

# SCRIPTA ISLANDICA

ISLÄNDSKA SÄLLSKAPETS

ÅRSBOK 67/2016

---

REDIGERAD AV

LASSE MÅRTENSSON OCH VETURLIÐI ÓSKARSSON

under medverkan av

Pernille Hermann (Århus)

Else Mundal (Bergen)

Guðrún Nordal (Reykjavík)

Heimir Pálsson (Uppsala)

Henrik Williams (Uppsala)

UPPSALA, SWEDEN

Publicerad med stöd från Vetenskapsrådet.

© Författarna och Scripta Islandica 2016

ISSN 0582-3234

Sättning: Ord och sats Marco Bianchi

urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-307788

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-307788>

## Innehåll

ADALHEIÐUR GUÐMUNDSDÓTTIR, Tales of Generations: A comparison between some Icelandic and Geatish narrative motifs . . . . .	5
ELDAR HEIDE, The term <i>leizla</i> in Old Norse vision literature – contrasting imported and indigenous genres? . . . . .	37
HEIMIR PÁLSSON, DG 3 in memoriam . . . . .	65
SVEINN YNGVI EGILSSON, Jónas Hallgrímssons inre och yttre natur . .	103
ÚLFAR BRAGASON, Jón Halldórsson of Stóruvellir and his reading circle: Readings in the farming community in Iceland around 1870 . . . . .	121

### Recensionier

JUDY QUINN, rev. of Eddukvæði, red. Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason . . . . .	135
DANIEL SÁVBORG, rec. av Riddarasögur: The Translation of European Court Culture in Medieval Scandinavia, utg. Karl G. Johansson och Else Mundal . . . . .	141
HEIMIR PÁLSSON, rec. av Þórunn Sigurðardóttir. Heiður og huggun: Erfiljóð, harmljóð og huggunarkvæði á 17. öld . . . . .	151
VETURLIÐI ÓSKARSSON, anm. av Jón Ólafsson úr Grunnavík: <i>Ævi-sögur ypparlegra merkismanna</i> , utg. Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir . . .	159

### Isländska sällskapet

AGNETA NEY & MARCO BIANCHI, Berättelse om verksamheten under 2015 . . . . .	159
---	-----

Författarna i denna årgång . . . . .	161
--------------------------------------	-----



# Tales of Generations: A comparison between some Icelandic and Geatish narrative motifs

ADALHEIÐUR GUÐMUNDSDÓTTIR

Medieval Icelandic literature spans a richly diverse corpus, and besides its most famous literary genre, the *Íslendingasögur* [‘Sagas of Icelanders’ or ‘family sagas’], we find other categories as well. One of these is the *fornaldarsögur*, or legendary sagas (cf. *fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*). The *fornaldarsögur* were mostly written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and were frequently based on earlier poetry and/or oral tradition, and as is evident from the name of the category, they deal with the Nordic past.<sup>1</sup> While the heroes may travel outside Scandinavia in search of fame and fortune, the narrative is usually set somewhere in the Nordic countries, and most frequently in Norway and Denmark. In this article, however, I will look specifically at a saga that is set in Eastern Scandinavia, in what is now Sweden, in order to shed light on its Swedish characteristics and the possible Swedish origin of some of its materials and motifs. While doing so, I will consider proper names (personal names and placenames), individual narrative motifs, the plot of the saga, and its connection with images on the famous Sparlösa Stone from Viste region, Västergötland.

---

<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to give the precise period of the writings, and some of the *fornaldarsögur* may well have been written a bit later than presumed above. On the origins of this category as literature, see Torfi H. Tulinius 2002: 44–69. For a general introduction to the *fornaldarsögur*, see Mitchell 1991: 8–90. There has been a considerable growth in modern scholarship on this genre, as seen, e.g., from the three volumes, published in the wake of three conferences on the *fornaldarsögur* (Ármann Jakobsson, Lassen and Ney 2003; Ney, Ármann Jakobsson and Lassen 2009; Lassen, Ney and Ármann Jakobsson 2012).

## Some Swedish characteristics in the *fornaldarsögur*

*Fornaldarsögur* were first published as a compendium in Sweden by Erik Julius Björner in 1737, then in Denmark by Peter Erasmus Müller in 1818, and shortly afterwards, the Danish scholar Carl Christian Rafn published 31 texts in 1829–30 under the title *Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda*. This edition has up to the present day shaped people’s ideas, both about the category in question, and regarding which texts should be included in the corpus. Later scholars have either tried to reduce the number of the ‘actual’ *fornaldarsögur*, or add some other texts to the corpus.<sup>2</sup>

Not many of the *fornaldarsögur* take place in Sweden or focus on Swedish heroes, but those that do have a number of characteristics in common. One interesting feature of them, for example, is how frequently the personal names of saga heroes tally with names common in the Swedish language area, as attested by preserved runic inscriptions from the eleventh century and even earlier. For example, some runic inscriptions associated with the Swedish hero Yngvar/Ingvar *víðförli* [Yngvar the Far-Travelled] match the personal names found in his saga, *Yngvars saga víðförla* (see, e.g., Jansson 1976: 67 ff.), which is one of the sagas included in Rafn’s corpus. However, while it is debatable to use *Yngvars saga víðförla* as a typical example of a *fornaldarsaga*,<sup>3</sup> numerous other parallels can be found. As a further example, mention might be made of a runic inscription from Bjudby in the Oppunda region in Södermanland, near the church of Blacksta. This inscription, dated to the period from the ninth to the eleventh century, reads:

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1959: 500–1. Many scholars have studied these sagas in recent years, and not all of them agree on the definition of the ‘genre’, or how many texts should be considered as ‘actual’ *fornaldarsögur*, see, e.g., Quinn *et al.* 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Some scholars have rejected the status of *Yngvars saga víðförla* among the *fornaldarsögur*, as it has some fundamental elements that differ from most of them (see, e.g., the discussion in Phelpstead 2009). The saga is, as Lars Lönnroth claims, “a strange mixture of history and myth, Latin clerical learning and Old Norse folklore,” probably mostly from the eleventh and the twelfth century (2014: 101 and 111). *Yngvars saga víðförla* was, however, originally written in the late twelfth century, in Latin, while the preserved version is from the thirteenth or fourteenth century. It is partly based on the *fornaldarsögur* tradition, and should be examined in close connection with other *fornaldarsögur*. Much has been written on *Yngvars saga víðförla*; for the historical matter, see, e.g., Larsson 1986–89; on the Latin version, see Hofmann 1984.

Porstæinn ok Øystæinn ok Nattfari ræistu stæin at Finnvið ok Olæif, Þorkel, brøðr sina. Varu allir Vikings synir, landburnir mænn, letu retta stæin. Stæinkell ræist runar.

(Sö 54, according to Samnordisk runtextdatabas)

The inscription states that the brothers Thorsten, Østen and Náttfari raised the stone in the memory of their brothers Finvidh, Olaf and Thorkil, who were all sons of a certain Viking, and born as landowners, indicating that they were chieftains, or at least from the higher ranks of society.<sup>4</sup> *Porsteins saga Vikingssonar*, a *fornaldarsaga* from about 1300, tells of the Swedish earl Viking and his nine sons. The most renowned of these was Porsteinn, who later settled down in Sogn in Norway, and among his other sons are Eysteinn, Finn, Finnbogi, Úlfr and Þorkell. Apart from the name *Víkingr*, three names are identical, while there are close correspondences between the names *Finnr*, *Finnbogi* and *Finnviðr*, and *Úlfr* and *Ólafr* (*Fornaldar sögur Norðrlanda* 1829: II 405).

Even though it might be considered questionable to associate the inscriptions directly with legendary heroes (except, of course, in the case of Yngvar *víðförli* and his companions), it is nevertheless noteworthy how close the correspondences are between some of the *fornaldarsögur* that take place in Sweden and Swedish naming tradition in the Viking Age, as attested by the rune stones.<sup>5</sup> Naturally, some of these names are/were also common elsewhere in the Nordic world (Lind 1905–15; 1931), while others seem to have been specifically prominent in Eastern Scandinavia.<sup>6</sup> But even if a comparison between Nordic personal naming traditions can never be accurate, if only for the fact that rune stones are

<sup>4</sup> Old Swedish spelling is according to Peterson (2007). Four of these names, Thorsten, Østen, Olaf and Thorkil are among the most common male names on rune stones from Västergötland and Södermanland (Peterson 2002: 747).

<sup>5</sup> Names found in inscriptions from various Swedish areas that also occur in the *fornaldarsögur* include *Adhils*, *Aghmund*, *Algot*, *Ale*, *Asa*, *Asmund*, *Atle*, *Brune*, *Dagh*, *Esten*, *Eghil*, *Frodhe*, *Gøt*, *Grim*, *Gudhrun*, *Gunnar*, *Halfdan*, *Hidhin*, *Hialli*, *Hiælm*, *Hiorvarðr*, *Hælghe*, *Hærmoth*, *Hærrøðr*, *Høk*, *Illughi*, *Inge*, *Ingigærdhr*, *Ingjæld*, *Ivar*, *Kætil*, *Od*, *Olaf*, *Orm*, *Ormar*, *Ottar*, *Ragnar*, *Rahnild(a)*, *Ragnvald*, *Rane*, *Ring*, *Roar*, *Rolf*, *Romund*, *Ræv*, *Rørik*, *Siggæirr*, *Sighmund*, *Sighne*, *Sighrun*, *Sighurdh*, *Skule*, *Sote*, *Styr*, *Styrbiorn*, *Styrlaugr*, *Sven*, *Thora*, *Thorbiorn*, *Thore(r)*, *Thordh*, *Thorsten*, *Toke*, *Toste*, *Ubbe*, *Ulf*, *Ulfhidhin*, *Viborgh*, *Viking*, *Ølver*, *Ømund*, *Øricus*, *Ørn* and *Østen*.

<sup>6</sup> By looking specifically at the origins of the rune carvings, as listed in Peterson 2007, it is evident that all the names listed in n. 4, except for *Adhils*, *Algot*, *Ubbe*, *Sighurdh*, *Toke*, *Øricus* and *Ørn*, are more common in runic inscriptions from Sweden than from elsewhere. For East-Scandinavian personal names in medieval times, see Wessén 1927: 97–109.

far more common in Sweden than in the other Scandinavian countries, the available data may indicate the existence of some underlying Swedish narratives or even that the people who preserved the legends or wrote the stories down had some knowledge of Swedish circumstances.

Another noticeable thing about *fornaldarsögur* that take place in what is now Sweden is that quite a number of them are located in the land of the Gautar (Old English Geatas, modern English Geats). This is called Götland/Göteborg in Swedish, and Gautland in Old Norse and Icelandic. Although Gautland belongs to present-day Sweden, and has done for many centuries, it used to be independent, and it is commonly believed that Västergötland [West Gautland] and Östergötland [East Gautland] were also separate kingdoms, and sometimes rivals in war.<sup>7</sup> This is reflected, for example, in one of the *fornaldarsögur*, the legendary text *Sögubrot af fornkonungum* from the thirteenth century, even if it is not an historical source in the modern sense. Gautland is generally used in Icelandic medieval saga-writing to refer to Västergötland, while Östergötland is distinguished as ‘eystra’ Gautland, as in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*. The sagas that are set mainly in Gautland are *Gautreks saga*, *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, *Úlfhams saga* and *Ormars saga*, and mention may also be made of some Geatish characters

<sup>7</sup> Sweden (‘Svealand’/‘Svíaríki’) and Gautland are usually distinguished in sources all the way from the sixth century and far into medieval times (Larsson 2002: 62–64, 170). It has been suggested that they were united in the eleventh century, during the reign of Óláfr Eiríksson, but this has always been – and still is – a matter of debate. The Swedish historian Dick Harrison claims that there is almost nothing known for certain about the union of Sweden, except that the Latin title *rex Sweorum et Gothorum* indicates that one king ruled over the Swedes and the Geats in the 1260s (2002: 58, 70–74; Weibull 1993: 18; Henrikson 1963: 86–88 ff.). Some previous scholars had, however, claimed that the Geats were subdued by the Swedes already in the sixth century, others claimed that it would rather have been about c. 800, and yet others believed that this took place well after the year 1000, as the Geats “were gradually subsumed into the larger kingdom of Sweden, while maintaining their cultural identity in many respects” (Farrell 1970–73: 270). According to *Ynglinga saga*, most parts of Svealand and Gautland were already united under one king in the seventh century, when Ingjaldr *inn illráði*, King of Uppsala, burnt six regional kings to death and took over their kingdoms (Snorri Sturluson 1979: 66–67). This union was not, however, permanent, and some great battles were to be fought, e.g. where the inhabitants of Denmark and Östergötland fought against the inhabitants of Sweden and Västergötland, the battle of Fyrisvall, and the battle of Svolder (Harrison 2002: 73–74; Henrikson 1963: 48–49, 63–65, 72–76). In one of the *fornaldarsögur*, *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* we are, for example, told that Ívar hinn víðfaðmi defeted Ingjaldr and took over all of ‘Svíaveldi’, which his son, Haraldr *hilditönn* ruled after his days (*Fornaldar sögur Norðrlanda* 1829: I 509–10); the source is, however, not to be considered as historically reliable.

from other sagas, such as Álfr inn gamli and Angantýr from *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, Bjarkmar jarl from *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserjabana*, Ingigerðr, the heroine of *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinsonar*, Siggeir from *Völsunga saga*, and Þóra, Ragnarr loðbrók's queen, and her father, Herrauðr, earl of Västergötland, from *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*.<sup>8</sup>

## Gautland in Old Icelandic literature

Before considering possible relations between the Icelandic material and Geatish storytelling tradition, there might be a reason to ask why Icelanders wrote stories about the Geats? And are there any indications at all that Icelandic writers were familiar with Geatish oral tradition?

As Lars Lönnroth (2008) discussed in his article “En gräns mot det överkliga. Göta älv-området i fornländska texter”, Icelandic poets accompanied Norwegian kings to the areas around Gautelfr, or ‘Göta älv’ [‘The river of the Geats’], and Norwegians and Icelanders had dealings of various types with people in the locality during certain periods. Icelandic saga-writers could therefore easily describe several areas around Gautelfr, like Konungahella, Lödöse, Brännö and Öckerö, and even areas farther up the terrain. When it came to describing events that took place in the more remote parts of Västergötland, on the other hand, the accounts would generally become less clear and more mythical, and the Swedes and the Geats living farther up the river are generally described in rather a comic way, and are seen as primitive, pagan, aggressive and maybe even a bit simple at times. The reason for this difference in the quality of geographical knowledge is that in the Middle Ages, Gautelfr marked not only the borderline between Norway and Sweden, but for some people – and perhaps especially for Icelanders – also between the known and the unknown; the terrain east of the river was therefore characterized by mystery and myth. This geographical ignorance is reflected in the Sagas

<sup>8</sup> The sagas that are set, at least partly, in Sweden [‘Svealand’/‘Svíaríki’] are: *Af Upplendinga konungum*, *Ásmundar saga kappabana*, *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, *Sörla saga sterka*, and *Yngvars saga víðförla*. It is difficult to assert whether or not some of this material has Swedish roots in oral tradition, but scholars have for a long time claimed that certain episodes, e.g. in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, are of Swedish origin (Schück 1911: 113 ff.; Nedoma 1996–1997: 493–94). Of the above mentioned sagas, *Úlfhams saga* (see below) and *Ormas saga* were not included in Rafn’s compendium.

of Icelanders, for example, where the area around Gautelfr is primarily represented as the setting of dramatic events and is in some respects a borderline region (Lönnroth 2008: 22–33). It has also been claimed that the Icelandic saga-writers were mostly interested in the history of Norway, and that they paid little attention to the Swedes and the Geats *per se* (Larsson 2002: 112). However, the above-mentioned *fornaldarsögur* might well be considered as evidence of their interest in the far and remote East Scandinavian peoples, even if it was of a different nature from that shown in their more historical works.

A number of Icelandic poets mention the zone around Gautelfr in their poetry, and a few Icelanders are known to have crossed the border on their travels to Västergötland, for examples Sighvatr Þórðarson and others in the year 1018 (Snorri Sturluson 1979: 92–94 and 134–46). A few decades later, around 1080, Gizurr Ísleifsson visited Västergötland (*Íslendingabók* 1986: 21–22) and it may well be that Snorri Sturluson visited the lawman Áskell (or Eskil) in Västergötland in 1219, as his nephew, Sturla Þórðarson, reports (*Sturlunga saga* 1988: I 256; cf. Larsson 2002: 121, 126 and 169). On the other hand, Sturla himself wrote a *drápa* for Earl Birgir in 1263, which shows that Icelanders and Swedes could easily communicate, even in the late thirteenth century (*Sturlunga saga* 1988: II 768).<sup>9</sup> The question is – did visits of this kind have any impact on Icelandic storytelling tradition? Did Icelanders merely improvise fabulous stories of the Geats east of Gautelfr, or did they perhaps pick up stories and motifs in the surrounding areas to bring back home? These questions are not easy to answer, but it is unlikely that authors like Snorri and Sturla would reject new kinds of narrative material, particularly Sturla, who is remembered for having entertained the Norwegian court with the story of the sorceress Huld (*Sturlunga saga* 1988: II 765); quite possibly, this may have been about the famous sorceress Huld who Snorri mentions couple of times in his *Ynglinga saga* and who is associated with Swedish royalty (Snorri Sturluson 1979: 29–31). Judging by the age and the subject matter of the saga, this may have been akin to a *fornaldarsaga*.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> It is believed that certain features of the dialect spoken in Västergötland in medieval times (the Götamål dialect) were comparable to Old Norwegian (Kjartan Ottosson 2002: 792). However, as Stephen Mitchell has pointed out, the recital of skaldic poetry may have had more to do with honoring a tradition than any actual communication. Therefore, it is hard to say how much of the poetry the earl actually comprehended (1997: 234). On general understanding and communication between people from different Nordic areas, see Jóhanna Barðdal et al. 1997: 36.

<sup>10</sup> The medieval saga about Huld – the one referred to in *Sturlunga saga* – is now lost, but

## Geatish storytelling tradition

As Geatish legendary tales from medieval times were not recorded, as in the Icelandic *fornaldarsögur* and/or the Danish material by Saxo Grammaticus in his *Gesta Danorum*, it is worth considering what we really know about Geatish oral tradition.

One of the main monuments to Geatish narrative culture in medieval times is the rune stone from Rök in Östergötland (ÖG 136), from the early ninth century. On this remarkable, tightly-written memorial stone, there may be references to heroic stories: a man seems to have made a list for his dead son of all the stories that the latter would either have grown up with or held in favour. These stories are now otherwise lost, but it is not unlikely that they refer to heroic legends of the type told in the Icelandic *fornaldarsögur* (Harris 2009: 470–71 and 494–95; cf. Jansson 1976: 33–40), even if it must be considered as a possibility that the Geats were familiar with stories that were circulating in more southerly areas of Europe, and akin to heroic poems that have not been preserved in the Nordic countries.<sup>11</sup> How widespread these otherwise unattested narratives were among the people of Östergötland, no one actually knows, but what is more important is the presumed testimony of the inscription on the Rök stone to the importance of the narrative tradition.

Another Geatish monument is the stone from Sparlösa in Viste region in Västergötland (Vg 119). In addition to its runic inscriptions, the stone is richly illustrated, and while it is natural to believe that the images may refer to a background story or stories, they have proved difficult to interpret, though various attempts have been made, as will be discussed in some detail below. The date proposed for this in recent studies ranges from the seventh century AD until about 900 AD, depending on the relationship between the runes and the images, and whether the runes were added later or not (Almgren 1940: 127; Norr 1998: 212–13 and 216; Kitzler Åhfeldt 2000: 99; Nordgren 2009: 158).

Finally, mention must be made of *Beowulf*, which was recorded in

---

two reconstructed versions, preserved in manuscripts from the eighteenth century and later, are known. As the medieval narrative, they both deal with Huld, the great sorceress of the North (Maurer 1894: 223–75; *Sagan af Huld drottningu hinnu ríku* 1909).

<sup>11</sup> In a recent study, Per Holmberg rejects the traditional interpretation of the runes, and does not believe that they refer to legends, but to actual events in people's lives, mediated through riddles (2015).

its current form in England in the eighth century, approximately.<sup>12</sup> The material of the poem, which is older and shows Scandinavian connections, relates to the kings of the Danes, the Swedes and a people called ‘*Gēatas*’, or Geats. Though scholars do not agree on the geographical location of this people and whether it was Gautland, the island Gotland or even Jutland,<sup>13</sup> it can be deduced that the author of the poem – or earlier storytellers – knew Geatish stories. It is at least obvious that he – or they – were familiar with stories about the legendary heroes Sigmund and Fitela, corresponding to Sigmundur and Sinfjötli, the protagonists of *Völsunga saga*, one of the Icelandic *fornaldarsögur* (*Beowulf* 2000: 59 [ll. 874–883]). According to *Völsunga saga*, Sigmundur and Sinfjötli dwell in Västergötland for the greatest part of Sinfjötli’s life (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* 1829: I 128–36), and this could indicate that the narrative unit that is now preserved within *Beowulf* is of Geatish origin. Broadly speaking though, the author(s) of *Beowulf* seem(s) to have had a good knowledge of legendary material and the history of certain North European peoples.

It is not the aim of this article to decide whether the general topic of *Beowulf* was of Geatish, Gotlandish or even Danish origin, as the distinction between these peoples in historical sources can be quite unclear. Besides, some previous scholars have stressed the common cultural characteristics of the area that corresponds to present-day southern Sweden. In the nineteenth century they referred simply to a ‘Geatish-Gotish’ culture, or alternatively a ‘Halvdane’ culture in the period c. 200–700 (Munch 1852: 344–46; Grundtvig 1867: 94).<sup>14</sup> Even though theories of this kind are disputed nowadays, and in fact far beyond the

---

<sup>12</sup> The Old English *Beowulf* is an epic poem, preserved in a single manuscript that is usually dated to the beginning of the eleventh century. Although the poem itself is now usually dated to the eighth century, scholars are by no means in agreement on its age, and dates proposed range from the seventh to the eleventh century. The author(s) of the poem is/are unknown, and most scholars believe that the material was constructed in its original form in the Nordic region, and that the core itself had lived in oral tradition among Nordic people for a long time (Bjork 2008: 389–91).

<sup>13</sup> Most scholars believe that the Geats were the people of Götland (Nedoma 1996–1997: 488).

<sup>14</sup> The theory can be traced to Peter Andreas Munch, who claimed that this particular culture, characteristic for Götland and Denmark, also extended southwards and to large areas in Norway at some point, and was even influential in Lejre and Uppsala. Svend Grundtvig believed that the basis of Munch’s theory was very probable, whether we chose to define the culture as ‘gotisk’, ‘gøtisk’ or ‘dansk’. The ideas are nevertheless coloured by the nationalistic enthusiasm that was so typical of nineteenth-century scholarship, but what

scope of this article, one cannot but ask whether Icelandic authors knew of traditions from this area. The name ‘Hálfðan Gautakonungr’ [‘Hálfðan, King of the Geats’] is frequently met with in Icelandic literature, though it evidently does not always refer to the same figure. It seems as if Icelandic authors and storytellers felt it appropriate to call Geatish kings Hálfðan, the implication being that they were half Danish.

Though various questions remain to be examined regarding how Icelanders picked up narratives in Scandinavia,<sup>15</sup> how they included them in their work at home and whether they made significant changes to this material, or even misunderstood some of its previous context, it is worth remembering that even the most renowned of authors, such as Snorri Sturluson himself, seems to have misunderstood old poetry in some cases, at least that of the poet Þjóðólfr úr Hvini (Bergsveinn Birgisson 2007: 385 ff.; Frank 1981).<sup>16</sup> Thus, other authors may have misunderstood some older material as well, or they may, naturally, have made some changes to it conciously. This leads us to one of the Icelandic *fornaldarsögur*, *Úlfhams saga*, that will be the focus of the following case study, in order to shed a light on possible Swedish origin of some of its narrative motifs.

### *Úlfhams saga*

*Úlfhams saga* is not preserved in its original form, i.e. as a medieval prose text: it is now extant in fourteenth century *rímur*<sup>17</sup> and in three later prose redactions, A, B and C. In view of its subject matter and other characteristics, I believe these manifestations can be regarded as evidence of a now lost *fornaldarsaga*.<sup>18</sup> But even if the saga is probably among the

---

matters in this context is the existence of influential cultural currents from the present-day southern Sweden.

<sup>15</sup> For a research on the connection between *Beowulf* and the Icelandic *Grettis saga*, see Magnús Fjalldal 1998.

<sup>16</sup> In most cases, probably, Snorri’s changes were made conciously. According to Bjarni Guðnason, he used to treat traditional material at will, attributing characteristics and descriptions from one character to another, and connecting unrelated material and motifs. Bjarni claims that it mattered little what kind of material Snorri was working with, whether it were Christian writings, poems or legends; the Christian writings could easily become a myth and the myth a heroic tale (Bjarni Guðnason 1963: 80).

<sup>17</sup> *Rímur* (sing. *ríma*): Icelandic ‘metrical romances’, the dominant literary genre from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, first composed in the fourteenth century. This epical poetry was usually based on known sagas, mostly legendary heroic sagas and chivalric romances.

<sup>18</sup> None of the later versions was included in C. C. Rafn’s compendium. In the case of

most recent of the *fornaldarsögur*, dating from the fourteenth century, it also contains older narrative material. Some of it is obviously very old, and probably rooted in Old Norse/Scandinavian oral traditions, as in the case of other *fornaldarsögur* (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001: cliv–clxi and ccxvi–ccxxvi). Overall, the narrative motifs adhere to Icelandic storytelling tradition, as in the case of the stepmother- and spell motif (*stjúpu- og álagaminnið*), shape-shifting and battles with berserks.<sup>19</sup> In some cases, however, the material seems to have exceptionally strong connections to East Scandinavia, or even Gautland. What follows is a short resumé of *Úlfhams rímur* (literally, ‘The *rímur* of Wolf-Coat’), the earliest preserved form of the saga material:<sup>20</sup>

King Hálfðan of the Geats used to turn into a wolf during the winter, and in this form he wandered the woods. At the beginning of each summer he returned home and reigned until the following winter. In Hálfðan’s service was a loyal earl, who had two sons, Skjöldr and Hermann. Hildir, Hálfðan’s queen, was dissatisfied with her husband’s situation and on one occasion when the king arrived back after his transformation, she gave him a sleeping potion and then murdered him. The following morning, she suggested to their son, Úlfhamr, that he take over the kingdom, as long as he would also accept her – his own mother’s – hand in marriage. He refused and fled with his men to the woods, where he built a fortress. Hildir made another attempt to win Úlfhamr over to her side, but this only led to a battle between their troops. After a valorous advance by Úlfhamr and his men, they felled four oak trees on Hildir, who managed to escape by means of magic.

After this, Úlfhamr lived with the earl and his sons, but soon Hildir made another move. She wrote a letter to Úlfhamr, inviting him and his company to a feast. Úlfhamr accepted his mother’s invitation and attended the feast with his sworn brothers, Skjöldr and Hermann, Ásmundur (the son of a Danish duke) and Dagbjört, his sister. Queen Hildir entertained her guests by telling the story

---

*Hrómundar saga Gripssonar*, however, Rafn published a late *rímur*-derived prose version of the saga, as the medieval prose version is now lost. The preservation of the saga material, i.e. lost medieval prose version > medieval *rímur* > *rímur*-derived and post-reformation prose version(s), is similar to that of *Úlfhams saga*. For an argument that the *rímur* (*Úlfhams rímur*) were based on a now lost medieval *fornaldarsaga*, see Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001: cliv–clxi.

<sup>19</sup> For a thorough analysis of narrative motifs, see Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001: clxvi–clxvii.

<sup>20</sup> In this article, *Úlfhams saga* is discussed as it is told in the earliest preserved form, the *rímur*. The plot of the late prose versions is basically the same, even if minor details were changed. The title *Úlfhams saga* thus covers the ‘story’ itself, which is preserved in different forms and texts, but an asterisk (\**Úlfhams saga*) is used for the lost medieval version in particular.

of Vörn, a shield-maiden, who had waged war against Hálfðan, the king of the Geats. After being defeated, she put the king and his men under a spell, which turned them into wolves during the winter. After this, Vörn was killed and buried in a mound, which was called *Varnarhaugr*, the mound of Vörn.

When the story was finished, Hildir became frantically angry and put a different kind of spell on those present. She sent Úlfhamr to dwell in *Varnarhaugr*, where he was to be in the power of Vörn, the mound-dweller, all his life, unless a certain woman adorned with gold came to save him by taking his place in the mound. Should this happen, however, he would completely forget about his rescuer. Hildir told Ásmundr that he would only have a short while to live, and as for the brothers, Skjöldr and Hermann, she sent them off to Valland, under a spell making them desire birds instead of women. At this point her daughter, Dagbjört, thought things had gone far enough and used the magic that her mother had taught her to curse Hildir; this led to Hildir's death.

The four sworn brothers now set off. Úlfhamr undressed and then disappeared into the mound. Skjöldr, Hermann and Ásmundr set sail but ran into a violent storm in which they drifted apart. Ásmundr landed on an island; the two brothers arrived in Valland, where they were enchanted by 'dancing' cranes, which they constantly tried to catch, but without success. Ásmundr walked to a farm where he met a woman named Ótta (daughter of Ammat/Áma and Ati/Áti), who knew all about the fates of the four sworn brothers. Determined to save Úlfhamr, even though she knew that he was bound to forget her, she took a boat and sailed until she came to the mound; then she undressed and disappeared into it. Ásmundr went forth to meet his fate, in accordance with the spell put on him by Hildir, and was defeated in battle by a mysterious knight on the island, after having himself killed the knight's animal companion.

Úlfhamr was now free, but could not remember how he had managed to escape from the mound. He set out to look for Skjöldr and Hermann, his sworn brothers, and found them in Valland, fighting against berserks. Úlfhamr joined in the battle and after their valiant victory, the cranes came flying towards them. The two brothers became restless and tried to catch the birds, which then flew away, but Úlfhamr and his new warrior, Assam/Atram – who turned out to be Ótta's brother – followed them and finally found an underground house in which two maidens lay asleep, with the crane's *hamir* (shapes) beside them. They burned the *hamir* and brought the maidens – Álfsól and Sólbjört – to the ships.

All these young people now started their journey home, i.e. to Gautland. Sólbjört helped Úlfhamr to recover his memory, and he decided to save Ótta from the mound. He sent some men to go and fetch his sister Dagbjört, who was supposed to meet them by the mound and bring along with her four slaves. Dagbjört did not hesitate; in fact, it was she who managed the rescue. They

lured Vörn, the mound-dweller, out and away from Ótta by impaling the four slaves on spears as bait. Atram killed the mound-dweller, and Úlfhamr entered the mound and brought Ótta, who was barely alive, out. Finally, they all sailed home together, where they had a fourfold wedding, Úlfhamr and Ótta being the new rulers.

While treating *Úlfhams saga* as the topic of my doctoral dissertation some years ago, I interpreted the story material, and stressed – among other things – its emphasis on the new generation that finally takes over, i.e. the inheritance of the kingdom. All the events, and all the deeds of the saga characters, lead towards the rather predictable end, where Úlfhamr becomes a king with the aid of his companions, who all settle in his kingdom, freed from worries, as is emphasized at the end of the *rímur* (*Úlfhams saga* 2001: 37, cf. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001: ccxxxvi–ccxxxvii):

Sezt at rikium sęmdar þiod.  
sorg nam burtv lida.

However, I did not have the opportunity to consider some important factors – that were thus not included in my work – i.e. the connection between the saga material and Gautland. In this article I intend to examine not only whether the saga might deal specifically with motifs from Geatish oral tradition, but also whether it could possibly be interpreted in the light of the pictures on the aforementioned stone from Sparlösa.

## Personal names and placenames

As seen from the resumé above, *Úlfhams rímur* (and presumably also \**Úlfhams saga*) tells of King Hálfðan of the Geats, his son Úlfhamr, and their adventures both in the familiar and the supernatural world. Like other *fornaldarsögur*, the saga is shaped by the conceptual world of old Scandinavian legend, and – like related literary works – derives its material from a rich medieval narrative tradition. The proper names in the saga (both personal names and placenames) are, as in other stories set in Sweden, remarkable in many ways, but in a rather different way from those described above. There are only three placenames, Gautland, Varnarhaugr and Valland. While Valland could be an unspecific name of some far away land, it could also have referred to Valand, which was the name of the area around Vallentuna in Uppland.

Some of the personal names correspond to traditional Geatish – and in a wider context Nordic – names, such as Ásmundr and Hálfdan (Strandberg 1994: 154; Peterson 2007: 32, 103–4 and 272–73; Lind 1905–15: 82–84 and 451–52; 1931 98–108 and 378–82). However, while the name of King Hálfdan’s son, Úlfhamr, is to be found in two medieval Icelandic texts, *Skjöldunga saga* and *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, it is not commonly attested in the Swedish runic corpus, and only one inscription includes a name that is reminiscent of it, i.e. ‘Ulfhvatr (?)’ (G 216; Peterson 2007: 240).<sup>21</sup> But Úlfhamr is not the only character with an unusual personal name, and some of the names of the characters are more or less alien to Icelandic naming and saga tradition,<sup>22</sup> though they are reminiscent of Geatish proper names (placenames and personal names). In fact, some of them appear to have been so strange in Icelandic context, that the authors/scribes of the *rímur*-derived prose versions, felt obliged to change them (tab. 1).

Even if some of the placenames listed in tab. 1 are to be found in other Nordic areas as well, the majority is characteristic for Gautland. It is, however, not clear in every instance whether all of them existed in medieval times or, if they did, what they meant, but their prevalence is bound to indicate that they are traditional in the given area.<sup>23</sup> Also, the point here is not their etymology and meaning, but rather how the words

<sup>21</sup> While the name is admittedly unusual (lit. ‘Wolf-Coat’), it is worth remembering that Úlfhamr is not a shapeshifter himself, even if his father is, and therefore his name should be regarded as a personal name, rather than a symbolic one. On related names in Germanic languages (beginning with ‘Wulf-’), see Siebs 1970: 174–75.

<sup>22</sup> Some of the names are known from Old Norse sources, without having been known as personal names in Iceland. Áma is the name of a troll woman and Áti is the name of a Sea King, both mentioned in *Snorra-Edda*; Otta appears as a man’s name, specifically in Norway, and is believed to be imported from Germany (Lind 1905–15: 22, 93 and 826; 1931: 655). See further discussion in Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001: ccxxvi–ccxxviii and ccxxxii–ccxxxvi.

<sup>23</sup> It is believed that most Scandinavian placenames ending with *-staðir* (*-sta(d)*) were created between ca. 400–ca. 1000 (Peterson 2002: 745); the ending *-sta(d)* is characteristic for the eastern parts of Mid-Sweden (Franzén 1982: 27), and is known from several runic inscriptions from Västergötland (Strandberg 1994: 153 et passim), cf. Otterstad/Otterstätt. Placenames ending with *-borg/-berg* developed before the Viking Age (Jóhanna Barðdal et al. 1997: 159–60), cf. Åmmeberg and Varberg. Placenames ending with *-þorp* (*-torp*, *-orp*, *-arp*) are of different age, but many of them were created after ca. 1100 (Peterson 2002: 746; Franzén 1982: 43); in Västergötland, they were at least known from the twelfth century, and possibly already from late Viking Age (Strandberg 1994: 148, 155), even if they were particularly common in the fourteenth century (Jóhanna Barðdal et al. 1997: 159), cf. Ammarp and Ottarp. The ending *-hem* is characteristic for Norway and the western part of Sweden. Like *-staður/-sta(d)*, it is believed to be earlier than *-þorp/-torp* (Franzén 1982: 27–28), cf. Varnhem.

Tab. 1. Geathish proper names in *Úlfhams saga* and their parallels.

Personal Names	Geathish placenames	Parallels <sup>a</sup>
Ammat (Áma) <sup>b</sup>	Ammarp, Åmmeberg, Åmmelågen, Ammenäs and Ammerån (a river)	OR: Ammarp (Älvsborgs län); Åmmeberg (Skaraborgs län). SO 379: Åmmeberg in Närke ( <i>Ååmeberg</i> 1544), drawn from Ama, which is a name of a nearby river, meaning ‘the misty, the steamy’. SOUS: Ammenäs (Göteborgs län). Cf. the personal name/nickname Amma in a runic inscription from Göstrings herad (Peterson 2007: 22).
Assam <sup>c</sup>	Assman (a river), Assmabro and Asserbo	Assman: a river in Västergötland. OR: Assman, Assmabro and Asserbo (Älvsborgs län). Cf. the personal name Assurr in runic inscriptions (Old Norse; Qszurr) (Peterson 2007: 22 and 32).
Ati (Áti) <sup>d</sup>	Atten and Attholmen	OR: Attholmen (Älvsborgs län). Cf. the personal name Aiti in a runic inscription from Södermanland (Peterson 2007: 297); Atte was also Swedish nickname (Janzén 1947: 254, cf. Lind 1931: 125).
Atram <sup>e</sup>	Ätran and Ätradalen	SO 386: the river Ätran: <i>Ethra</i> 1283, known 1177; The river Ätran runs southwards from Hornborgasjön (see e.g. Larsson 2002: 20). OR: Ätran (Skaraborgs län); Ätran and Ätradalen (Älvsborgs län). SOUS: Ätran and Ätrafors (Hallands län).
Otta	Otterbäcken, Otterstad, Otterstätt, Otterön, Ottravad, Öttum and Ottarp	OR: Otterbäcken (Göteborgs och Bohus län and Älvsborgs län); Otterbäcken, Otterstad, Otterön, Ottravad and Öttum (Skaraborgs län). <sup>f</sup> SO 246: Otterbäcken ( <i>Otter becken</i> 1634), from the West-Geatish dialect form ot(t)er, meaning otter. Otterstad ( <i>Otars stadum</i> 1283), from the personal name Ottar. Ottravad ( <i>Oterwadh sokn</i> 1397), from ot(t)er, otters’ ford; 396: Öttum ( <i>Öttem</i> 1540), uncertain meaning of the former item. SOUS: Otterbäcken (Skaraborgs län); Otterön (Göteborgs län); Ottravad (Skaraborgs län); Ottarp (Kalmar län).

Personal Names	Geathish placenames	Parallels
Vörn and Varnarhaugr <sup>g</sup>	Vara, Varberg, Vare, Varing, Varnhem, Varola and Varnum	OR: Vara (Älvsborgs län); Vara, Varnhem and Varnum (Skaraborgs län); Varnum (Älvsborgs län). SO 343: Vara ( <i>Wara</i> 1540), from ‘vara’ (highland forest area); 344: Varnhem ( <i>Warnem</i> 1234), from Varnhems kloster (established 1150), a protective wall, a fort. Varnum ( <i>Hwærnemh</i> 1288), from ‘hverna’ (cauldron). SOUS: Vara and Varola (Skaraborgs län); Varberg (Hallands län).

<sup>a</sup> OR: Ortnamnsregistret (with information about ‘län’ or counties from 1951); SO: Svenskt ortnamnslexikon 2003; SOUS: Svenska ortnamn – uttal och stavning 1991.

<sup>b</sup> First, when this female character is mentioned in the *rímur*, her name is Ammat, but then it changes into Áma. In the prose versions A (seventeenth century) and B (eighteenth century), the name is also Áma. In the nineteenth-century C-version, the name is Anna, which was and still is a common personal name in Iceland.

<sup>c</sup> First, when this character is mentioned in the *rímur*, his name is Assam, but then it changes into Atram.

<sup>d</sup> In the prose versions A, B and C, the name has been changed into Atli, which was and still is known as a personal name in Iceland.

<sup>e</sup> In the C-version, the name is Al(f)ram. Despite the attempt to make the name sound more like a traditional Icelandic name, it is still alien to Icelandic naming tradition.

<sup>f</sup> There is also a river in Norway with an analogous name: Otta in Ottadal. The name is usually believed to stand for the ‘frightening’ nature of the river, cf. the Old Norse ‘ótti’.

<sup>g</sup> In the C-version of *Úlfhams saga*, Varnarhaugr (the mound of Vörn) is called Varinshaugr (cf. the personal name Varinn in runic inscriptions from Gautland and Småland (Peterson 2007: 247)). Varinshaugr is reminiscent of Svarinshaugr (the burial mound of Svarinn), mentioned in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* and II. Svarinn was a Geatish chieftain (Grundtvig 1867: 83).

a) may have been written and taken up by a non-native Swedish speaker (as, e.g., Ätra, probably pronounced with an [e] that becomes Atram, pronounced with an [a]), or b) how they were pronounced and may have sounded to a foreigner who may have picked them up from oral tradition.<sup>24</sup> Originally – and for a long time – placenames were a type of lore that was passed on from one individual to another and could easily have merged

<sup>24</sup> The pronunciation of place names is given in SOUS: Svenska ortnamn – uttal och stavning 1991.

with other types of folklore material, for example narratives. It is also important to remember that many placenames include a personal name.

It is apparent that each of the above-listed names would not suffice to support the idea of Geatish naming tradition behind the personal names in *Úlfhams saga* on its own. However, judging by their collective impact, it is quite reasonable to ask if the author of *\*Úlfhams saga* either drew on an oral tale that included Geatish proper names (personal names or placenames), or if he himself – either through misunderstanding (by using placenames as personal names) or intentionally – used the Geatish proper names in order to give his Geatish characters more credibility; to make it sound like they were actually from Gautland? Alternatively, where did he get these ideas from? – because the names are unique among those found in medieval Icelandic literature. Apart from these interesting analogues with Geatish naming tradition, it would be helpful to see if there are some further indications that might support such a possibility. This takes us to the subject matter of *Úlfhams saga*, which deals particularly with shape-shifters, or characters who have been cursed and transformed into other creatures, wolves and cranes, neither of which are found in Iceland, even though wolves certainly play part in some Icelandic literary texts.

## Geatish motifs

Wolves are prominent in Old Icelandic literature, not least in the form of the werewolf motif, as is the case in *Úlfhams saga*. But even if the variant found in this saga adheres to, and should be seen in the context of, the indigenous Icelandic narrative tradition, it is in some ways unusual and differs from the more standardised versions. By comparing *Úlfhams saga* with other Old Norse material featuring the werewolf motif, it is evident that the author of the saga either used his imagination more freely than others when it came to using the motif, or that he knew, and drew on, narratives not attested elsewhere in Icelandic literature (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001: clxxxi–ccxi; 2007: 296–98, 303). Even if Swedish stories about werewolves were not written down in medieval times, they are plentiful in folklore recorded in later centuries, indicating that the material was traditional (Odstedt 1943).<sup>25</sup> However, unlike wolves,

<sup>25</sup> For werewolves in later Scandinavian folk belief, see Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2007:

cranes are extremely rare in Old Icelandic literature, though various other birds play a role in shape-shifting stories;<sup>26</sup> in fact, cranes only have a narrative function in a couple of texts (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001: ccviii–ccx).<sup>27</sup> In no other case apart from *Úlfhams saga* do they appear in the company of wolves and in no other instance do they play a significant role in saga literature.

From time immemorial, wolves have been common in the woods of Gautland, and even if they were admittedly once common throughout Scandinavia, they were associated particularly with the wild forests of Västergötland. This can be explained by the fact that on the western side of lake Vättern, there was nothing but woods, that were difficult and dangerous to cross, right down to the Middle Ages (Larsson 2002: 29). Besides, the pairing – wolves and cranes – is probably nowhere more closely connected than exactly in Västergötland, and the area has in fact long been a renowned resting place for migrating cranes. Admittedly there are no sources that can tell us how long cranes could have occupied a special position in Geatish folklore. A bit further north, however, at Rinkeby near Stockholm (earlier Rickeby, not far from Valand, i.e. Vallentuna, a possible location mentioned in *Úlfhams saga*), a skeleton of a crane was found in a burial mound from about the seventh century. The buried warrior had been laid to rest among his weapons, his horse and his dogs, and finally some domestic animals and the crane, with an uncertain function (Larsson 2002: 72–73). *Fagrskinna*, written in the twelfth century, also relates how Ólafr Eiríksson († 1022), king of the Geats, hunted cranes for his pleasure (*Fagrskinna* 1985: 179). This shows not only that cranes were territorial birds in Sweden, and probably in Västergötland, for ages, as they almost certainly were a long time prior to the burial, but also that they had a special meaning for the locals, whatever it was. The connection between cranes and wolves can be seen from the fact that both species are a regional emblem in the territory, i.e. Västergötland and the adjacent Värmland (cf. *Libes Lilla Sverige atlas* 2005: 108–9). It is therefore hardly surprising how many placenames are

---

277–78. For werewolves in Old Norse sources, see pp. 283 ff.

<sup>26</sup> E.g., eagles and swans (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001: ccvi–ccxi).

<sup>27</sup> Apart from this and the incident from *Fagrskinna*, mentioned below, the nickname *trani* is known from *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* (Ingjaldr *trana*) and *Droplaugarsona saga* (Þorkell *trani*). Finally, Trönuvogar is a placename in *Örvar-Odds saga*; cranes may appear in some kennings in scaldic poetry.

to be found in this area that remind us of these animals, such as Ulvåker, Ulv(s)hult, Ulvåsa, Ulvanstorp, Vargtofta, Tranås and Tranemo.

Cranes arrive at Hornborgasjön, a lake in Västergötland, on about 10 April each year, and usually stay there throughout April, attracting tourists with their enchanting dancing (*Värt att se i Sverige* 1978: 265). Today, the lake is also known as ‘Tranornas sjö’ (Lake of the Cranes). Regardless of whether or not the lake existed in medieval times, and whether or not it attracted cranes, as it does today, this shows us that cranes are specifically noticed for their movements; the ‘dancing’. Regarding *Úlfhams saga*, it seems to be no coincidence that the two sisters – Álf sól and Sólbjört, the enchanted maidens of Gautland – are turned into cranes. That the author was familiar with these birds can be seen from the fact that the enchanted cranes of the saga are depicted as dancing, as the cranes of Västergötland still do every spring (*Úlfhams saga* 2001: 21):

Traunmunar koma j tialldit þa.  
og tryta [move around, dance] inn fyrer recka.

It is easy to find connections between other features of *Úlfhams saga* and Gautland, for example in the episode where Úlfhamr is cursed and forced to enter a certain burial mound where he is to stay with the mound-dweller, Vörn. As in the case of the werewolf motif, instances of *haugbrot* (the reopening of grave-mounds) are common in saga literature, and do not call for a search for particular models (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001: ccxxi; cf. Sävborg 2011). However, compared to other variants, the *haugbrot* in *Úlfhams saga* seems far less influenced by Icelandic storytelling tradition than are most other variants, and is noticeably less standardised. The *haugr* is, for example, described more closely, and is characterised by four entrances, which open up every night.<sup>28</sup> The development of the narrative is also unique, especially regarding how the protagonists of the saga break into the mound and how they lure the

<sup>28</sup> This is reminiscent of Scandinavian forts that were built with four doors, one in each cardinal direction, and also of Snorri’s description of Loki, who “flees to a mountain and constructs a house with four doors, so that he may see in all directions” (Lindow 1994: 213). John Lindow, who has studied the four cardinal directions in relation to Old Norse literature, believes that they are charged with meaning (1994: 221), and it is possible that *Úlfhams saga* draws on some ancient traditions in this respect. Not only does the mound have four openings, but in order to lure the mound dweller out, four thralls are speared and thrust through each opening as bait; as a result the saga heroes are able to attack the mound dweller from different directions (*Úlfhams saga* 2001: 34; Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001: ccxxi).

mound dweller – the *haugbúi* – out of it; this has no parallels in the saga literature. While this could be ascribed to the original use of traditional narrative motifs, as in the case of the werewolf motif, putting it in connection to other Geatish cultural characteristics might help to shed light on its relations to the other elements in the saga.

While burial mounds are common throughout Scandinavia, they are in fact very common in Gautland, for example at large burial sites such as the one at Tift, the largest site in Östergötland, with more than 600 graves, not to mention Ekornavallen south-east of Hornborgasjön, one of Västergötland's best-known burial sites. Some of the chamber graves have clearly been broken into at some point (*cf.*, e.g., Larsson 2002: 20, 84, 109 and 170–72). As it would have been quite normal for a community living in such an environment to create and tell legends about grave mounds, it should be considered as a possibility that the *haugbrot* of *Úlfhams saga* could be based on local legends about burial mounds.

From the discussion above it is obvious that *Úlfhams saga* includes certain features that are uncharacteristic for medieval Icelandic literature, i.e. its proper names and the treatment of certain narrative motifs. While some of these features may have been known in other areas of Scandinavia, it is particularly noteworthy how close they are to Geatish tradition, and especially that of Västergötland. In view of these similarities, it must be reasonable to ask: Was *Úlfhams saga* developed from a Geatish oral tale, or was it more or less made up from popular Geatish narrative motifs? If the locality of the saga and the proper names, along with wolves, cranes and the overall Geatish characteristics are not sufficient, additional hints from the Sparlösa Stone, located in Viste region, not far from Stora Levene and the aforementioned Hornborgasjön, will now be examined.

## The Sparlösa Stone

This famous stone, from Sparlösa in Västergötland, was removed from the wall of Sparlösa church (the present-day Salems kyrka) in 1937 (Jungner 1938: 193; *cf.* von Friesen 1940: 7 and 15–17). It is rectangular in section, carved with runes and richly illustrated, with a particular concentration of pictorial material on two sides (III and IV). The carvings have been studied thoroughly, for example by Hugo Jungner (1938), Otto von Friesen (1940), Svante Norr (1998), Laila Kitzler Åhfeldt (2000),

Bo Isakson (2004), Åke Hyenstrand (2007), Bengt Nordqvist (2007) and Ingemar Nordgren (2009), each of whom focus, in most cases, either on the runes or the images. It is clear that there are two inscriptions on the stone, an original one, usually dated to c. 800, and an additional inscription, made approximately 200 years later (Kitzler Åhfeldt 2000: 99). The focus is in most cases on the original inscription, together with the images.

Scholars have not come to an agreement on the age of the carvings, and while some of them would date both the runes and the images to the eighth or the ninth century (or c. 800), given that there is a relationship between the two, Ingemar Nordgren believes that the images are more original than the runes, and probably from the seventh century, while the runes were added later. He believes that the runic inscriptions bear no relation to the images (2009: 158 and 183–85). It is worth bearing in mind that the pictures on sides I–IV need not necessarily have been made simultaneously, or by the same carver.<sup>29</sup> Laila Kitzler Åhfeldt, who studied the carvings by using a laser scanner, agrees that some of the images are obviously earlier than the inscription, as for example the ornament on side III (see fig. 2), but believes that the images on sides I and IV may have been added at a later stage, at least theoretically. She concludes that the original inscription (with mixed rune-forms, both from the older and the younger futharks) was carved by two individuals, and that one of them also made most of the images.<sup>30</sup> The images on side IV, which is the main concern of the comparison made here, were made by only one carver (2000: 100, 105 and 114–17). The four sides of the stone include a considerable variety of images:

- (I) a figure or a supernatural being with coarse features, holding his right hand up and apparently holding something. The figure has variously been interpreted as a Christian priest (Nordgren 2009: 176), Christ himself or the Norse god Thor, or alternatively as a man with a spear (von Friesen 1940: 25–26).
- (II) a partially preserved image of a mask or a man with a helmet, variously interpreted as an owl or a gargoyle, which some have

<sup>29</sup> Jungner believed that there were three carvers altogether (1938: 225, *cf.* Kitzler Åhfeldt 2000: 105).

<sup>30</sup> Kitzler Åhfeldt analysed the Sparlösa stone "with surface structure analysis using a laser scanner and statistical data analysis". The procedure of the analysis "is that casts in plasticine of runes and ornament are measured with a 1 mm interval by a non-touch laser scanner" (Kitzler Åhfeldt 2000: 99 and 105–7).

argued represents the head of the Medusa (von Friesen 1940: 31–32; Nordgren 2009: 177–78).

- (III) an owl or some kind of a creature, with one or two large birds, and one or two serpents. The central bird has been identified as a crane (von Friesen 1940: 26), or alternatively as a long-necked sea-bird, such as a swan or a heron (Norr 1998: 194; cf. Kitzler Åhfeldt 2000: 103). It has also been suggested that the figure could represent a fabulous animal, comparable to the griffons that were common in medieval heraldry. The animal on side III, apparently a bird with a lion's head, could therefore have been a heraldic sign (Kitzler Åhfeldt 2000: 104).
- (IV) and finally, on this side, which is the most richly decorated one, and which will be considered here, there is a building (a hall or a temple) with a circular marking (a ring), two large birds, a ship with a sail and finally a leopard (or lion), a knight on horseback with drawn sword and two quadrupeds of some kind (Jansson 1976: 32–33).

The images have been interpreted in various ways, for example in relation to the surrounding text, which has been seen as a testimonial of the transfer of a) an estate (von Friesen 1940: 87–91), or b) a kingdom from one king, the Swede Øyuls, to another, Alrikr, who was also Swedish. According to the inscription, the new king, who has now seized the throne, has fulfilled the conditions for his legitimacy (Norr 1998: 190–91; cf. Kitzler Åhfeldt 2000: 102–3). In all, the inscription mentions three men by name, 'Æivisl' (Øyuls/Aiuls/Aðils), 'Æiriks sunr' (Eiríkr) and 'Alrik[r]' (Alrekr), together with 'Sigmarr' (or 'victory-renowned'), a nickname for Øyuls (Vg 119); at least two of these names – Eiríkr and Alrekr – are mentioned in the Old Norse poem *Ynglingatal*, and in Snorri Sturluson's *Ynglinga saga*, referring to Swedish kings (Snorri Sturluson 1979: 39–40; Jungner 1938: 209 and 212–13).<sup>31</sup> Based on the rune text alone, there is a possible link between the carvings and Old Icelandic historiography.

The picture on side IV has been interpreted as Øyuls on his way to

<sup>31</sup> As might be expected, the evidence of the Sparlösa Stone (as a testimonial of transfer) does not demonstrate that the inhabitants of Västergötland were ruled by the 'Svear' at this time in history, but rather that their kings, Øyuls and Alrikr, were descendants of Swedish kings (Norr 1998: 202). Besides, the stone was most probably carved in Götland, and since the artist would therefore most likely have been from that area, it is more natural to see the craftsmanship involved as belonging to a West-Geatish, rather than to a Swedish, tradition.



Fig. 1. Fig. 2. The stone from Sparlösa in Västergötland (Vg 119), I, II, III and IV (clockwise, starting from top left). Photo: Marco Bianchi, 2008 (CC BY)

the house of Freyr, the most popular god in Sweden, or as a narrative about Alrikr with his sword drawn, and presumably ready for a fight. The picture has also been seen as a hunting scene (*cf.* the animal above the knight), but as has been pointed out, men were not usually armed with a sword when hunting, as the knight is in the picture. Furthermore, some scholars have noted that the knight is either wearing a helmet or has long hair. Long hair could imply a reference to the dynasty of the Merovingians, whose kings distinguished themselves by wearing their hair long.<sup>32</sup> The building has variously been interpreted as the gate to Valhalla, the house of Freyr, or simply as a symbol of a kingdom (*riki*).<sup>33</sup> The ship is naturally thought to represent a journey, either in this world or from this world to another (Norr 1998: 191, 202 and 209–14; Jungner 1938: 227–28). Indeed, the whole scene has been interpreted as showing a dead man on his way to Valhalla, a journey for which he would need a ‘swan ship’ (Jäger 2010: 195).

Besides interpretations that are based on the rune text and Norse mythology, the images of the scene have been seen as referring to Theoderic the Great (d. 526) and interpreted in context with Christian imagery. A thorough study by Ingemar Nordgren, comparing the images to Christian symbols, Visigothic stone carvings and Theoderic’s mausoleum in Ravenna, concludes that “the stone was raised, at the latest, during the 7<sup>th</sup> Century CE or earlier and [...] the initiator of the depicted motif was an Arian Christian” (Nordgren 2009: 185, *cf.* 160 ff.). In Nordgren’s interpretation, the images are not seen as bearing any relation to the rune carvings. Without going further into this interpretation, it is worth mentioning that in some images of Theoderic the Great, he is pictured as an armed hunter (Kitzler Åhfeldt 2000: 104; Melin 2012: 172). Nordgren’s interpretation is neither to be dismissed nor to be considered improbable.

The Swedish archaeologist Svante Norr stresses the relationship between the runes and the images (1998: 211):

In a society where literacy was still exclusive [...] and where an important political statement was made (according to my interpretation of the text) it must be considered likely that the iconography was intended to transmit very much the same message as the text.

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., Gregory of Tours 1974: 125 og 352 [II 9 og VI 24].

<sup>33</sup> The roundel on the door has been interpreted as a sun symbol, representing a ‘golden gate’ into a sacred place, which could be Valhalla or a Christian church (Paulsen 1966: 41–47). For the interpretation of the ring as a symbol of *riki*, and/or “as a symbol of bonds of loyalty”, see Norr 1998: 211.

In a similar vein, his colleague Anders Andrén has stressed that images on rune-stones “[...] should be regarded as part of the total composition” (2000: 19, *cf.* 27).<sup>34</sup> In what follows, I will propose a new and totally different perspective that makes it possible for us to interpret the images on side IV in relation to the runes. Since the *fornaldarsögur* are in many cases reminiscent of stories that had been circulating in Scandinavia for a long time, as attested for example by earlier poetry and the writings of Saxo Grammaticus (see, e.g., Mitchell 1991: 49–88), it might be worth considering whether they could shed light on the images. In short, no preserved *fornaldarsaga* can explain all the images, but regarding the context, *Úlfhams saga* comes to mind as a possible parallel. By comparing *Úlfhams saga* with the images on side IV, the following points of contact (2001: 1–61) may be revealed:

- *Úlfhams saga* is located in Gautland, which is also the location of the stone. Like many other narratives, the story begins and ends, after various adventures, in a palace (representing the centre of power in the kingdom); this corresponds to the ‘building’ – the hall with the ring in the stone carving, representing a kingdom (e.g. Norr 1998: 211).
- One of the protagonists of the saga, Hálfðan, King of the Geats, and all his men, are cursed and put under a spell turning them into wolves every winter. The two quadrupeds, one on either side of the knight and the leopard/lion, have previously been seen as dogs (or a lion cub, in the case of the one above the leopard/lion, *cf.* Nordgren 2009: 165–66). They are, however, rather stylized and could as well be interpreted as wolves, as there is no certain way to identify their species.
- Úlfhamr and his men undertake a journey by *ship(s)*. Ships are, naturally, very common, both in Old Norse literature and in medieval iconography, but the ship should nevertheless not be left out of the comparison, since it plays a part in the saga, and the overall imagery.
- The two brothers, Skjöldr and Hermann, sail to a land where they meet two sisters, both of whom have been cursed and turned into cranes; *cf.* the two large *birds*. The two birds have been seen as resembling cranes (von Friesen 1940: 30; *cf.* Kitzler Åhfeldt 2000: 103).
- Ásmundr lands on an island, where he meets an animal [‘dýr’],

<sup>34</sup> *Cf.* Kitzler Åhfeldt 2000: 117. Scholars have, however, criticised Andrén’s work for its lack of empirical evidence, e.g. in Källström 2007: 30–2 and 169–83; Bianchi 2010: 38–9 and 52–3.

which he kills and in consequence is attacked by an angry knight with his sword drawn, and killed. In Old Icelandic, the word *dýr* usually meant a wild animal or a beast, and in some cases, a lion.<sup>35</sup> As is evident from *Úlfhams saga*, the animal is the knight's companion, and the episode is reminiscent of the traditional 'lion-knight' motif, where a lion follows his master (*cf.* the *leopard/lion*).<sup>36</sup>

- After all kinds of adventures, the protagonists meet Úlfhamr, and together with him they board the ship and sail to the kingdom, followed by the two young women who have regained their form, having been cranes earlier in the story. Everybody is now free of the evil spells, and the young generation has finally displaced the old one. The new generation returns and takes over, with their new king (*cf.* the *helmet knight on horseback*).

A comparison between the images on the Sparlösa Stone and the subject matter of *Úlfhams saga* reveals some interesting parallels. It is important to note that the images by no means cover the entire saga as we now have it, but rather some of its narrative elements. Consequently, the link between the two does not lie in individual images or motifs, but rather in the joint imagery, which might be traced to a common storytelling tradition.

To sum up, it appears that the author of the Icelandic *\*Úlfhams saga* not only knew some traditional Geatish narrative motifs, but specifically motifs that are in some ways reminiscent of the pictures on the Sparlösa stone, side IV, and even on side III as well.<sup>37</sup> The central theme of the saga

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g. *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*: [http://dataonp.ad.sc.ku.dk/wordlist\\_d\\_adv.html](http://dataonp.ad.sc.ku.dk/wordlist_d_adv.html)

<sup>36</sup> Lions and leopards appear quite early in Scandinavian art, despite how alien these animals must have been in the Nordic region. A lion and a leopard are depicted on the 'Cirkusbæger' from Himlingøje in Denmark, dated to the third or fourth century, and leonine quadrupeds were carved on some Gotlandic grave slabs (Stern 2013: 82). Other Icelandic sagas from medieval times, e.g. *Sigurðar saga þögla*, tell of knights who avenge their lions in a similar manner, and such heroes are reminiscent of the lion-knight motif, which was prominent in the literature of the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries (Harris 1970: 125–29).

<sup>37</sup> Side III is decorated with what have usually been interpreted as an owl (animal 1) and a bird (animal 2a) surrounded by serpents (animal(s) 3), or two intertwined birds (animals 2a and 2b) (Norr 1998: 194). The creatures have also been interpreted as a goose (animal 2a) and an owl (animal 1), fighting with a snake (animal 3) (Nordgren 2009: 159). However, the identification of the images is by no means unequivocal, and it is perhaps legitimate to ask whether the figures might not be seen as a wolf – or werewolf – (animal 1) and two cranes (animals 2a–b)? These could arguably be figures of the same nature as in *Úlfhams saga*, humans in animal form. In his thorough study of the stone, Otto von Friesen has already addressed the possibility that the central bird (animal 2a) might be a crane (1940:

is partially comparable with the text of the runes, where an elder king leaves and a new one takes over. Just as Svante Norr's interpretation of the runes (1998: 190–91) is not beyond question, so too the interpretation here may not be above criticism; nevertheless, it seeks to shed light on the equally ambiguous and obscure imagery of this fascinating, and much disputed rune and picture stone.

## Conclusion

*Úlfhams saga* is above all the offspring of Icelandic narrative and literary traditions, well in accordance with other late *foraldarsögur*, and yet heavily dependent on Geatish narrative motifs and proper names. From the comparison between the saga and geographical and cultural aspects of Geatish history, on the one hand, and the illustrations on the Sparlösa Stone, on the other, it is hard not to see a connection between the two, notwithstanding the differences. Perhaps it would be most natural to assume that both are derived from Geatish oral tradition, and that the connection is indirect. As demonstrated above, it seems fair to argue that *Úlfhams saga* includes some traditional narrative motifs from Gautland, which might be partly similar to those that lie behind the pictures. But just as the Sparlösa Stone may contain a reflection of the subject matter of *Úlfhams saga* and strengthen the possibility of the Geatish origin of the saga material, or of individual narrative motifs, the abovementioned features of *Úlfhams saga* could also throw light on the imagery on the stone and indicate that it was based on traditional Geatish narrative motifs. Thus the comparison requires that the illustrations on the stone be examined in a new light. The possibility that the meaning behind them could lie in a popular oral narrative, which was based on traditional Geatish motifs and considered an appropriate accompaniment to the written material of the

---

26), and if we take a closer look at the image, we notice that there are in fact two identical bird-figures, with intertwined necks (animals 2a–b) (see Almgren 1940: 118, fig. 15), and finally a single snake (animal 3). Even if the larger animal (animal 1) is, admittedly, reminiscent of a lion or an owl with its big, round eyes, it does actually look more like a mythical creature of an uncertain nature. Why should it not be a shape-shifter? Although the wolves and the cranes do not appear simultaneously in the action of *Úlfhams saga*, they are nevertheless participants in the same plot, and are interwoven with the fates of the protagonists. The interpretation of this side of the stone is, however, much more uncertain than that of side IV.

stone, must be considered. In other words, *Úlfhams saga*, and the images on the Sparlösa Stone, may be based on a similar narrative pattern, a story that was thought appropriate to recite or refer to when a kingdom was, or had been, transferred from an older king to a younger one. Whether or not a story was recited on such occasions is another matter, and all that can be said is that the underlying tale, relating how a new generation takes over, fits both the images on side IV and the text of the runic inscription.

In the discussion above, three different features of *Úlfhams saga* were studied and compared to Eastern Scandinavian tradition, 1) its personal names and placenames, 2) some of its individual narrative motifs, and 3) its plot and its connection with images on the Sparlösa Stone. Despite the fact that some of the proper names and narrative motifs may certainly have been known elsewhere in Scandinavia, the comparison revealed close connections between the saga material and Eastern Scandinavia, or even Gautland specifically. But even if these features do not – each and individually – prove an underlying Geatish story-telling tradition that might have influenced the author of the saga, it is important to put them in a larger context, and focus on their overall testimony. Some Geatish influences might at least be considered as a possibility, and by comparing the plot of the saga to the images on the Sparlösa Stone as well, the circumstantial evidence for the given connection become even stronger.

One of the questions asked above in connection with Icelanders visiting Gautland was whether such visits might have had an impact on Icelandic storytelling tradition. While the comparison and the interpretation offered here is – and should only be seen as – a case study, it implies that they may well have had such an impact, and that there was a channel through which Geatish narrative material could influence Icelandic saga literature.<sup>38</sup> And even if *Úlfhams saga* seems to have exceptionally strong relations to Geatish story telling tradition, it might help to take a closer look at other *fornaldarsögur* that are set mainly in Gautland as well (i.e. *Gautreks saga*, *Hrólf's saga Gautrekssonar*, *Bósa saga ok Herraauðs* and *Ormars saga*), or even some Geatish characters from other sagas. Considering the recent growth in modern scholarship on the *fornaldarsögur*, and its general popularity, we may hope that such a study – or studies – will take place before long.

---

<sup>38</sup> The present article is based on a paper I gave at the Fifteenth International Saga Conference, held in Århus in August, 2012. I would like to thank Jeffrey Cosser for assistance with the final English version.

## Cited works

### Primary sources

- Beowulf*. A new verse translation. 2000. Transl. Seamus Heaney. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Fagrskinna – Nóregs konunga tal*. 1985. Íslensk fornrit XXIX. Ed. Bjarni Einarsson. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag.
- Fornaldar sögur Norðrlanda eptir gömlum handritum* I–III. 1829–1830. Ed. C.C. Rafn. Kaupmannahöfn.
- Gregory of Tours. 1974. *The History of the Franks*. Transl. Lewis Thorpe. London: Penguin Books.
- Íslendingabók*. 1986. Íslensk fornrit I. Ed. Jakob Benediktsson. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag.
- Sagan af Huld drottningu hinni ríku*. 1909. Reykjavík: Skúli Thoroddsen.
- Snorri Sturluson. 1979. Heimskringla II. Íslensk fornrit XXVII. Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag.
- Sturlunga saga* I–II. 1988. Ed. Örnólfur Thorsson. Reykjavík: Svart á hvítu.
- Úlfhams saga*. 2001. Ed. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir. Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi.

### Secondary sources

- Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir. 2001. Inngangur. *Úlfhams saga*, ed. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir. Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi.
- Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir. 2007. The Werewolf in Medieval Icelandic Literature. *JEGP* 106/3: 277–303.
- Almgren, Bertil. 1940. Den arkeologiska dateringen af Sparlösaasten. In Otto von Friesen. 1940. *Sparlösaasten: Runstenen vid Salems kyrka, Sparlösa socken, Västergötland*. Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand. Pp. 114–27.
- Andrén, Anders. 2000. Re-reading Embodied Texts: an Interpretation of Runestones. *Current Swedish Archaeology* 8: 7–32.
- Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen and Agneta Ney, eds. 2003. *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi*. Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet.
- Bergsveinn Birgisson. 2007. *Inn í skaldens sinn: Kognitive, estetiske og historiske skatter i den norrøne skaldediktingen*. Bergen: Universitetet i Bergen.
- Bianchi, Marco. 2010. Runor som resurs. Vikingatida skriftkultur i Uppland och Södermanland. Uppsala: Institutionen för nordiska språk.
- Bjarni Guðnason. 1963. *Um Skjöldungasögu*. Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa Menningarssjóðs.
- Einar Ól. Sveinsson. 1959. Fornaldarsögur Norðrlanda. *KLNM* IV. Reykjavík: Bókaverzlun Ísafoldar. Pp. 499–507.

- Farrell, R.T. 1970–73. Beowulf, Swedes and Geats. *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 18: 220–96.
- Frank, Roberta. 1981. Snorri and the Mead of Poetry. *Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*. Eds. Ursula Dronke et al. Odense: Odense University Press. Pp. 155–70.
- Franzén, Gösta. 1982. *Ortnamn i Östergötland*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Friesen, Otto von. 1940. *Sparlösastenen: Runstenen vid Salems kyrka, Sparlösa socken, Västergötland*. Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand.
- G + number: inscription published in *Gotlands runinskrifter*, by Sven B. F. Jansson, Elias Wessén, and Elisabeth Svärdström = Sveriges runinskrifter. Vols. 11–12. Stockholm, 1962–78.
- Grundtvig, Svend. 1867. *Om Nordens gamle literatur, en anmeldelse og en indsigelse*. København: Gyldendalske boghandel.
- Harris, Richard L. 1970. The Lion-Knight Legend in Iceland and the Valþjófsstaðir Door. *Viator* 1: 125–45.
- Harrison, Dick. 2002. *Sveriges historia: Medeltiden*. Stockholm: Liber.
- Henrikson, Alf. 1963. *Svensk historia* I. Stockholm: Bonniers.
- Hofmann, Dietrich. 1981. Die *Yngvars saga víðförla* und Oddr munkr inn fróði. *Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*. Eds. Ursula Dronke et al. Odense: Odense University Press. Pp. 182–222.
- Holmberg, Per. 2015. Svaren på Rökstenens gåtor: En socialsemiotisk analys av meningsskapande och rumslighet. *Futhark: International Journal of Runic Studies* 6: 65–106.
- Hyenstrand, Åke. 2007. Makt och Kult – exempel Västergötlands äldre kyrkor. *Kult, Guld och Makt*. Ed. Ingemar Nordgren. Källby: Historieforum Västra Götaland.
- Isakson, Bo. 2004. Insular Manuscripts and the Sparlösa Stone – Similarities, Signs and Jokes. *North-Western European Language Evolution* 45: 75–81.
- Jansson, Sven B. F. 1976. *Runinskrifter i Sverige*. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell. [2nd ed.]
- Janzén, Assar. 1947. De fornsvenska personnamnen. *Nordisk kultur* VII. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers. Pp. 235–68.
- Jäger, Gundula. 2010. *Die Bildsprache der Edda*. Stuttgart: Urachhaus.
- Jóhanna Barðdal et al. 1997. *Nordiska: Våra språk förr och nu*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Jungner, Hugo. 1938. Sparlösastenen. Västergötlands Rök – ett hövdingadöme från folkvandringstid. *Fornvännen* 33: 193–229.
- Källström, Magnus. 2007. Mästare och minnesmärken: Studier kring vikingatida runristare och skriftmiljöer i Norden. Stockholm: Stockholm University, Faculty of Humanities, Department of Scandinavian Languages.
- Kitzler Åhfeldt, Laila. 2000. The Sparlösa Monument and its Three Carvers. A Study of Division of Labour by Surface Structure Analysis. *Lund Archaeological Review* 6: 99–121.

- Kjartan Ottosson. 2002. Old Nordic: A definition and delimitation of the period. *The Nordic Languages: An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages I*. Berlin, New York: de Gruyter. Pp. 787–93.
- Larsson, Mats G. 1986–89. Yngvarr's Expedition and the *Georgian Chronicle*. *Saga-Book* 22: 98–108.
- Larsson, Mats G. 2002. *Götarnas riken: Upptäcktsfärder till Sveriges enande*. Stockholm: Atlantis.
- Lassen, Annette, Agneta Ney and Ármann Jakobsson, eds. 2012. *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*. Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press.
- Libes Lilla Sverige atlas*. 2005. Eds. Christina Björklund et al. Stockholm: Liber Kartor.
- Lindow, John. 1994. The Social Semantics of Cardinal Directions in Medieval Scandinavia. *The Mankind Quarterly* 34: 209–24.
- Lönnroth, Lars. 2008. En gräns mot det överkliga. Göta älv-området i fornisländska texter. "Vi ska alla vara välkomna!" *Nordiska studier tillägnade Kristinn Jóhannesson*. Eds. Auður G. Magnúsdóttir et al. Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet. Pp. 21–36.
- Lönnroth, Lars. 2014. From History to Myth: The Ingvar Stones and *Yngvars saga víðfjrla*. *Nordic Mythologies: Interpretations, Intersections, and Institutions*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: North Pinehurst Press. Pp. 100–14.
- Maurer, Konrad. 1894. Die Huldar Saga. *Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Philologischen Klasse* 20/2. München: Königlich-bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Magnús Fjalldal. 1998. *The Long Arm of Coincidence: The Frustrated Connection between Beowulf and Grettis saga*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Melin, Pia Bengtsson. 2012. Bilden av Theoderik, Didrik och Dietrich: Från tidigkristen historia till senmedeltida hjältemyt. *Francia et Germania: Studies in Srengleikar and Piðreks saga af Bern*. Eds. Karl G. Johansson and Rune Flaten. Oslo: Novus forlag. Pp. 167–78.
- Mitchell, Stephen A. 1997. Courts, Consorts, and the Transformation of Medieval Scandinavian Literature. *Germanic Studies in Honor of Anatoly Liberman*. Nowele 31/32: 229–41.
- Mitchell, Stephen A. 1991. *Heroic Sagas and Ballads*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press.
- Munch, P. A. 1852. *Det norske Folks Historie I*. Christiania: Chr. Tønsbergs Forlag.
- Nedoma, R. 1996–1997. Gauten- und Schwedensagen. *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 10. Eds. Heinrich Beck, Heiko Steuer and Dieter Timpe. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter. Pp. 487–95.
- Ney, Agneta, Ármann Jakobsson and Annette Lassen, eds. 2009. *Fornaldar-sagaerne. Myter og virkelighed*. København: Museum Tusulanums Forlag – Københavns Universitet.
- Nordgren, Ingemar. 2009. A New Interpretation of the Depictions on the Sparlösa Rune Stone in Sweden. *Pyrenae* 40/2: 157–91.

- Nordqvist, Bengt. 2007. Nya rön om offerplatsen Finnestorp och exempel på några av dess vetenskaplig konsekvenser. *Kult, Guld och Makt*. Ed. Ingemar Nordgren. Källby: Historieforum Västra Götaland.
- Norr, Svante. 1998. *To Rede and to Rown: Expressions of Early Scandinavian Kingship in Written Sources*. Uppsala: Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Uppsala University.
- Odstedt, Ella. [1943]. *Varulven i svensk folktradition*. Uppsala: Lundequistska bokhandeln.
- OR: Ortnamnsregistret. Institutet för språk och folkminnen. <[http://www2.sofi.se/SOFIU/topo1951/\\_cdweb/index.htm](http://www2.sofi.se/SOFIU/topo1951/_cdweb/index.htm)> Viewed 2 November 2016.
- Paulsen, Peter. 1966. *Drachenkämpfer, Löwenritter und die Heinrichsage*. Köln: Höhlau Verlag.
- Peterson, Lena. 2002. Developments of personal names from Ancient Nordic to Old Nordic. *The Nordic Languages: An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages* I. Berlin, New York: de Gruyter. Pp. 745–53.
- Peterson, Lena. 2007. *Nordiskt runnamnslexikon*. Uppsala: Institutet för språk och folkminnen. [5th ed.]. <<http://www.sprakochfolkminnen.se/om-oss/arkiv-och-samlingar/nordiskt-runnamnslexikon.html>> Viewed 2 November 2016.
- Phelpstead, Carl. 2009. Adventure-Time in *Yngvars saga víðförla*. *Fornaldarsagaerne. Myter og virkelighed*. Eds. Agneta Ney, Ármann Jakobsson and Annette Lassen. København: Museum Tusulanums Forlag – Københavns Universitet. Pp. 331–46.
- Quinn, Judy et al. 2006. Interrogating Genre in the *Fornaldarsögur*. Round-Table Discussion. *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 2: 287–89.
- Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, Department of Scandinavian Languages, Uppsala University. <<http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm>> Viewed 2 November 2016.
- Sävborg, Daniel. 2011. Haugbrot, Haugbúar and Sagas. In *Viking Settlements and Viking Society*. Ed. Svavar Sigmundsson. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornleifafélag – University of Iceland Press. Pp. 437–47.
- Schück, Henrik. 1911. *Illustrerad Svensk Litteraturhistoria* 1. Stockholm: H. Geber.
- Siebs, Benno Eide. 1970. *Die Personennamen der Germanen*. Niederwallauf, Wiesbaden: M. Sändig.
- SO: *Svenskt ortnamnslexikon*. 2003. Ed. Mats Wahlberg. Uppsala: Uppsala universitet.
- Sö + number: inscription published in *Södermanlands runinskrifter*, by Erik Brate and Elias Wessén = *Sveriges runinskrifter*. Vol. 3. Stockholm, 1924–36.
- SOUS: *Svenska ortnamn – uttal och stavning*. 1991. Ed. Claes Carlén and Ann-Christin Mattison. Stockholm: Norstedts.
- Stern, Marjolein. 2013. *Runestone Images and Visual Communication in Viking Age Scandinavia*. Doctoral thesis, University of Nottingham.
- Strandberg, Svante. 1994. Om förhållandet mellan runantroponymer och ortnamnsförleder. En förberedande undersökning. *Vikingetidens sted- og personnavne*.

- Eds. Gillian Fellows-Jensen and Bente Holmberg. Uppsala: NORNA-förlaget. Pp. 141–64.
- Torfi H. Tulinius. 2002. *The Matter of the North. The rise of literary fiction in thirteenth-century Iceland*. Transl. Randi C. Eldevik. Odense: Odense University Press.
- Vårt att se i Sverige: En reseguide*. 1978. Ed. Olof Thaning. Stockholm: Bonniers.
- Vg + number: inscription published in *Västergötlands runinskrifter*, by Hugo Jungner and Elisabeth Svärdström = Sveriges runinskrifter. Vol. 5. Stockholm, 1940–70.
- Weibull, Jörgen. 1993. *Swedish History in Outline*. Stockholm: The Swedish Institute.
- Wessén, Elias. 1927. *Nordiska namnstudier*. Uppsala: Lundequistska bokhandeln.

## Summary

The medieval Icelandic sagas known as *fornaldarsögur* usually take place in Norway and Denmark. Some of them, however, are set in Eastern Scandinavia, especially in Gautland. It is of interest, for its own sake, that Icelandic authors chose to write about the Gautar (Old English Geatas, modern English Geats), people whom they seem to have known little about. Accordingly, there is a reason to ask where they got the material for their stories from. Was it entirely made up, or did they perhaps know of some Geatish narrative tradition? This article seeks not to answer these questions in general terms, but rather to throw light on the topic by a case study, and deals with one of the *fornaldarsögur*, *Úlfhams saga*, which seems to have exceptionally strong connections to Eastern Scandinavia, or even Gautland specifically. Some aspects of the saga will be considered: its personal names and placenames, individual narrative motifs, its plot and its connection with images on the famous Sparlösa Stone from Viste region, Västergötland. The article reveals the possibility of an underlying Geatish story-telling tradition that might have influenced the author of the saga – and possibly also the person who carved the images on the stone.

**Keywords:** Fornaldarsögur, legendary sagas, the Sparlösa Runestone (Vg 119), Úlfhams saga, Old Norse-Icelandic literature

*Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir*

*University of Iceland*

*Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies*

*Árnavarður, Suðurgata, 101 Reykjavík, Iceland*

*adalh@hi.is*