he must challenge the warrior to whom her father has betrothed her (sts. 15–20).

Eddic poetry engages directly with the will of valkyries, but even skaldic poetry recognizes their semantic power. When skaldic poetry moves into the exclusively male zone of combat, there is still a female influence in the hovering presence of valkyries, lending their names and their zeal for the death of warriors to many of the kennings that describe weapons and heroic warfare: battle is the snow-storm of Skoꝓgul or the noisy wind of Gõndul ('él Skoꝓglar', 'glymvindr Gõndlar'), a sword the bending reed of Hrund's hands ('Hrundar handa hnigreyrr'), a shield Hildir's cloud or Hlõkk's tent ('Hildar sky', 'Hlakkar tjald').

The Sagas

This survey of the representation of women in skaldic and eddic sources has necessarily been selective; the size of the saga corpus imposes an even greater need for selectivity, for which I can only compensate by promising the reward of reading the sagas themselves and pointing to the available surveys of 'types' of saga heroines: the shield-maidens, warrior women, troublemakers, sorceresses, avengers and inciters (see Jesch 1991; Jochens 1996). For the remainder of this chapter I will focus on two short sagas about the Viking discovery and settlement of North America, *Eiríks saga rauða* ('The Saga of Erik the Red') and *Grœnlendinga saga* ('The Saga of the Greenlanders'),⁵ to give a sense of the range of characterizations yielded by the feminine in saga narrative and the way they embody some aspects of the feminine instanced in poetry and mythology which I have surveyed. We will meet another powerful *volva*, this time one who prophesied from farm to farm in Greenland; a noble woman in the Hebrides who had a summer romance with Leifr Eiríksson and bore him a strange son; another of Erik the Red's children who organized her own trading expedition to Vínland, where she provoked her husband to violence over a fictitious assault, and became a pragmatic axe-murderer herself before returning to a quiet life at home; an

intriguing Icelandic woman who came into the saga by being picked up off a reef near the coast of Greenland after she had been shipwrecked and who went on to establish a small dynasty of bishops; a female corpse in a remote outpost of Greenland who didn't much like leaving her husband in the company of that same woman; and a remarkable migrant who had a ship built in Scotland, settled extensive valleys in Iceland, and freed and granted land to her slaves – all this in two sagas which together cover only a few dozen pages.

The prophetic and magical powers of women known from eddic sources are evidenced in *Eiríks saga rauða*, the former in the account of a prophetess known as *lítill vǫlva* ('the little seeress') who, during a period of famine in Greenland, is invited to foretell the season's prospects and the fortunes of farmers and their families (Es 410). The introduction of Þorbjörg into the story is accompanied by one of the most detailed physical descriptions in saga literature: her blue dress is decorated with gems across the skirt down to the hem; her belt is of touchwood and has a large pouch hanging from it, in which she keeps the charms she uses for divination. She wears a necklace of glass beads and on her head a black lambskin hood lined with white cat's fur; on her feet shaggy calfskin shoes with long, strong laces with big tin baubles on the ends (Es 411). In order for the future to be revealed to her, Þorbjörg needs to summon spirits into the room, and this requires women to sing magical chants called *varðlokur*. There is no one on the farm who knows these songs, and the fortune-telling looks set to fail until a visiting Icelander admits that her foster-mother has taught her such songs. The visitor expresses her disinclination to participate in this kind of ceremony, since she is a Christian, but she is prevailed upon by the farmer to sing so that others may hear their destinies. As is apparent in a number of other incidents in saga literature, certain kinds of women are credited with knowledge which is hidden from other people and which they can be prevailed upon to reveal in certain circumstances (see Quinn 1998), a phenomenon in everyday saga life that mirrors the mythological attribution of foreknowledge to goddesses and *vǫlur*.

Another woman in *Eiríks saga rauða* described as having uncanny knowledge – and, it turns out, disconcerting powers – is the mistress whom Leifr takes while in summer transit in the Hebrides, a woman called Þórgunna who challenges him to take her with him to Greenland when he leaves, even though her family may disapprove. Fearing the consequences of what would be judged forced abduction (*bertaka*), Leifr refuses on account of his few supporters (Es 414). Þórgunna realizes she has landed a man without the pluck to oppose her male relatives – unlike the heroes whom eddic valkyries choose – and she does not hide her displeasure at the dishonour this entails. Announcing that she will soon bear his son, Þórgunna chides Leifr for his irresponsible behaviour and declares her mode of retribution and its outcome: by determining to send her son to his father in Greenland as soon as he is old enough, and by joining them herself, Þórgunna promises that Leifr will not enjoy having a son by her any more than the manner of their parting warrants.

Wilful prophecy, and arguably a curse, are ascribed to the Hebridean, and both capacities are repeated in another saga Þórgunna appears in, when in *Eyrbyggja saga*

she tempts Þuríðr with her exquisite bed-linen and determines her covetousness will cause nothing but menace (Scott 2002: 236–67). In another unsettling episode in that saga she emerges naked from her coffin to prepare a meal for her pallbearers when they happen upon stingy hosts, signalling again women's tireless campaign against low standards of hospitality, one endorsed by Frigg in her wager with Óðinn. The narrative spread of the encounter between Þórgunna and Leifr in *Eiríks saga rauða* is not unfolded in the extant saga – we only learn that the boy is not without strangeness – but to a medieval Icelandic audience the Hebridean Þórgunna must have stood for the unleashed magic of a woman crossed, the working of whose magic could illuminate any number of social issues.

Perhaps it is the disparity in spirit between a man and a woman that draws the author of *Grœnlendinga saga* to the story of another couple, when he introduces Erik the Red's daughter Freydís as haughty, with a rather feeble man for a husband, and married to him only for money (Gs 245). Freydís does not seem to regard her gender as any reason to forego the family tradition of mounting trading voyages to Vínland, and in partnership with two Norwegians she sets off and almost immediately breaks the terms of their commercial agreement. In the depths of the Vínland winter, Freydís strikes out on her own – her resolve as enigmatic as her motivation throughout, unless we are to understand her being married for money as the kind of character stain that initial saga descriptions very often leave.

The saga narrative is arresting in its precision: Freydís gets up early one morning, gets dressed but does not put on her shoes; the weather that night has brought a heavy dew to the ground. She takes her husband's cloak and goes to the door of the brothers' house (Gs 265). For the first time the saga author alerts us to the presence of Freydís's husband in Vínland – he too lives up to his initial description as a rather weak character – but wearing another's cloak and walking bare-foot in winter spell dangerous intentions in saga literature. Freydís extracts agreement from the Norwegians to swap ships and returns to her bed, where her rather startled husband wakes up and asks her why her feet are so cold and wet. With great vehemence, Freydís tells him she has been violently beaten by the Norwegians. Her mendacity is proven by the saga narrator's staging of the conversations, although her husband is yet to find it out. She then turns on him, challenging him to avenge the shame this brings to both of them, enacting the traditional role of inciting wife. He quickly capitulates, perhaps because the likelihood of sexual assault is high in the trading camp where the ratio of men to women is so unsatisfactory (Jochens 2002). To her satisfaction, her provoked husband seizes the brothers and their men, and as each of them is led outside, Freydís has them killed. When only the women are left, no one is willing to go on killing. 'Give me an axe', says Freydís (Gs 266), and she kills them all herself.

Her bloody-mindedness then turns to lethal threat, as her companions are warned that if they reveal her crime back in Greenland, they will be killed. Freydís is said to be pleased with the way she has conducted herself, and back in Greenland she bribes her companions richly. But they do talk and her brother, Leifr, tortures three of her men in order to find out the full story. He then does nothing, except to predict that

her descendants will not prosper. The saga writer is the only one to take any revenge on her by giving force to Leifr's prediction, making no mention of her offspring while making much of the bishop-rich family-lines of Guðríðr and Karlsefni, a contrast which Jesch (1991: 185) has argued underlines the distinction between pagan past – Freydís is not mentioned as having converted – and Christian present.

While the portrait of Freydís in *Grœnlendinga saga* may well signal the historical existence of powerful women who took part in trading missions, who may indeed have murdered for commercial advantage, when compared with the cameo performance of a woman called Freydís in *Eiríks saga rauða*, it cannot help but alert us to the significant stylization of literary characterization in these sagas. This characterization drew, no doubt, on elements of historical report, but used them with such selectivity that a woman of treacherous deceit emerges in one telling, and a woman of spirited initiative emerges in the other. There seems little doubt that the two women are one and the same, though there are important differences in their backgrounds as well as in their behaviour that might owe as much to inconsistent oral traditions as to ideological moulding by saga writers.

Freydís's social status varies from that attested in *Grœnlendinga saga*: she is introduced as Erik the Red's illegitimate daughter (Gs 422) – perhaps a clue to why money might have played a part in the arrangement of her marriage – and rather than participating in her own expedition to Vínland, she is said to be among the large party accompanying Karlsefni on his mission (her husband Þorvarðr is mentioned, but he plays no role in the narrative). Contrary to her depiction in *Grœnlendinga saga*, however, Freydís turns out to be something of a benevolent virago, taking on the aggressive natives (called *Skrælingar* in the saga) when the men in Karlsefni's party are in retreat. In a typical saga whetting-scene, she eggs the men on to fighting, challenging them to explain why they are running away from the *Skrælingar*, whom they should be able to slaughter like cattle. In a move calculated to humiliate the men, Freydís says that if she had weapons, she would be able to fight better than any of them (Es 429). As this scene shows, the cold counsel saga women are notorious for – their unwavering assertion of family honour is so characterized in *Njáls saga* and *Gísla saga Súrssonar* (see Anderson 2002) – is not cold in the sense of being unfeeling, but in the chill implications of its logic for men (Miller 1990: 212).

Karlsefni and his men ignore her, but Freydís has another card to play: unable to keep up with her party because she is pregnant, she becomes isolated in the woods and the *Skrælingar* close in on her. Finding the body of one of Karlsefni's men, she snatches up his sword and prepares to defend herself. When the *Skrælingar* attack, she pulls one of her breasts out of her dress and slaps it with the sword, at which sight the *Skrælingar* take fright and flee to their boats, ending the incursion (Es 429–30). Karlsefni and his men find her, and praise her luck – faint praise indeed for what Freydís has just accomplished; the precise significance of her act is unclear but there can be no doubt that it is an act of considerable sangfroid in the face of a hostile army (see Wolf 1996). In addition, the exposure of her breast only intensifies the force of her goading of Karlsefni and his men: it takes a woman, and it takes a woman to do so

little to make the Skrälingar evaporate from the scene. Perhaps there is an implicit assumption in the narrative that the creation of illusions by the Skrälingar – in this case a swarming army much greater than their actual numbers – is more effective on men than women, who may be able to see through the deception. The difference between Freydís and Karlsefni in this incident, however, comes down to courage, something women are driven to assert when their menfolk falter. Karlsefni's quip that she was lucky in her action at least testifies to his continued control of masculine assertiveness, though we might also read into the description the sense of social good fortune that accompanies Leifr Eiríksson's epithet *hinn heppni* ('the lucky'), gained, it says in the *Hauksbók* text, because he brought Christianity to Greenland (Es 212), and, *Skálholtsbók* adds, because he also rescued the shipwrecked (Es 415).

According to *Grœnlendinga saga*, one of those he rescued was Guðríðr. Fortune went on to deal Guðríðr something of a mixed hand: offered hospitality by Leifr, she next appears in the saga married to his brother Þorsteinn, who sets off with her on his planned expedition to Vínland. The weather is not kind to them, and after floundering no further than the western coast of Greenland, they have to spend the following winter there at the remote settlement of Lýsufjörðr, where they are offered hospitality by a farmer also named Þorsteinn, a man who describes himself as something of a loner (Gs 258). The saga then provides the first description of Guðríðr: she is a woman of noble appearance, a clever woman, and she knows how to behave among unfamiliar people. Just as well, for shortly afterwards the locality is ravaged by disease and the first one to die is Þorsteinn the farmer's wife – an extremely fierce woman, as strong as a man. After Guðríðr's husband also becomes ill, the saga describes an unsettling scene, as intimate as it is unyielding of sociological certainty.

When Þorsteinn the farmer goes outside to get a plank on which to lay his wife's corpse, Guðríðr says: 'Don't be too long, Þorsteinn dear' (Gs 259). Then Guðríðr's husband – lying in the same room as the corpse – announces that there was something very strange about the farmer's wife. She had propped herself up on her elbow and stuck her feet out of the bed, feeling about for her shoes. When her husband came back into the room, she slumped back down onto the bed with such force that the whole house shuddered. Guðríðr's husband dies shortly afterwards, leaving the two bereaved alone in the house. Þorsteinn the farmer then takes Guðríðr in his embrace and comforts her. The saga gives no clue of Guðríðr's reaction, sitting there with the loner in the middle of nowhere, her husband's dead body beside her. But all of a sudden, the corpse sits up and asks where Guðríðr is. She hesitates, but Þorsteinn the farmer walks across the room and takes a seat beside the corpse with Guðríðr on his knee. The dead man then delivers a detailed prophecy of his widow's future – one that sets out the course the saga narrative indirectly follows – but one that conclusively rules out Þorsteinn the farmer as her next husband. It seems neither dying spouse was happy about the affection being shown by their surviving partners, and in different ways they fought back from the world of the dead with a last powerful thud or warning against an affectionate turn that had not escaped their attention.⁶

The man Guðríðr is destined to marry is Þorfinnr Karlsefni (the by-name means '(having) the makings of a man'), the leader of *Grænlandinga saga's* fourth expedition to Vínland, in which Guðríðr has a strange brush with a Skræling woman who appears at her door and identifies herself as Guðríðr. As Guðríðr gestures to her Skræling-double to sit down she hears a loud crashing noise and the woman disappears, precisely at the moment when, outside, one of the Skræling men wanting to take some 'eastern' weapons is killed by Karlsefni's men. The Skrælingar are adept at creating illusions, and it is hard to know from the apparition's demeanour whether good or ill might have come from the visit had it continued. What is noteworthy is the fact that male-to-male engagement was proceeding without language and that the imagining of communication was explored through a doubling of the female, with each Guðríðr marked in her own way by openness: an open door, the immediate disclosure by Guðríðr of her name, the welcoming gesture to sit down, and on the other side, the Skræling-Guðríðr's extraordinarily wide eyes. Guðríðr's role in the remainder of *Grænlandinga saga* is comparatively colourless, though not without religious significance: after her third husband's death, Guðríðr goes 'south', and after returning to her son's farm in Iceland becomes a nun.

Guðríðr's biography is slightly different in *Eiríks saga rauða*: she is the daughter of a chieftain, himself the son of a freed slave, who none the less strongly opposes his daughter's marriage to another son of a freed slave, taking her with him instead to seek his fortune in Greenland. The scene in which the unsuccessful suitor sees the beautiful Guðríðr for the first time as she walks past an open door is reminiscent of the berserk's doomed betrothal in *Eyrbyggja saga*, though Guðríðr's self-determination is made explicit: when Ormr enquires about his chances, he is told she is choosy about men, and so is her father (Es 408).⁷ While in Greenland, it is Guðríðr who furnishes the songs for the *völva* Þorbjörg. Pious as Guðríðr is depicted to be in both sagas, it is telling that her father, also Christian, has refused to stay in the farmhouse while such heathen practices as *varðlokur* and prophecy are being performed (Es 413). Brought to the edge of the known world, and to one in famine, the reactions of a Christian father and daughter become asymmetrical, the daughter drawn back into a culture through the lore taught to her by her foster-mother, enabling an ancient rite to take place that the narrative implicitly condones: the sybil foretells Guðríðr's destiny correctly.

After her father's death, Guðríðr inherits everything from him (Es 420), an indication of the independent wealth a woman could accumulate in saga society (Jochens 1995: 20–2). This is nowhere more plain than in the short biography of Auðr djúpauðga Ketilsdóttir which begins *Eiríks saga rauða* – her by-name is usually translated as 'the deep-minded' but it literally means 'deeply wealthy' – who is married to a Norwegian warrior king who conquers Dublin. After her husband's death, Auðr and her son go to the Hebrides; after the son's death in battle, Auðr has a ship built secretly in the forest and sails to the Orkneys and thence to Iceland, taking with her 20 free-born men and many Viking prisoners of war, some of whom she frees. Auðr takes possession of an extensive stretch of territory in Iceland, some of which she also grants to members of her entourage (Es 403–4). More is known about Auðr from

Laxdæla saga and other sources, but unfortunately no verses survive either by or about her. Had she been commemorated in skaldic verse, described as ‘seat of treasure’ or ‘fir-tree of the head-dress’, the circumlocutions, while conventional, would have encompassed female qualities that should by no means be regarded as superficial or insubstantial.

See also CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY; EDDIC POETRY; FAMILY SAGAS; GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL; LATE SECULAR POETRY; ORALITY AND LITERACY; PAGAN MYTH AND RELIGION; RHETORIC AND STYLE; ROYAL BIOGRAPHY; SAGAS OF ICELANDIC PREHISTORY; SHORT PROSE NARRATIVE; SKALDIC POETRY.

NOTES

- 1 Quotations from *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Grœnlendinga saga* are from the Íslenzk fornrit edition (Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1935; Halldórsson 1985), and are referred to by page number preceded by the abbreviation Ebs, Es or Gs.
- 2 All citations and quotations of eddic poems are from Neckel and Kuhn (1962).
- 3 An account of Óðinn’s acquisition of the powerful magic of *seiðr* from Freyja is given in *Ynglinga saga*.
- 4 This is the manuscript reading (punctuation is mine). Most editors have amended the word ‘fé’ to ‘fekki’, changing a nominal object to a past-tense verb, which radically alters the syntax and distorts the medieval record of the nature of the interaction between Óðinn and the *volva*.
- 5 *Eiríks saga rauða* is preserved in *Skálhótsbók* (AM 557 4to) and *Hauksbók* (AM 544 4to); *Grœnlendinga saga* is an editorial composite made up of þættir from *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* within *Flateyjarbók* (GkS 1005 fol.). For a recent discussion of the relationship of the sagas, see Þorláksson (2001).
- 6 The strange scene of the two difficult corpses plays out differently in *Eiríks saga rauða*: the dead wife has tried to get into bed with the dying Þorsteinn, only to have an axe driven into her chest by her husband. There is no hint of smouldering passion between the surviving couple, and the message Guðríför’s husband wants to deliver from beyond the grave concerns proper Christian burial (Es 419).
- 7 For an analysis of betrothal scenes in sagas, see Schulman (1997).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Anderson, Sarah M. (2002) ‘Introduction: “og eru köld kvenna ráð”.’ In Sarah Anderson with Karen Swenson (eds.) *Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology*. New York and London, pp. xi–xvi.
- Anderson, Sarah M. with Swenson, Karen (eds.) (2002) *Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology*. New York and London.
- Clover, C. (1986a) ‘Hildigunnr’s Lament.’ In John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth and Gerd W. Weber (eds.) *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature*. Odense, pp. 141–86.
- Clover, C. (1986b) ‘Maiden Warriors and Other Sons.’ *JEGP* 85, 35–49.
- Clover, C. (1993) ‘Regardless of Sex: Men, Women and Power in Early Northern Europe.’ In Nancy Partner (ed.) *Studying Medieval Women*. Cambridge, MA, pp. 61–85.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret (1992) ‘Women and Power in the Scandinavian Sagas.’ In B. Garlick et al. (eds.) *Stereotypes of Women in Power: Historical Perspectives and Revisionist Views*. London and New York, pp. 105–19.

- Clunies Ross, Margaret (1994) *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, vol. I: *The Myths*. Odense.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret (2000) 'Women Skalds and Norse Poetics: Jörunn skáldmærs *Sendibitr*.' In Stina Hansson and Mats Malm (eds.) *Gudar på Jorden: Festskrift til Lars Lönnroth*. Stockholm, pp. 85–96.
- Frank, Roberta (1990) 'Why Skalds Address Women.' In Teresa Pàroli (ed.) *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages: Atti del 12o Congresso Internazionale de Studi sull'Alto Medioeva*. Spoleto, pp. 67–83.
- Jesch, Judith (1991) *Women in the Viking Age*. Woodbridge.
- Jesch, Judith (1994) 'In Praise of Ástríðr Óláfsdóttir.' *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 24, 1–18.
- Jochens, Jenny (1995) *Women in Old Norse Society*. Ithaca, NY, and London.
- Jochens, Jenny (1996) *Old Norse Images of Women*. Philadelphia.
- Jochens, Jenny (2001) 'Representations of Skalds in the Sagas 2: Gender Relations.' In Russell Poole (ed.) *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*. Berlin and New York, pp. 309–32.
- Jochens, Jenny (2002) 'Vikings Westward to Vinland: The Problem of Women.' In Sarah Anderson with Karen Swenson (eds.) *Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology*. New York and London, pp. 129–58.
- Kress, Helga (1993) *Máttugar meyar: Íslensk forn-bókmenntasaga*. Reykjavík.
- Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben (1983) *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*. Odense.
- Larrington, Carolyne (1992) "'What Does Woman Want?" *Mær* and *munr* in *Skírnismál*.' *Alvíssmál* 1, 3–16.
- Miller, William Ian (1990) *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland*. Chicago and London.
- Neckel, Gustav (ed.) and Kuhn, Hans (rev.) (1962) *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*. 4th edn. Heidelberg.
- Quinn, Judy (1998) "'Ok verðr henni ljóð á munni": Eddic Prophecy in the *fornaldarsögur*.' *Alvíssmál* 8, 29–50.
- Quinn, Judy (2002) 'Dialogue with a *volva*: *Völuspá*, *Baldrs draumar* and *Hyndluljóð*.' In Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington (eds.) *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology*. New York and London, pp. 248–74.
- Schulman, Jana K. (1997) 'Make Me a Match: Motifs of Betrothal in the Sagas of Icelanders.' *JEGP* 69, 296–321.
- Scott, Forrest S. (2002) 'The Woman Who Knows: Female Characters in *Eyrbyggja saga*.' In Sarah Anderson with Karen Swenson (eds.) *Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology*. New York and London, pp. 225–43.
- Straubhaar, Sandra Ballif (1993) 'Skáldkonur.' In Philip Pulsiano, Paul Acker and Kirsten Wolf (eds.) *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*. New York, pp. 594–6.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur and Þórðarson, Matthías (eds.) (1935) *Eyrbyggja saga . . . Eiríks saga rauða, Grœnlendinga saga . . .* reissued with Ólafur Halldórsson (ed.) (1985) *Eiríks saga rauða: Texti Skálholtsbókar AM 557 4to* (Íslensk fornrit IV). Reykjavík.
- Þorláksson, Helgi (2001) 'The Vinland Sagas in a Contemporary Light.' In Andrew Wawn and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir (eds.) *Approaches to Vinland*. Reykjavík, pp. 63–77.
- Wolf, Kirsten (1996) 'Amazons in Vinland.' *JEGP* 95, 469–85.

Index

The following alphabetical order is used here as throughout the volume: a, b, c, d, ð, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, r, s, t, þ, u, ü, v, w, x, y, z, ä, æ, ö, ø, œ, ø, å, with no distinction made in alphabetization between vowels with an acute accent and those without.

The following procedure has been adopted in this index for Icelandic personal names: names of modern scholars are given (as in the lists of references for each chapter) in the order patronymic followed by given name. Other Icelanders are listed in the order given name followed by patronymic and/or any nickname or appellation; for example, Arnórr Þórðarson jarlaskáld, Eyvindr skáldaspillir.

Page numbers in italics refer to figures.

- Aall, Jacob 331
Abbo of Fleury 158
abbreviations
 manuscripts 261–2
 runes 424
Adam of Bremen
 on Icelandic government 225
 on paganism 305–6, 313
 on the Scritefingi 130
 on travel 132
 work as model 158, 159
Aðalbjarnarson, Bjarni 495
Aebischer, Paul 378
Aethelstan, king of England 166, 504
affluence 13–18
Akureyri 332
Alcuin of York 339, 347–8
Alexander de Villa-Dei 355, 358
Alexander the Great
 Alexanders saga 113, 167–8, 345
alphabet, adoption of Roman 184, 245–6
Althing *see* assemblies
Altuna stone 306, 418, 419
Alvíss 87
Anders Sunesøn 230
Andersson, Theodore M. 104, 438, 451,
 466–7, 475
annals 36–7
 Logmannsannáll 253
Anne, St 39
Anselm, St 342
anthropology, and mythology 10
Appalachian Mountains 299
archaeology 7–26
 and saga historicity 75–6
 ships 127
 as source for myth 306
architecture *see* building styles

- Ari inn fróði ('the Knowledgeable')
 Þorgilsson 147, 157–8, 302, 389
 see also Íslendingabók
- Ari Jónsson 253
- Ari Þorgeirsson 38
- Árnes 9
- Arngrímr Brandsson 34, 38–9
- Arngrímur Jónsson 70, 72, 78, 392
- Árni Lárentíusson 32
- Árni Magnússon 64, 75, 213, 285, 324, 428
- Árni Þorláksson, bishop of Skálholt 35,
 232–3
 Árna saga biskups Þorlákssonar 27, 37, 152,
 427, 433
- Arnórr Þórðarson jarlaskáld ('earls'
 poet') 48–9, 273, 479, 481
- art, 12th-century 20
- artes poeticae* 356–8
- Arthur, King 166, 170, 200
- Ásbirningar family 149
- Ásgarðr 309, 313
- Ásgautr 125
- Aspö stone 413
- assemblies 8–9, 138, 139–43, 227, 503–5,
 508–12
 Law Council 226–7, 504, 510
 origin 512–13
- Atli (Attila, king of the Huns) 88, 90, 91,
 454
- Auden, W. H. 333
- Auðr djúpauða ('the Deeply Wealthy')
 Ketilsdóttir 123, 533–4
- Augustine, St 58, 355, 358
- Babylon 199
- Baetke, Walter 287
- Baffin Island *see* Helluland
- Bagge, Sverre 398, 440
- Baie de Vin (Wine Bay) 297
- bailiffs 151
- Baldr 91–2, 524, 526
- Baldwin, king of Jerusalem 133
- Balestrand 331
- ballads 376–7
- Barnes, Geraldine 381, 384
- Bartholin, Thomas 323, 324
- Bay of Fundy 299
- Bech, Benedikt Magnússon *see* Benedikt
 Magnússon Bech
- Becket, St Thomas 34
- Bede, the Venerable 156, 158, 168, 317,
 343
- Benedict, St 341
- Benedikt Magnússon Bech 217
- Benediktsson, Gunnar 436
- Benediktsson, Jakob 72
- Bergen
 and dance ballads 377
 language 187
 laws 232, 238
 in poetry 128
 runic inscriptions 415–16, 418
 and spread of foreign literary influence
 206, 212
- Bergr Sokkason 32, 34, 38
- Bergsteinn Þorvaldsson blindi ('the
 Blind') 67, 217
- Bergþórshváll, Bergþórshvoll 67, 104
- berserks 520, 521
- Bible, the
 first Icelandic edition 70
 influence on saga 113
 translations 343–7
- Billings mey 526
- Birka 181
- Birkibeinar, the 149
- Biörner, Erik Julius 325
- Bjarni Gissurarson 71, 72
- Bjarni Herjólfsson 299
- Bjarni Jónsson Borgfirðingaskáld 218
- Bjarni Thorarensen 73
- Björketorp 180
- Björn Einarsson Jórslafari
 ('Jerusalem-farer') 212
- Björn Jónsson of Skarðsá 428–9
- Björn Þorleifsson 39, 253
- Björn Brynjólfsson 253
- Björn buna Veðrar-Grímsson 141–2
- Black Death 153, 246
- Blackwell, J. A. 327
- Bláland hit mikla ('Blue-land the
 Great') 198–9

- Blekinge inscriptions 180
 Bloch, R. Howard 442
 Bloxwich, John, bishop of Hólar 215
 Blöndal, Lárus H. 392–3
 Boer, Richard Constant 456
 Boniface VIII, Pope 243
 Borg 11
 Bornholm 229
 Borre 11
 Boston 334
 Boyer, Régis 380, 441
 Bragason, Úlfar 466
 Bragi 309
 Bragi inn gamli ('the Old') Boddason 276–7, 479, 480
 Brandr Jónsson, bishop of Hólar 167
 Brandr Sæmundarson, Bishop 429–30
 Brattahlíð 16, 498
 Breiðabólstaður 246, 253
 Breiðfjörð, Sigurður *see* Sigurður Breiðfjörð
 bridal quest themes 457–8
 Briem, Halldór *see* Halldór Briem
 British Isles
 runic inscriptions 182
 see also individual countries by name
 Broby 132
 Brown, George Mackay 334
 Bruun, Daniel 9
 Brünger, Tanja 469
 Brynhildr Buðladóttir 88, 89–90, 454–5, 523, 526–8
 Brynjólfur Steinraðarson 253
 Brynjólfur Steinraðarson, Valgerður 459
 Brynjólfur Sveinsson, bishop of Skálholt 83
 building styles
 10th-century change 22–3, 24
 halls 11, 12, 22–3
 long-houses 11, 22
 burials 10–11, 22
 cemeteries 18
 ritual carts in 304
 ships in 127
 Byatt, A. S. 334
 Byock, Jesse L. 79–80, 105, 439
 Byzantium 126
 see also Constantinople; Mikligarðr
- Bállsta 417
 Böðvarsson, Jón 35
- Cape Breton 299
 Cape Cod 299
 Cape Farewell *see* Hvarf
 Carlson, Catherine 298
 Cartier, Jacques 297
 carts, ritual 304, 313
 Cederschiöld, Gustav 378
 cemeteries 18
 see also burials
 Chase, Martin 48
 Chicago 334
 chieftain-priests 147
 chieftains 9, 139–41, 149, 226, 227, 512, 513–15
 Chrétien de Troyes 192, 200, 373, 454
 Christian literature
 annals 36–7
 Bible translations 343–7
 Christian history 342–3
 exempla 341–2
 lists of saints' feasts 29
 manuscripts 248
 moral treatises 347–50
 prose of instruction 338–53
 sermons 339–41, 359, 361, 362–3
 style 358–9, 361, 362–3, 368–70
 translation into vernacular 29
 þýðingar belgar 29
 visions 40, 350–1
 Christian literature: works
 'Dedication Homily' 340
 Dialogues (Gregory) 341–2, 351
 Duggals leiðsla ('Dougal's Vision') 351
 Elucidarius (Honorius) 342
 Etymologiae 343
 Heimsaldrar 343
 Imago mundi (Honorius) 342–3, 345
 Níðrstigningarsaga 351
 Oculus sacerdotis 352
 Rannveigar leiðsla 40, 351
 Un samedi par nuit, translation of 350
 Senna æðru og hugrekkis ('Debate between Anxiety and Courage') 349–50

- Speculum penitentis* 352
Speculum regale or *Konungs skuggsjá* 348–9
Stjórn 344–6
Viðræða líkams ok sálar ('A Debate between Body and Soul') 350
De virtutibus et vitiis (Alcuin) 347–8
Visio sancti Pauli apostoli 350–1
Vitae patrum 341
see also poetry: Christian poetry; saga: as Christian literature; saints' lives
- Christiania *see* Oslo
- Christianity
 Avignon papacy 243
 Christian voyages 132–3
 church administration 35
 church power in 12th century 50
 church power in Iceland 145–7, 152–3
 church power in Norway 145–6, 235–7, 239
 church schools 50, 246
 church's attitude to *rímur* 210–11
 church's attitude to *vikivakar* 215
 conversion as literary theme 457, 463, 464–5, 469–71
 Icelandic adoption of 20–2, 28–9, 144–5, 184, 302–3
 Icelandic church law 232–3, 236
 Icelandic–French church links 348
 influence on literature 94, 147–8, 157, 277, 279, 469
 Norwegian adoption of 28, 396, 420–2
 Norwegian church law 232, 234, 235–7
 and post-medieval reception of sagas 70
 reform attempts 31, 160
 Reformation in Iceland 153
 Scandinavian adoption of 184, 302, 420–2
 status of Icelandic priests 146
 and women 39–40
- Christoffer, king of Sweden 241
- Christopher, St 470
- chronologies, of Gerlandus 32
- churches 16, 22, 340
- Ciklamini, Marlene 437–8
- classical literature and works drawing from
Alexanders saga 113, 167–8, 345
Germania (Tacitus) 303–4, 305
 on grammar and rhetoric 355
 Josephus 345
 Lucan 113, 156, 164, 345
 on metre and metrics 282
Physiologus 339
Rómverja saga 164–5, 168–9, 345
 Sallust 113, 156, 164, 345
 as sources for sagas 113
Trójumanna saga 113, 165, 170
- Clement IV, Pope 236
- cloth industry 137
- Clover, Carol J. 292, 440, 518, 519, 522
- Clunies Ross, Margaret
 on literary representation of women 522, 523
 on myth 316–17, 438
 on *Sturlunga saga* 437, 438, 440
- Collingwood, W. G. 333
- Comhaer, Bishop Godsvin 39
- Constantinople 125, 126
see also Byzantium; Mikligarðr
- cooking 22–3
- cosmology 342–3
- courtly style 360, 368, 380
see also saga: *riddarasögur*
- courts, law
 effectiveness 227
 Iceland 142, 507–8, 510–11
 Norway 233–4, 239, 504–5
 origin 513
 Sweden 241
- Craigie, William A. 270
- Craxton, John, bishop of Hólar 215
- crime and punishment 238, 242, 504–5, 507–8, 510–11
see also dispute resolution; feuds
- Cumbria 306
- cursus* 362–3
- Cyprus 132
- Dahl, Johan Christian 331
- Dálkr bóndi ('the Farmer') 252
- Dares Phrygius 156, 165
- Debes, Lucas Jacobsen 326
- democracy 515

- Denmark
 19th-century politics 330
 adaptation of romances 376
 adoption of Christianity 184, 420
Gesta Danorum (Saxo) 307, 324
 history of kings 392, 450
 Icelandic rule 153
 interest in Old Norse literature 323–5,
 329–30
 language 182–3, 184, 185–8
 laws 229–31
 medieval extent of 229
 Norwegian union 153
 runic inscriptions 413
- Dictys Cretensis 165
- dispute resolution 148–9, 227, 233–4, 239,
 439
see also feuds
- Djulefors stone 411, 423
- Donatus, Aelius 282, 355, 357
- drama, eddic poetry as 95–6
- dreams 436–7, 463, 499–500, 523
- Driscoll, Matthew James 211
- Drävle stone 420, 421
- Dublin 123, 533
- Dumézil, Georges 313–14
- Dunstan, St 32–3
- Dýrafjörður 9
- earthwork systems, Iceland 16–18, 17
- Ebel, Else 471
- Eberhard de Béthune 355, 358
- economy
 affluence 13–18
 medieval Iceland 136–9, 153
- Edda* (Snorri)
 on *ars poetica* 356
Gylfaginning ('The Tricking of
 Gylfi') 1–2, 308, 309–11, 315,
 316–17
Háttatal ('List of Verse Forms') 280,
 281–3, 309, 483
 poetry preserved in 48, 51, 92, 492
Skáldskaparmál ('Poetic Diction') 53,
 308–9, 483, 487–8
 as source for myth 308–11
 sources 82–3
 translations 334
- eddic poetry, the Poetic Edda *see* poetry: eddic
 poetry
- education
 church schools 50, 246
 and sagas 77–8
- Edwards, Diana 48
- Edwards, Paul 457
- Eggert Ólafsson 72
- Egill Skalla-Grímsson
 and Einarr skálaglamm 480
Höfuðlausn 274, 323, 424, 489
 and metre 279
 on own abilities 479
 preservation of corpus 489
 representation in *Egils saga* 107, 414–15
Sonatorrek ('The Loss of Sons') 267, 489,
 491
 and travel 411
see also saga: family sagas: *Egils saga*
- Eiðaskógr 130
- Eilífr Goðrúnarson 43–4, 482, 489, 491–2
- Einarr fóstri 212, 217
- Einarr Sigurðsson, Rev. 218
- Einarr Gilson 206
- Einarr Hafliðason 253
- Einarr Helgason skálaglamm ('Scale-
 tinkle') 46, 480, 492–3
- Einarr Skúlason 51, 128, 274
- Einarr þambarskelfir ('Paunch-shaker' or
 'Bowstring-trembler') 397
- Einarsdóttir, Ólafía 441
- Einarsson, Árni 9
- Einarsson, Stefán 193, 197
- Einfeetingaland ('Uniped Land') 123
- Eiríkr, Archbishop 146
- Eiríkr, king of Denmark 132, 133
- Eiríkr Magnússon 481
- Eiríkr Oddsson 389
- Eiríkr rauði ('the Red') 15, 120, 122
see also saga: family sagas: *Eiríks saga rauða*;
 saga: family sagas: *Grænlandinga saga*
- Eiríkr the Good, king of Norway 398
- Eiríkr Þrondarson 248
- Ekrem, Inger 159

- Eliade, Mircea 312–13
 Elizabeth of Schönau 38
 England
 the Danelaw 223
 Danish claims to 229
 government 503, 504
 influence on Norse script 255–6
 interest in Old Norse literature 322–3,
 326–7, 331–2, 332–3
 Knútr's court and poetry 489
 language and runic inscriptions 182, 185
 missionary work in Scandinavia 184
 Viking raids on 124
 English literature
 Anglo-Norman 374
 Bede 156
 Beowulf 93, 330, 410, 411, 422, 484
 Deor 93, 407
 Geoffrey of Monmouth 113, 156, 165–6,
 392, 451
 influence on Norse 215, 275–80, 390
 Middle English 207
 Thomas of Britain 191
 Widsith 93
 Wulf and Eadwacer 276
 entertainment
 fornaldarsögur as 449–52, 457
 leikir 215
 and *rímur* 212
 saga reading 66, 71–2, 202–3
 storytelling, prevalence of 288–90,
 449–50
 vikivakar 214–15
 Erlingr Skjálǫgsson 397
 Erlingsson, Davíð 209–10
 erosion 138–9
 Estonia 184, 185
 ethics
 Christian view of traditional 470–1
 eddic poetry on 85
 rune stones as sources 422
 and sagas 70–5, 102–5, 108, 110–12, 148
 Sturlunga saga 437–8
 see also Christian literature
 Eufemia, queen of Norway 376
 euhemerism 318
 Eustace, St (formerly Placidus; Old Norse
 Plácíðus, Plácitus) 29–30, 52
 Evans, David A. H. 131
 Eyjafjörður, Eyjafjörðr 432, 508
 Eysteinn, archbishop of Niðaróss 146, 234
 Eysteinn, king of Norway 51
 Eysteinn Ásgrímsson 49, 59–61, 274–5
 Eysteinn Erlendsson, Archbishop 394
 Eysteinn Haraldsson, king of Norway 51, 128
 Eysturoy 15
 Eyvindr skáldaspillir ('Poet-spoiler/
 Plagiarist') 267, 480, 482
 Faeroe Islands/Faeroe
 affluence 15, 16
 antiquities committee 332
 archaeology 11
 Færeyinga saga 161, 162, 332, 391–2
 Icelandic links with 123
 interest in Old Norse literature 332
 laws 235, 249
 manuscripts 249
 runic inscriptions and language 182, 184,
 185–8
 sagas 123
 sea routes round 119–20
 Fáfnir 89, 418–20, 420, 421
 family life 141, 143–4
 farms and farming
 12th-century change 22
 advice for farmers in eddic poetry 85
 farmers and government 18–19, 138,
 139, 143, 468, 503, 505
 farmers' relationship to chieftains 514–15
 medieval Iceland 136–7, 138
 North Atlantic 15–16
 saga reading 66, 71–2, 202–3
 south Scandinavia 22
 storytelling, prevalence of 288–90,
 449–50
 Fearnley, Thomas 331
 feudemes 105
 feuds 102–5, 110–12, 148–9, 151, 439
 as *þáttir* theme 463, 465, 471–2
 women's role 519
 Fidjestøl, Bjarne 481, 500

- Finland, language 183–4, 185
 Finnur Magnússon 320, 330
 fishing 136–7, 138, 139, 153
 Fitela 93
 Fjellhammer Seim, Karin 415
Fjölnismenn 332
Flateyjarbók
 age and origins 250, 253
 historical writings in 157, 162
 poetry in 51, 90, 92, 206
 sagas in 162
 structure and contents 155, 399
 þættir in 304, 467–8, 471, 473
 Fljótsdalsheiðr 129–30
 Fljótsdalshérað 9
 Foley, John Miles 292–3
 food *see* cooking
 Foote, Peter
 on *Jóns saga* 36
 on laws 223
 on metre and metrics 272, 274
 and runes 404
 and *Sturlunga saga* 435, 436
 Forsa 423
 France
 interest in Old Norse literature 325
 links with Icelandic church 348
 see also French literature
 Frank, Roberta 519
 freedom *see* democracy
 French literature
 chansons de geste 191
 Chrétien de Troyes 192, 200, 373, 454
 Marie de France 373, 455
 sagas based on 373, 378–81
 Freydís (daughter of Leifr Eiríksson) 530–2
 Freyja 92, 304, 313, 315
 Freyr 86, 304–5, 308, 313–14, 316–17, 524
 Friðriksson, Adolf 9
 Friðþjófr of Sognefjord 331
 Frigg 497, 524, 525
 Frosta 504
 Frosta peninsula 231
Frostuþingslög 223, 231, 232, 234, 504
 Furðustrandir ('Wonder Beaches') 122
Fürstenspiegel 349
 Gade, Kari Ellen 272, 277, 282, 466–7, 475
 Galicia 133
 Gallehus Golden Horn inscription 174–5
 Gamli kanoki 49, 53–5
Gamli sáttmáli (1262) 150
 Garðaríki *see* Russia
 Gautland 495, 496
 Gefion 524
 Geirrøðareyri (now Narfeyri) 250
 Gellir Þorkelsson 48–9
 Gellner, Ernest 515
 gender issues
 gender response to popular literature 213
 gender roles in sagas 108–9
 see also men; women
 genealogies 431
 Geoffrey of Monmouth 113, 156, 165–6, 392, 451
 Gerðr 86, 316–17, 524, 526
 Gerlandus, chronology of 32, 36
 German literature
 barditus 95
 Hildebrandslied 93
 influence on Norse 210, 275–8
 Nibelungenlied 307, 328
 Old High German literature 93
 Germany
 connections with Iceland 39
 Germanic language 173–4
 interest in Old Norse literature 328–9
 linguistic influences on Scandinavia 187–8
 missionary work in Scandinavia 184
 Tacitus on 303–4, 305
Gerpla (Laxness) 69
 giants 315, 316–17
 Gísl Illugason 35, 36
 Gíslason, Björn M. 330
 Gísli Súrsson 274
 Gissur Einarsson, bishop of Skálholt 251
 Gissur Sveinsson, Rev. 213
 Gizurr Hallsson 147, 169
 Gizurr Ísleifsson, bishop of Skálholt 29, 50, 145
 Gizurr Þorvaldsson 150, 434, 437
 Gjermundbu 11

- Glasisvellir, Glæsisvellir ('glittering plains') 199, 452
- Glauser, Jürg 111, 192, 197
- Glendinning, Robert J. 436–7
- Glæsisvellir *see* Glasisvellir
- goðar* 139–41, 149, 226, 227, 512–15
- Gokstad 127
- Gosforth Fishing Stone 306
- Gotland 126, 229
- government 503–17
 - assemblies 8–9, 138, 139–43, 227, 503–5, 508–12
 - England 503, 504
 - Iceland 12–13, 138, 139–43, 149, 150–1, 225, 505–15
 - Norse society 12–13, 18–19
 - see also* kings and kingship; laws
- grammatical treatises
 - Artes grammaticae* (Donatus) 355
 - Doctrinale* (Alexander) 355
 - De doctrina christiana* (Augustine) 355
 - First Grammatical Treatise* 157, 187, 257–60, 281, 356, 363
 - Fourth Grammatical Treatise* 356, 357–8
 - Graecismus* (Eberhard) 355
 - Institutio oratoria* (Quintilian) 355
 - Institutiones grammaticae* (Priscian) 355
 - Second Grammatical Treatise* 356
 - Skáldskaparmál* (Snorri) 53
 - Third Grammatical Treatise* (Óláfr Þórðarson) 53, 282–3, 356–7, 359
- graves *see* burials
- Gray, Thomas 327
- Greece *see* Grikkland
- Greenland
 - affluence 15
 - antiquities committee 332
 - derivation of name 120–1
 - Eiríks saga rauða*
 - historicity 161, 162–3, 295–300
 - on Leifr's nickname 129
 - setting 101
 - travels in 122–3
 - women in 101, 528–30, 531, 533
 - Grœnlendinga saga*
 - historicity 161, 162–3, 295–300
 - on Leifr's nickname 129
 - setting 101
 - travels in 122–3
 - women in 528–9, 530–3
 - Grœnlendinga þáttir* (*Einars þáttir Sokkasonar*) 471
 - runic inscriptions and language 182, 183, 185
 - sea routes to 120
 - settlement of 122, 162–3, 298
- Gregory the Great 250, 341–2, 470
- Gregory IX, Pope 230
- Gregory X, Pope 236, 239
- Grelutóttir 15
- gríð* 143–4
- Grikkland (Greece) 126
- Grimm brothers 329
- Grímr geitskǫr 513
- Grímr Hólmsteinsson 33, 346
- Grímur Thorkelín 330, 333
- Gripsholm stone 125, 410, 423
- Grotti 92
- Grundtvig, N. F. S. 320, 330
- Gräter, Friedrich David 329
- Gröf 16
- Guðbrandur Þorláksson 70, 210
- Guðmundr (character from eddic poetry) 88
- Guðmundr Arason, bishop of Hólar and Bishop Páll 31 and female visionary 40
 - Guðmundar saga biskups* 34, 36–7, 37–9, 40, 252, 351
 - and Icelandic church power 146–7
 - Prestssaga* 36–7, 37–8
- Guðmundr Ormsson 432
- Guðmundr the Powerful 109
- Guðmundsson, Barði 513–14
- Guðmundur Bergþórsson 217
- Guðmundur Ólafsson 325
- Guðnason, Bjarni 389, 391, 450
- Guðríður Þorbjarnardóttir 299, 531, 532–3
- Guðrún Gjúkadóttir 88, 90, 91, 523, 526–7
- Guðrún Hákonardóttir 213
- Gufudalur 58
- Gula, Gulen 231, 504

- Gulapingslög* 131–2, 223, 231, 232, 234, 504
 Gulf of St Lawrence 297–9
Gullöld Íslendinga (Jón Jónsson) 74
 Gummarp 180
 Gunnarr Gjúkason (Gundaharius, king of the Burgundians) 88, 89–90, 91, 93, 455, 527
 Gunnar Pálsson 73
 Gunnarr Hámundarson 66, 67
 Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi 80
 Gunnell, Terry 215
 Gunner, bishop of Viborg 230–1
 Gunnhildr, queen of Norway 522
 Gunnlaugr Leifsson 30, 36, 147, 265, 394, 489
 Gunnlaugr ormstunga 274
 Gunnlǫð 524
 Gylfi 309–10
 Götaland 124
 Gården under Sandet (GUS) 16

 Hafstein, Hannes *see* Hannes Hafstein
 hagiography *see* saints' lives
 Hákon, Duke 235
 Hakon, Earl 43, 44, 481
 Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri, king of Norway *see* Hákon the Good
 Hákon Hákonarson gamli ('the Old'), king of Norway 147, 149–50, 235, 367, 375, 395, 396, 398
 Hákon Magnússon háleggr ('the Highleg'), king of Norway 152, 344
 Hákon Sigurðarson, Earl 493
 Hákon the Good, king of Norway 231, 396, 504
 Hálfðan the Black 396, 397
 Hallar-Steinn 484
 Hallberg, Peter 434–5
 Halldór Briem 332
 Halldór Laxness 64–5, 69, 75, 79, 80
 Halldórsson, Bragi 497
 Halldórsson, Ólafur 217–18, 296, 468
 Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld ('Troublesome-Skald') 43, 44–6, 124, 496–7
 Hallgerðr Hǫskuldsdóttir 76, 80
 Hallgrímsson, Jonas *see* Jónas Hallgrímsson
 Hallgrímur Pétursson 72, 83, 218
 Hallr Þórarinnsson 280, 281, 483
 halls 11, 12, 22–3
 Hallur Magnússon 216
 Halvorsen, Eyvind Fjeld 248, 378
 Hamðir 91, 487
 Hamer, Andrew 472
 Hannes Hafstein 69
The Happy Warriors (Laxness) 69
 Haraldr (brother of Ingvarr) 125
 Haraldr blátǫnn ('Blacktooth'), king of Denmark 184, 229, 420
 Haraldr harðráði ('the Hard Ruler') Sigurðarson, king of Norway campaigns 125, 126, 494 in *Morkinskinna* 396 Percy's accounts of 327 and poetry 280–1, 415 praise-poems for 48, 481
 Haraldr hárfagri ('Finehair') 10, 158, 391, 481
 Harris, Joseph 104, 438
 Hassmyra stone 422–3
 Haugen, E. 186
 Haukadalur 29, 50, 149
 Haukadalur family 145, 150
 Haukr Erlendsson 119–20, 158, 252, 352
 Haukr Valdísarson 216, 269–73
 health, Iceland 18
 Hebrides 123, 124, 183, 279, 533
 Hedeby 181
 Heimdallr *see* Rígr
Heimskringla ('The Circle of the World') (Snorri) on Ari 157 editions 327 manuscripts 252 as model for family sagas 113 on Norwegian history 231 *Óláfs saga belga* 131, 394–5, 397, 465, 467–8, 473, 485, 495, 496 poetry preserved in 51 prologue 383 sea-battles described in 127 as source for myth 308

- sources 389
 structure and contents 396–7
Ynglinga saga 166, 308, 391, 534
- Heinrekr, bishop of Hólar 147
- Heinrichs, Anne 437, 473
- Helgadóttir, Guðrún P. 436
- Helgafell 153, 252
- Helgason, Jón 196, 212, 213, 217, 381, 417
- Helgason, Ögmundur 219
- Helgi Hjörvarðsson 84, 87–8
- Helgi Hundingsbani 84, 87–8
- Heller, Rolf 435
- Helluland ('Flat-stone Land', probably Baffin Island) 122, 299
- Hennøya 121
- béradríki* 149
- Herder, Johann Gottfried von 73, 328–9
- Herjólfssdalur 15
- heroism
 Christian view of 470–1
 sagas' treatment of 109–10
- Hertzberg, Ebbe 233
- Heusler, Andreas 78, 285, 439
- Hickes, George 326
- Hildir (anchoress) 35, 36, 39, 40
- Hildir Hrólfssdóttir 522
- Hill, Thomas D. 60, 470
- Hillersjö inscription 422
- historical writing 155–72
 family sagas as 112
 transmission 169–70
- historical writing: post-medieval
Brevis commentarius de Islandia
 (Arngrímur) 70
Crymogæa (Arngrímur) 70, 72
Gullöld Íslendinga (*The Golden Age of the Icelanders*) (Jón Jónsson) 74
Íslandssaga banda börnum (*The History of Iceland for Children*) (Jónas Jónsson) 77
Íslenzkt þjóðerni (*Icelandic Nationality*)
 (Jón Jónsson) 74
- historical writing: pseudo-histories 163–8
Alexanders saga 113, 167–8, 345
Breta sögur 165–6, 170
Gyðinga saga 166–7, 345
Rómverja saga 164–5, 168–9, 345
Trójumanna saga 113, 165, 170
- historical writing: works
Ágrip af Nóregs konunga sögum ('Summary of the History of the Kings of Norway') 160–1, 391, 396
Eiríks saga rauða
 historicity 161, 162–3, 295–300
 on Leifr's nickname 129
 setting 101
 travels in 122–3
 women in 101, 528–30, 531, 533
Fagrskinna ('Fair Parchment') 124, 396, 397
Gesta Danorum (Saxo) 307, 324
Grœnlendinga saga
 historicity 161, 162–3, 295–300
 on Leifr's nickname 129
 setting 101
 travels in 122–3
 women in 528–9, 530–3
Historia de antiquitate regum Norvagiensium
 (Theodoricus) 160, 390–1
Historia Norwegiae 159, 343, 391
Imago mundi (Honorius) 342–3, 345
Nóregskonungatal ('List of the Kings of Norway') 157
Veraldar saga 168–9, 170, 343
see also *Íslendingabók*; *Landnámabók*; saga: kings' sagas; saga: political sagas
- Hjaltalín, Jón *see* Jón Hjaltalín
- Hofmann, Dietrich 169
- Hofstaðir 11, 12
- Hólar 29, 50, 153, 252
- Holm-Olsen, Ludvig 392–3
- Holmsteinn 125
- Holsten 229
- Holtsmark, Anne 451
- Holy Land, pilgrimages to 132–3
- Homan, Theo 211
- Homer 165
- Honorius Augustodunensis 342–3, 345
- honour *see* ethics
- Hóp ('Tidal Inlet') 122

- Horn 119, 121
 horses 129, 141
 Horsford, Eben 334
 hospitality 131
 houses
 10th-century change 22–3, 24
 halls 11, 12, 22–3
 as homes 143–4
 long-houses 11, 22
 Hrabanus Maurus 58
 Hrafn Oddsson 150
 Hreinsson, Viðar 436
breppr 143, 505–7
 Hríngerðr 88
 Hróðgeirr 125
 Hrómundr Gripsson 190
 Hruni 149
 Hudson river 299
 Hugh of St Victor 348, 350, 391
Hugsvinnsmál (didactic poem) 61, 269
 human sacrifice 304–5
 Hundingr 88
 Hvamms-Sturla Þórðarson 432, 435
 Hvarf (now Cape Farewell) 119, 121
 Hvítárholt 15
 Hymir 86–7
 Hyndla 92
 Hällestad stone 412–13, 422
 Hälsingland 423
 Högby stone 412, 423
 Hqðbroddr 88
 Høgni 89, 90, 91
 Høskuldr Þráinsson Hvítanessgoði 76
- Ibsen, Henrik 331
 Iceland
 14th century 152–3
 19th- and 20th-century politics 73–5, 79, 286
 adoption of Christianity 20–2, 28–9, 144–5, 184, 302–3
 affluence 13–18
 Age of the Sturlungar 149
 antiquities committee 332
 archaeology 7–26
 assemblies 8–9, 508–12
 building styles 22–3
 chieftains 9, 139–41, 149, 226, 227, 512, 513–15
 church power 145–7, 152–3
 Danish rule 153
 earthwork systems 16–18, 17
 economic and social change 22
 economy 136–9, 153
 etymology of name 120
 first settlement 10–12, 121–2, 123, 136
 government 12–13, 18–19, 138, 139–43, 149, 150–1, 225, 505–15
 history 136–54
 language 182, 184, 185–8, 333
 law courts 142, 507–8, 510–11
 laws 150–1, 224–9, 235, 236, 246
 links with French church 348
 links with Germany 39
 links with Norway 119–20
 manuscripts 249–53, 250, 251
 Norwegian rule 149–52
 overland travel 129–30, 131, 141
 place names 121
 post-medieval reception of Old Norse literature 64–81, 332
 republic declared (1944) 153
 and rhetoric 356
 script 254, 257–61
 settlement patterns 12–13
 status of priests 146
 war (1235) 148–50
Iceland's Bell see *Íslandsklukkan*
 Icelandic Youth Movement 79
 Île de Bacchus (Isle of Bacchus) 297
- imagery
 sagas 368
 saints' lives 370
Independent People see *Sjálfstætt folk*
 India, as saga setting 198
 Indrebø, Gustav 395
 Ingi, king of Norway 51
 Ingólfur 121
 Ingstad, Helge 297
 Ingvarr 125
 inheritance
 laws 238, 242

- and rune stones 422
as saga theme 453
insurance 506
Ireland
influence on Norse literature 277, 279
language 182, 183
sea routes round 119–20
Viking activities in 123, 124
Irnerius 237
Isidore of Seville 343
Íslandsklukkan (Laxness) 64–5, 67
Isle of Man *see* Man, Isle of
Ísleifr Gizurarson, bishop of Iceland 28–9, 145, 246
Íslendingabók ('The Book of Icelanders') (Ari)
age, sources and contents 157–8
end 389
on Greenland 15, 120
on Icelandic adoption of Christianity 184
on Icelandic government 141, 508–13
on laws 224–5, 246
as model 36
on settlement of Iceland 121, 136
style 363
Istaby 180
Íþróttasambandið Skarphéðinn 79
Ivla stone 411

Jacobus de Voragine 167
Jakobsson, Ármann 437, 459, 467, 469
James, St, sagas about 34, 352
Jamtaland (Jämtland) 124, 131, 420
Jansson, Sven B. F. 423
Jefferson, Thomas 333–4
Jerusalem 132–3
Jesch, Judith 431
jewellery 20, 21
Jewish history, books about 166–7, 345
Johannessen, Matthías 74
Jóhannesson, Jón
on chieftains 513–14
on *Landnámabók* 158
on *Sturlunga saga* 430, 431, 432, 433, 440, 441
on Vínland sagas 296
John the Apostle, St, sagas about 34, 53, 352
John the Baptist, St, sagas about 33, 346
Jómsvíkingar, the 162
Jón Arason 213
Jón Birgisson, archbishop of Niðaróss 51
Jón Einarsson 227
Jón Gissurarson 428
Jón Guðmundsson lærði ('the Learned') 217, 218
Jón Hákonarson 253, 399
Jón Halldórsson, bishop of Skálholt 192, 376
Jón Hallsson 217
Jón Hjaltalín 200
Jón Jónsson að Kvíabekk 217
Jón kollur ('Pate') Oddsson 253
Jón Leifs 329
Jón Loptsson 146
Jón Ólafsson Indíafari 213
Jón Pálsson Maríuskáld 216
Jón rauði ('the Red'), archbishop of Niðaróss 152, 232, 235, 236, 239
Jón Rugmann 324–5
Jón Sigurðsson 332
Jón Þórðarson 253, 399, 467, 468, 473
Jón Þorláksson 253
Jón Þorvaldsson, Abbot 253
Jón Vilhjálmsson 215
Jón Ögmundarson, St, bishop of Hólar 27, 145, 147
Jóns saga helga 27, 30–1, 32, 35, 36, 39, 252
Jónakr 91
Jónas Hallgrímsson 73–4, 78, 332
Jónasson, Hermann 76
Jonsson, Bengt R. 376–7
Jónsson, Brynjúlfur 9
Jónsson, Finnur 197, 202, 395, 441, 489, 495
Jónsson, Jón 74, 77
Jónsson, Jónas 77
Jónsson, Magnús 436
Jórunn skáldmær ('Skald-maid') 480, 522
Joseph, Herbert S. 437
Josephus 345
Judas Iscariot 166–7
Jutland 186
Jämtland *see* Jamtaland
Jørmunrekr 91, 93

- Kaalund, Kristian *see* Kålund, Kristian
 Kalinke, Marianne E. 192, 379, 457–8, 459
 Kaplan, Merrill 470
 Karberga 131
 Kári Sölmundarson 67, 104
 Kári S. Sölmundarson 67
 Karl Jónsson, Abbot 147, 392–3
 Karlevi stone 404, 408–10, 409, 488
 Karlsefni *see* Þorfinnr Karlsefni
 Karlsson, Gunnar 225, 437
 Karlsson, Stefán 34, 40, 248, 252, 431
 Ker, William Paton 196, 434, 440
 Ketilfastr 125
 Ketill flatnefr ('Flatnose') 123, 136
 Ketill Sigfússon 76
 Ketill Þorsteinsson 158
 Keyser, Rudolf 330
 kings and kingship 503
 ideology of 388–9, 393, 395–6, 398
 in *fornaldarsögur* 458
 in *þættir* 467–8, 468–9, 471–2, 474
 Norwegian 388–402
 Kirby, Ian J. 344
 Kirk, Geoffrey S. 312, 317
 Kirkjubær 39
kirkjugöðar 147
 Kjalarnes ('Keel Headland') 123, 512
 Kjær, Jonna 378–9, 381
 Knirk, James E. 415
 Knútr, king of Denmark and England 132, 398, 481, 485, 488
 Kock, Ernst A. 489
 Kolbeinn Arnórsson the Young 509
 Kolbeinsey 119
 Kormákr Ögmundarson 280, 482
 Kramarz-Bein, Suzanne 382
 Kress, Helga 424
 Kristjánsdóttir, Bergljót Soffía 67, 496
 Kristjánsson, Jónas 6, 435, 462, 475
 Krossanes ('Crosses' Headland') 123
 Krömmelbein, Thomas 438
 Kúabót 16
 Kuhn, Hans 214, 272
 Kviabekkur 251
 Kygri-Björn Hjaltason 32
 Kölbing, Eugen 378
 Kålund, Kristian 8, 9, 329, 428
 Labrador *see* Markland
 Ladoga 126
 Lambkár Þorgilsson 37
 land
 and the church 146, 152
 erosion 138–9
 laws regarding 238, 242
 ownership 140
Landnámabók ('The Book of Settlements')
 (Haukr)
 antecedents 389
 relationship to sagas 294–5
 on sea route to Iceland 119–20
 on settlement of Greenland 129
 on settlement of Iceland 15, 121–2, 123, 142, 158–9
 on Þorkell Geitisson 293
 þættir in 159
 Langanes 119, 121
 Lange, Wolfgang 462
 language 173–89
 adoption of Roman alphabet 184, 245–6
 Common Scandinavian 179–81
 Germanic 173–4
 Latin 184
 loan-words in Icelandic 368, 369
 Old Norse 7
 pronunciation 5
 runic 174–5, 180–1
 Scandinavian 181–8
 Scottish–Icelandic similarities 333
 syncope period and early Norse 176–9
 see also grammatical treatises; manuscripts:
 script; rhetoric; style
 L'Anse aux Meadows 297–8
 Lapps 130–1
 Lárentíus Kálfsson, bishop of Hólar 27–8, 152
 Latin, spread of 184
 Laufás 38
 Law Council 226–7, 504, 510
 law-speakers 142, 151, 511
 lawmen

- Norway 234–5, 236–7, 239
 Sweden 241
- laws 223–44
 Denmark 229–31
 effects of writing down 292
 Iceland 150–1, 224–9, 235, 236, 246
 law-making process 226, 234, 510–12
lögmaðr 151
lögretta 142, 151, 236, 504
lögsgumaðr 142, 151
 manuscripts 247, 248, 250, 252
 Norway 231–40
 oldest legal document 423
 recommended reading 224, 230, 241
 role 142
 style 362, 363–4
 Sweden 240–2
see also courts, law
- laws: works
Bæjarbók/Bæjarlög 232, 237–8
Frostuþingslög 223, 231, 232, 234, 504
Grágás
 on chieftains 140, 226–7
 editions 223, 228
 on Icelandic government 505–6,
 508–15
 list of saints' feasts in 29
 manuscripts 225–6, 252
 origins 234
 as retrospective rationalization 9
 as source 228
 style 363–4
Gulaþingslög 131–2, 223, 231, 232, 234,
 504
Hirðlög/Hirðskrá 232, 235
Járnsíða 151, 225, 227, 232, 235,
 237
Jónsbók 151, 223, 227–8, 232, 237, 239,
 250
 Justinian's *Digest* 237
Landsbók/Landslög 232, 237–8
 Magnús's national lawcode 232, 236–9
Stóridómur 217
- Laxness, Halldór *see* Halldór Laxness
 Leach, Henry Goddard 373
 Lehman, Carl Peter 335
- leidang* 18
 Leifr Eiríksson 'the Lucky'
 and North America 122–3, 333–4
 reason for nickname 129, 532
 and women 528, 529–30
see also saga: family sagas: *Eiríks saga*
rauda; saga: family sagas:
Grœnlendinga saga
- Leifs, Jón *see* Jón Leifs
 Leifsbúðir 122–3
leikr 215
 Lévi-Strauss, Claude 314–16, 317
 Liestøl, Knut 424, 434
 ligatures 258
 Liljencrantz, Ottilie 334
 Lindblad, Gustav 83–4
 Lindow, John 470
 lions 200
 Lofoten 11
 Loftur ríki Guttormsson 216
 Loki 87, 315, 524
 long-houses 11, 22
 Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth 334
 Lord, Albert B. 291
 Loth, Agnete 192–3
 Louis-Jensen, Jonna 211
 Low Countries, Viking raids on 124
 Lucan 113, 156, 164, 345
 luck, and sagas 110
 Lyons, council of (1284) 236
 Lýsufjörðr 532
 Lödöse, runic inscription from 416
 Lönnroth, Lars
 on dating medieval works 430
 on heroes 456
 on runic inscriptions 414, 417
 on sagas 104–5, 442, 449, 457
- Lögberg* 511–12
lögmaðr 151
lögretta 142, 151, 236, 504
lögsgumaðr 142, 151, 511
- McKinnell, John 315, 470
 Macpherson, James 326
 magic 85
 Magnus, Johannes 324

- Magnus, Olaus 324, 326
 Magnus Eriksson, king of Sweden 241–2
 Magnús Erlingsson, king of Norway 234, 393
 Magnús Hákonarson lagaboetir ('the Lawmender'), king of Norway
 books translated for 167
 and church power 152, 235–6, 239
 and law 150–1, 232, 235–40, 504
 poems for 481
 sagas about 398
 Magnús Jónsson prúði ('the Courteous') 208
 Magnús Ólafsson, king of Norway 47, 48, 49
 Magnús Þórhallsson 253, 399, 464, 467, 471
 Magnússon, Finnur *see* Finnur Magnússon
 Magnússon, Sigurður Gylfi 71
 maiden-kings 201–2
 Mallet, Paul-Henri 325–6, 329
 Man, Isle of 124, 141, 182
 Manitoba 334
 manuscripts 245–64
 abbreviations 261–2
 Faeroese 249
 fornaldarsögur 449
 Icelandic 249–53, 250, 251
 Norway 246–8
 scribes 248, 252–3
 script 253–62
 Sturlunga saga 428–9
 manuscripts: individual and compendia
 Bæjarbók í Flóa 253
 Hauksbók 158, 160, 252, 349–50, 449, 489
 Kollsbók 195, 206, 253
 Króksfjarðarbók 428, 429–30
 Kvæðabók séra Gíssurar Sveinssonar 213
 Melabók 158
 Möðruvallabók 116
 Reykjabólalabók 253
 Reykjarfjarðarbók 428–9, 433
 Skarðsárabók 158
 Sturlubók 158
 Þórðarbók 158
 Vallabók 429
 Vatnsbyrna 253
 see also Flatyjarbók
 Marie de France 373, 455
 Markland ('Forest Land', probably Labrador) 122, 299
 Markús Skeggjason 132, 273
 marriage 146, 242, 316–17
 Mary, Virgin
 poems about 49, 59–61
 popularity 39
 sagas about 32
 Maurer, Konrad 8–9, 286, 329
 Meissner, Rudolf 378, 379, 489
 men
 berserks 520, 521
 Norse concepts of maleness 519
 see also gender issues; women
 merchants 469
 Mervalla stone 126, 411, 423
 Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben 10, 105–6, 434, 436, 438–9, 519
 Michael, Archangel 32
 Miðgarðr Serpent (Miðgarðsormr) 87, 306, 418, 419
 Mikligarðr 126, 198
 see also Byzantium; Constantinople
 military organization 18
 Miller, William I. 10
 Mímir's well 313
 miracles 31, 40
 Miramichi Bay 297, 299
 Mitchell, P. M. 192
 monasteries 29, 341
 literary influence 147–8, 157
 morals *see* ethics
 Morris, William 333
 Mosfell family 145
 Motte Fouqué, Friedrich de la 329
 Munch, Peter Andreas 330–1
 Munkaþverá 147
 see also Þverá
 murder 238, 242
 Müller, Bishop P. E. 330
 Mykleboestad 11
 myth 302–19

- and anthropology 10
 in eddic poetry 84–92, 523–8
 in *fornaldarsögur* 453, 455–6
 interpretation 311–17
 on origin of poetry 480
 and runes 417–18, 419
 in skaldic verse 483–4
 skiing in 131
 sources 306–11
- Mývatnssveit 11
- Mǫrðr Valgarðsson 66
- Narbonne 133
- Narfeyri *see* Geirrþóðareyri
- Nerthus 303–4, 305, 313
- networks and relationships 144
- New Brunswick 297
- Newfoundland 297–8
- Niðaróss (modern Trondheim) 160
- Níðhoggr 85
- Níðuðr 87
- Nielsen, H. F. 174, 175
- Nikulás (Benedictine monk) 133
- Njáll Þorgeirsson 66, 70, 107
- Njarðvík, Njörður 469
- Njörðr 304, 308, 316
- nobility 10–13
- Noleby 417–18
- Nordal, Guðrún 56, 437, 438, 483
- Nordal, Sigurður 79, 196, 435, 439–40, 442
- Normandy 185, 333
- Norse
 in archaeology 8
 definitions 3, 7
 as a language 7
- North, Richard 318
- North America
 poetry from Vínland 497–9
 Viking discovery of 122–3, 162–3, 181,
 295–300, 333–4
see also saga: family sagas: *Eiríks saga rauða*;
 saga: family sagas: *Grœnlendinga saga*
- Norumbega 334
- Norway
 adoption of Christianity 28, 396, 420–2
 archaeology 11
 assemblies 141
 church law 232–3, 236
 church power 145–6, 235–7, 239
 church reform 160
 Danish union 153
 government 503–5
 historical writing about 158, 159–61,
 162, 166
 history 10
 Icelandic rule 149–52
 interest in Old Norse literature 330–1
 kings 388–402
 language 185–8
 law courts 233–4, 239, 504–5
 laws 231–40
 links with Iceland 119–20
 manuscripts 246–9
 overland travel 130–2
 plague 153
 and rhetoric 356
 script 256–7
 succession to throne 234
- Norwegian literature
Konungs skuggsjá (The King's Mirror)
 120–1, 348–9
- Novgorod 126
- Nygaard, Marius 359–61
- Näsbyholm stone 420
- oaths 363–4, 454–5
- Oddi 29, 50, 146, 149
- Oddi family 149
- Oddr Snorrason 30, 147, 157, 393–4
- Oddrún 90
- Oddur Einarsson, Bishop 66
- Oddur Gottskálksson 346
- Óðinn
 aliases 408
 in *fornaldarsögur* 453, 455–6
 and giantesses 526
 knowledge contests 85–6
 and poetry 417, 480
 quests 524
 and social order 313–14
 stories in eddic poetry 84–6, 92, 523,
 524, 525–6, 527–8

- Óðinn (*cont'd*)
 temples to 305
 trickery 524
 and Troy 325
þættir as evidence for worship 470
 and valkyries 527–8
 the *vǫlva*'s prophecies to 84–5, 92, 308, 523, 525–6
- Oehenschläger, Adam 329–30
- Ófeigr (saga character) 109–10
- Oklunda 423
- Óláfr, king of Sweden 481
- Óláfr Hákonarson, king of Norway 468
- Óláfr Haraldsson, St, king of Norway
 books about 159, 160
 and Icelandic adoption of Christianity 28
 laws of 234
Óláfs saga helga (Snorri) 131, 394–5, 397, 465, 467–8, 473, 485, 495, 496
Óláfs saga helga (Styrmir) 147
 poems for 46, 47, 51–2, 488
 sagas about 465, 467–8
 and St Jón Ögmundarson 31
 shrine of 132
- Óláfr Ormsson 250, 253
- Óláfr pái ('the Peacock') 481
- Óláfr Tryggvason
 books about 159, 160
 and Christianity 28, 145, 302
 kenning representing 487
Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (Gunnlaugr) 30, 147, 157, 394
Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (Oddr) 30, 157, 393–4, 395, 397, 473
Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta 394
 poems for and about 43, 44–6, 124, 482
þættir relating to 289, 465, 467–8, 471–2, 473
- Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld ('the White Poet')
 family 479–80
 and *Knýtlinga saga* 397–8
 metres used 273
 and Staffholt 148
Third Grammatical Treatise 53, 282–3, 356–7, 359
- Ólafsson, Guðmundur *see* Guðmundur Ólafsson
- Ólafur Loftsson 253
- Ólason, Vésteinn 67, 69, 213, 442, 468
- Old English literature *see* English literature
- Old Norse, definitions 7
- Ólsen, Björn M. 78, 79, 430, 434, 441
- orality to literacy
 poetry 51
 prevalence of storytelling 288–90, 449–50
 sagas 66, 202–3, 285–301, 366, 435, 449–52
- Orkneys/Orkney
 expeditions 133
 language 182, 184–5
Orkneyinga saga 133, 161, 162, 391–2, 522
 poetry 279
 sagas 123
- Ormland ('the land of serpents', Babylon?) 199
- Ormur Loftsson hirðstjóri ('the Royal Governor') 208, 253
- Oseberg 11, 127, 304
- Oslo (Christiania) 187, 232, 238
- Ossian 326
- Óttarr svartí ('the Black') 488
- Oxamýrr 130
- paganism 302–19
 Iceland 144–5
 and Icelandic chieftains 514
 religious practices 303–6
 and Snorri 397
 in *þættir* 463, 464, 469–71
see also myth
- Páll Jónsson, bishop of Skálholt 27–8, 31, 392
- Páll Styrkársson 248
- Páll Vídalín 67
- Pálsson, Gunnar *see* Gunnar Pálsson
- Pálsson, Hermann
 on family sagas 65–6
 and *fornaldarsögur* 448–9, 457
 on Icelandic ethics 70
 and poetry 500

- on Sturla 437
 on *Sturlunga saga* 436, 441
 and *þættir* 468–9
 Paris 345, 348
 Pauli, Johannes 213
 Paulus Diaconus 160
 Percy, Bishop Thomas 326–7
 Peringskiöld, Johan 325, 326
 perjury 238
 Perkins, Richard 470, 500
 Peter Comestor 166, 344, 345
 Petersen, N. M. 330
 Pétr, bishop of Hólar 153
 Phelpstead, Carl 159, 459
 Philip IV the Fair, king of France 243
 Pilate, Pontius 166–7
 pilgrims and pilgrimage 131–3
 place names 120–1, 122–3
 Plácidus, Plácitus, St *see* Eustace, St
 plague 153, 246
 Poetic Edda, the *see* poetry: eddic poetry
 poetry: alliteration
 in *dróttkvætt* 271
 in *fornyrðislag* 271
 function 266
 and runic inscriptions 404–5
 poetry: Christian poetry 43–63
 influence of mainstream Christian
 material 56–61
 skaldic inheritance 43–50, 54
 poetry: Christian poetry: works
 by Arnórr 48–9
 by Eilífr 43–4
 Erfidrápa (Sigvatr) 47–8
 Geisli 50–2
 Glælognskviða (Þórarinn) 47
 by Hallfreðr 44–6
 Harmsól 50–1, 53–5
 Heilags anda vísur 58–9
 Hrynbenda (Arnórr) 49, 273–4
 Jóansdrápa (Gamli) 49, 53
 Leiðarvísan 50–1, 53, 55–6
 Líknarbraut 56–8
 Lilja (Eysteinn) 49, 59–61, 274–5
 Plácitus drápa 50–1, 52–3
 Sólarljóð 61–2, 351, 436
 poetry: eddic poetry 82–100
 age and provenance 93–5
 content 84–92
 context and performance 95–7
 form, dating and degrees of direct
 speech 97–8
 and *fornaldarsögur* 448, 451, 454
 German translations 329
 influence of skaldic poetry 94
 linguistic studies 186
 main manuscripts 82–4
 metre and metrics 265
 publishing history 323, 324
 representation of women 523–8
 as source for myth 307–8
 poetry: eddic poetry: works
 Alvíssmál ('The Words of Alviðs') 87
 Atlakviða ('The Lay of Atli') 91, 95, 96,
 277–8
 Atlamál (*in grœnlensku*) ('The [Greenlan-
 dic] Story of Atli') 89, 91, 95, 268
 Baldrs draumar ('The Dreams of
 Baldr') 91–2
 Brot af Sigurðarkviðu ('Fragment of the Lay
 of Sigurðr') 89
 Eiríksmál 269, 481
 Fáfnismál ('The Words of Fáfnir') 84, 89,
 94, 96
 Grímnismál ('The Words of Grímnir')
 content 86
 form 85
 landscape in 94
 language 410
 metre 268
 performance 96
 women in 525
 Grípisspá ('The Prophecy of Grípir') 89
 Grottaþongr ('The Song of Grotti') 92, 95
 Guðrúnarhvöt ('The Whetting of
 Guðrún') 91, 94, 95
 Guðrúnarkviða I ('The First Lay of
 Guðrún') 90, 94, 95
 Guðrúnarkviða II ('The Second Lay of
 Guðrún') 90, 95, 527
 Guðrúnarkviða III ('The Third Lay of
 Guðrún') 90

- poetry: eddic poetry: works (*cont'd*)
- Hákonarmál* (Eyvindr) *see* poetry: skaldic poetry: works
 - Hamðismál* ('The Words of Hamðir') 91, 95, 275, 277
 - Hárbarðsljóð* ('The Chant of Hárbarðr') 86, 94, 277–8
 - Hávamál* ('The Words of the High One')
 - composition 84
 - content 85
 - form 85
 - influences on 94
 - landscape in 94
 - metre and metrics 268
 - as model 61
 - printed editions 323, 324
 - and ritual acts 94
 - on runes 417
 - on travel 131
 - women in 524, 526
 - Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* ('The Lay of Helgi Hjörvarðsson') 84, 87–8, 94, 523, 528
 - Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* ('The First Lay of Helgi Hundingsbani') 87–8, 94, 95, 523, 528
 - Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* ('The Second Lay of Helgi Hundingsbani') 87–8, 94, 95, 523, 528
 - Helreið Brynhildar* ('Brynhildr's Ride to Hel') 90, 527
 - Hervararljóð* ('The Waking of Angantýr') 92, 326
 - Hlōðskviða* 453
 - Hymiskviða* ('The Lay of Hymir') 86–7, 94
 - Hyndluljóð* ('The Chant of Hyndla') 92, 94, 524
 - Lokasenna* ('Loki's Contest of Insults') 87, 94, 96, 523, 524
 - Oddrúnargrátr* ('The Lament of Oddrún') 90, 266
 - Reginismál* ('The Words of Reginn') 84, 89
 - Rígsþula* ('The Account of Rígr') 92, 94
 - Sigrdrífumál* ('The Words of Sigrdrífa') 89, 94, 418, 523, 524, 528
 - Sigurðarkviða in skamma* ('The Short Lay of Sigurðr') 90
 - Skírnismál* ('The Words of Skírnir') 86, 94, 96, 316–17, 524, 526
 - Svipdagsmál* ('The Words of Svipdagr') 92
 - Þrymskviða* ('The Lay of Þrymr') 87, 95, 523, 524
 - Vafþrúðnismál* ('The Words of Vafþrúðnir') 85–6, 96, 269, 523, 524
 - Vegtamskviða* ('The Lay of Vegtamr') 91–2
 - Völundarkviða* ('The Lay of Völundr') 87, 94
 - Völuspá* ('The Prophecy of the Seeress')
 - content 84–5, 308
 - influences on 94
 - printed editions 323, 324
 - women in 523, 525
- poetry: general
- artes poeticae* 356–8
 - didactic poetry (*Hugsvinnismál*) 61, 269
 - in family sagas 101–2
 - female poets 67, 211–12, 522
 - in *formaldarsögur* 448
 - grátr* 417
 - heiti* 208–9, 309, 486
 - Óláfr Þórðarson on 357
 - orality to literacy 51
 - printed editions 323, 324
 - referring to sagas 66–7
 - representation of women 518–28
 - from runic inscriptions 404–17
 - in saints' lives 38–9
 - status 480
- poetry: kennings
- in Arnórr 49
 - and Christian poets 46
 - definition 486–8
 - end of 61
 - gallows-kennings 48
 - God-kennings 58–9
 - in late secular poetry 208–10
 - man-kennings 52
 - Meissner's compendium 489
 - on runic inscriptions 408–10
 - seafarer-kennings 52–3
 - Snorri's lists of 309
 - and valkyries 528
 - women-kennings 519–20

- poetry: late secular 205–22
 humour and satire 218
 minor genres 216–18
sagnakvæði 217
 spells 218
þulur 218
vikivakakvæði 214–16
öfugmælavísur 218
see also poetry: *rímur*; poetry: *sagnadansar*
- poetry: late secular: works
 ‘Allra kapp kvæði’ 216
 by Bergsteinn Þorvaldsson blindi 217
 ‘Ellikvæði’ (Jón Hallsson) 217
 ‘Fjandafæla’ (Jón Guðmundsson) 218
 ‘Fjósaríma’ (Þórður Magnússon á Strjúgi) 217
 ‘Fjölmóður’ (Jón Guðmundsson) 217
 ‘Grettisfærsla’ 217–18
 by Guðmundur Bergþórsson 217
háttalyklar (Loftur) 216
 ‘Heimsósómi’ (Skáld-Sveinn) 218
kappkvæði 217
 ‘Kötludraumur’ 217
 ‘Ljúflingsdilla’ 217
 ‘Mæðgnasenna’ (Þórður Magnússon á Strjúgi) 218
 ‘Skauhalabálkur’ (?Einar fóstri) 217
 by Steinunn Finnsdóttir 67, 70, 217
 ‘Tólf postula kvæði’ 216
 by Þórður Magnússon á Strjúgi 216–17
- poetry: metre and metrics 265–84
afbending 208
bálkarlag 282
bragbent 208
 diachronic aspects 275–80
dróttkvætt 61, 206, 269–73, 276–9, 280, 408–10
ferskeytt 207–8
fornyrðislag 265–6, 275–6, 280
gagráljóð 208
galdralag 269
brynbenda 273–4, 279
brynbent 49
knittel 376
kviðubáttur 267–8, 276, 278, 280
ljóðabáttur 95–6, 268–9, 276
málabáttur 268, 276, 280
 minor late secular poetry genres 216, 217, 218
rímur 207–8
runbent 274–5, 279–80
 runic verses 404
sagnadansar 214
skjálfbent 280
stikluvík 208
úrkast 208
vikivakakvæði 215–16
- poetry: metrical treatises 280–3
Háttalykill (‘Clavis metrica’) (Rognvaldr and Hallr) 280, 281, 483
Háttatal (‘List of Verse Forms’) (Snorri) 280, 281–3, 309, 483
- poetry: post-medieval
 ‘Aldarháttur’ (‘State of the Times’) (Hallgrímur Pétursson) 72
 ‘Fljótshlíð’ (Bjarni Thorarensen) 73
 ‘Gunnarshólmi’ (‘Gunnar’s Holm’) (Jónas Hallgrímsson) 73–4, 332
 by Hannes Hafstein 69
 ‘Ísland’ (‘Iceland’) (Eggert Ólafsson) 72
 ‘Ísland’ (‘Iceland’) (Jónas Hallgrímsson) 332
 by Sigurður Breiðfjörð 76
 ‘Skarphéðinn’s Axe’ (Páll Vídalín) 67
 ‘Some Noblemen in *Njals saga*’ (Bjarni Gissurarson) 71, 72
 by Steinn Steinarr 69
- poetry: *rímur* 206–12
 authorship 211
 based on *riddarasögur* 377
 influence of Germanic poetry 210
mansöngvar 210, 482, 523
 manuscripts 253
 metre and metrics 207–8
 performance 212
 religious 210–11
 sources 195, 210
- poetry: *rímur*: works
Grettis rímur 208
Hyndlu rímur (Steinunn Finnsdóttir) 211–12
Landrés rímur 211

- poetry: *rímur*: works (*cont'd*)
- Mábilár rímur* 195
 - Óláfs ríma Haraldssonar* (Einarr Gilsson) 206, 208, 210
 - Reinalds rímur ok Rósu* 195
 - Rollants rímur* 211
 - Skíða ríma* 211, 212
 - Skikkjurímur* 211
 - Snækóngs rímur* (Steinunn Finnsdóttir) 211–12
 - Vilmundar rímur viðutan* 208
 - Völsungs rímur* 208, 214
- poetry: *sagnadansar* 212–14
- Óláfs vísur* 213
- poetry: skaldic poetry 479–502
- characteristics 480–1
 - clause arrangement and word-order 485–6
 - diction 486–8
 - drápa* 484–5
 - flokkar* 484–5
 - influence on Christian poetry 43–50, 54
 - influence on eddic poetry 94
 - and kings' sagas 395
 - lausavísur* 485, 496–500
 - linguistic studies 186
 - metre and metrics 269–73
 - modern editions 489–90
 - representation of women 522–3
 - and seafaring 127, 128, 483
 - skald *þættir* 463, 465
 - skalds 479–80, 483
 - Snorri on 281–3
 - as source for myth 307
 - status 480
 - structures 484–5
 - subject matter and social function 481–4
 - transmission 488–9
 - see also* poetry: Christian poetry
- poetry: skaldic poetry: works
- Arinbjarnarkviða* (Egill) 267, 489
 - Austrfararvísur* (Sigvatr) 130, 485, 494–6
 - Bersglisvísur* (Sigvatr) 500
 - Darraðarljóð* ('Dǫrruðr's Lay') 265
 - by Eilífr 43–4
 - Eiríksdrápa* (Markús) 132, 273
 - Eiríksmál* 269, 481
 - Glymdrápa* (Þorbjörn) 481
 - Hákonardrápa* (Hallfreðr) 44
 - Hákonardrápa* (Tindr) 46
 - Hákonarkviða* (Sturla) 267
 - Hákonarmál* (Eyvindr) 269, 481
 - Háleygjatal* (Eyvindr) 267, 482
 - by Hallfreðr 44–6
 - Haraldskvæði* (Þorbjörn) 269
 - Haustlög* 483
 - Húsdrápa* (Úlfr) 481, 483
 - Höfuðlausn* (Egill) 274, 323, 424, 489
 - Íslendingadrápa* (Haukr) 216, 269–73, 293, 482
 - Jómsvíkingadrápa* 482
 - Krákumál* 323, 324
 - Merlínussþá* ('The Prophecy of Merlin') (Gunnlaugr) 30, 265, 489
 - Nórengskonungatal* 267
 - Ragnarsdrápa* (Bragi) 277, 278, 479, 482
 - Rekstefja* (Hallar-Steinn) 482, 484, 490
 - Rumbenda* (Einarr) 274
 - Sexstefja* (Þjóðólfr) 493–4
 - Sigtryggsdrápa* (Gunnlaugr) 274
 - Sonatorrek* ('The Loss of Sons') (Egill) 267, 489, 491
 - Þórsdrápa* ('Þórr's Lay') (Eilífr) 43, 482, 483, 489, 491–2
 - Vellekla* (Einarr) 46, 487, 492–3
 - Ynglingatal* (Þjóðólfr) 267, 276, 407
- politics and political system *see* government
- Pope, Alexander 322–3
- poverty 506
- power distribution *see* government
- Prince Edward Island 299
- printing and publishing
- book dissemination 113
 - first Icelandic printed books 70, 251
 - publishing history of Old Norse texts 320–7
- Priscian 282, 355, 357
- prophecy *see* seeresses
- Propp, Vladimir 290
- Psaki, F. Regina 381
- Pseudo-Seneca 349
- Pynchon, Thomas 334

- Quebec 297, 299
 Quintilian 282, 355
- Rafn, Carl Christian 8, 191, 332, 333, 447
 Ragnarøk 84–5, 86, 315
 Ragnvaldr 126
 Ramsund rock 418–20, 420
 Rannveig Þórðardóttir Magnússonar á Strjúgi 211
 Rask, Rasmus 330
 Reenhielm, Jacob 325
 Repp, Þorleifur *see* Þorleifur Repp
 Resen, Peder 324
 Reuschel, Helga 448
 Reykholt 16, 23, 24, 147
 Reykjanes 119, 121
 Reykjarvík (later Reykjavík) 121
 Reynistaður 39
 rhetoric 354–71
 early learned writings 362–4
 sagas 364–8
 saints' lives 368–70
 Ribe cranium inscription 181, 413–14
 Richard of St Victor 345, 348
 Richardson, Peter 471
 riddles 453–4
 Rígr (Heimdallr) 92
 Ripelin, Hugo, of Strassburg 352
 Risaland ('the land of giants') 199
rittengsl 435
 romance *see* saga: *lygisögur*; saga: *riddarasögur*
 Rome 132–3, 164
 Roosevelt, Teddy 334
 Roskilde Fjord 127
 Rudbek, Olaf 325
 Rugmann, Jón *see* Jón Rugmann
 runic inscriptions 403–26
 abbreviations 424
 as divine gift 417–18
 inscriptions as historical and cultural sources 420–4
 inscriptions as literary documents 404–20
 language 174–5, 180–1, 182–3, 185
 and mythology 417–18, 419
 pictures on 418–20
 published editions 323
 on travel 124–6, 132
 Russia (Garðaríki)
 interest in Old Norse literature 333
 runic inscriptions and language 182, 185
 as saga setting 198
 Viking activities in 124, 126
 Rygh, Olav 8
 Rædwald, king of East Anglia 317
 Rök stone 93, 180, 276, 405–8, 406, 410
 Rognvaldr Brúsason, earl of Orkney 48
 Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson, earl of Orkney 133, 274, 280, 281, 483
 Rognvaldr Úlfsson, earl in Gautland 495, 496
- saga: general
 book-prose theory 9, 285–6
 decline 152
 depiction of violence 150
 and ethics 70–5, 102–5, 108, 110–12, 148
 free-prose theory 285–6
 historicity 23, 75–8, 105–6, 285–301, 440–2
 'Icelandic school' 79–80, 116, 286
 manuscripts 253
 Norwegian translations 330–1
 oaths 363–4
 orality to literacy 66, 202–3, 285–301, 366, 435, 449–52
 post-medieval reception 64–81
 printed editions 323, 327
 reasons for quality 147–8
 representation of women 518–22, 528–34
 style 359, 360–1, 364–8
 see also saints' lives
 saga: as Christian literature (bishops' sagas and saints' lives)
 Anne, St, saga of 39
 Árna saga biskups Þorlákssonar 27, 37, 152, 427, 433
 Becket, St Thomas, saga of 34
 Benediktus saga 253
 Dunstan, St, saga about 32–3
 Elsta saga of St Óláfr 394
 Guðmundar saga biskups 34, 36–7, 37–9, 40, 252, 351

- saga: as Christian literature (*cont'd*)
- Helgisagan* 394, 397
 - Hungrvaka* 31–2, 157, 327, 469
 - James and John, the Apostles, saga of *see*
saga: as Christian literature, *Tveggja*
postola saga Jóns ok Jakobs
 - Jóns saga baptista* 33, 346
 - Jóns saga helga* 27, 30–1, 32, 35, 36, 39,
252
 - Jóns saga postola* 34, 53
 - Kristni saga* 327
 - Lárentíus saga* 27–8, 37, 152, 252
 - Mariú saga* 32
 - Michaels saga* 32
 - Nicholas saga* 34
 - Oddaverja þáttir* 35
 - Óláfs saga helga* (Snorri) 131, 394–5, 397,
465, 467–8, 473, 485, 495, 496
 - Óláfs saga helga* (Styrmir) 147, 394
 - Páls saga* 27–8, 31
 - Plácíðus saga* 29–30, 52
 - postola sögur* 254
 - Prestssaga* 36–7, 37–8
 - Reykjabólubók* 39
 - Tveggja postola saga Jóns ok Jakobs* 34, 352
 - Þorláks saga* 30–2, 34–5, 35–6, 251
 - see also* saints' lives
- saga: family sagas 101–18
- age and dating 102, 114–16
 - characterization 107–10, 366
 - comparisons with *Sturlunga saga* 434–5
 - form and narrative patterns 438–9
 - as form of narrative 102–7
 - historical context 110–12
 - historicity 75–6, 105–6
 - 'Icelandic school' 79–80, 116, 286
 - manuscripts 254
 - narrative method 106–7
 - sources and models 112–14
 - themes and values 102–3
 - treatment of time in 107
- saga: family sagas: works
- Austfirðingasögur* 293–5
 - Bandamanna saga* 109–10, 111, 151
 - Bjarnar saga Hítðelakappa* 102, 482
 - Droplaugarsona saga* 289, 293–4
 - Egils saga*
authorship 308
characterization 107, 365
Egill's boast 479
Hickes on 326
language 411
poetry in 102
on runes 414–15
and Scott 327
setting 101
structure 103
style 366
 - Eiríks saga rauða*
historicity 161, 162–3, 295–300
on Leifr's nickname 129
setting 101
travels in 122–3
women in 101, 528–30, 531, 533
 - Eyrbyggja saga*
characterization 108, 366
and Scott 327
on settlement of Iceland 512
on social values 111
structure 104
women in 519–21, 529–30
 - Finnboga saga ramma* 114, 332
 - Fljótsdæla saga* 293, 294, 295
 - Flóamanna saga* 114
 - Fóstbræðra saga* 109, 366, 435
 - Gísla saga* 102, 109, 110, 111, 435, 531
 - Grettis saga* 102, 103, 109, 255, 267,
457
 - Grœnlendinga saga*
historicity 161, 162–3, 295–300
on Leifr's nickname 129
setting 101
travels in 122–3
women in 528–9, 530–3
 - Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* 102, 113, 327,
366
 - Hallfræðar saga* 44–6, 102, 497
 - Hávarðar saga* 109
 - Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* 79, 103, 109,
111, 129–30, 303, 326
 - Hænsa-Þóris saga* 111, 151
 - Kjalnesinga saga* 114

- Kormáks saga* 102, 280
- Laxdæla saga*
 on Árnorr's poetry 48–9
 borrowings from 295
 characterization 365
 content 103
 heroine 347, 522
 honour in 110
 on Iceland 136
 influences on 113, 435
 plot 294
 style 366
 voyages in 129
 women in 109
- Ljósvetninga saga* 109, 294
- Njáls saga*
 characterization 365
 feuds 104
 historicity 75–6
 later additions 66
 Laxness on 64
 on luck 111
 plot 294
 post-medieval reception 67, 69, 70–1,
 72, 73–4, 79, 80, 330
 and Scott 327
 structure 103
 style 366, 434–5
 translations 334
 treatment of time in 106
 women in 109, 531
- Reykðæla saga* 104
- Þorsteins saga hvíta* 115
- Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar* 115
- Valla-Ljóts saga* 131
- Vatnsdæla saga* 332
- Vápnfirðinga saga* 293, 294, 435
- Víga-Glúms saga* 102, 327, 464
- Víglundar saga* 113, 480
- Vínland sagas *see* *Eiríks saga rauða*; *Grœn-
 lendingar saga*
- Ólkofra saga* 115–16, 294
- saga: *fornaldarsögur* 447–61
 characteristics 452–8
 definition and taxonomy 190–4, 447–9
 and eddic poetry 448, 451, 454
 metre and metrics 265
 origins 449–52
 publishing history 325
 as sources for *rímur* 210
- saga: *fornaldarsögur*: works
Fríðþjófs saga hins frækna 325, 331–2
Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka 449, 451
Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks 191, 326, 448,
 449, 451, 452–4
Hrólfs saga Gautreksssonar 201, 449, 457–8
Hrólfs saga kraka 201, 326, 459
Hrómundar saga Gripssonar 450
Ketils saga hængs 452
Nornagests þáttur
 content 289, 448
 on conversion to Christianity 457, 463
 on ethics 470
 imitations of 464
 influences on 470
 transmission of 462
Ragnars saga loðbrókar 326, 448, 449, 454,
 455
Sögubrot af fornkonungum 448
Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar 325
Völsunga saga 89, 329, 448, 449, 451–2,
 454–6
Yngvars saga víðförla 125, 423, 474
Orvar-Odds saga 326, 448, 449, 452,
 456–7
- saga: kings' sagas 388–402
 definition 388
 foreign influences 390
 form and narrative pattern 438
 and *fornaldarsögur* 450–1
 genesis 388–90
 influence on family sagas 113
 style 364
 synoptics 390–2
- saga: kings' sagas: works
Ágrip af Nóregis konunga sögum ('Summary
 of the History of the Kings of
 Norway') 160–1, 391, 396
Elsta saga of St Óláfr 394
Fagrskinna ('Fair Parchment') 124, 396,
 397
Færeyinga saga 161, 162, 332, 391–2

- saga: kings' sagas: works (*cont'd*)
- Hákonar saga* (Sturla) 395, 398
 - Helgisagan* 394, 397
 - Historia de antiquitate regum Norvagiensium* (Theodoricus) 160, 390–1
 - Historia Norwegiae* 159, 343, 391
 - Hlaðajarla saga* 391–2
 - Hryggjarstykki* 389
 - Jómsvíkinga saga* 161, 162, 391–2
 - Knýtlinga saga* 397–8
 - Morkinskinna* ('Rotten Vellum')
 - content and structure 395–6
 - influences on and sources 389, 391
 - as model and source 113, 397
 - poetry in 128, 280–1
 - þættir in 466–7
 - Óláfs saga helga* (Snorri) 131, 394–5, 397, 465, 467–8, 473, 485, 495, 496
 - Óláfs saga helga* (Styrmir) 147, 394
 - Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (Gunnlaugr) 30, 147, 157, 394
 - Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (Oddr) 30, 157, 393–4, 395, 397, 473
 - Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* 394
 - þættir in Óláfr sagas 465, 467–8
 - Orkneyinga saga* 133, 161, 162, 391–2, 522
 - Skjöldunga saga* 391, 392, 450
 - Sverris saga* 113, 131, 391, 392–3, 394, 398
 - see also *Heimskringla*
- saga: *lygisögur* 190–204
- battle scenes 202
 - critics on 196–7
 - definition 190–4
 - feast descriptions 202
 - originality 197–8
 - personal names in 199
 - popularity 194–7
 - rímur* based on 195
 - settings 198–9
 - sources 198
 - themes and content 199–203
 - see also *saga: riddarasögur*
- saga: *lygisögur*: works
- Adonias saga* 202
 - Ála flekks saga* 198, 201
 - Blómstrvalla saga* 192, 200
 - Clári saga* 192, 202, 367, 373, 376, 377
 - Dínus saga* 201, 202
 - Ectors saga* 194, 199, 200
 - Elis saga* 192, 367–8, 373, 375–6, 377
 - Erex saga* 192, 373, 376
 - Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans* 194, 200
 - Flóvents saga* 373, 375, 377
 - Gibbons saga* 198, 201
 - Grega saga* 192, 200
 - Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns* 194, 201
 - Jóns saga leikara* 192
 - Kirjalax saga* 198, 199
 - Konráðs saga keisarasonar* 192, 195, 198, 200, 373, 377
 - Mágus saga jarls* 191, 194, 199, 201, 372
 - Melkólfs saga* 192–3
 - Mírmanns saga* 192, 198, 199, 373, 377
 - Nikulás saga leikara* 193, 201
 - Nitida saga* 195, 198, 199, 201, 202, 203
 - Partalopa saga* 202, 373
 - Rémundar saga* 198, 202, 373
 - Saulus saga ok Nikanos* 202
 - Sigrgarðs saga frækna* 198, 201
 - Sigurðar saga fóts* 199
 - Sigurðar saga turnara* 198, 199
 - Sigurðar saga þøgla* 194, 200, 201
 - Tristrams saga ok Ísoddar* 191–2
 - Viktors saga ok Blávus* 198, 201
 - Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs* 192, 199, 200
 - Vilmundar saga viðutan* 194, 195, 198, 199
- saga: political sagas
- Færeyinga saga* 161, 162, 332, 391–2
 - Jómsvíkinga saga* 161, 162, 391–2
 - Orkneyinga saga* 133, 161, 162, 391–2, 522
- saga: pseudo-histories
- Alexanders saga* 113, 167–8, 345
 - Breta sögur* 165–6, 170
 - Gyðinga saga* 166–7, 345
 - Rómverja saga* 164–5, 168–9, 345
 - Trójumanna saga* 113, 165, 170
 - Veraldar saga* 168–9, 170, 343
- saga: *riddarasögur* 372–84
- battle scenes 368

- characterization 368
 definition 190–4, 372–4
 editions 377–8
 history 374–8
 list of 373
 manuscripts 377
 and pseudo-histories 170
 recent research issues 378–81
 as sources for *rímur* 195, 210
 style 360, 366–8
 translations 378–82
- saga: *riddarasögur*: works
Barlaams ok Josaphats saga 374
Beyvers saga 373, 374, 377
Bærings saga 373
Clári saga 192, 202, 367, 373, 376, 377
Elis saga 192, 367–8, 373, 375–6, 377
Erex saga 192, 373, 376
Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr 376
Flóvents saga 373, 375, 377
Ívens saga 200, 373, 375, 376, 377
Karlamagnús saga 373, 374, 375, 376, 378–9
Konráðs saga keisarasonar 192, 195, 198, 200, 373, 377
Mágus saga jarls 191, 194, 199, 201, 372
Mírmanns saga 192, 198, 199, 373, 377
Mottuls saga 211, 373, 375, 377
Partalopa saga 202, 373
Percevals saga 373, 376, 377, 381
Rémundar saga keisarasonar 198, 202, 373
Strengleikar 367–8, 373, 375, 376, 377, 379, 383
Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar 191–2, 367, 373, 375, 376, 384
Þiðreks saga 329, 372, 374
Valvers þáttur 373, 377
- saga: *Sturlunga saga* 427–46
 composition 38, 429–33
 definition 427
 editions 327
 evidence for courts in 507–8
 feuds in 142
 genealogies 431
 as historical source 440–2
 poetry in 499–500
 preservation 428–9
 saints' lives in 27
 storytelling episode 288–9
 and Sturlungar family 149
 style 434–6
 as subject of literary research 433–40
 and *þættir* 466
 verse in 282
- saga: *Sturlunga saga*: components
Árna saga biskups Þorlákssonar 27, 37, 152, 427, 433
Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns 427, 431, 437, 438, 462, 466
Guðmundar saga dýra 431, 432, 435–6
Haukdæla þáttur 427, 432, 437
Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar 38, 431, 432, 435, 436, 439
Íslendinga saga (Sturla)
 authorship 150
 completeness 430
 dating 431, 432
 historicity 441, 442
 moral messages 437, 438
 narrative method 436, 440
 as source 38
 structure 435
 style 434–5
Jarteinasaga Guðmundar biskups 427, 433
Prestssaga Guðmundar góða 427, 431, 432, 441
 prologue 432
Sturlu saga 431, 432, 435, 436
Sturlu þáttur 433, 434, 438–9, 450
Svinfellinga saga 432
Þórðar saga kakala 431, 432
Þorgils saga ok Hafliða 431, 439, 440, 449–50
Þorgils saga skarða 430, 431, 433, 434
- St Lawrence river 297, 299
 St Victor 345, 348
 saints' lives 27–42
 canonization process 40, 41, 147
 influence on family sagas 113–14
 manuscripts 247, 251, 254
 style 359, 361, 362–3, 368–70
 translations from Low German 39

- saints' lives (*cont'd*)
 use of annals 36–7
 use of rhetorical devices 34
 women 39–40
see also Christian literature, *exempla*; saga:
 as Christian literature
- Sallust 113, 156, 164, 345
- Sammes, Aylett 326
- Samsonarson, Jón 219
- Sandnes 16
- Sarkel 125
- Sarpsborg 238
- Sawyer, Birgit 422
- Saxo Grammaticus 83, 92, 289, 307, 324, 450
- Scania *see* Skåne
- Schier, Kurt 191, 192, 462
- Schlauch, Margaret 196–7
- Schlyter, D. C. J. 240
- Schrøter, Johan 332
- Scotland
 interest in Old Norse literature 327, 333
 language 182, 183, 333
 Viking activities in 124
- Scott, Walter 327
- scribes 248, 252–3
- scriptoria 252
- Scritefingi 130–1
- seafaring, as skaldic theme 127, 128, 483
- seeresses 523, 525–6, 528, 529
- Seip, Didrik Arup 246, 253
- Sequentia 95
- serfdom 18–19
- Serkland 125, 483, 494
- servants 144
- Servius 282
- settlement of Iceland *see* Iceland
- settlements and settlement patterns
 12th-century change 22
 North Atlantic 12–13, 15–16, 19
- sheep farming 137
- shelters for wayfarers 131–2
- sheriffs 151
- Sheringham, Robert 326
- Shetland Islands
 cooking 22–3
 language 182, 185
 sea routes round 119–20
- shipping laws 242
- ships and boats 126–9, 137
 replicas 334
 seafaring, as skaldic theme 127, 128, 483
- Shute, Neville 334
- Sicily 483, 494
- Sidon 133
- Sievers, Eduard 266, 270, 278
- Sighvatr Sturluson 508
- Sigmundur (father of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani) 93, 454–5
- Sigmundur Brestisson 162, 332
- Signý 454–5
- Sigrdrífa 89, 418, 524
- Sigrún 88, 528
- Sigtuna box 410
- Sigurðr Fáfnisbani
 in eddic poetry 88, 89–90, 524, 527
 lost poetry on 84
 in runic inscriptions 418–20, 420, 421
 in *Völsunga saga* 454–5
- Sigurðr Haraldsson, king of Norway 51, 147
- Sigurðr Magnússon, king of Norway 132–3
- Sigurðr munnr ('Mouth'), King *see* Sigurðr Haraldsson
- Sigurðsson, Gísli 217
- Sigurðsson, Jón *see* Jón Sigurðsson
- Sigurðsson, Jón Viðar 508
- Sigurður Breiðfjörð 76
- Sigurgeirsson, Magnús Á. 9
- Sigvatr Þórðarson, poet 47–8, 130, 473, 479, 485, 494–6, 500
- Simpson, Jacqueline 436
- Simpson, John M. 440–1
- Simrock, Karl 329
- Sinfjötli 88, 455
- Sjálfstætt fólk* (Laxness) 69
- Sjælland *see* Zealand
- Sjörup stone 413, 422
- Skaði 131, 316, 524
- Skáld-Sveinn 218
- skalds 479–80, 483
- Skálholt 29, 50, 152–3
- Skapti Þóroddsson 513

- Skarphéðinn Athletic Club 79
 Skarphéðinn Njálsson 67, 69, 79
 Skarpåker stone 413–14
 Skeljastaðir 18
 skiing 130–1
 Skírnir 86, 316–17, 526
 Skúlason, Sveinn *see* Sveinn Skúlason
 Skuldelev 127
 Skúli, Duke 149
 Skåne (Scania) 124
 runic inscriptions 412–13
 slavery 138
 Slesvig 229
 Slesvig-Holsten 330
 see also Holsten
 Slyne Head 119
 Småland 411
 Snorri Sturluson
 and the church 147–8
 and Einarr Skúlason 51
 family 479–80
 Háttatal ('List of Verse-forms') 280,
 281–3, 309, 483
 likely environment 23
 and politics 149
 and *þættir* 464
 visit to Norway 234
 writings as source for myth 308–11
 see also *Edda*; *Heimskringla*
 Snæfellsnes 119, 121, 512
 social order and classes 10–13, 139–43
 chieftains 9, 139–41, 149, 226, 227, 512,
 513–15
 kings 503
 nobility 10–13
 and religion 314
 social welfare 506
 Sommerfelt, Karl 330
 songs 216, 376–7
 South Jutland (Slesvig) *see* Slesvig;
 Slesvig-Holsten
 Spain
 interest in Old Norse literature
 333
 Viking activities in 133
 Sparlösa 417–18
 spells 85
 Stad 119, 121
 Staffholt 148
 Starkaðr inn gamli ('the Old') 500
 Steinn Steinarr 69
 Steinsland, Gro 470
 Steinunn Finnsdóttir 67, 70, 211–12, 217
 Steinunn Refsdóttir 522
 Steinvör Sighvatsdóttir 522
 Stentofte 180
 Stephens, George 331–2
 Sterpin, John 326
 Stikla(r)staðir, Stiklestad 131
 Stóraborg 16
 Storch, Wilhelm 76
störgoðar 141
 storytelling, prevalence of 288–90,
 449–50
 see also orality to literacy
 Straubhaar, Sandra Ballif 522
 Straumey 122
 Straumfjörðr 122
 Sturla Sighvatsson 149, 437
 Sturla Þórðarson
 as chieftain 515
 family 479–80
 Hákonar saga 234–5, 395, 398
 and laws 227
 and poetry 39, 267, 273, 282, 437
 and politics 150, 440–1
 royal eulogies 481
 sagas about 450
 and storytelling 289
 and *Sturlunga saga* 429–31
Sturlunga saga see saga: *Sturlunga saga*
 Sturlungar family 149
 style 354–71
 categories of prose 358–62
 Christian literature 358–9, 361, 362–3,
 368–70
 early learned writings 362–4
 sagas 359, 360–1, 364–8
 saints' lives 368–70
 skaldic poetry 485–6
 Sturlunga saga 434–6
 Styrmir inn fróði ('the Knowledgeable')
 Kárason 147, 158, 394, 479
 Stäket 132

- Stöng 16
 Suður-Þingeyjarsýsla 9
 supernatural, the
 journeys to the other world 464, 472
 and sagas 436–7
 and *þættir* 464
 see also magic
 Svalbard 119
 Svanhildr 91
 Svarfaðardalur 252
 Sváva 88
 Sveinn Knútson (Alfífuson), King 47
 Sveinn Skúlaon 332
 Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur 58, 79, 80, 441, 451
 Sveinsson, Rev. Gissur *see* Gissur Sveinsson
 Sverrir (Sigurðarson), king of Norway 131,
 147, 190, 392–3, 394, 398, 452
 Svipdagr 92
 Svölðr, battle of 473
 Sweden
 adoption of Christianity 184
 interest in Old Norse literature 323–5, 331
 law courts 241
 laws 240–2
 religious practices 305
 runic inscriptions and language 183, 185
 Swedish literature
 Eufemiavisor 376, 377
 Karl Magnus 376
 swords, as grave goods 11
 syncope 176
sýslumaðr 151
 Sæmundr (inn) fróði ('the Knowledgeable')
 Sigfússon
 and eddic poetry 83, 323
 education 29
 historical writings 157
 and royal biography 389
 and St Jón 35, 36
 societal status 147
 as source 158
 Sæmundr Ormsson 432
 Södermanland, runic inscriptions 125, 126,
 410, 411, 413, 418–20, 420, 423
 Tacitus 303–4, 305, 503
 Tallin 229
 Taranger, Absalon 504
 Tate, George 58
 taxation 138
 Tegnér, Bishop Esaias 331, 332
 Temple, William 323
 temples, pagan 305–6, 313
 tephras 136
 theft 238, 242
 Theodoricus monachus 160, 289, 390–1
 Theodric the Great, king of the
 Goths 405–7
 Thomas of Britain 191
 Thorkelín, Grímur *see* Grímur Thorkelín
 Thorsson, Örnólfur 499
 Tindr Hallkelsson 46
 Tinghaugen 11
 Tóftanes 15
 Tolkien, J. R. R. 285, 287, 334
 Tómasson, Sverrir 211
 Torf-Einarr 282
 trade 137, 469
 translation, medieval notion of 163
 Tranter, Stephen 432–3, 439, 466
 travel 119–35, 141
 seafaring as skaldic theme 127, 128, 483
 Trondheim 187, 212, 232, 415
 see also Niðaróss
 Trondheimsfjord region (modern
 Trøndelag) 223
 Troy 309, 310, 325
 Trójumanna saga 113, 165, 170
 Tulinius, Torfi 454
 Tumbo 423
 Turinge stone 411–12, 423
 Tussehaugen 11
 Tystberga 125
 Tønsberg 232, 238
 Þangbrandr 522
 Þingeyjarsýsla 513
 Þingeyrar 29, 50, 133, 147, 252
 Þingskálar 9
 Þingvellir 129, 141, 509
 Þjóðólfr Arnórsson 280–1, 483–4, 493–4
 Þjóðólfr of Hvinir 267, 407

- Þjóðrekr 90, 93
 Þórarinn kaggi ('Keg') Egilsson 252
 Þórarinn loftunga ('Praise-tongue') 47, 484–5
 Þórarinn pentr ('Painter') Eiríksson 252
 Þorbjörn Jónsson 253
 Þorbjörn Þórðarson 218
 Þorbjörg 529, 533
 Þorbjörn hornklofi 269, 481
 Þorbiörn skáld 405, 423
 Þórðr Kolbeinsson 479
 Þórðr Narfason 430
 Þórður Magnússon á Strjúgi 208, 216–17, 218
 Þorfinnr Karlsefni 299, 498, 531–2, 533
 Þorfinnr Sigurðarson, earl of Orkney 48
 Þorgeirr (scribe) 252
 Þorgeirr Hákonarson 248
 Þorgeirr Hávarsson 109
 Þorgeirr Þorkelsson (law-speaker) 145, 302–3
 Þórgunna 529–30
 Þórhallr veiðimaðr 497–9
 Þorkell Elfaraskáld 66, 78
 Þorkell Geitisson 293–5
 Þorkelsson, Jón 219
 Þorlákr, St 27, 29, 34–6, 146, 147
 church services celebrating 207
 Þorláks saga 30–2, 34–5, 35–6, 251
 Þorlákr Rúnólfsson 158
 Þorláksson, Helgi 469–70
 Þorleifur Repp 333
 Þóroddr dráputúfr ('Poem-stump') 480
 Þórólfsson, Björn Karel 208, 209, 219
 Þórr
 in eddic poetry 86–7
 and giants 315
 power of 522
 sculptures and carvings 306, 418, 419
 and social order 313–14
 temples to 305
 and the wind 470
 Þorsteinn Eiríksson 532
 Þorsteinn Illugason 252
 Þorsteinn Þorleifsson 253
 Þorsteinsson, Björn 150
 Þorvaldr Eiríksson 123, 299
 Þorvaldr Hjaltason 413
 Þrándr í Gøtu 162, 332
 Þrymr 87
 Þverá 133
 see also Munkaþverá
 Þykkvibær, Þykkviboer 53
 þættir 462–78
 age 464
 compilation studies 466–8
 conversion group 463, 469–71
 definition 462
 etymology 465
 feud stories 463, 465, 471–2
 independence from context 465
 mythic-heroic þættir 464, 472–3
 relationship to sagas 159
 sources and reliability 464–5
 taxonomy 462–4
 þættir: works
 Auðunar þáttir vestfirzka 463, 464, 467
 Bergbúa þáttir 463
 Bolla þáttir 463, 464
 Brand-Krossa þáttir 294
 Brands þáttir orva 463, 468–9
 Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar 463
 Einars þáttir Skúlaasonar 463
 Eindriða þáttir ok Erlings 473, 474
 Eymundar þáttir Hringssonar 473, 474
 Geirmundar þáttir heljarskinns 427, 431, 437, 438, 462, 466
 Grœnlendinga þáttir (Einars þáttir Sökkasonar) 471
 Gunnars þáttir helmings 304
 Gunnars þáttir Þiðrandabana 294
 Halldórs þáttir Snorrasonar II 463
 Haukdæla þáttir 427, 432, 437
 Helga þáttir ok Úlfs 463, 464, 467, 471
 Helga þáttir Þórissonar 464, 470, 472
 Hróa þáttir heimska 464, 473–4
 Hrómundar þáttir balta 463, 471–2, 473, 475
 Íslendingaþættir 463, 468–9
 Ívars þáttir Ingimundarsonar 463, 467
 Kumblbúa þáttir 463
 Mána þáttir Íslendinga 463

- þættir*: works (*cont'd*)
- Nornagests þáttur*
 - content 289, 448
 - on conversion to Christianity 457, 463
 - on ethics 470
 - imitations of 464
 - influences on 470
 - transmission 462
 - óláfs þáttur Geirstaðaálfs* 473
 - Orms þáttur Stórvölfssonar* 464, 473, 475
 - Rognvalds þáttur ok Rauðs* 463, 470
 - Sneglu-Halla þáttur* 463, 464, 467
 - Sturlu þáttur* 433, 434, 438–9, 450
 - Styrbjarnar þáttur Svíakappa* 473–4
 - Sveins þáttur ok Finns* 463, 470
 - Sörla þáttur* 463, 470, 471, 472–3
 - Tóka þáttur* 463, 464, 471
 - Þáttur af Ragnars sonum* 473
 - Þáttur Ásbjarnar selsbana* 476
 - Þáttur Eindriða ilbreiðs* 463
 - Þiðranda þáttur ok Þórballs* 470
 - Þorleifs þáttur jarlaskálds* 473, 474
 - Þorsteins þáttur Austfirðings* 463, 464, 465
 - Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns* 464, 472
 - Þorsteins þáttur skelks* 463, 470, 471
 - Þorsteins þáttur stangarboggs* 463, 471
 - Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts* 464, 472, 475
 - Valvers þáttur* 373, 377
 - Völsa þáttur* 463, 470
 - Qgmundar þáttur dytts* 463, 464, 469–70
- Ubby stone 125
- Úlfjótr 224, 509
- Úlfr Uggason 481
- Undset, Sigrid 331
- Unger, Carl Richard 330–1, 378
- Ungmennafélagshreyfing 79
- Uppland
 - runic inscriptions 126, 416
 - Altuna stone 306, 418, 419
 - Bällsta inscription 417
 - Hillersjö inscription 422
 - Karberga inscription 131
 - Stäket stone 132
 - Ubby stone 125
 - Upplönd 503
 - Uppsala 305
 - Uppsala, battle of 413, 422
- Vafþrúðnir 85–6
- Valhalla 86
- valkyries 527–8
- Vanir 304, 316
 - see also* Freyja; Freyr
- Varangian Guard 126
- Vatnsfjörður, Vatnsfjörðr 252
- Vedel, Anders Sørensen 213, 214
- Veili 280
- Vellir 252
- Verelius, Olaus 325
- Verstegen, Richard 326
- Vestmannaeyjar 15
- Vídalín, Páll *see* Páll Vídalín
- Viðey 153
- Vígfússon, Guðbrandur 430, 495
- Vígfússon, Sigurður 9, 75
- Viking Society 333
- Vikings
 - definition 7, 8
 - origins of traditional conception 324
 - travels and raids 124–6, 423
- vikivakar* 214–15
- Vilborg skáldkona 522
- vinátta* 144
- Vincent of Beauvais 344
- vinfengi* 144
- Vínland
 - Norse discovery 122–3, 162–3, 295–300, 333–4
 - poetry from 497–9
 - subsequent voyages to 530, 532
 - see also* saga: family sagas: *Eiríks saga rauða*;
 - saga: family sagas: *Grænlandinga saga*
- Virgil 46
- Virgil's Wheel 370
- Visio 199
- Vogt, Kari 470
- Vogt, Walter Heinrich 159, 435
- Västergötland 416–17, 417–18
- Västmanland 422–3
- Völundr 87, 93

-
- Wagner, Richard 329, 448
 Walcheren 124
 Walter of Châtillon 113, 167, 198, 345, 349
 Weber, Gerd Wolfgang 380
 Wendland 124
 werewolves 455
 Wergeland, Henrik 331
 Werlauf, E. C. 332
 Widmark, Gun 181
 Wilhelm II, kaiser of Germany 331
 William of Jumièges 391
 Wine Bay *see* Baie de Vin
 Wodan *see* Óðinn
 women
 and chieftaincies 515
 Christian misogyny 470
 eddic poetry on 85
 first substantial poet 67, 211–12
 inheritance rights 238, 242
 and marriage 316–17
 poems in praise of famous 217
 in poetry and sagas 108–9, 518–35
 role of Icelandic 141
 rune-stone commemorations 422–3
 saints 39–40
 taste in popular literature 212
 temporary adoption of male gender 454
 wool and cloth industry 137
 Worm, Ole 323, 324, 325
 Würth, Stefanie 451–2, 467–8
 Yggdrasill 84, 86, 313
 Yngvarr víðfjörli 147
 York Powell, F. 495
 Zealand (Sjælland) 186
 Æsir 309–10, 316, 325
 Öland, Karlevi stone 404, 408–10, 409, 488
 Örlygsstaðir, battle of (1238) 499, 508
 Östergötland
 Högby stone 412, 423
 runic inscriptions 125
 Rök stone 93, 180, 276, 405–8, 406, 410
 Österholm, Nils
 Öxnadalur 14
 Øresund 186
 Ogmundr Helgason 432
 Orlygsstaðir *see* Örlygsstaðir