SCRIPTA ISLANDICA

ISLÄNDSKA SÄLLSKAPETS

ÅRSBOK 60/2009

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REDIGERAD AV DANIEL SÄVBORG

under medverkan av

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With English summaries

UPPSALA, SWEDEN

Tryckt med bidrag från Samfundet Sverige–Island

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ISSN 0582-3234

Sättning: Textgruppen i Uppsala AB

Tryckning: Reklam & Katalogtryck AB, Uppsala 2010

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Scripta Islandica 60

Scripta Islandica fyller sextio år. Jubileet firas med tidskriftens mest internationella nummer hittills. Här finns nio artiklar, åtta av dem skrivna av ickesvenska författare. De kommer från Island, England, USA, Ryssland och Japan. Några av författarna har länge funnits med inom forskningen, andra är nytillkomna. Theodore Andersson publicerade sin första vetenskapliga artikel 1962, för övrigt också den gången om muntlig tradition i sagalitteraturen, medan Helen Leslie här publicerar sin allra första artikel. Flera av artikelförfattarna har bidragit förr till Scripta Islandica. Lars Lönnroth redan 1964, för 45 år sedan, Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir i tidskriftens senaste nummer. Även Theodore Andersson hör till dem som härmed återvänder till Scripta Islandica.

Bidragen i denna årgång återgår alla på föredrag hållna vid den 14:e internationella sagakonferensen i Uppsala 2009. De fyra första bygger på de plenarföreläsningar som hölls inför samtliga delegater. Tre av dem är omarbetade till artiklar inför publiceringen i Scripta Islandica. Så har inte skett med Svanhildur Óskarsdóttirs bidrag. Det är förvisso en vetenskaplig översikt över nordisk editionsfilologi under fyra århundraden, men det är också ett brandtal för filologin och handskriftsstudiets betydelse för norrönforskningen. Som ett brandtal har det redan blivit legendariskt inom forskarvärlden. Det har varit självklart att låta texten få behålla den karaktären även här. De fem senare bidragen är valda bland de övriga föredragen vid Uppsalakonferensen.

Artiklarnas ursprung i en sagakonferens förklarar den renodlade inriktningen på medeltiden i denna volym. Men det hindrar inte en stor spännvidd i ämnesvalen. Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir behandlar filologins och textutgivningens utveckling. Terry Gunnells och Helgi Skúli Kjartanssons artiklar är inriktade på Islands historia. Theodore Anderssons, Elena Gurevichs, Lars Lönnroths och Helen Leslies artiklar ägnas alla sagalitteraturen, men helt olika delar av den, och både deras frågeställningar och metoder är påfallande olika. Ytterligare två artiklar ägnas den norröna poesins två huvudgenrer. John McKinnell undersöker skaldedikten Ynglingatal, medan Tsukusu Itó tar sig an en eddadikt, låt vara att han djärvt gör kopplingar även till fornengelsk bildkonst och renodlat lingvistiska frågeställningar.

För första gången någonsin är alla bidrag i en volym av Scripta Islandica på engelska. Det kan ses som en del av jubileumsnumrets internationella karaktär och av tidskriftens internationalisering överlag. Men internationell är inte detsamma som ickesvensk. Scripta Islandica förblir en svensk tidskrift. Svenska förblir ett vetenskapligt språk inom Islandsforskningen. Även fortsättningsvis kommer vi att publicera bidrag på svenska likaväl som på norska, danska, isländska, engelska och tyska.

Daniel Sävborg

To the letter
Philology as a core component of Old Norse studies[1]

SVANHILDUR ÓSKARSDÓTTIR

> But to shut manuscripts up in libraries abroad, where no one will ever be able to understand them, and thus keep useful sources away from capable readers forever – a practice, which out of ignorance has long been tolerated, to the great detriment of historical enquiry – is indeed not to preserve old lore but to destroy it.[2]

These are the words of Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson of Skálholt in a letter to Professor Villum Lange in Copenhagen, the librarian of King Frederik III, dated the 10th of July 1656. The letter accompanied several

[1] The following is a key-note paper given at the Fourteenth International Saga Conference in Uppsala, 10 August 2009. In preparing the paper for print I have not changed its form, except that I have added references and incorporated into the text some of the information which at the conference was conveyed through overhead slides. In the discussion following the paper, pertinent remarks were made by Hans Kuhn and Odd Einar Haugen, among others. Kuhn reminded me of the negligence we continue to show to *rímur*, and I have taken his remark on board in the revision of the lecture, while Haugen took up the question of how we can raise funds to finance editorial work. That is a central problem related to the low status editions and editorial work occupy within the academic hierarchy, a condition that needs to be challenged at every opportunity (within funding bodies, in academic committees etc.). But I would also like to stress that, in my view, working on editions is not a question of either/or. Rather, editorial work should form a part of every Old Norse specialist's training and they should subsequently reckon editing to be one of the avenues for their scholarship, not the only outlet. When involving graduate students and post-doctoral researchers in editorial projects, it is important that they be able to define, within the overall project, a sub-project they can make their own and which may result in an independent publication, enhancing their chances in the competitive job market.

[2] 'At in bibliothecas exteras codices mutos compingere, ubi a nullo unqvam intelligentur, atqve ita materiam modo non desperatam ab idoneis lectoribus æterno divortio removere, qvod hactenus magno antiqvitatum malo per imprudentiam admissum est, id vero antiqvitates non conservare sed extingvere est.' Úr bréfabókum Brynjólfs biskups Sveinssonar. Ed. Jón Helgason. 1942. Copenhagen. (Safn Fræðafélagsins um Ísland og Íslendinga 12.) P. 72. I am indebted to my colleague Margrét Eggertsdóttir for directing me to this source.

manuscripts, one of them probably Flateyjarbók, which the bishop sent to the king in response to a request for old books for the royal library. This statement follows from Brynjólfur's urging that the texts contained in the Icelandic manuscripts be published, in the original language as well as in Latin translation.

I find it easy to concur with Brynjólfur that it is the obligation of institutions which preserve important documents that are of potential interest to a wider circle of people to make these available. Since Brynjólfur was writing before the time of photographic reproduction, the medium he envisages is the printed edition. One might therefore, somewhat hastily, assume that were Brynjólfur among us today, he would consider his wishes fulfilled by the project that is under way at the two Arnamagnæan institutes and involves photographing the collection digitally and making the images available over the internet. Scrutiny of the letter reveals, however, that, in Brynjólfur's view, there was more at stake. The scenario he pictures in the quotation is of mute books stored away from their interpreters. The words on the pages will not be heard unless they find their mediator, a human mind that is able to convey their meaning to the wider world. Brynjólfur mentions Latin translations, and translations are of course an important element in the transmission of Old Norse texts. But because my time is limited here today, I shall have to leave these outside my main focus. I want, instead, to use Brynjólfur's letter as a starting point for a discussion of palaeography, textual criticism, textual commentary and the practice of editing – a discussion of *philology* in other words, where philology is seen to encompass all the fields I mentioned. (This is philology in a wide sense, a definition I have adopted from Jakob Benediktsson's article Textafræði, which formed a part of the syllabus when I began my studies at the University of Iceland in the 1980s.[3]) Let us return to Brynjólfur's letter to Lange:

> And, in fact, no one, no matter how great his learning, erudition, ingenuity or discernment, has ever been able to interpret the spirit of these sources truthfully, except those of Icelandic extraction who are well versed in these matters, having studied them thoroughly.[4]

[3] Jakob Benediktsson, 1981: Textafræði. In: Mál og túlkun. Ed. Páll Skúlason. Reykjavík. Pp. 19–37.

[4] 'Nemo etenim unqvam cujuscunqve doctrinæ, eruditionis, ingenii, judicii vir fuerit, qvi animam illis monumentis, nisi Islandus oriundo nationeqve, isqve tantum probe in his tritus versatusqve, serio bonaqve fide reddiderit.' Úr Bréfabókum Brynjólfs biskups Sveinssonar. P. 72.

We see here, more explicitly, the idea that the spirit (*anima*) of the texts can only be restored through the agency of the interpretive mind. The verb Brynjólfur uses is *reddo*, which can mean "to restore, render, interpret, translate". In Brynjólfur's view, the interpretation of these sources presupposes intimate knowledge of them acquired by thorough study, and he reckons such knowledge to be exclusive to Icelanders. It is a pleasure to be able to disagree with that last part. This conference is in itself a testament to the fact that the study of Old Norse texts would never have blossomed into the extensive and multifaceted field of enquiry that it is today, had not scholars outside my native land taken interest in the subject and brought their learning and experience to bear on the interpretation of these texts. And since we are all in this together, the matter of text editions should concern us all.

Brynjólfur did not live to see his ambitious dream of text editions fulfilled, but had he risen from his grave in the nineteenth century, he would most certainly have appreciated what he saw. And had he met the phenomenally industrious Norwegian Carl Richard Unger (1817–97), I suspect he would instantly have modified his stance on the superiority of native Icelanders as text editors.

Over a period of thirty years, from 1847–1877, Unger produced a major edition just about every year, and sometimes more than one. At the beginning of his career he also became involved in the editing of Diplomatarium Norvegicum and he went on to co-edit the first fifteen volumes, the last instalment of which came out after his death in 1897. (As if this weren't enough, he put in a lot of work for Johan Fritzner, especially when the dictionary was revised for its second edition. Fritzner died before that task was finished, so it was left to Unger to see it through press.) This output is remarkable, but what is equally remarkable (and some might say worrying) is that some of these volumes still serve as the standard editions of the works in question, as is evidenced by the fact that several of them appear in bibliographies accompanying papers in the preprints for this conference.

Unger's was a remarkable achievement – and he was a conscientious editor. But he did not have access to all the manuscript material that is now available and further research into manuscript transmission has also meant that there are reasons for revising the premises for his editions. It is perhaps instructive to note that the most substantial

Table 1. Unger's phenomenal output

1847	Fagrskinna (with P. A. Munch) Oldnorsk læsebog (with Munch) Det oldnorske sprogs eller norrönsprogets grammatik Den ældre edda (Munch with Unger)
1848	Alexanders saga Konungs skuggsjá (with Munch and R. Keyser)
1849	Ólafs saga hins helga (with Keyser)
1850	Strengleikar (with Keyser)
1851	Baarlams saga ok Jósaphats (with Keyser)
1853	Ólafs saga helga sérstaka (with Munch) Þiðreks saga
1860	Karlamagnús saga Flateyjarbók I (with Guðbrandur Vigfússon)
1862	Stjórn Flateyjarbók II (with Guðbrandur Vigfússon)
1863	Oldnordisk læsebog (new edition)
1864	Gammel norsk homiliebog
1867	Morkinskinna
1868	Flateyjarbók III (with Guðbrandur Vigfússon) Heimskringla
1869	Thomas saga erkibyskups
1871	Maríu saga Codex Frisianus
1873	Konunga sögur: sagaer om Sverre og hans efterfølgere
1874	Postola sögur
1877	Heilagra manna sögur

revision of Unger's work has been in the edition of *konungasögur*, and many of the critical editions we rely on there are the work of Finnur Jónsson, which means that they are also somewhat dated.

So, one might ask, did nothing happen in the twentieth century? And the answer would be: on the contrary, a great deal happened – but not all of it was conducive to editing projects. Before I proceed to a brief discussion of the development of twentieth-century scholarship, let's take a look at one *blómaskeið* – the 1960s, the apex of the editorial activity associated with Professor Jón Helgason in Copenhagen. Jón Helgason established the series Editiones arnamagnæanæ in the 1950s against the backdrop of the dispute between Denmark and Iceland over Icelandic manuscripts in Danish libraries. These were good times to gain financial

support for the publication of editions and the output in the first decade or so was impressive.

Table 2. Volumes published in the two series of Editiones arnamagnæanæ in the 1960s. In addition, ten volumes appeared during the decade in the two facsimile series Manuscripta Islandica and Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile.

	Series A	**Series B**
1960	Alkuin (Widding) Membrana regia deperdita (Loth) Harðar saga (Hast)	Hrólfs saga kraka (Slay) Gibbons saga (Page)
1961	Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta II (Ólafur Halldórsson)	
1962		Hemings þáttr (Fellows-Jensen) Íslenzk fornkvæði I–III (Jón Helgason) Late medieval romances I (Loth)
1963	Islandske originaldiplomer (Stefán Karlsson) Trójumanna saga (Louis-Jensen)	Life of St Gregory/Dialogues (Hreinn Benediktsson) Dunstanus saga (Fell) Íslenzk fornkvæði IV Late medieval romances II–III
1964		Late medieval romances IV
1965		Erex saga (Blaisdell) Íslenzk fornkvæði V Late medieval romances V
1967		Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar B (Hasle)
1968		History of the Cross-Tree (Overgaard) Íslenzk fornkvæði VI

As with Unger's output, there was a steady flow of editions over these years, and in some years several volumes were issued. The obvious contrast with the Unger list is that here we see several editors involved, working individually – although everyone knows that Jón Helgason, who acted as series editor, had considerable input in all these editions. The Icelandic-Danish dispute over the manuscripts not only strengthened Jón Helgason's base in Copenhagen, but in Reykjavík it led to the establishment of Handritastofnun Íslands, which later became Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi (now part of Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum). The Reykjavík institute soon established its own series of critical text editions, and it was also, like its sister institute in Copenhagen, involved in the production of facsimile editions. The two in-

stitutes have kept their series of editions going, but there is no denying that the collective output has never again reached the heights of the swinging sixties.

We are, it seems to me, in the middle of a strange paradox: the worldwide interest in Old Norse texts seems to be greater than ever before – as the record number of participants at this conference seems to bear out; this interest has spread to cover more genres than in the past; and the development in electronic text-processing is gradually opening up possibilities of transmitting these texts in new, revolutionary ways. At the same time the production of text editions seems to be grinding slowly to a halt. There are telling exceptions to this, the most obvious one being the Skaldic editing project, which I will return to later on. But the pessimistic (and by no means unrealistic) view is that we will continue to rely on Unger and Finnur Jónsson for decades to come unless we begin to see some change in the way we go about these things.

So, why were Unger and Finnur able to do what we don't seem to manage – produce editions, based directly on manuscript evidence, for students and scholars, on which other (popular) editions and translations could then be based? There are historical, ideological, and university-politics related reasons for this, many of which were discussed by some of our Swedish hosts and their guests at a symposium held in Gothenburg a decade ago under the heading "Den fornnordiska texten i filologisk och litteraturvetenskaplig belysning". In the proceedings from this symposium one encounters a lively discussion of the role of philology and textual editing in our field, a discussion I feel needs to be ongoing and in which more people need to become involved.[5] In their introduction to the proceedings,, Lars Lönnroth and Karl Gunnar Johansson lament the gulf that has evolved between what they term philology (and they use it in a narrower sense than I do, as referring predominantly to linguistically oriented textual criticism) and literary studies (*litteraturvetenskap*). This gulf is largely due to the ever- increasing specialization witnessed by the twentieth century, specialization which has had consequences which are good as well as bad.

Our good man Unger, whose editorial production was no doubt close-

[5] Cf. Den fornnordiska texten i filologisk och litteraturvetenskaplig belysning. Studier och diskussionsinlägg redigerade av Kristinn Jóhannesson, Karl G. Johansson och Lars Lönnroth. 2000. Göteborg. (Gothenburg Old Norse Studies 2.)

ly linked to his teaching of Old Norse, was professor not only of Germanic philology but also of Romance philology, and would give lectures on, for instance, Shakespeare and Cervantes as well as on Old Norse language and literature.[6] The large scope of his learning is typical of the nineteenth century – the great age of comparative studies of many kinds, not least in folklore and linguistics; and the nineteenth century was of course also the age of the stemma. Thanks to Karl Lachmann, his predecessors, contemporaries and successors, the methodology of textual criticism was refined and the seeds for the controversy between a positivist approach and the hermeneutic view of editing were sown.[7] On the practical side, this meant that demands for methodological accuracy of textual editions became more stringent and in Old Norse studies that development culminated in the Helgasonian school. Jón Helgason insisted that editors should survey all existing manuscripts of a given text – even young paper manuscripts – in order to establish the history of the transmission and justify the choice of a main text. This insistence can be seen, as M. J. Driscoll has pointed out, as a reaction to the shortcomings of Finnur Jónsson's editions, where younger manuscripts were often discounted as a matter of course.[8] The Arnamagnæan editions were thus a step forward in that they were based on a more solid methodological ground. Arnamagnæan oral tradition has it that Jón Helgason's chief concern was to get the texts themselves printed according to his standards, and that he cared less about the contents and quality of the introductions that accompanied them. Many of the volumes in the B-series of Editiones originated as student projects – mostly *magister* projects by Jón Helgason's students and MA or PhD projects by students from Britain – and the introductions could therefore take on variant forms although some treatment of the manuscript transmission was a *sine qua non*.

What I find quite striking when viewing the entire list of Arnamag-

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[6] Cf. Heyerdal, Gerd Høst, 1975: Unger, Carl Richard. In: Norsk biografisk leksikon 17. Ed. J. Jansen and Ø. Anker. Oslo. Pp. 391–96.

[7] The literature on editorial theory is extensive and there is no room here for a lengthy list of references, but for an overview of some of the issues involved see G. Thomas Tanselle, 1995: The Varieties of Scholarly Editing (In: Scholarly Editing. A Guide to Research. Ed. D.C. Greetham. New York. Pp. 9–29), and Greetham's own treatment in his Textual Scholarship. An Introduction. 1992. New York.

[8] M.J. Driscoll [forthcoming]: The words on the page: Thoughts on philology, old and new. In: Creating the medieval saga: Versions, variability, and editorial interpretations of Old Norse saga literature. Ed. J. Quinn and E. Lethbridge. Odense.

næan editions (till the present day) is that most of the editors who cut their teeth working on a text for Editiones B seem not to have bitten into any Old Norse text since – many of them became university teachers in the field but did not produce any further editions. Could it be that they had had enough? Was one of the reasons that topics that appealed to them and they wanted to address had been banished from the 'standard edition'? I am sure there was never any formal decree stipulating what could or could not be included in an Arnamagnæan introduction but the tendency was definitely towards linguistic minutiae and away from any literary pronouncement. It is possible to pick up one of these volumes and search in vain for any information about the literary origins and characteristics of the text in question. One thinks of poor old Brynjólfur again and his ambition to have the *spirit* of the texts restored. The editions became increasingly specialized and geared more towards the needs of scholars interested in the history of the language. That, however, was not enough to draw in new generations of linguists. They had been moving away from an historical approach to language since Saussurian linguistics gained ground and, as Henrik Williams pointed out in his paper at the Gothenburg symposium, those interested in the Scandinavian languages tend nowadays to be linguists first, *nordister* second.[9]

On the literary front there were also developments that changed the circumstances for textual editing and in fact changed the whole definition of what constitutes a text. New criticism arrived with its reaction against the biographical approach to literary studies. The sixties and the seventies came with structuralism, oral-formulaic theory, anthropological approaches and an inclination to read the texts as evidence of the society that produced them.[10] University syllabuses changed drastically in the 1970s as the content of degree programmes was redefined. Old languages did not do well out of that shake-up. The scholars who represented fresh ideas or new approaches and who were most likely to inspire new generations of students did not do philology. Philologists withdrew into their shell and their defence sometimes took the form of shrouding their activities in mystery, giving the impression that dealing with manuscripts was only for the hardiest of souls – or possibly only for curmudgeons. Philology had developed a serious image-problem, as Odd Einar

[9] Williams, Henrik, 2000: Framtidens fornnordiska filologi: etymologisk exempelsamling eller litteraturteoretisk lekstuga? In: Den fornnordiska texten, pp. 5–16; 6.

[10] This is admirably summarized by Lönnroth and Johansson in their introduction, cf. Den fornnordiska texten, pp. 1–4.

Haugen noted very succinctly in his Gothenburg paper: Philology was seen as elitist and monumental, obsessed with narrow detail and archetypes.[11] In short: it was out of date and out of touch. *Boring*.

At this point one has to pinch one's arm – are we not talking about incredibly important texts preserved in old manuscripts, each different from the other, each with its fascinating history? How could it have come to this? Show a moderately curious person a manuscript and he or she is invariably smitten, drawn towards its peculiarity, its message, the miracle of its existence. Verily I say unto you: Those medievalists who deny themselves the opportunity to work with manuscripts are losing out on one of the greatest pleasures they can have with their clothes on.

I confess that I borrowed this last sentence from Nigel Slater, the English cookery writer (although he was obviously not talking about manuscripts and medievalists).[12] And there are, I believe, some further parallels between cooking and textual editing in modern times. We all need editions as we all need nourishing food. But who is going to do the cooking? For the best part of the twentieth century, everyday cooking was done by housewives, whose job was invisible in society and not valued. Nowadays, cooking is largely thought of as a pleasant and creative, albeit necessary, activity – a sociable thing, the source of pride for individuals, males and females alike. We need a similar seismic shift of attitudes towards the editing of Old Norse texts. For even though the entire scholarly community is dependant on editions, it is difficult to get them done. People are reluctant to give up the time and energy to produce them, which is understandable since there is comparatively little remuneration on offer – there are few brownie points to be had for an edition (if you count the hours spent on it) compared with an article or a monograph. And is it not also conceivable that we, as a scholarly community, almost look down on editorial work – in our hearts we don't believe it is real scholarship and therefore worthy of our efforts. But, if we are not to subsist on a diet of Unger and Finnur, with a few more recent editions thrown in, we need to change the way we think, and the way we behave. There will of course always be those who can't cook or won't cook. And that's fine, as long as the majority of us manage to discover the pleasure

[11] Haugen, Odd Einar, 2000: Fem argument mot filologien. In: Den fornnordiska texten, pp. 17–26.
[12] Slater, Nigel, 2000: Appetite. London. P. 10.

involved in preparing a long-neglected text for consumption. And there is no shortage of texts in need of attention – we can mention whole genres: *postola sögur* (among which are some of the oldest preserved texts in Old Norse), *rímur* (a vast corpus of which only a fraction has been published), *fornaldarsögur* (mostly extant in inadequate nineteenth-century editions). And we can mention individual works, some of them from the core of the traditional canon: Heimskringla, Vápnfirðinga saga, Reykdæla saga, Laxdæla saga, Grettis saga. Yes, even Brennu-Njáls saga.

These are only examples: the list could go on. I do not want to suggest that all of these texts have been utterly neglected; a monograph on the manuscript tradition of Heimskringla was published recently[13] and there are significant stirrings on the *fornaldarsögur* front.[14] We are, however, still dependent on old editions of these texts. It happens too often that research into the manuscript transmission of texts does not translate into an edition for us to use. My heart sinks every time I hear of a thesis that is an excellent first step towards opening up a neglected text, but is destined to languish in a drawer for time immemorial while the author turns to other tasks. Why does this happen so frequently? One keyword here is *individualism*.

One of the main reasons, I believe, for the bankruptcy (if that is not too strong a word) of the Arnamagnæan approach to editing is the fact that projects have been the responsibility of individuals. The ever-increasing demands that every stone be turned have blown the edition of even the shortest of texts into a gigantic task that requires years of solitary confinement to complete. No sane person wants to spend her life like that. And why should she? Modern editorial projects should be defined as group projects. Not only will this save editors from depression and loneliness, but it will increase the likelihood of the projects making it past the goalposts, of editions actually materializing, and – last but not least – it is the only way out of the prison of specialization. By bringing together the efforts of a group of people and pooling resources, we can have our cake and eat it – we can fulfill the modern criteria for accuracy

[13] Jørgensen, Jon Gunnar, 2007: The lost vellum Kringla. Copenhagen. (Bibliotheca arnamagnæana 45.)

[14] Cf. for instance recent conferences in Uppsala (2001), Copenhagen (2005) and Reykjavík (2009) and the resulting publications (Fornaldarsagornar struktur och ideologi, Uppsala 2003, and Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og virkelighed, Copenhagen 2009, both volumes ed. Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen and Agneta Ney).

and transparency in the presentation of the manuscript evidence, but we can also unite the world of nineteenth-century philologists and the interests of the many branches of twentieth-century scholarship. This is because every member of the group will wear the cloak of the philologist as well as being a linguist, or a historian, a literary historian, or art historian. The collective work on the text will inform the studies of the individuals, and their various expertise will bring valuable insights and interpretations which will be fed into the commentary on the texts.

Is this an illusion? You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I think the new edition of Skaldic poetry that is underway is an important step in this new direction (http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au). This brings together scholars from all corners of the world to tackle collectively the considerable task of replacing Finnur Jónsson's edition. It has rescued several PhD theses from oblivion. And it is also a significant milestone because it combines a printed edition with electronic resources. The Skaldic edition teaches us an important lesson on what can be achieved if people work together, but it is still only a halfway house in the sense that the contributing editors work mostly, I believe, individually. The corpus has been divided between them and each editor tackles his or her bit. This is a fully valid mode to proceed but I would like to advocate here a model that goes a step further and presupposes several people working together on the same text (or rather texts of the same work). Such an approach is being experimented with at the institution that is the International Summer School in Manuscript Studies.[15] The summer school began as a suggestion made by Herbert Wäckerlin of Zürich university to two of our colleagues, Matthew Driscoll and Stefanie Gropper. He suggested there was a need for a course introducing graduate students in Old Norse to palaeography and manuscript studies in general. Driscoll and Gropper responded by saying 'Let's do it', got me onboard, and we held the first summer school in Copenhagen in 2004. We had no idea what to expect, but to cut a long story short, the enthusiasm and engagement of our students has cemented my belief that there is hardly a person in our field who does not enjoy working with manuscripts. The students keep coming back for more, which has led to the formation of groups that tackle the edition of a single work with the assistance of a senior scholar or two.

[15] It is run by the two Arnamagnæan institutes in collaboration with the National and University Library in Iceland and the universities of Zürich, Tübingen and Cambridge.

The first such group, initially made up of eight young scholars[16] from Britain, Germany and Switzerland, has been working on an edition of Margrétar saga III. I have been their assistant together with Michael Chesnutt and Jonna Louis-Jensen, and working with these hardworking young people has been encouraging and very illuminating in the best sense of the word. We have had a lot of fun, a fair amount of disagreement and our share of the frustrations and epiphanies that go with the territory.

The choice of Margrétar saga III was largely fortuitous: my eyes fell upon it because it was an unedited text, but it had the advantage that its transmission had been studied by Peter Rasmussen back in the seventies.[17] We could therefore retrace Rasmussen's steps and, when satisfied that we were standing on a sound basis, produce our own edition of the text. None of the students who formed the group had any particular interest in saints' lives. They soon, however, became immersed in their task, and found that the manuscripts and their text held a lot of interesting aspects. Some of the manuscripts have drawings in the margins. The language of the translation is rich – the group had, for instance, the satisfaction of discovering a word which had not been recorded by the Dictionary of Old Norse Prose, and seeing it added to the database. All the extant manuscripts are incomplete, so choosing a main text has not been a straightforward case. And there has been much healthy discussion on what form the edition should take – resulting in a decision to produce a printed edition with critical apparatus as well as depositing the marked-up text of two of the main sources in the MENOTA electronic archive. When I asked some members of the group to comment on the experience, they mentioned that working on a text that was not on their everyday menu had been surprisingly enjoyable and made them more aware of the many dimensions of Old Norse culture. They all agreed that studying the manuscript sources gives them the satisfaction of getting to the core of the text; it means peeling away intermediaries and forces them to confront the material directly, to interpret it for themselves. And (and this may surprise you): finding out that a lot of the work is mundane is reassuring, de-mystifying. It also alerts students to the limits of editions. One of them said, 'I tend to seek perfection and it is good for me to see

[16] They are Astrid Erismann, Sarah Gaffuri, Simone Horst, Helen Imhoff, Vera Johanterwage, Emily Lethbridge, Jonjo Roberts and Ludger Zeevaert.

[17] Rasmussen, Peter, 1977: Tekstforholdene i Margrétar saga. Specialeafhandling til magisterkonferens i nordisk filologi ved Københavns Universitet. [Unpublished dissertation.]

that it is impossible to achieve perfection in this kind of work.' So, contrary to the claims of detractors that philology narrows the mind, the experience of our summerschoolers, generally, I think, is that it broadens their horizons.

And the main thing is: anyone can do it. The only prerequisite is a knowledge of the language – a skill that is necessary anyway for any person who intends to become seriously involved in Old Norse studies. The flip-side of that coin is that one's knowledge of the language is greatly enhanced by grappling with editing texts. So it works both ways and gradually one becomes more adept. However, the basic responsibility for language acquisition lies with all your universities. It is vital to preserve the teaching of Old Norse/Icelandic language in as many places as possible. And when students have progressed beyond the initial stage, it is desirable that editing projects be accepted as part of their degrees.

But if we, as a community, embrace the idea that anyone can do philology, and anyone can – and should – produce editions, it follows that we must become more tolerant of different types of editions. There are many ways to edit texts and the contents and the extent of the accompanying luggage, commentary et cetera can vary greatly.

And then there is cyberspace. The development in the electronic processing of texts and the creation of the worldwide web has transformed the possibilities for disseminating manuscripts and the material they contain. Our views on what we do and our methods are necessarily influenced, limited or conditioned by the tools at our disposal. Technological innovations invite us to re-examine our attitude to our work and the material we work with.[18] As matters now stand, one might describe the status as regards electronic editing of Old Norse manuscripts something like this: a vast new building is arising in front of us, its layout very different from what we are accustomed to. A few of our number have entered the hallway but the majority are still standing outside wondering whether to put their best foot forward and cross the threshold. I think we ought to be very grateful to those colleagues of ours who have led the way into the new era, for instance by taking part in the development of international standards for marking-up texts – I refer here primarily to the Text Encoding Initiative – and by working assiduously towards es-

[18] For a concise discussion of the potentials (and pitfalls) of electronic editing see Peter L. Shillingsburg, 2006: From Gutenberg to Google. Electronic Representations of Literary Texts. Cambridge.

tablishing the Medieval Nordic Text Archive MENOTA (http://www.menota.org/). A lot of effort has gone into grappling with theoretical issues and solving technical problems, and there now exist fairly user-friendly tools and methods to mark up the text of whatever manuscript that takes one's fancy and display it on the internet. It is now relatively uncomplicated to produce on-line what Odd Einar Haugen terms monotypic editions,[19] i.e. editions of a single manuscript, and they are starting to build up in the MENOTA archive. A focus on single manuscripts has become more common lately, due to the shift in manuscript studies associated with New or Material Philology. Such studies and editions are definitely to be welcomed but there will also be demand for editions that embrace the entire corpus of a given text and give the reader some advice as to how to approach it. We are, it seems to me, still some way away from more complicated electronic editions, those where the various manuscript sources of a given text are linked together, giving the user a map of the manuscript transmission; where the user is able to explore all variant readings in order to choose any of the manuscripts as his/her main text; to compare two or more texts side by side; to access extensive commentary and consult an annotated bibliography. The vision for an edition of the *fornaldarsögur* which Matthew Driscoll outlined in his paper at this conference is one scenario of this kind and, as Driscoll mentions, the technology already exists.[20] There are, however, not many such projects that have yet been carried out in the field of medieval studies – the one best known to me is the Canterbury Tales project that Peter Robinson in Birmingham and his associates have been working on (http://www.canterburytalesproject.org/). I am certain that we will manage to launch ambitious projects like that in the future. But such an undertaking is not merely a question of acquiring the technical skills and building the right software. Producing editions will still be, in essence, practising philology. Granted, its practitioners need to acquire skills to fit the medium (learning to mark-up etc.), but the most important thing is that they have the desire to bring the text to a wider audience and

[19] Haugen, Odd Einar, 2003: The spirit of Lachmann, the spirit of Bédier: Old Norse textual editing in the electronic age. Paper read at the annual meeting of The Viking Society, University College London, 8 November 2002. Electronic version, 20 January 2003 (http://www.ub.uib.no/elpub/2003/a/522001/haugen.pdf). P. 16. Accessed 23 October 2009.

[20] Driscoll, Matthew J., 2009: Editing the Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda. In: Á austrvega. Saga and East Scandinavia. Preprint papers of The 14th International Saga Conference Uppsala 9th–15th August 2009. Vol. 1. Gävle. Pp. 207–212.

that they feel they have something to say about the text and the manuscripts that contain it. Electronic editions must **not** become yet another area of specialization, where we have on the one side a small band of experts who know all about how to produce them – in theory – and on the other hand a handful of ageing philologists who are supposed to be the practitioners but haven't a clue how to orientate themselves in the unfamiliar building. Theory and practice must go hand in hand. And practical considerations must be given attention. If editorial projects are to be realistic, a balance must be struck between possibility and feasibility. There is hardly a limit to the detail one can get into when editing and commentating a text. This holds true for printed editions, and in the electronic world the possibilities have multiplied. You can tag yourself to death. Let's not lose the will to live.

We are understandably excited by the revolution of electronic media. As of yet, though, the printed book is still alive. I see nothing intrinsically wrong with continuing to produce editions on paper, alongside any electronic development. (One might say it's a little bit like the co-existence of runes alongside the innovation that was the roman alphabet.) What we must not do is sit around scared to start any new project because we fear that when we have finished it, our methods or the technology will be out of date, or that something better will have come along, rendering our edition obsolete. Editions only become truly obsolete when new editors manage to improve the philological **content** on all counts, that is to provide a more accurate reading of the manuscripts, to explain their relationship better, to provide a better historical context, a closer analysis of the language, and a superior or more extensive commentary on the literary aspects of the text. As Finnur Jónsson's editions superseded some of Unger's work, the Skaldic project is superseding some of Finnur's. And so it must continue.

Every person in this auditorium knows the meaning of the word philology. It means love of words. So let's do it – let's fall in love.

Summary

This article reviews the position of text editions in the field of Old Norse studies and argues the need for a revival. As it is, scholars often have to rely on the work of nineteenth-century editors, and although the Arnamagnæan institutes in Reykjavík and Copenhagen have ventured to carry on the ambitious projects begun in

the heyday of the cultural-political strife over the Icelandic manuscripts, they have not managed to keep up the impressive output of the 1960s. Meanwhile, both the theory and the practice of textual editing have undergone significant changes. There are different views on what constitutes a text; manuscripts are scrutinized in new ways; the printed book is no longer the only – not even the preferred – medium for editions; and last, but not least, the concept of collaboration has acquired a whole new significance in the age of the internet. These issues have consequences for the ways in which editions of Old Norse texts are to be produced. The author argues that editorial work should not be seen as an area of specialization within Old Norse studies, but rather that scholars and students should generally see it as one of their tasks to participate in the editing of texts.

Ynglingatal – A Minimalist Interpretation[1]

JOHN MCKINNELL

Ynglingatal (*Yt.*) is usually read alongside the prose material on early Swedish and Norwegian kings in *Ynglinga saga* (*YS*), Ari's *Íslendingabók*, *Historia Norwegiæ* (*HN*) and *Af Upplendinga konungum*.[2] Unfortunately, this has contributed to some muddled thought about the date and purport of the poem, and in this paper I will confine myself as far as possible to the poetic text itself. Admittedly, we depend on the prose writers for the preservation and order of the poem's stanzas, since Þjóðólfr (as I shall call the poet) does not explicitly say that any king is the *immediate* successor of any other. Nor can we be sure that the poem is complete, though the near unanimity of the prose sources about the sequence of kings suggests that by the mid-twelfth century the number and order of stanzas was virtually the same as we know now.

Two couplets were probably added by later medieval revisers to enhance the reputations of the last two kings. At the end of the description of Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr (st. 35) Flateyjarbók adds:

godum likr	like the gods
ok grenlandz fylke.	(he) also (ruled) the district of Grenland.

The noun *fylki* was not applied to districts of Norway before about 1200, so this must be a late addition;[3] Bergsveinn Birgisson has argued effectively that it is part of an attempt to present Óláfr as a virtuous forerunner of his two great Christian namesakes, Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr inn

[1] I would like to thank Margaret Clunies Ross and an anonymous reviewer for valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper.

[2] See respectively ÍF 1, 27–28; Storm, ed. (1880), 97–99 and Kunin, trans. (2001), 12–13; *FSN* II, 153–55.

[3] See ÍF 26, 82; Bergsveinn Birgisson (2007), 390 also argues that the form *líkr* is a sign of late date, but one would expect a late-14th century manuscript to prefer this spelling even if its exemplar had *glíkr*. The word itself appears in earlier poetry, e.g. as *glíkr* in Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, *Óláfsdrápa* 29,5 (*Skj.* I A, 166; I B, 157; shortly after 1000), while both spellings are found in MSS of Arnórr jarlaskáld, *Magnússdrápa hrynhend* 10,8 and 16,5 (*Skj.* I A, 335, 337; I B, 308, 310; ca. 1046.

helgi. More doubtfully, in st. 37 Codex Frisianus has an extra couplet in praise of Rǫgnvaldr heiðumhárr:[4]

ok milldgeðr	and (he is called) generous-natured
markar drottiN.	lord of the forest/borderland.

This could be original, since only two manuscripts preserve this stanza and Codex Frisianus is as good a witness as Jǫfraskinna, but most editors regard it as a later addition.

It does seem generally possible to disentangle the poem from the twelfth- and thirteenth-century prose accounts, but Claus Krag has maintained that *Yt.* itself dates from the later twelfth century; his major arguments are:

1. That the fire-kennings *sævar niðr* [kinsman of the sea] (st. 4,3) and *sonr Fornjóts* [son of Fornjótr] (st. 29,7) show knowledge of the classical idea of the four elements,[5] and that each of the first four kings in the poem dies through the agency of a different element.[6] In ch. 1 of *Hversu Nóregr Byggðist*,[7] Fornjótr (taken by Krag to mean 'ancient giant')[8] is the father of Hlér, Logi and Kári ['Sea', 'Flame' and 'Wind']; Krag identifies him with Ymir, from whose body the world was made, and associates him with earth. Elsewhere in poetry, *Fornjótr* appears as father of the winds in a late-eleventh-century *lausavísa*[9] and in a list of giant-names in the *þulur*.[10] It seems to mean simply 'giant', so *sonr Fornjóts* could alternatively mean 'son of the fire-giant Surtr', and *sævar niðr* 'kinsman of Ægir' (seen as another giant, and therefore related to Surtr). The claim about the first four kings in *Yt.* is similarly doubtful. Vísburr is certainly destroyed by fire (st. 4) and the vat of drink in which Fjǫlnir drowns and the rock into which Sveigðir pursues the dwarf (stt. 1–2) might possibly represent water and earth, but the association of Vanlandi's death with air depends on him being smothered by the supernatural *mara* sent to afflict him – a detail which appears only in *HN* and *YS* ch. 13 (ÍF 26, 29). The verb used in *Yt.* 3,6 is *troða* [to trample], which implies crushing rather

[4] Jǫfraskinna itself does not survive, but J1 (AM 37 fol.) and J2 (AM 38 fol.) are probably reliable copies of it.
[5] Krag (1991), 52–58.
[6] Krag (1991), 60–67.
[7] *FSN* II, 137.
[8] *AEW* 138–9 also suggests the derivations *for-njótr* ['ancient possessor' or 'destroyer'], or, less probably, *forn-njótr* [receiver of sacrifice]. The sense 'destroyer' would apply better to Surtr than to Ymir, while the interpretation 'ancient giant' might refer to either, though more obviously to Ymir.
[9] Sveinn 2,2 (*Skj.* I B, 388).
[10] *Þula IV b* 3,5 (*Skj.* I B, 659).

than smothering. It seems probable that the primeval figures of *Hversu Nóregr Byggðist* represent an indigenous Germanic view of the three destructive forces of nature – sea, fire and storm – rather than the idea of the four elements.[11]

2. That heathen deities are regarded as devils at two points in *Yt.*[12] Krag regards Aun (stt. 15–16) as a heathen magus who makes a pact with the devil (in the form of Óðinn) to achieve an unnaturally long life for himself by sacrificing his sons. *Yt.* 16,6 describes Aun as *áttunga hrjóðr* [destroyer of his offspring], but the sacrifice to Óðinn comes from *YS* ch. 25 (ÍF 26, 48–49), and the identification of Óðinn with the devil is Krag's own interpretation. He also assumes that the *vitta véttr* [magic-working creature] who causes Aðils to fall fatally from his horse in st. 21 is the devil in the form of Freyja. This builds on *HN*, which says that Aðils, 'fleeing from idolatrous sacrifice, fell from his horse in front of the temple of Diana and died', a story which is not mentioned in *Yt.*; again, the identifications of 'Diana' with Freyja and the devil are due to Krag himself.

3. That the last stanzas of *Yt.* associate the kings with Vestfold because the Norwegian kings of the later twelfth century wanted to counter Danish claims to lordship in that area by stressing that their own ancestors had controlled it in ancient times.[13] But this relies on linking the kings in *Yt.* to the Norwegian royal family descended from Hálfdan svarti and Haraldr hárfagri, as is done in *HN* and *YS* chs. 48–49 (ÍF 26, 80–82). *Yt.* never mentions either Hálfdan or Haraldr, so it would be useless as support for a claim to lordship of Vestfold by their descendants.

None of this proves that *Yt.* dates from ca. 900, as its attribution to Þjóðólfr implies, but only that if one relies on details derived from twelfth and thirteenth-century sources one will naturally arrive at a twelfth- or thirteenth-century dating.[14] Leaving aside the question of the poem's date, it

[11] See Meulengracht Sørensen (1993).
[12] Krag (1991), 67–72.
[13] Krag (1991), 132–143, cf. Skre (2007), 410–12.
[14] Skre (2007) reviews Krag's arguments and concludes that the traditional dating of the poem is probable; Sapp (2000) compares the uses of the expletive particle and the distribution of A- and B-type lines in *Yt.* with those in other poems in *kviðuháttr*, and concludes that in both respects it resembles the tenth-century *Sonatorrek* and *Arinbjarnarkviða* rather than the twelfth- and thirteenth-century *Nóregs konungatal* and *Hákonarkviða*.

seems to be made up of three or four fairly distinct blocks, connected by two 'link' figures, which probably reflect different oral sources. These do not include the gods: there are four generalised references to divine descent – e.g. Aðils is called *Freys áttungr* (21,7) – but unlike the prose accounts, *Yt.* does not claim that any king is actually the son of a god.[15]

The final section of the poem lists Þjóðólfr's presumed patron, Rǫgnvaldr heiðumhárr and his five immediate predecessors (Appendix I A). With the probable exception of Guðrøðr, none of the five dead kings here is known from any source that is clearly independent of *Yt.*,[16] and except for Guðrøðr, they all die rather banal deaths, or have no stated cause of death. But they all have exact places of burial (except Guðrøðr, who is probably assumed to be buried at Stiflusund, where he was killed); these are all in Vestfold and close to the sea, and four are said or implied to have mounds. None are cremated; this may suggest that burial of kings in mounds near water was normal in Þjóðólfr's own time, whereas cremation was seen as an ancient and/or Swedish practice.

This section may be derived from a claim of *óðal*-right over Vestfold, though one could hardly explain the whole poem in terms of such a claim, nor can it be established whether it was historically accurate or

[15] Wessén (1924, 53–63) also argues that *Yt.* is based on blocks of pre-existing tradition, and that the Vestfold kings found it advantageous to claim a historically spurious link with the prestigious Uppsala line; he thinks that their legendary history begins with Agni and his wife Skjǫlf, the earlier 'mythological' generations having been added later in five distinct stages, that the beginning of *Yt.* is lost, and that it originally began with Yngvi-Freyr.

[16] Frankish annals include several Scandinavian leaders called *Godefridus* (=ON *Guðfriðr*), one of whom may be the Guðrøðr of *Yt*: according to the contemporary *Annales Regni Francorum*, Godefridus *rex Danorum* returned from a raid on Frisia in 810 and was killed by one of his own servants; the same annal's entry for 813 says that during peace negotiations with Charlemagne, Godefridus's sons were not at home, *sed ad Westarfoldam cum exercitu profecti, quae regio ultima regni eorum inter septentrionem et occidentem sita ... cuius principes eis subici recusabant* [but had set out with an army for Vestfold, the furthest region of their realm, situated between north and west, ... whose chieftains were refusing to be subjected to them.] (ed. Pertz and Kurze (1895), 130, 138). Notker balbulus's *Gesta Karoli Magni Imperatoris* (Book II, ch. 13, written during the 880's) says that Godefridus *rex normannorum* 'king of the Norsemen' had invaded the Moselle region: *Cum vero falconem suum de aneta vellet extrahere, consecutus eum filius suus, cuius nuperrime matrem reliquit et alteram super eam duxit uxorem, per medium divisit* [Indeed, while he was trying to separate his falcon from a heron, one of his sons, whose mother he had recently abandoned in order to take another wife in her place, followed him and cut him in half.] (ed. Haefele (1962), XII–XVI, 76). Both stories show resemblances to the death of Guðrøðr in *Yt*., though the chronology implied in *Ynglinga saga* would place Guðrøðr's death about a generation later than 810. The *Annales Regni Francorum* seems to regard Godefridus and his sons as Danish, but Frankish sources often use the terms *Dani* and *Normanni* interchangeably, and it is hard to know how much historical reliance to place on this.

not. The oldest surviving Norwegian legal code (*Gulathingslog*) stipulates about people who wish to claim *óðal*-right:

> þeir scolo telja til langfeðra sinna V. Er átt hava. En sa hinn sette er bæðe atte at eigu oc at óðrle.[17]
>
> [that they must list five of their paternal ancestors who have possessed it, and the sixth who has possessed it as his possession and inheritance.]

The same requirement is observed in at least two Swedish runic inscriptions (Norra Sandsjö in Småland (Sm.71), where Ärnvard names himself and five paternal ancestors, and Malsta in Hälsingland (Hs.14), where Frömund names himself and six paternal ancestors).[18] It also underlies the brief enumeration of Óttarr's five immediate paternal ancestors in *Hyndluljóð* 12.[19]

Two other details support this idea. One is the reference to Hálfdan II as *þriði jǫfurr* 'the third chieftain' (32,2), which Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson took to mean that he was the third successive king to die of sickness rather than violence. But this is not convincing, partly because Hálfdan's father Eysteinn dies in a sailing accident rather than of sickness, and partly because it assumes that his great grandfather Óláfr did die by violence, and *Yt.* gives no warrant for this, as we shall see. Alternatively, Bryan Weston Wyly[20] suggests that only stt. 32–37 are by Þjóðólfr, and that stt. 36–32 should be read in reverse order, with st. 37 at the end; Hálfdan is then the third ruler before Rǫgnvaldr heiðumhárr. I don't think this can be quite right, because Eyvindr skáldaspillir's *Háleygjatal* has probably been influenced by *Yt.*, and it clearly began with Óðinn and finished with the living Hákon jarl. However, claims of *óðal*-right do normally begin with the claimant naming himself and then his father, grandfather, and so on, and if Rǫgnvaldr did this, Hálfdan II would be the third of his five paternal ancestors. Further support comes from Magnús Hákonarson's late-thirteenth-century revision of the law. Here the 'five generations' rule is relaxed to three, or family possession of the land for at least sixty years, but the reckoning of ancestors is said to be *til haugs ok til heiðni* [to the mound and to heathen times].[21] This suggests that knowledge about the funeral mounds of five immediate paternal ancestors was once needed to maintain a claim of *óðal*-right,

[17] *Gulathingslog* 266; *NGL* I, 87, lines 7–8.
[18] Jansson (1987), 100–101.
[19] See Gurevich (1973).
[20] Wyly (2004), 115–19.
[21] *Kong Haakon Magnussöns Retterbod om Odelslösning*, *NGL* III, 121.

and that would explain the exact placing of the Vestfold mounds in *Yt.*

Immediately before this section comes the link-figure of Óláfr (Appendix I B), who in the prose sources is called *trételgja* 'the wood-feller' and said to be king of Vermaland in Western Sweden, but has no nickname or kingdom in *Yt.*. Saxo (VII.xi.7–10)[22] also tells of a *regulus* Olavus of Vermaland, with a daughter called Esa who probably corresponds to Ása in illráða, who in *YS* ch. 39 is the daughter of Óláfr's father Ingjaldr. *YS* ch. 43 says that the Swedes burned Óláfr in his hall as a sacrifice to Óðinn because of his reluctance to make heathen sacrifices (ÍF 26, 74) (though men sacrificed to Óðinn are usually hanged rather than burned), while *HN* merely says that he 'died full of days in Sweden'. *Yt.* 29 actually says very little:

Ok við vág	And beside the bay
hinns viðjar ...[23]	of the wide ...
hræ Óláfs	the alder-tree's wolf (=fire) swallowed
ǫlgylðir svalg,	Óláfr's corpse,
ok glóðfjalgr	and the burning hot
gǫtvar leysti	son of Fornjótr (=fire)
sonr Fornjóts	loosened the armour
af Svía jǫfri.	from the prince of Swedes.
Sá áttkonr	That kinsman
frá Uppsǫlum	of the family of kings
lofða kyns	disappeared long ago
fyr lǫngu hvarf.	from Uppsala.

This sounds more like the cremation of a dead body than the burning of a living king; all that is actually said is that Óláfr's corpse was burned beside a stretch of water, and that he was a prince of the Swedes who had once been at Uppsala; the fact that his name begins with a vowel would support this claim. The likeliest explanation is probably that Þjóðólfr knew a tradition about a King Óláfr who had ruled somewhere in the borderlands between Norway and Sweden, and that he used this tradition to invent a link between the kings of Vestfold and the legendary kings of the Swedes at Uppsala, giving Óláfr aspects of the funeral practices of both.

[22] Ed. OR I, 211–12; trans. FD I, 230–31.

[23] Kringla and Jǫfraskinna read *hin er viðiar*, while Codex Frisianus has simply *viðar*; neither makes complete sense, and *Skj.* I B, 12 emends to *hinn's við arði* [of him who had ploughed the wood], thus supplying a source in *Yt.* for Óláfr's nickname. Since this is based only on Snorri's prose, I prefer Bjarni's assumption that a word (possibly the name of a stretch of water) has been omitted at an early stage of the manuscript tradition.

Having made this link, he could then deploy existing traditions about the Swedish kings (Appendix I C). Their names all begin with a vowel, and most are also known in other sources that are probably not dependant on *Yt.*. Unlike the Vestfold kings, most die in memorable and violent ways, and only one (Jǫrundr) has a death near water. None are cremated, but two are 'burned in'. About half of them have stated places of death, some of which probably imply a source with genuine knowledge of the area round Lake Mälaren,[24] but there are no stated places of burial, probably because they would have served no practical purpose in Þjóðólfr's period.

A second 'link' figure is Agni (Appendix I D). Luckily for Þjóðólfr, his name also begins with a vowel; according to Snorri's interpretation of *Yt* 10, he is given a place of death near water – *við Taur*, probably Södertörn, Stockholm (ÍF 26, 38). But this may be based on a misunderstanding of the last quatrain of this stanza:

> hinns við taur
> temja skyldi
> svalan hest
> Signýjar vers.

Taurr may mean 'necklace' (cf. Latin *torques* and the kenning *taurar Týr* [necklace god] (= 'wealthy man') in Kormákr, *lausavísa* 47,3, *Skj.* I B, 80), in which case *temja við taur* [to tame with a necklace] is an ironic variant of *temja við beizl* [to tame with a bridle]. The whole quatrain would then mean 'who had to tame with a necklace the cold horse of Signý's husband' (i.e. Hagbarðr, whose 'horse' is the gallows).[25] This provides a clever thematic link to the first generation of Uppsala kings, which immediately follows, in which Alrekr and Eiríkr literally kill each other with horse-bridles, but the manner of Agni's death at the hands of his wife also links him to two earlier, quasi-mythological kings, Vanlandi and Vísburr,[26] who are part of a group apparently associated with fertility or its absence (Appendix I E). The first two of this group are contrasted, Fjǫlnir being an example of wild over-abundance, while Sveigðir seems to represent barrenness. The other two tell variants of the

[24] It seems unlikely that the Norwegian Þjóðólfr had personal knowledge of Vendel (19,8), *Lófundr* (23,4) and *Ræningr* (27,4). Storm (1899), 112–14 identifies *Lófundr* as Laghunda Herred on the north-west side of Lake Mälaren and *Ræningr* as a farmstead on Tosteröen, an island in Lake Mälaren belonging to Södermanland.

[25] Eggert Ólafur Brím (1895), 9; cf. also Bergsveinn Birgisson (2008), 298; *AEW* 584.

[26] Cf. Wessén (1924), 55.

same story as that of Agni: the king visits a land in the far north or east, where he marries a daughter of the Winter King, but later abandons or abducts her, with the result that she contrives his death.[27] Apart from Vanlandi and Vísburr, the names of these kings do not alliterate with each other, though they all have meanings probably related to the king's function as patron of fertility, either of crops or of human succession. None of them are known in other sources independent of *Yt.*, but similar story types do appear elsewhere; these seem more akin to myth than to heroic legend. Three have deaths or funerals associated with rivers or the sea, even the drink in which Fjǫlnir drowns being called *svigðis geira vágr vindlauss* [the windless bay of the ox's spears] (i.e. of the drinking horn) (1,6–7). Two have deaths and/or funerals associated with fire. The place-name associated with Vanlandi may suggest a basis in early Swedish tradition, and possibly that these kings had already been linked to the Uppsala dynasty before Þjóðólfr's time.

Finally, a sequence of four kings whose names begin with *d* may have been interpolated into the list of 'fertility' kings, although they may already have been a part of it (Appendix I F). None of them is known from other sources clearly independent of *Yt.*, and only two have real stories: Dómaldi is sacrificed by the Swedes for the sake of the crops, and Dagr is killed with a hayfork at a place called *Vǫrvi* (or more likely 'the shore', cf. OE *wearoð*) after setting out to avenge the death of a sparrow.

Dómarr, the protagonist of *Yt.* 6, is a shadowy figure whose name looks like a variant of that of his predecessor *Dómaldi*:

Ok þess opt	And this, often,
of yngva hrør	I have asked
fróða menn	wise men
of fregit hafðak,	concerning the prince's body,
hvar Dómarr	where Dómarr
á dynjanda	was carried
bana Hálfs	onto the roaring
of borinn væri;	slayer of Hálfr (=fire);
nú þat veitk	now I know
at verkbitinn	that bitten by pain
Fjǫlnis niðr	Fjǫlnir's descendant
við Fýri brann.	burned beside (the river) Fýri.

[27] Further on this pattern, see McKinnell (2005), 69–80.

This stanza is almost entirely built on allusion to other legends: the heroic death of Hálfr,[28] the drowning of Fjǫlnir in a vat of mead (see *Yt.* 1), and the river Fýri, which would recall the battle between Aðils and Hrólfr kraki at Fýrisvellir.[29] But none of this tells us anything about Dómarr himself, except that he died of disease and was (as we might expect of a Swedish king) cremated by the river at Uppsala. The first quatrain also suggests that Þjóðólfr did not expect his audience to know this tradition already – possibly because he had just made it up?

St. 7, on Dyggvi, seems equally vague:

Kveðkat ek dul	I say it is not hidden
nema Dyggva hrør	that the mounted goddess
glitnis Gná	has Dyggvi's corpse
at gamni hefr,	for her amusement,
þvít jódís	because the steed-spirit
ulfs ok Narfa	(sister of) the Wolf and Narfi
konungmann	was destined to choose
kjósa skyldi;	a royal husband;
ok allvald	and Loki's girl
Yngva þjóðar	has the sole ruler
Loka mær	of Yngvi's nation
of leikinn hefr.	in her power.

It begins with another assertion of the poet's knowledge, and *Dyggva hrør* in l.2 echoes *yngva hrør* at the same point in st. 6, while *Yngva þjóðar* (l. 10) picks up the reference to Dómarr as *yngvi*. Again, there is a single poetic theme, though here it is the family relationships of Hel, who now has the king within her sexual power. But all that we learn about the king himself is his name and the fact that he is dead – and even his name may be merely a complimentary adjective meaning 'trusty', 'reliable'.[30] Again, the opening assertion of knowledge conceals the fact that nothing is actually revealed, probably because there was no pre-existing tradition.

Þjóðólfr shows a tendency in this 'mythological' section to echo phrases and images found in the section on the Uppsala kings, where in-

[28] See *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekkar* chs. 12–13, *FSN* II, 172–4.

[29] See *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 44, ed. Faulkes (1998), I, 58–9; *Hrólfs saga kraka* ch. 45, *FSN* II, 78–80.

[30] Cf. the reference to Óláfr helgi as *dyggr þengill* [trusty prince] (Steinn Herdísarson, *Óláfsdrápa* 16,5–6, *Skj.* I B, 382), and *dyggvar dróttir* [bands of trustworthy men], *Vǫluspá* 64,5–6.

herited traditions were probably stronger. Both Vanlandi and Aðils are destroyed by a *vitta véttr* 'creature of spells' (cf. 3,3 with 21,3); the image of fire as a thief destroying the house is applied to the burnings of both Vísburr and Ingjaldr (cf. st. 4,5 with 27,5); and the image of a king riding a 'horse' of the gallows is used of both Agni (10,9–12) and Jǫrundr (14,5–12), the legend of Hagbarðr and Signý being invoked in both cases. Such repetitions suggest that Þjóðólfr was using material traditionally associated with the Uppsala kings to fill out a quasi-mythological section where he had little inherited material to go on.

One of the later Uppsala kings, Ǫnundr, may come under similar suspicion, even if his name seems more distinctive:

Varð Ǫnundr	Ǫnundr became
Jónakrs bura	bound with the grief
harmi heptr	of Jónakr's sons (=stones)
und himinfjǫllum,	under heaven's mountains,
ok ofvæg	and the extremely heavy
Eistra dolgi	feud of a bastard
heipt hrísungs	came against
at hendi kom;	the Estonians' foe;
ok sá frǫmuðr	and that maker
foldar beinum	of Hǫgni's corpse
Hǫgna hrørs	was gone among
of horfinn vas. (*Yt.* 26)	the bones of earth (=stones).

Most commentators have seen a story behind this stanza. *HN* says that Ǫnundr was killed by his brother Sigvarðr 'at Himinheiðr, whose name means "field of heaven"', and Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson suggests that Sigvarðr, Ǫnundr's bastard brother, killed him to avenge his father Hǫgni, whom Ǫnundr had killed for dishonouring his mother. This would make a lively story, but the dishonoured mother and the bastard brother's revenge for his father are not found in any medieval source, and although Snorri quotes this stanza he makes no mention of a brother, but says that Ǫnundr perished in a landslide.

I think that *HN* misunderstands the imagery of *Yt.* here (and hence that its author was influenced by this stanza of *Yt.*, directly or indirectly). 'Jónakr's sons' are the brothers Hamðir and Sǫrli, the protagonists of *Hamðismál*, who were stoned to death, and the second quatrain probably also refers to this legend, with the stones taking vengeance on Hamðir and Sǫrli for spilling the blood of their bastard brother Erpr on them, as in *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 42 (*FSN* I, 90); so the 'extremely heavy feud of a bastard' is another reference to stones. The last quatrain again refers to

stones, as the 'bones' of the earth (i.e. of the primeval giant Ymir). The allusion to Hǫgni could refer to a lost legend about Ǫnundr, but perhaps the story of Hamðir and Sǫrli reminded Þjóðólfr of another heroic intrusion into a tyrant's hall, when Gunnarr and Hǫgni visit Atli, and Hǫgni has his heart cut out by Atli's warriors. In that case, *frǫmuðr Hǫgna hrørs* may mean simply 'warrior' or 'ruler', possibly with associations of tyranny.

Snorri's interpretation, that Ǫnundr was killed in a landslide, remains possible, but it is simpler to see this stanza as a description of building a mound of stones over the body of a dead king, which would make it a description of a funeral rather than a death, and thus comparable with several other stanzas in the poem. *HN* and *YS* ch. 35 (ÍF 26, 64) treat *und himinfjǫllum* as a place-name, but although this would seem quite possible[31] it more probably means 'clouds', as in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* 1,4 (N-K 130). Ǫnundr is called the enemy of the Estonians simply because his predecessor was killed by them. What remains in terms of actual information is only that Ǫnundr was buried beneath the clouds under a stony mound. Perhaps Þjóðólfr had heard of a king called Ǫnundr who had once ruled in Sweden, since *Hauks þáttr hábrókar*[32] says that Hálfdan svarti's enemy Eiríkr Svíakonungr was the son of King Ǫnundr, who had ruled the Swedes for forty years; but if this tradition were historically true, this King Ǫnundr would have lived in the early ninth century, six generations after the king in the poem. The simplest conclusion is that Ǫnundr has been added, possibly from an isolated legendary tradition, to make up a predetermined number of generations.

Including Rǫgnvaldr heiðumhárr, *Yt.* lists twenty-seven generations of kings, and this number probably seemed significant. Eyvindr's skáldaspillir's *Háleygjatal* (ca. 990) clearly imitates *Yt.*. Only fragments of it now survive, but a genealogy of the Háleygjar in the Codex Resenianus (ca. 1300) was probably derived from a complete text of it, and this also contains twenty-seven names, finishing with Hákon jarl Sigurðarson, for whom Eyvindr composed his poem. Some rather contrived name-repetitions suggest that he was piecing out his material to

[31] cf. *Hefenfeld*, where Oswald defeated the invader Cadwalla (Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* III, ch. 2, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors (1969), 216–7); Bede claims that the place already had this name before the battle, and that this was an omen of the heavenly victory that was to be achieved there.

[32] Flateyjarbók (1944–5), II, 63.

make up the required number.[33] The late-twelfth-century *Nóregs konungatal* (*Skj.* I B, 575–90), which lists the rulers of Norway between Hálfdan svarti and Sverrir, also includes twenty-seven rulers, though one only arrives at this number by counting joint kings separately.[34] Snorri was also conscious of the number:

> Í því kvæði eru nefndir þrír tigir langfeðga hans ok sagt frá dauða hvers þeira ok legstað. (ÍF 26, 4).
>
> [In that poem (i.e. *Yt.*) thirty of his paternal ancestors are named, and information is given about the death and burial place of each of them.]

He arrives at thirty by adding Óðinn, Njǫrðr and Freyr to the beginning of a list of twenty-seven rulers.

Some critics have assumed that *Yt.* was composed as a praise poem,[35] but many of the deaths it describes seem ridiculous or disgraceful, and even the two kings who die in battle are not valorised. Óttarr is killed by the Danes at Vendel (stt. 19–20), but stories about this battle are said to be told in honour of his two opponents. Yngvarr is killed during a raid on the Estonians, but only the eastern sea sings to entertain him (st. 25). Similarly, the human sacrifice of Dómaldi (st. 5) is presented prosaically, with no suggestion that his death was voluntary.

Bergsveinn Birgisson has recently argued that the whole poem was designed to mock Rǫgnvaldr's family because they were regarded by the Upplandic supporters of Haraldr hárfagri as aliens, giant-like intruders from Denmark. He finds the most explicit evidence for this in the description of Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr in st. 35:

Ok niðkvisl	And the branch of descent	
í Nóregi	in Norway	
þróttar Þrós	of Þrór (probably = Óðinn)	(F: þvrs)
of þróazk hafði;	had grown in strength;	(F: náði)
réð Áleifr	Óláfr ruled	
Upsa forðum	the broad land	(Fl: Upsa, other MSS ofsa)
viðri grund	of Upsi long ago	(Fl, 61, 73: viða frægr)
ok Vestmari	and in Vestmar	
goðum glíkr,	like the gods	(Fl. likr; last couplet only in Fl.)
ok Grenlands fylki.	And the Grenland district.[36]	

[33] See Storm (1899), pp. 111–2; he derives the list of the Háleygjar from Torfaeus, *Historia Norvegiae* I, 146 and from a copy of parts of the Codex Resenianus in MSS Delagardie 36–38 and Stockholm, Kungliga Bibliotek, Islandica chart. 78 fol.

[34] See Magerøy (1976), cols. 362–4.

[35] Most recently Skre (2007).

[36] *Yt.* 35; text from *Skj.* I B, 13; variants from *Skj.* I A, 14–15.

The last couplet must be a later addition (see above), and the praise of Óláfr as *viða frægr* 'widely famous' is probably not original either. The first quatrain survives in only two manuscripts: in line 3, Bergsveinn prefers the Codex Frisianus reading *þrottar þvrs*, and translates 'and the powerful giant's line of descent managed to develop in Norway'. But it seems more likely that the unfamiliar form *Þrós* would be corrupted to the familiar *þurs* than vice versa, and the context demands a genitive singular, while *þurs* [giant] is a nominative form, of which the genitive would be *þursar*.[37]

Bergsveinn is on safer ground in the second quatrain, which is also preserved in AM 61 fol., AM 73 fol. and Flateyjarbók. He points out that the unidentified place-name *Upsa* appears only in Flateyjarbók, while all other manuscripts read *ofsa* ['arrogantly' or 'violently'], so it does seem likely that Óláfr is being criticised. But is Þjóðólfr also hostile to the other kings he lists? This is a more difficult question. Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir characterises the poem as grotesque rather than ironic,[38] but there are undoubtedly moments of irony in it – and yet, one cannot automatically assume that all praise is meant ironically.

There certainly are some overtly critical statements, though several of them are directed at the kings' opponents:

St. 4,7–8: Vísburr's sons carry out an attack *á sinn fǫður* [against their own father]; their description as *setrs verjendr* [defenders of the estate] as they set fire to his hall must be hostile sarcasm.

5,1–4: The Swedish warriors redden the ground with (the blood of) *sínum drótni* [their own lord]; this seems to imply a treacherous act.

10,1–4: Þjóðólfr says he would be 'surprised' if Agni's warriors thought Skjǫlf's behaviour fitting when she hanged her husband – another act of treachery.

11,1–4: Alrekr and Eiríkr are killed by *bróður vápn* [a brother's weapons] – a breach of proper family loyalties.

12,5–8, 13: Alfr's attack on his brother Yngvi is *ǫfundgjarn* [malicious], it is unbearable that Bera stirred up the two brothers against each other, and they kill each other *óþurfendr* [needlessly].

[37] See Sigfús Blöndal (1920–24), 991.
[38] Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (1994), 768.

16,6: Aun is *áttunga hrjóðr* [destroyer of his sons].

33,7 and 34,1–4: The killing of Guðrøðr is contrived by *hǫfuð heiptrækt* [a vengeful head] and carried out by Ása's servant in a *launsigr* [underhand victory]; again, treachery is implied.

35,6 Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr ruled *ofsa* [tyrannically]; a troubled relationship between Rǫgnvaldr heiðumhárr and his father may be being hinted at.

Nearly all these comments condemn violence against one's own immediate family, whether committed by the kings or against them.

We may suspect irony when an adjective of praise conflicts with what someone is said to have done, and contrasts between the divine descent of a king and his miserable fate may have the same function, though it is sometimes difficult to decide whether the intended effect is sarcasm or pathos:

7,9–12: The contrast between Dyggvi's description as *allvald Yngva þjóðar* [total ruler of Yngvi's (=Freyr's) nation] and his subjection to Hel could be either sarcasm or pathos; the latter may seem more likely.

8,3 and 7: The statement that Dagr was *frægðar fúss* [eager for fame] might be taken at face value, but when he is called *spakfrǫmuðr* [wise initiator] as he dies trying to avenge a sparrow this must be sarcastic.

11,7 and 11: The description of Alrekr and Eiríkr as *Dags fríendr* [Dagr's kinsmen] suggests that they are, like him, unreasonably vengeful, while the label *Freys afspring* [Freyr's descendants] draws a sarcastic contrast between their divine descent and their petty quarrel.

17,1–4: Egill is *lofsæll Týs áttungr* [descendant of Týr, happy in praise] as he flees from the land. As Týr was probably a god of victory, this looks sarcastic.

19,3: Óttarr is *dugandligr* [capable] as he falls in battle; this could be either sarcasm or pathos.

21,5–7 and 22,5–7: Aðils is *dáðgjarn ...Freys áttungr* [descendant of Freyr, eager for valiant deeds] and *dáðsæll ... Ála dolgr* [enemy of Áli, blessed with valiant deeds], as he falls from his horse and his brains mingle with the mud. The first phrase could be either sarcasm or pathos, but comparison with the

triumph of Eadgils (=Aðils) over Onela (=Áli) in *Beowulf* may suggest that the second should be taken seriously.

27,7: Ingjaldr is *goðkynning* [relative of the gods] as he burns himself in his hall; leaving aside his treacherous career as described in *YS* chs. 36–40 (ÍF 26, 65–72), it is difficult to know whether this reflects admiration, horror, or both.

Several other statements in the poem imply admiration, though some may be ironic:

2,6–7: Sveigðir is *stórgeði Dusla konr* [the great-minded kinsman of Dusli] as he pursues the dwarf into the rock. *Dusli* (or *Dulsi*, Kringla's reading) is unknown; if it is related to *dusilmenni* (or *drysilmenni*) [a person of puny strength or ability] the implication must be sarcastic, and *AEW* 88 glosses it as 'däumling' [Tom Thumb].

3,11: Vanlandi is called *menglǫtuðr* [necklace-destroyer] – perhaps merely a conventional epithet for a generous king, but possibly a reference to the king's necklace as a symbol of his role as patron of fertility, which he had a duty to protect.[39]

25,5: Yngvarr is *ljóshamr* [fair-complexioned] as he is killed by the Estonians. This may simply mean that he was Scandinavian, but could indicate handsome appearance, in which case pathos may be implied.

30: The *sǫkmiðlendr* [reconcilers of disputes] are forced to do without Hálfdan I, and (the mound at) Skereið droops over his bones. It is difficult to see anything other than genuine sorrow here.

33,2: Guðrøðr is *inn gǫfugláti* [the splendid];[40] nothing is said about his treacherous attack on Ása's father and brother (*YS* ch. 47, ÍF 26, 79–81), and without this, stt. 33–34 seem sympathetic towards him.

[39] See McKinnell (2005), 70–75.

[40] *gǫfugláti* might be translated 'the showy', implying that he seemed admirable without actually being so, but the word's only other occurrence in verse, in Sturla Þórðarson's *Hákonarkviða* 6,5 (*Skj.* II B, 119) is clearly complimentary. *Hákonarkviða* is in the same metre as *Ynglingatal* (*kviðuháttr*) and may be influenced by it; whether Þjóðólfr meant the word to be complimentary or not, Sturla seems to have thought that it was.

36,3 and 5: Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr may be described as tyrannical (see above), but is still *gunndjarfr* [brave in battle]; we have no reason to take this ironically.[41]

The epithets applied to recent kings of Vestfold seem slightly more sympathetic than those given to the more remote Swedish ones, but this may be merely what we would expect if they were the immediate ancestors of the king before whom the poem was recited.

The poem's one moral constant seems to be disapproval of violence against one's own relatives, and Þjóðólfr probably altered two received stories to sharpen this point. The brothers Alrekr and Eiríkr, who kill each other with horse bridles (st. 11), are also mentioned by Saxo Grammaticus and in *Gautreks saga*,[42] but both say that Eiríkr killed Alrekr and had a successful career afterwards.[43] It is only in *Yt.* and *YS* ch. 20 that they kill each other. The same change has probably been made in the next generation, where Álfr and Yngvi kill each other needlessly because of jealousy over Álfr's wife Bera (*Yt.* 12–13). *HN* says that Ingjald (=Yngvi) was killed by his brother because of Bera's taunts, but not that each killed the other; Saxo preserves the names Alwer and Yngi but has lost the murder.[44] In both generations, Þjóðólfr seems to have changed the story to make the fratricide mutual, and he explicitly condemns it in both cases.

Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (1994, 763–65) points out that many of the deaths in *Yt.* are ridiculous: Dagr is killed with a pitchfork; Egill by an animal; Alrekr and Eiríkr beat each other to death with horse bridles; Eysteinn is knocked overboard by a sail boom. She consequently takes the whole poem as a grotesque, in which mockery is used to keep the fear of death (or possibly the fear of fate) at bay.[45] But it does not seem possible to read every stanza in the same way, and while there certainly is a large element of the grotesque, I would see it as a device to disarm, not the fear

[41] In *Skj.* I B, 13 he is also *virða vinr* [friend of honourable men], but this reading comes only from AM 61 fol.; Flateyjarbók and AM 73 fol. (also late MSS) have *uigs fromozstum / vigfrǫmuzstum* [for the man foremost in slaying], but the more neutral readings of J1 and Codex Frisianus (*vigmiðlvng* and *vigniðiong*, both meaning 'warrior') are probably preferable, see *Skj.* I A, 15.

[42] Saxo V.x.1–2; ed. OR I, 134–35; trans. FD I, 149–50; *FSN* III, 28–29.

[43] This is the usual form of this story-type; for other examples, see McKinnell (2009).

[44] *Gesta Danorum* VIII.iii.11 (ed. OR I, 217; trans. FD I, 240), where Yngi and Alwer are two of the four sons of Elricus.

[45] See also Gurevich (1988); Steinsland (1991), 227–231.

of one's own death, but the fear of the dead. Rǫgnvaldr and his men must have been acutely aware of the presence of his recent ancestors in their imposing burial mounds, and that he needed them: in practical terms, to assert his *óðal*-right, and in magical terms because it was believed that the dead could bequeath their strength and courage to the living, as Angantýr says in *Hervararkviða* 30 that he would have done for Hervǫr if only she could have believed it:

Far vel, dóttir,	Farewell, daughter –
fljótt gæfak þér	I would quickly have given you
tólf manna fjǫr,	the lives of twelve people
ef þú trúa mættir,	if you could have believed it,
afl ok eljun	all the good
allt it góða	strength and endurance
þat er synir Arngríms	that Arngrímr's sons
at sik leifðu.	bequeathed after them.[46]

Statements in earlier runic inscriptions are harder to be sure of, but another expression of the same belief may appear on the Stentoften stone (Blekinge, ca. 650),[47] where row D:

hᴀriwolᴀfʀ(m)a??usnuh?e

should probably be read as:

Hariwolafr mǫrgu's nú hlé

[H. is now a protection for many]

The same man is commemorated on the nearby Istaby stone,[48] and both were erected by Haþuwulafr, son of Haeruwulafr, who is probably invoking the protection of one of his ancestors for himself and his neighbours.

But the dead were also feared. Several late heathen inscriptions include the injunction to the dead man to *njóta (vel) kumls* [enjoy / make good use of the monument], with the implication that he should remain safely inside it and not become a *draugr* or member of the walking dead.[49] The verse inscription on the Karlevi stone in Öland (ca. 1000)

[46] Ed. Guðni Jónsson and Christopher Tolkien (1956), 22.
[47] *DR* 357, KJ 96; see also Moltke (1985), 137–145; McKinnell, Simek and Düwel (2004), 54–6.
[48] *DR* 359, KJ 98.
[49] See e.g. Gørlev stone 1, Sjælland (*DR* 239, early 9th century), Nørre Nærå, Fyn (*DR* 211, ca. 900); see Moltke (1985), 158–9; McKinnell, Simek and Düwel (2004), 134–5, 170.

even uses the phrase *dolga Þrúðar draugr*;[50] this is usually interpreted as 'warrior' (literally 'tree of the Þrúðr (=goddess) of wounds (=valkyries)'), but applied to a dead man in his mound, it is hard to exclude the additional punning sense 'man taken by a valkyrie and now a revenant'.[51]

It is in this context that the number of generations in the poem may be significant. Just as Óðinn brings back eighteen magic spells from the world of the dead in *Hávamál* (nine that he has been taught by his dead uncle and nine that he has generated for himself), and as Svipdagr in *Svipdagsmál* raises his dead mother Gróa to chant nine protective spells for him, Þjóðólfr contrives the magically effective number twenty-seven to gain for Rǫgnvaldr the life-force of his ancestors without, he hopes, also allowing them to pass on their ill-luck. Perhaps he also had to name that ill-luck in order to avert it.

More tentatively, I would suggest that Þjóðólfr may have given the poem a deliberate structure distinct from the ingredients he had inherited, in which he uses multiples of three and nine to identify different threats to the function of a king (see Appendix II). The first nine generations are mainly about the king's responsibility for fertility; the next three concern the danger posed by fraternal strife; the next nine have a recurring theme of external threat, which Snorri seems to have recognised and accentuated; and the last six guard against loss of Rǫgnvaldr's *óðal*-right by naming him and his five immediate ancestors, with the sites of their burial mounds. Admittedly, this structure is subjectively observed and incapable of proof, but it would account for many of the puzzling features of the poem, and it suggests that Þjóðólfr's ultimate purpose may have been neither praise nor mockery, but an uneasy tension between invocation and exorcism.

[50] Öl. 1, *DR* 411, see Moltke (1985), 320–22; McKinnell, Simek and Düwel (2004), 124–25.

[51] For another example of the same wordplay, see Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa* 8,8, *Skj.* I B, 2, where *draugr* is applied to the Hildr and Heðinn legend, in which the dead are repeatedly revivified after each day's battle.

Appendix

I. The Ingredients of *Ynglingatal*

Yt.	King	Cause of Death	Place of Death	Burial Mound
A. Kings of Vestfold				
30	Hálfdan I§	unstated	Þotn, Haðaland	Skereið at Skíringssal, Vestfold (=Nordre Kaupang?)
31	Eysteinn§	hit by a sail boom	unstated	beside the mouth of the Vaðla river, Vestfold
32	Hálfdan II§	unstated	(lived at Holtar, probably Vestfold	Borre, Vestfold)
33–4	Guðrøðr(*)§	murdered by Ása's servant	on the shore at Stiflusund	(? possibly implied to be where he died?)
35–6	Óláfr§	leg disease	by the shore in Vestfold	Geirstaðir, Vestfold, in a *haugr*
37	Rǫgnvaldr heiðumhárr	(still living)		
B. Link to Sweden				
29	Óláfr*§+ *Svía jǫfurr*	unstated	unstated	(cremated beside a *vágr*) (not at Uppsala)
C. Kings at Uppsala				
11	Alrekr* and Eiríkr* *Dags fríendr*	killed each other with horse-bridles	unstated	unstated
12–13	Álfr* and Yngvi*	killed each other with swords	unstated	unstated
14	Jǫrundr*§ *bana Goðlaugs*	hanged	Limafjǫrðr	unstated
15–16	Aun¶ *áttunga hrjóðr*	extreme old age	Uppsala	unstated
17–18	Egill¶ *Skilfinga niðr*	killed by an ox	unstated	unstated
19–20	Óttarr*	killed by Danish jarls of K. Fróði	Vendel	unstated
21–22	Aðils* *Freys áttungr, Ála dolgr*	fall from horse caused by *vitta véttr*	Uppsala	unstated

Yt.	**King**	**Cause of Death**	**Place of Death**	**Burial Mound**
23–24	Eysteinn(*)+	burned in by Jutlanders	Lófund	unstated
25	Yngvarr, *jǫfurr sænskr*	killed in battle by Estonians	unstated	unstated
26	Ǫnundr, *Eista dolgr*	unstated (covered with stones)	*und himinfjǫllum*	unstated*
27–28	Ingjaldr*+	burned himself in	Ræningr	unstated
D. Link to 'Mythological' Kings				
10	Agni¶§	hanged by his wife using his own necklace	*við Taur* (?)	unstated
E. Fertility Kings				
1	Fjǫlnir¶§	drowned in a vat of drink	(*þars Fróði bjó*)	unstated
2	Sveigðir	pursued a dwarf into a rock	unstated	unstated
3	Vanlandi¶§+	trampled by a *mara*	unstated	cremated on bank of R. Skúta
4	Vísburr¶+	burned in by his own sons	unstated	unstated
F. The d- Kings				
5	Dómaldi	sacrificed for the crops by his own men, the *Svía kind*	unstated	unstated
6	Dómarr§+ *Fjǫlnis niðr*	unstated, *verkbitinn*	unstated	cremated beside R. Fýri
7	Dyggvi	unstated	unstated	unstated
8–9	Dagr§	killed with a pitchfork while avenging a sparrow	'Vǫrvi', *á austrvega*	unstated

Key to Symbols

* Kings also mentioned in other sources probably not wholly dependent on *Yt.*:
  Alrekr and Eiríkr: Saxo V.x.1–2 (OR I, 134–35; FD I, 149–50); *Gautreks saga* ch. 7 (*FSN* III, 29).
  Yngvi and Álfr: Saxo VIII.iii.11 (OR I, 217; FD I, 240).
  Jǫrundr: *Skjǫldunga saga* ch. 9 (ÍF 35, 19–21).
  Óttarr: *Beowulf* 2379–96, 2928–35 (Fulk, Bjork and Niles 82, 100 and Intro. pp. lx–lxiii).
  Aðils: *Beowulf* 2391–96 (Fulk, Bjork and Niles 82); *Hrólfs saga kraka* chs. 14–45 (*FSN* II, 24–80); etc.
  Ingjaldr: *Skjǫldunga saga, sǫgubrot* ch. 3 (ÍF 35, 56).
  Óláfr (of Vermaland): Saxo VII.xi.7–10 (OR I, 211–12; FD I, 230–31).

(*) doubtful cases: Eysteinn: *Svía konungatal* (ÍF 35, 77).
  Guðrøðr: *Annales Regni Francorum* 810, 813; Notker balbulus II, 13.

¶ Kings whose stories resemble those attributed to others in other sources:
  Aun: somewhat resembles Hálfdan gamli in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 64 (ed. Faulkes I, 101; trans. Faulkes 146–47).
  Egill: cf. Ongenþeow in *Beowulf* 2484–89 (ed. Fulk, Bjork and Niles 85 and Intro. p. lix).
  Fjǫlnir: cf. Hundingus in Saxo I.viii.27 (OR I, 34–35; FD I, 35).

§ Kings whose death or place of burial are close to or associated with water.

+ Kings whose death or burial is associated with fire.

II. *Ynglingatal* – a suggested structure

A. Nine threats to the fertility function

Yt. 1. Fjǫlnir – drowned in abundance
2. Sveigðir – lured into a barren rock
3. Vanlandi – killed by a witch's magic (Summer King story)
4. Vísburr – burned in (Summer King story)
5. Dómaldi – sacrificed because of a famine
6. Dómarr – no story (added to make up the number nine)
7. Dyggvi – no story (added to make up the number nine)
8–9. Dagr – killed with a pitchfork
10. Agni – hanged by his wife by his necklace (Summer King story)

B. Three threats from fraternal strife

11. Alrekr and Eiríkr – brothers kill each other
12–13. Alfr and Yngvi – brothers kill each other
14. Jǫrundr – hanged (probably part of a submerged murderous brothers story)[52]

C. Nine threats to the security function (kings at Uppsala)

15–16. Aun* – becomes senile after killing his sons
17–18. Egill* – flees from his realm and is gored by an ox
19–20. Óttarr – killed at Vendel by invading Danes
21–22. Aðils* – thrown from his horse, destroyed by a witch's magic
23–24. Eysteinn* – burned in by invading Jutlanders
25. Yngvarr – killed by Estonians during a raid on their country
26. Ǫnundr – no story (a traditional name, added to make up the number nine)
27–28. Ingjaldr* – burns himself in
29. Óláfr – no story (probably a Vermaland tradition, added to form a link)

* kings who are said in *YS* to suffer successful foreign invasion

D. Six generations as defence against threats to *óðal*-right (kings of Vestfold)

30. Hálfdan I – dies at Þotn, mound at Skereið in Skíringssalr
31. Eysteinn – killed by sail boom, mound by mouth of Vaðla river
32. Hálfdan II – lived at Holtar, mound at Borre

[52] For Jǫrundr, cf. *Skjǫldunga saga* ch. 9 (ÍF 35, 20–21), where he helps to take vengeance on King Fróði for his fratricide of Áli: *Hic fratrem per Starcardum interfecit innocentem; et vicissim conjuratione Iorundi regis Sveciæ ac Svertingi baronis affinis sui, qvos nullo jure subegerat, dum noctu semel sacra ethnica perageret, trucidatus est.* [He (Fróði) had killed his innocent brother through Starkaðr, and he in turn was killed by an alliance between Jǫrundr King of Sweden and Earl Svertingr, Fróði's kinsman, both of whom he had wrongfully conquered, while he was carrying out tribal rites at night.] The story known to Þjóðólfr cannot now be reconstructed and is clearly not the one told in *YS* chs. 23–24 (ÍF 26, 44–47) (which is based chiefly on *Háleygjatal*), but it probably included at least one fratricide.

33–34. Guðrøðr – killed at Stiflusund by Ása's servant (mound there implied?)
35–36. Óláfr (Geirstaðaálfr) – dies of leg disease, mound at Geirstaðir
37. Rǫgnvaldr heiðumhárr – the king now living *und bláum himni*.

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Summary

This paper argues that there is no convincing evidence to suggest that *Ynglingatal* is significantly later than the date to which it is traditionally assigned, and that it may be fruitful to examine it without reference to the twelfth- and thirteenth-century prose accounts of the same material in *Ynglinga saga*, Ari's *Íslendingabók*, the *Historia Norwegiæ* and *Af Upplendinga konungum*. I suggest that the poem may be based on three or four blocks of received tradition, with two 'link' generations:

1. A claim of *óðalréttr* over Vestfold (the last six kings, including Rǫgnvaldr heiðumhárr, for whom the poem was supposedly composed, stt. 30–37);

2. Link a: Óláfr of Vermaland (st. 29);

3. The legendary kings of the Swedes at Uppsala (starting with Alrekr and Eiríkr and ending with Ingjaldr, stt. 11–28);

4. Link b: Agni (st. 10);

5. The mythical kings (possibly of various origin, stt. 1–9).

It is noticeable that there are a number of kings about whom almost nothing is said: the stanzas on Óláfr of Vermaland and Ǫnundr (stt. 29, 26) seem to be based on very thin traditions, while Dómarr and Dyggvi (stt. 6, 7) may even have been invented out of nothing at all. Þjóðólfr seems to have manipulated his material to arrive at a total of 27 kings – a number that was imitated in *Háleygjatal* and *Nóregs konungatal* – and he may have used this sacred number (9 x 3) as part of an attempt to control the dead by magical means. There are many examples of irony and the grotesque in the poem, but there does not seem to be a consistently hostile or mocking attitude to all the kings listed in it. The one thing they all share (except for Rǫgnvaldr himself) is that they are all dead, and the poem can be read as an attempt to enlist the power and support of Rǫgnvaldr's dead ancestors while at the same time holding them and the potentially destructive power of their ill-luck at arm's length.

Old Norse Text as Performance

LARS LÖNNROTH

Þoku dregr upp it ytra,
él festist it vestra,
mǫkkr mun náms, af nǫkkvi
naðrbings kominn hingat.

[Fog spreads up the outside,
the blizzard grips the west,
the theft of the dragon's bed
has caused this cloud to come.]

I am quoting, first in Icelandic, then in free translation by Judith Jesch, the only lines that have been preserved of the famous *Jarlsníð*, or "Earl Abuse", an insulting *níð* poem that was supposedly recited by the Icelandic poet Thorleif Ásgeirsson against Earl Hákon, the last pagan ruler of Norway. The story of this recitation is told in *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds*, or "The Tale of Thorleif, the Earl's Poet", preserved in the magnificent manuscript *Flateyjarbók* from the end of the 14th century. We are told in the *þáttr* that the recitation took place in front of Earl Hákon himself, in the hall of Lade in Trøndelag on the evening before a midwinter festival towards the end of the 10th century. The poem is said to have had a most powerful effect on the mighty earl.

First Earl Hákon "thought he heard praise in every stanza" but as the poem continued he began to feel "a great itching uneasiness creep all the way around his body and especially around his thighs so that he could hardly sit still. This uneasiness was so strange that he had himself scratched with combs wherever they could reach. Where they could not reach, he had three knots made in a coarse cloth and two men pulled it between his thighs." Somewhat later in the recitation, when the so-called "Fog verses" were pronounced, i.e. the lines just quoted, the hall became

completely dark. As Thorleif then recited the last part of the poem, "every weapon in the hall moved of its own accord and many men were killed." The earl fell unconscious, and when he came to his senses again, he found that "his beard had fallen out, along with the hair on one side of his parting, and they never grew again." The injuries "kept the earl in his sickbed all that winter and much of the summer, too."

The story is one of several in which the recitation of a *níð* poem is said to have had supernatural effects. As we know from the works of Bo Almqvist, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen and other scholars, such poems would question a man's masculinity in an insulting manner, often by suggesting that he had been sodomized from behind by another man or a troll. But the poem could also, as is demonstrated in the case of the *Jarlsníð*, harm its victim by literally depriving him of masculinity and power, thus making him less manly than Norse men were supposed to be. This evidently happens to Earl Hákon when his bottom begins to itch in a humiliating and sexually suggestive manner, and the degrading magic is then completed when his men are killed, his beard falls off and he himself loses consciousness.

The recitation of *Jarlsníð* would seem to be an unusually powerful example of a performative speech act or "illocutionary act" in the sense of the philosophers J.L. Austin and John Searle, i.e. an utterance that is not primarily an assertion or an expression of emotion but a verbal act that does something with words to somebody else. Well-known examples of illocutionary speech acts are declarations of war, or the phrase used by a minister when joining two people in marriage: "I now pronounce you husband and wife". When Thorleif says "Fog spreads up the outside" and "the blizzard grips the west", he is thus not merely making a factual statement about the weather but he is actually making bad weather appear in Earl Hákon's hall. When he goes on to say that "the theft of the dragon's bed/ has caused this cloud to come", he is not just making an assertion about cause and effect but forcefully avenging himself on Earl Hákon, who had previously burnt Thorleif's ship, executed his companions and deprived him of his gold, a valuable metal that could be called "the dragon's bed" in poetic language. And Thorleif is able to do this because good poets were believed to possess magic powers that enabled them to destroy their enemies with words (Almqvist 1965).

In recent years several scholars, inspired by speech act theory, have analysed Old Norse texts as illocutionary acts and emphasized the importance of such acts in Old Norse culture. The late Fred Amory was the

first to introduce this approach in an interesting analysis of saga dialogues in which words are used in a particularly aggressive manner which, in Amory's view, makes them function as destructive speech acts which provoke violence (Amory 1991). Thomas Bredsdorff, who has also applied speech act theory to sagas, has been a bit more restrictive in his definition of "speech act" but he, just like Amory, argues that speech acts are extremely important in the sagas, for example when a lawsuit is presented in public at a thing meeting or in a chieftain's hall (Bredsdorff 1997, 2007).

Margaret Clunies Ross has gone a step further than either Amory or Bredsdorff by suggesting that the indigenous Old Norse categories of eddic and skaldic poetry, as explained by Snorri and others, are based on "what we can extrapolate as an indigenous speech-act theory, that classified kinds of poetry in terms of illocutionary and perlocutionary acts" (Clunies Ross 2005, 77). A poem such as the *Jarlsníð* could thus be classified as *níð* on the basis of its destructive speech act, while an *erfidrápa* or funeral elegy such as *Sonatorrek* could be classified on the basis of its specific type of ritual speech act in honour of a deceased person. Karl Gunnar Johansson, on the other hand, has protested against Margaret's way of using speech act theory, which in his opinion has no foundation in the writings of Austin and Searle (Johansson 2007, 110 f). Instead of interpreting Old Norse texts as expressions of an "indigenous speech-act theory", one should, in Johansson's view, rather see them as rhetoric aimed at influencing an audience in specific ways.

Karl G. Johansson may have a point, but in my opinion it does not matter very much whether or not speech act theory is applied to Old Norse texts in exactly the way recommended by the philosophers Austin and Searle. The important thing is whether or not the literary meaning of the text can be better explained by analysing it as a performative act with specific consequences in a social context. And from that point of view I think that the scholars I have referred to so far have all made important new contributions to the understanding of Old Norse literature. Yet I also think that their approach to the texts may become even more interesting if it is combined with some consideration of how the Old Norse texts were actually performed in public. Were they, for example, recited, chanted, or sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument? Were they dramatically acted by one or more actors? Who were the performers, and how did these performers relate to their audience?

In several articles and in my book *Den dubbla scenen: Muntlig dikt-*

ning från Eddan till ABBA, first published in 1978, I have tried to answer such questions (Lönnroth 1971, 1978, 1979, 2008) and so have other scholars, for example Joseph Harris (2000), Stephen Mitchell (2001, 2003) and Terry Gunnell, who in his important book on the origins of Scandinavian drama (1995) has attempted to show that several Eddic poems in dialogue form were intended to be performed as dramas in front of an audience. The study of performance has expanded considerably in later years, inspired by theorists such as Albert Lord (1960), Walter J. Ong (1982) and Richard Schechner (1988, 2002). "Performance studies" has even become a new academic discipline, incorporating elements from drama studies but also from social anthropology, folklore and the history of religion. Within the field of Old Norse literature, a very early pioneer of performance studies was the initiator of the saga conferences, the late Hermann Pálsson. His book *Sagnaskemmtun Íslendinga* which came out as early as 1962 argues that sagas were meant to be read aloud in wealthy farmhouses at *kvöldvaka* or festive occasions.

One of the earliest and most famous descriptions of saga entertainment or saga performance, discussed by Hermann Pálsson, myself and many others, is found in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, one of the sagas in the *Sturlunga* collection. Here is described how the guests were entertained in 1119 at a great wedding at Reykjahólar, one of the largest farms in Iceland, in the presence of chieftains and other prominent people:

> And now there was much merriment and happiness, good entertainment and many kinds of games, dancing as well as wrestling and saga entertainment (*sagnaskemtan*) [---] Hrólf from Skálmarnes told the saga about Hröngvid the Viking and Olav Lidsmanna king and how Thrain the Berserk broke into the burial mound and about Hrómund Gripsson – and several verses were included. This saga was used for King Sverrir's entertainment, and he said that such lying sagas were the most enjoyable. And yet people know how to trace their ancestry back to Hrómund Grípsson! Hrólf himself had composed this saga. Ingimund, the priest, told the saga of Orm Barreyjarskáld including many verses and at the end of the saga, a good poem by Ingimund, and yet many wise men hold this saga to be true. (*Sturlunga saga*, vol. I, 22)

Although Hermann Pálsson has interpreted this as a description of saga *reading*, it would seem from the wording that the sagas and poems used for the entertainment at the wedding of Reykjahólar were told from memory or possibly improvised by the performers, Hrólf and Ingimund, without the help of manuscripts. When the sagas had been written down in the 13th century, however, we can be certain that the written texts

were often read aloud in social contexts similar to that of the wedding of Reykjahólar when people had come together to eat and drink. As Hermann Pálsson has observed, several late medieval saga manuscripts contain admonitions to the audience to pay attention to what is read and not disturb the performance with too much drinking, eating and idle talk. Such admonitions give us at least some important clues as to how sagas and poems were presented to the audience in Early Icelandic and Old Norse society. The reference to King Sverrir in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* also indicates that Icelandic sagas would sometimes be used to entertain the Norwegian court.

Another well-known description of saga performance is found in *Morkinskinna*'s story about the young Icelander who entertains Harald Harðráði's court at Christmas time with a saga about the king's own adventures while his men are drinking in the royal hall (*Morkinskinna* 2000, 223). The impression one gets from sources such as these is that saga entertainment as well as poetic recitals are particularly associated with festive occasions in aristocratic surroundings, usually in the presence of kings, earls, chieftains and high officials. It is not until the 18th century that we find testimonies about *kvöldvökur* – evening entertainment – where sagas are read aloud or poems recited in the homes of ordinary Icelandic farmers (Magnús Gíslason 1977).

Let us now return to the story of the *Jarlsníð* in order to see how the circumstances of Thorleif's poetic performance were actually presented. The bulk of the story must have existed in some form at least as early as the late 12th century because it is referred to in Odd Snorrason's *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* and other sources from about that time. It is at least partly based on oral tradition, since the *Jarlsníð* is mentioned in 12th-century sources, but most of the still-extant *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds* was probably written in the late 13th century or early 14th century and partly influenced by Latin literature, since one of its episodes is clearly influenced by an episode in Bede's *Church history*. In 1387 the text of the *þáttr* was inserted as an edifying *exemplum* in the Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar of *Flateyjarbók* by the priest Jón Þórðarson who was commissioned as a scribe by the wealthy farmer Jón Hákonarson of Viðidalstunga (Elizabeth Ashman Rowe 2005). In the manuscript, the story begins with a moralizing and highly rhetorical introduction, which has evidently been added by Jón Þórðarson. I shall return to this introduction later but will ignore it for the time being and concentrate on the actual narrative as we now have it in *Flateyjarbók.*

This narrative begins with a presentation of Thorleif's family and early history in Svarfadardal, a district in northern Iceland whose inhabitants are described more extensively in *Svarfdæla saga*, a family saga which *Þorleifs þáttr* explicitly refers to in passing. After this presentation we learn that Thorleif buys a ship and travels to Norway, where he gets into trouble with Earl Hákon after refusing to trade with him. We are then told how the earl punishes Thorleif by burning his ship, stealing his money and executing several of his companions. Thorleif recites a verse that makes it clear that he plans to take revenge. He then travels to King Svein Forkbeard of Denmark, composes a poem in the king's honour, and is accepted as one of his followers. Some time later he asks the king's permission to go back to Norway and explains his reason for this as follows:

> "I composed some verses this winter which I've called 'Woman Verses'. They're about Earl Hákon, because the earl is called a woman in the language of poetry."

At this point an informed audience familiar with *níð* poetry will understand that Thorleif has already composed the *Jarlsníð* and is going to avenge himself by depicting Earl Hákon as a woman and thus as an unmanly man, ready to be sodomized and disgraced. After King Svein has given Thorleif permission to leave, we learn that the poet travels north to Trøndelag, where the earl then resides in the estate of Lade. The audience is now prepared for the climax of the tale: the actual speech act of reciting the *Jarlsníð*.

Thorleif first disguises himself, almost like a professional actor before a theatrical performance. "He tied on a goat's beard and took a large leather bag which he hid under his beggar's gear, so that everyone would think he ate the food which he put into the bag, as its opening was up by his mouth under the goat's beard. He also took two crutches with spiked ends, and went to Lade. It was the evening before the midwinter festival, and the earl had just taken his seat along with the many important people that he had invited to his feast."

The scene that now develops is one that has many analogues in early Norse texts and also in classical Greek literature: the arrival in the drinking hall of a crafty old man who looks like a beggar but will soon turn out to be a hero or a god in disguise. Odin often appears in this role. One is also reminded of Norna-Gest and of Ulysses' return to Ithaca. What these legendary characters all have in common with Thorleif is a humble

appearance that will make rich and important people in the hall look down upon them and scorn them until their real identities and powers are eventually revealed. We should also observe that the social setting of this scene has a great deal in common with the Wedding of Reykjahólar and other such festivities where sagas and poems were actually performed.

After his arrival in the hall, Thorleif gets into a fight with other beggars and is then called up to Earl Hákon's high seat in order to explain his behaviour. The earl asks him his name, and about his family and his home.

"My lord" (says Thorleif), "my name is unusual, in that I am called Nidung, Gjallandi's son, and I come from Syrgisdalir in Svithjod the Cold. I am called Nidung the Pernickety." The names here are obviously symbolic. Judith Jesch translates "Nidung Gjallandi's son" as "Scoundrel, son of Boomer", and "Syrgisdalir" may be interpreted as "The Valley of Sorrows", a name indicating that he has experienced great misery.

Thorleif goes on to say that he has travelled widely and visited many chieftains. "I am now getting so old that I can hardly remember my age. I have heard a lot about your nobility and your valour, your wisdom and your popularity, your legislation and your humility, your generosity and all your accomplishments."

Earl Hákon then asks: "Why are you so much harsher and more badly-behaved than the other beggars?"

Thorleif answers in a way which is probably meant to express, indirectly, his pain, anguish and misery as the victim of the Earl's harsh treatment: "What else can you expect from someone who has never had anything but misery and wretchedness, who lacks the bare necessities and has long slept out in fields and forests, than that he should get angry at old age and everything else, when he was once used to honour and a life of enjoyment from the most glorious chieftains but is now hated by every worthless peasant?"

The earl now asks Thorleif if he has any special skills, since he has been among chieftains. Thorleif answers that he may have had some talents in his younger days but he cannot show them off until he has had something to eat and drink. The earl then orders his men to give the old man as much as he needs, and Thorleif proceeds to throw lots of food into his bag in such a manner that it looks as if he is gulping it all down. "People rocked with laughter at this old man". This apparent demonstration of gluttony is evidently meant to be a comic interlude before the recitation of the *Jarlsníð* begins. It may also be – as Terry Gunnell has

suggested – that Thorleif's performance is supposed to imitate the traditional performance of the Christmas Goat or *Julbocken*, a person disguised as an old he-goat who would appear at Christmas celebrations at least as early as the late Middle Ages to entertain the guests in various more or less outrageous ways (Gunnell 2007, Celander 1933, Liungman 1946). Thorleif's behaviour is also reminiscent of the *ettergangar*, masked trickster figures who in bygone days would appear at wedding feasts in Trøndelag, the very region where Thorleif's performance is supposed to have taken place. These characters are described as follows in folkloristic literature:

> The *ettergangar* were people from outside the usual area of invited guests and the family. They usually came to the farm when the dance started. Often they were rigged out as tramps, and they could wear animal masks and horns. They would be seated at the table and had to get both food and drink. They could talk freely, but it was not usual to attach too much importance to what they said, so they could say what they liked. A madman could say things he would otherwise have to keep quiet about. [- - -] Sometimes they could fight, but usually it was just good fun... (Eike 2007, 522)

There are thus indications that Thorleif is putting on a comic show that the audience – both the audience in Earl Hákon's hall and the audience listening to the story about the *Jarlsníð* – would recognize as a traditional part of the midwinter festival. But the comedy becomes more terrifying when Thorleif next asks Earl Hákon if he may recite a poem in his honour, and the earl, after some hesitation, gives his consent. Thorleif now begins to recite the *Jarlsníð*, and the effects of the abusive poem are meticulously reported: first the itching between the earl's legs, then the dark fog, which makes it impossible to see what is happening in the hall, and finally the onslaught of weapons, the death of the earl's men, and the sickness of Earl Hákon himself, a sickness from which he does not recover until the following year. Thorleif, on the other hand, manages to get out of Norway and make his way back to Denmark, using the food in his leather bag as his provisions. He reports to King Svein on what has happened and is praised for his deed.

The last part of the *þáttr* describes how Earl Hákon, after his recovery, avenges himself by using pagan sorcery which leads to Thorleif's death in Iceland. After Thorleif is buried in a mound at Þingvellir, his ghost appears in a dream and teaches a shepherd by the name of Hallbjörn to compose a poem praising Thorleif for the famous deed of having crafted the *Jarlsníð*. This concluding episode is the one that is generally believed

to have been influenced by a similar episode in Bede's Latin *Church history*. It may well have been added at a fairly late stage in the tradition about Thorleif. The oldest and most important part of this tradition, however, is clearly the dramatic story of how Thorleif recites the *Jarlsníð*.

What makes this story highly effective, I think, is the fact that it enables its audience to identify with the audience in Earl Hákon's hall, and the identification is of course particularly strong if the story is presented orally in a social context similar to the Wedding of Reykjahólar or a large Christmas party, where people are eating and drinking and listening to literary entertainment as the earl's men were doing at the midwinter celebrations at Lade. The scene of Thorleif's recitation merges with that of the storyteller presenting *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds*. We seem to experience a performance within a performance or a play within a play. This is an example of what I have called a "double scene", that is a scene in which the scene of the narrative merges with the scene of narration, or vice versa. The act of telling the *þáttr* transforms its listeners into participants in Earl Hákon's midwinter festival witnessing Thorleif's speech act of reciting the *Jarlsníð*. This may sound like magic, but there is really nothing supernatural about the process, because this is the way good theatre, or a good performance, normally works in order to make the audience experience the world of myth or fiction as part of their own world.

Thorleif's recitation of the *Jarlsníð* is only one of several examples in Old Norse literature where a speech act is performed, establishing a double scene that will transform the spectator's or listener's perception of reality. But it is an unusually strong and powerful one, I think, and it does not matter at all whether or not the recitation of *Jarlsníð* actually took place in real life, because myth is often in some sense more real than reality itself, especially when it is enacted within a traditional framework such as a Christmas party, where the audience can feel at home and identify with what goes on.

I would finally like to consider for a moment how the story was handled by the priest Jón Þórðarson, the man who included it in *Flateyjarbók* for his wealthy mentor Jón Hákonarson. As Elizabeth Ashman Rowe has shown very persuasively in her important study *The Development of Flateyjarbók*, Jón added this *þáttr* and several others to his main text as digressive *exempla* illustrating how rulers should or should not behave towards their subjects in order to qualify as pious and Christian leaders. Earl Hákon, the last pagan ruler of Norway, is Jón's prime ex-

ample of how not to behave. This is made clear in his introduction to *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds*, where he explains the moral of the story in a rhetorical style very different from the actual narrative:

> The story that will now be told happened in the early days of Hákon, Earl of Lade. It shows how he was shamed, and quite rightly, for magic arts, witchcraft and sorcery, because his wickedness and apostasy were both a great burden to many, and irreparably harmful to their body and soul. It befell him, as it does to many, that when the time of chastisement came he could not escape, for it is in the devil's nature to deceive the man over whom he thinks he has full control and who has no hope of God's mercy. He first puts him to shame with the crooked guile of his accursed cunning, causing him to live a hideous life and, at the end of his days in the world, drowns him in the dark dungeon of wretched torments, in misery and subjection without end.

Now, this is also a speech act and a very interesting specimen but one that is quite different from the kind of speech acts we meet later in the story and in most classical saga literature. For Jón Þorðarson is here not primarily a storyteller aiming to entertain his audience or a poet aiming to praise or abuse his lord but a priest who wants to convert his congregation to correct Christian thinking. His rhetorical performance is that of an eloquent preacher speaking from the lectern down to the people below.

Moralizing speech of that sort may certainly do something to people. But the cool and apparently "objective" speech of the classical Icelandic saga-writers and skalds may in the long run be more effective from a literary point of view. They may not change the weather by filling the room with dark fog, but they can change our way of seeing the world.

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Summary

Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds, or "The Tale of Thorleif, the Earl's Poet", tells the story of how Thorleif avenged himself on Earl Hákon of Norway by reciting the *Jarlsníð*, a deeply insulting and destructive poem, at the midwinter festival at Lade when the Earl himself was present. The recitation is an example of a "speech act" in the sense of Austin and Searle, since its main purpose is not to convey meaning or express emotions but to "do things with words", in this case to put a magic spell on Earl Hákon and his men. But the story of the recitation is also an example of a semi-theatrical phenomenon that I have called a "double scene", i.e. an oral presentation in which the scene of the narrative merges with the scene of the performance (see Lönnroth, *Den dubbla scenen* 1978, new edition 2008).

The aim of the paper is to show that speech act theory and performance theory may be useful in analysing some early texts in Old Norse, especially when these theories are used in combination.

From Accusation to Narration
The transformation of the *senna* in *Íslendingaþættir*

Elena Gurevich

As saga scholarship has already established, direct discourse in family sagas contains a remarkable peculiarity: "it concerns present or future events, seldom past ones, and it does not itself bear factual plot information" (Clover 1982: 112). Hence, to put "a crucial prehistory in the mouth of a character is at direct odds with classical saga practice. [...] No important item of plot information is entrusted solely to a character. A character's report of the situation is a complement to the narrator's account, not a substitute for it" (*Ibid.*). Unlike the protagonists of the *Íslendingasögur*, the characters in the *Íslendingaþættir* could assume the function of a story-teller. In some *þættir*, the plots are developed through flashbacks in the form of first-person retrospective tales recounting past events which most often cause a sharp turn in the action (Gurevich 2003). The fact that this narrative strategy was absent from the dominant prose form, i.e. the saga, raises questions about its genesis in the *þættir*, whose narrative art in other respects is similar to that of family sagas. The easiest way to explain this problem is surely to attribute the rise of the first-person narrative in Icelandic prose to foreign influence, especially in view of the fact that this technique occurs in the *fornaldarsögur*. Nevertheless, some factors internal to Icelandic literary tradition must also be investigated in this connection, and this is the aim of the present paper.

Even in the classical sagas, however, one can find situations where the characters relate certain information not previously reported by the narrator. This could occur in the course of a *senna*, a verbal duel, which, as part of a saga composition, retained the generic features of a special kind of discourse even though it did not entirely conform to the poetics of the

saga narrative.[1] A first-person report of past events, real or fictional, is essential to the *senna*, as distinct from the saga.

Because the genre of *senna* has been much studied, it will suffice to summarize the characteristics relevant to the purposes of this paper. The *senna* appears in both prose and poetry (the most famous example of this genre is *Lokasenna*), and although it follows a stereotyped structure, it lacks a fixed form. Scholars generally assumed that the *senna* originated in the real practice of discourse similar to some modern abuse-games, e.g. those described by Labov (1972).[2] Perhaps this similarity explains the *senna*'s semi-independent status within different types of texts. The standard elements of the *senna* include threats, insults, challenges and replies thereto. These elements follow an order: a regular alternation of attack and counter-attack governed by traditional rules. Being "a stylized battle of words", the *senna* unfolds according to a structural pattern, consisting of a Preliminary (Identification and Characterization), and then a Central Exchange (its basic elements are Accusation and Denial, Threat and Counter-threat, or Challenge and Reply, or their combination) (see

[1] It is possible to point out a remarkable instance of interaction between the conventions of the two genres, *senna* and saga, that, to my mind, provides evidence that the *senna* retained its semi-independent status within the saga. In *Njáls saga* ch. 119 Skarphéðinn, in an effort to offend Guðmundr inn ríki, alludes to some obscure circumstances external to the saga-narrative of Guðmundr's conflict with Þorkell hákr, thus pronouncing the name of a person not mentioned previously in the story. Cf. "[...] er eigi einn veg farit ógæfu okkarri. Ek hefi ámæli af vígi Hǫskulds Hvítanessgoða, sem várkunn er. En þeir gerðu illmæli um þik Þorkell hákr ok Þórir Helgason, ok hefir þú af því ámæli." (*ÍF*, XII: 302) ["we are both men of ill luck, each in his own way. I stand condemned, as is only right, for the killing of Hoskuld Hvitaness-Priest; but Thorkel Braggart and Thorir Helgason have spread some very unpleasant tales about you, for which you yourself must stand condemned." (*Njal's Saga* 1960: 247)]. Thereupon this new character is introduced into the saga by the narrator himself. Formally such "narrative inversion" seems to be justified by the fact that Þorkell hákr takes part in the next round of the *senna*. However, the saga-author does not ignore the first appearance of this character in Skarphéðinn's speech, finding it necessary to shed light on the incident already alluded to in the verbal duel. After recounting Þorkell hákr's genealogy and some details of his personal history which portrayed him as a great champion, the narrator returns to Þorkell's confrontation with Guðmundr that Skarphéðinn has only hinted at in his speech (cf. "Hann barðisk ok á Ljósvetningaleið við Guðmund inn ríka með brœðrum sínum, ok hǫfðu Ljósvetningar sigr; gerðu þeir þá illmæli um Guðmund Þórir Helgason ok Þorkell hákr." (p. 303) ["He and his brothers also fought against Gudmund the Powerful at the Ljosawater Assembly, and the Ljosawater men won the day; it was on that occasion that Thorkel Braggart and Thorir Helgason had slandered Gudmund." (p. 248)]). Besides being an attempt to balance the conflicting conventions of the two genres, this saga episode also demonstrates that assertions made by the parties of the *senna* were meant to be intelligible to the audience: otherwise the story-teller provided the necessary explanation.

[2] Cf. Harris 1979: 69 ff.

Harris 1979:66). The schema can vary; moreover, the reply element is frequently suppressed.

Within the *senna* we can distinguish two types of hostile attacks: accusations and threats. While threats refer to the present and to the future, accusations appeal to the past, reporting real or fictitious events in the opponent's personal history; moreover, these utterances might vary from mere allusion intended for the competent in-group audience to a more detailed account of an incident. However, even the latter kind of allegations are hardly consistent narratives comprehensible for an outsider, because they focus not on a story itself but on certain striking (often grotesque) aspects of an event.[3] The aim of such accusations is to humiliate the rival, showing him in the most unfavourable light to compel him either to respond or to retreat. The topics exploited in abusive statements are traditionally: cowardice, low or unfree social status, and sexual perversions (Harris 1979: 66). It has often been stressed that, like the "sounding" described by Labov, the *senna* has a ritual nature. This is confirmed both by the clichéd character and by the absurdity of many assertions employed by the rivals. The factual state of affairs is virtually irrelevant; "an effective move" in a *senna* "is the product of inventiveness and verbal skill, regardless of the truth-value of the utterance" (Bax & Padmos 1983: 166). That even the most serious allegations were taken as context-dependent rather than real is suggested by the fact that they neither entailed any consequences for the speaker nor required an obligatory denial: an appropriate response to an accusation could well be a counter-claim.

Senna is not always distinguished from *mannjafnaðr*, i.e. a contest in

[3] E.g. Skarphéðinn's exchange with Skapti Þóroddsson (*Njáls saga* ch. 119): "Hverr er sá maðr," segir Skapti, "er fjórir menn ganga fyrri, mikill maðr ok fǫlleitr ok ógæfusamligr, harðligr ok trǫllsligr?" Hann svarar: "Skarpheðinn heiti ek, ok hefir þú sét mik jafnan á þingi, en vera mun ek því vitrari en þú, at ek þarf eigi at spyrja þik, hvat þú heitir. Þú heitir Skapti Þóroddsson, en fyrr kallaðir þú þik Burstakoll, þá er þú hafðir drepit Ketil ór Eldu; gerðir þú þér þá koll ok bart tjǫru í hǫfuð þér. Síðan keyptir þú at þrælum at rísta upp jarðarmen, ok skreitt þú þar undir um nóttina. Síðan fórt þú til Þórólfs Loptssonar á Eyrum, ok tók hann við þér ok bar út í mjǫlsekkum sínum." (*ÍF*, XII: 298 f.) ["Who is that man," asked Skapti, "the fifth in the line, that tall, fierce-looking, troll-like man with the pale, ill-starred look?" "Skarp-Hedin is my name," he replied, "and you have often seen me here at the Althing. But I must be sharper than you, for I have no need to ask you your name. You are called Skapti Thoroddsson, but once you called yourself Bristle-Head, when you had just killed Ketil of Elda; that was the time you shaved your head and smeared it with tar, and bribed some slaves to cut you a strip of turf to cower under for the night. Later you fled to Thorolf Loptsson of Eyrar, who took you in and then smuggled you abroad in his flour sacks." (*Njal's Saga* 1960: 245)]

the comparison of men (Lönnroth 1979: 97; Clover 1979; 1980: 445). While many similarities exist between these two types of verbal contests, we can agree with Bax and Padmos (1983: 159) that "in a *senna* the principal strategy seems to be the degradation of the opponent, while in a *mannjafnaðr* each participant mainly speaks favourably of himself (thus by presupposition degrading the other, whereas a *senna* most often exposes direct attack)"; and further: "the principal actions in any *mannjafnaðr* are the speech actions of proclaiming one's dominance and of dismissing this claim" (1983: 170). Although it appears that *mannjafnaðr* is not attested either in the family sagas or in the *þættir*, we will return to this genre later in the paper.

Whereas the verbal duels in *Njáls saga*, *Ölkofra þáttr* and *Bandamanna saga* are commonly recognised as examples of the Old Norse *senna*, as far as I know the episode of *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* on which I am going to focus has never been involved in any study of the genre. Hence the need to prove that it actually can be interpreted as a *senna*.

Ch. 6 of the *Flateyjarbók* redaction of *Sneglu-Halla þáttr*[4] describes a confrontation between two Icelanders at the court of Haraldr harðráði, Halli and the king's chief poet, Þjóðólfr Arnórsson. The rivalry between the two skalds had already been mentioned earlier in ch. 3 of the *þáttr*; this relates that while walking in the street the king happened to witness a quarrel between a tanner and a blacksmith and subsequently ordered Þjóðólfr to compose a verse about the incident. Þjóðólfr thought it beneath his dignity as chief poet to compose on such a trivial subject, but the king urged him to carry out the order. He explained that the task was not easy, as the skald had to represent the quarrelling artisans as if they were famous epic heroes, first Sigurðr Fáfnisbani and Fáfnir and then Þórr and the giant Geirrøðr, in each case identifying their trade. Þjóðólfr performed this assignment brilliantly and was praised for his poetic skill.

Halli was not present among the king's followers when Þjóðólfr improvised these verses, but later he had an opportunity to hear them recit-

[4] The *þáttr* is preserved in two versions. The first is contained in *Morkinskinna* and *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*, where it is included in *Saga Haralds harðráða*. The second occurs as an independent narrative in the latter part of *Flateyjarbók* where it is placed among some other *þættir* which follow the saga of the same king. Scholars have nevertheless not arrived at a definitive conclusion about the relationship between the two redactions. Although it is possible to single out certain features probably indicating that the *Morkinskinna* version might be the oldest, it has been appreciably shortened and edited for inclusion in the saga (see *ÍF*, IX: cix-cxiv; Danielsson 1993). Since the *Flateyjarbók* account is considerably longer, better told, and apparently the only complete version of the *þáttr*, the following analysis is based on the second redaction.

ed by the king's men, who said that Halli lacked the ability to compose on that level. Although he acknowledged his inferiority, his words were reported to the king and represented as if he "thought himself to be no less a poet than Þjóðólfr (*at hann þættisk eigi minna skáld en Þjóðólfr*)." The king's reaction was predictable: claiming that he doubted Halli's ability to compete with Þjóðolfr, the king promised that it would be "put to the test (*vér fáim þetta reynt*)." In the next episode Halli proves himself to be an able improviser, composing a verse about Haraldr's dwarf, but a comparison of the merits of the two skalds is still to come. The scene we find in ch. 6 of the *þáttr* is actually the very test to which the king refers, though it evidently exceeds the limits of competition in poetic skill and is carried out in the most unexpected way.

The episode begins with a dialogue between the skald and the ruler, a type-scene usually preceding the performance (or, as in *Stúfs þáttr*, the composition) of a praise poem. Here it replaces the preliminary exchange of the *senna*, which often opens with Identification. Halli comes before the king who is sitting in the hall with his retinue, stating that he (Halli) has composed a *drápa* in honour of the king and asking for a hearing. Haraldr in turn inquires whether Halli has ever composed any poems before. When the king learns that this is Halli's first long poem, Haraldr declares that Halli is taking too much upon himself "considering the calibre of poets" who have previously praised him in their poems.[5] A dialogue of this kind, although stereotyped in content, at least originally, was far from a mere formality. A king whose deeds were commemorated in skaldic praise poetry could not be indifferent to the professional qualities of the poets who glorified him in their poems. The mastery of the skald and the posthumous fame of the king were by no means unrelated.

Up to this point, the scene has unfolded according to the traditional pattern so that the audience has had every reason to expect an appropriate conclusion: i.e. that Halli will, nonetheless, get his way and be given the floor to recite his poem, thus proving his poetic ability. Finally, the reader expects the skald to receive a generous reward from the ruler to whom his verses are addressed. In fact this pattern is realised in full so that the hero gets everything he deserves, but this happens only at the very end of the episode.

[5] "Þat munu sumir menn mæla," segir konungr, "at þú takisk mikit á hendr, slík skáld sem ort hafa um mik áðr eptir nǫkkurum málefnum..." (*ÍF*, IX: 276) ["Some people would say," said the king, "that you're taking on quite a job considering the calibre of poets who have previously composed poems about me for various reasons." (*CSI*, I: 348)]

In the meantime, having left Halli's request unacknowledged, Haraldr turns to Þjóðólfr for advice. Depicted in the *þáttr* as an arrogant chief skald, Þjóðólfr is disinclined to support a rival. Avoiding the king's question, he offers advice to Halli, exhorting him not to deceive the king. Halli, Þjóðólfr insists, lied when he asserted that the *drápa* in Haraldr's honour had been the first long poem he had ever composed. In fact he concealed the fact that he had already composed another poem entitled *Kolluvísur* ("Polled-Cow Verses") about the cows he tended in Iceland. Halli does not deny this. His only excuse is that this poem was too insignificant to be mentioned at all. When the king insists upon hearing this poem first, Halli declares that "there will have to be more than one amusement,"[6] demanding that Þjóðólfr also perform a poem he had composed while living in Iceland. The name of this poem was *Soðtrogsvísur* ("Food Trough Verses"). Thus the offender is paid in his own coin.

As the initiator of the conflict, Þjóðólfr challenges his rival in an effort to humiliate him before the king. It is obvious that what he considers advice actually contains a hidden threat to expose a liar and reveal certain dishonourable facts he has learned about him. In response to Haraldr's inquiries, an accusation proper follows. Although this particular subject occurs only once, it is easy to demonstrate that it fits perfectly into the traditional content of a *senna*. The underlying meaning of Þjóðólfr's abusive statement emphasises the antithesis between the elevated heroic topic of a royal eulogy, i.e. the topic of his own poetic production, and the low themes of his opponent's poem dealing with the contemptible peasant work which befits a servant or slave. Thus Þjóðólfr's démarche constitutes a clear offensive, a hostile attack aiming to degrade the composer of such a despicable piece of poetry both professionally and socially. Having parried the blow of his enemy with his own weapons, Halli declares that he accepts the challenge, then in the most unambiguous manner defines the genre of his opponent's attack:

> ok er þat vél, at Þjóðólfr leitaði á mik eða afvirði fyrir mér, því at upp eru svá komnir í mér bitar ok jaxlar, at ek kann vel at svara honum jǫfnum orðum. (*ÍF*, IX: 277)
>
> [It's fine that Þjóðólfr should attack me or denigrate me because my eye-teeth and molars have come in so that I am quite able to answer him word for word. (*CSI*, I: 348)][7]

[6] "Skemmt mun þá fleira," segir Halli. (*ÍF*, IX: 277).

[7] This passage is missing in the *Morkinskinna* redaction of the *þáttr*.

No doubt Halli's remark about his eye-teeth and molars goes beyond simply revealing his maturity. As we can see, Halli is attempting to further a hostile debate by means of a demonstration of strength and force. Such an encounter in which the interlocutors exchange "words of equal worth" one after another is evidently a *senna*.

It should be noted, however, that here the *senna* has acquired some novel and unfamiliar features. The first is due to the new context of the verbal duelling, i.e. the rivalry between the two skalds for the sympathy of their patron; there is also a new generic frame – *Íslendingaþættir*, in which alongside an Icelander another protagonist appears, a king.[8] In addition to the opponents who are parties to the conflict, the important role in the *senna* is given to the representative of the otherwise silent audience, which in this case happens to be the Norwegian ruler himself. In this scene he plays the part of an arbitrator and now and then even an instigator of the conflict (cf. Haraldr's reaction to Halli's reply: "Konungr brosti at, ok þótti honum gaman at etja þeim saman" (p. 277) ["The king grinned at that and thought it fun to set them against each other" (p. 348)]). The king directs the entire argument between the skalds through his questions and remarks. Every assault by the opponents takes place only with his sanction.

This innovation entails yet another one. Bringing the third party into the action, i.e. the spectators, who usually only watch the development of the debate and intervene at the concluding stage, results in a more complicated *senna* structure. As a consequence of the introduction of a new component, the Arbitrator's Question (or Remark), a direct address to the opponent ("You have done something") is replaced with an appeal to the audience, which is informed about the opponent's behaviour ("He has done something"). Further, it entails some revisions of the traditional moves in the *senna*, which are no longer restricted to the ordinary alternation of the opponents' attacks and counter-attacks. Every one of Halli

[8] On *Íslendingaþættir* see especially Harris (1972; 1976; 1991). Harris' stimulating attempt to identify a recurring narrative pattern in a particular group of short stories, "king-and-Icelander (or *útanferðar*) *þættir*", most of which are found only as embedded narratives in the kings' sagas, and thus to define them as a generic subgroup, has not won general support. No scholarly consensus yet exists on such issues as the origin of *þættir*, their status within the larger works in which they were preserved, and the basic distinctions between the saga and the *þáttr*. The dominant trend in recent scholarship is the contextual investigation of *þættir* within the compilations (see, e.g. Ármann Jakobsson 1997; 1998; Rowe 2005). Despite the fact that in this area of research a range of unsolved problems persist, few scholarly studies exploring the approach to *þættir* from a generic perspective have appeared over the last decades (see Gurevich 2004).

and Þjóðólfr's moves, whether an accusation or a reply, is expanded into a dialogue with an arbitrator, thus being dramatised in a distinct (micro)-scene. Only once throughout the entire episode does Halli address Þjóðólfr directly, but the king immediately pulls up the disputing parties ("Ekki skuluð þit við talask" (p. 277) ["You two mustn't quarrel"]).

However, notwithstanding the transformations noted above, the confrontation between the two skalds develops fundamentally along the lines of a traditional *senna* and first of all demonstrates one of its main properties: structural symmetry. Halli's counter-attack almost mirrors his opponent's initial attack. When the king learns that his court poet had once composed a long poem with a non-heroic title, he asks Halli (as he previously had asked Þjóðólfr) what the poem was about. Halli's reply is very similar to Þjóðólfr's concerning the poem composed by his rival:

> Þat er ort um þat, er hann bar út ǫsku með ǫðrum systkinum sínum, ok þótti þá til einkis annars fœrr fyrir vitsmuna sakar, ok varð þó um at sjá, at eigi væri eldr í, því at hann þurfti allt vit sitt í þann tíma. (*ÍF*, IX: 277)
>
> [It's about his carrying out ashes with his siblings, and he was thought to be capable of nothing more because of his lack of intelligence, and moreover it was necessary to make sure there were no live coals in the ashes because he had no more brains than he needed at that time. (*CSI*, I: 348).]

Here again we observe a feature typical of *senna*: Halli's counter-attack outdoes Þjóðólfr's attack upon him, hence in the context of verbal combat it is much more effective. The meaning of his claim is clear. He concedes that when at home in Iceland he was assigned work which was degrading for a free-born man and which, of course, was entirely improper for a future king's follower. Nevertheless, his arrogant opponent, the chief court skald, was also required to perform "low status work" when he was at home, and in fact his work assignment was even more humiliating than Halli's. It was the most contemptible of all farmwork, a task normally assigned to the most worthless member of a household. Thus Þjóðólfr is represented as somebody who was good for nothing and could not even handle as easy a task as carrying out ashes properly. Þjóðólfr is compelled to admit that Halli has told the truth and then, in answer to Haraldr's inquiries, explains why he, Þjóðólfr, had had to engage in "such contemptible work (*svá óvirðuligt verk*)."

By the conclusion of the first round in this verbal interaction, the competition in abuse has given way to a poetic competition. At the king's re-

quest, the opponents in turn perform the poems which caused the argument (neither is cited in the *þáttr*), and then hear the king's judgement on their compositions. Once again Þjóðólfr suffers defeat. In Haraldr's opinion, although both poems are insignificant and in keeping with their topics (*yrkisefnin*), the one composed by the chief skald "was even slighter (*þó enn minna*)." Such an unfavourable resolution impels Þjóðólfr to launch a new assault against his opponent. He readily agrees with the king and admits that Halli is very sarcastic (*orðhvass mjǫk*), but to his mind his opponent "is more obliged to avenge his father than engage in verbal duels with me here in Norway" (*CSI*, I: 349): "En skyldara þœtti mér honum at hefna fǫður síns en *eiga sennur við mik* hér í Nóregi" (*ÍF*, IX: 278). As we may see, it is Þjóðólfr's turn to define the genre of their contest and in compliance with the nature of their interaction he immediately charges Halli with the most common sort of assault typical of *senna*.

The second round in the verbal duel starts at this point, and from the very beginning it reflects in every structural detail the first exchange of the *senna*. The accusation is followed by the arbitrator's questions and Halli's replies. As on the previous occasion, the latter does not dispute the truth of Þjóðólfr's claim, but justifies his behaviour, giving a fitting answer to the king's indignant question:

> "Hví fórtu af Íslandi til hǫfðingja við þat, at þú hafðir eigi hefnt fǫður þíns?" segir konungr. "Því, herra," segir Halli, "at ek var barn at aldri, er faðir minn var veginn, ok tóku frændr málit ok sættusk á fyrir mína hǫnd. En þat þykkir illt nafn á váru landi at heita griðníðingr." (*ÍF*, IX: 278)

> ["Why did you leave Iceland to meet with chieftains given that you had not avenged your father?" said the king. "Because, my lord," said Halli, "I was a child when my father was killed and my relatives took over the case and settled it on my behalf. And in our country it's thought bad to be called a truce-breaker." (*CSI*, I:349)]

Haraldr likes his words very much: "Þat er nauðsyn at ganga eigi á grið eða sættir" ["It's a duty not to violate truces or settlements" (*Ibid.*)], and Halli, with his quick wit, manages "to free" himself from the accusation (*er úr þessu allvel leyst*).

Having thus relieved himself of the suspicion of dishonourable behaviour, i.e. evasion of his duty, Halli once again assumes his offensive against Þjóðólfr on his opponent's territory, taking up the topic of vengeance which the latter had just raised. And this time he deals such a sud-

den and precisely-aimed blow that Þjóðólfr is left no other way out but to catch hold of his sword (*senna* may be resolved by a physical fight). As we will see, at the end of the verbal part of their confrontation the chief poet suffers utter defeat: it is noteworthy that in the second exchange beyond his initial attack on Halli, Þjóðólfr makes no remarks at all. It is Halli who has the last word in this verbal combat, thereby gaining the upper hand over his rival.

Having won the king's approval, Halli hurries to find "excuses" for his offender:

> "en vel má Þjóðólfr tala stórmannliga um slíka hluti, því at engan veit ek jafngreypiliga hefnt hafa síns fǫður sem hann." "Víst er Þjóðólfr líkligr til at hafa þat hraustliga gǫrt," segir konungr, "eða hvat [er] verkum gǫrt um þat, at hann hafi þat framar gǫrt en aðrir menn?" "Þat helzt, herra," segir Halli, "at hann át sinn fǫðurbana." Nú œpðu menn upp ok þóttusk aldri slík undr heyrt hafa. Konungrinn brosti at ok bað menn vera hljóða. "Ger þetta satt, er þú segir, Halli," segir konungr. Halli mælti: "Þat hygg ek, at Þorljótr héti faðir Þjóðólfs. Hann bjó í Svarfaðardal á Íslandi, ok var hann fátœkr mjǫk, en átti fjǫlða barna. En þat er siðr á Íslandi á haustum, at bœndr þinga til fátœkra manna, ok var þá engi fyrri til nefndr en Þorljótr, faðir Þjóðólfs, ok einn bóndi var svá stórlyndr, at honum gaf sumargamlan kálf. Síðan sœkir hann kálfinn ok hafði á taum, ok var lykkja á enda taumsins; ok er hann kemr heim at túngarði sínum, hefr hann kálfinn upp á garðinn, ok var furðuliga hár garðrinn, en þó var hæra fyrir innan, því at þar hafði verit grafit torf til garðsins. Síðan ferr hann inn yfir garðinn, en kálfrinn veltr út af garðinum. En lykkjan, er á var taumsendanum, brásk um háls honum Þorljóti, ok kenndi hann eigi niðr fótum; hekk nú sínu megin hvárr, ok váru dauðir báðir, er til var komit. Drógu bǫrnin heim kálfinn ok gerðu til matar, ok hygg ek, at Þjóðólfr hefði óskert sinn hlut af honum." "Nærri hófi myndi þat," segir konungr. Þjóðólfr brá sverði ok vildi hǫggva til Halla. Hljópu menn þá í milli þeira. Konungr kvað hvárigum hlýða skyldu at gera ǫðrum mein, — "leitaðir þú, Þjóðólfr, fyrri á Halla." (*ÍF*, IX: 278 ff.)

> ["but Thjodolf may very well speak arrogantly in such matters since I know no one who has avenged his father as grimly as he." "Certainly, Thjodolf is likely to have done that boldly," said the king, "but what in fact is the proof that he did more in this than other men?" "Most of all, my lord," said Halli, "that he ate his father's killer." At this people set up an uproar and it seemed to them they had never heard such a monstrosity. The king grinned at this and ordered silence. "Show that what you've said is true, Halli," said the king. Halli said, "I think that Thorljot was Thjodolf's father. He lived in Svarfadardal in Iceland and he was very poor and had many children. It's the custom in Iceland that in the autumn the farmers assemble to discuss the poor people and at that time no one was named sooner than Thorljot, Thjodolf's father. One farmer was so generous that he gave him a calf which was one summer

> old. Then he fetched the calf away and had a lead on it and a noose in the end of the lead. When he got to his hayfield wall, he lifted the calf up onto the wall and it was extremely high and all the higher on the inner side because the turves for the wall had been dug there. Then he went in over the wall and the calf rolled off the wall on the outside. The noose at the end of the lead tightened around Thorljot's neck and he couldn't reach the ground with his feet. Then each was hanging on his own side of the wall and both were dead when people came up. The children dragged the calf home and prepared it for food and I think that Thjodolf ate his full share of it." "That would be very close to reasonable," said the king. Thjodolf drew his sword and wanted to strike Halli. Men ran in between them. The king said that neither should dare do the other harm — "Thjodolf, you went for Halli first." (*CSI*, I: 349)].

There is no doubt that Halli's statement contains every necessary ingredient of an accusatory speech against an opponent which is commonly employed in the course of a *senna*. It is also evident that it contains a pragmatic nucleus which meets the requirements of this genre. Moreover, the themes of poverty and begging exploited by the hero are conventional themes of a *senna*.[9] They are also typical for *mannjafnaðr* which is a related genre,[10] and in fact Halli's counter-attack against Þjóðólfr bears a strong resemblance to this type of verbal interaction. Each time he replies to the insults of his rival, Halli is first of all striving to bring him down to his own level. Aiming at Þjóðólfr's degradation, Halli is also trying to prove their equal culpability in everything of which Þjóðólfr accuses him: they are socially equal, for both descend from poor farmers; equal in the handling of their poetic craft, for both composed verses on low topics improper for a king's skald; and finally, their family circumstances and obligations are equal. Moreover, in responding to Haraldr's questions, each time Halli goes further and demonstrates his own superiority or, to put it the other way round, "a negative perfection" of his opponent who either achieves the worst result on the same field, or finds himself in the most humiliating and absurd situation possible. Furthermore, the resemblance to *mannjafnaðr* is supported by details such as the scene of action, the king's hall, where the confrontation between the two skalds takes place before the eyes of a great number of spectators. The entire action – mostly because of Halli's efforts – is, at

[9] See e.g. Hermundr's attack on Egill in *Bandamanna saga* ch. 10 and *Hárbarðsljóð* v. 6: "Þeygi er, sem þú þriú bú góð eigir; / berbeinn þú stendr, ok hefir brautinga gervi, / þatki, at þú hafir brækr þínar" (Edda: 79) ["You don't look like a lord with three good estates of your own: without breeches, barefooted, you look more like a tramp."]

[10] Cf. *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* ch. 37, v. 2: "en þú með byggðum / batt þér matar" (EM: 65) ["while you were out begging food from the farmers." (Lönnroth 1979: 111)]

least to some degree, performed for their amusement. And nonetheless there are good reasons to interpret this verbal duel not as a *mannjafnaðr* but as a *senna*. It is evident that every statement made by the parties is invariably "a proposition referring to the hearer" (Bax & Padmos 1983: 159) and not to the speaker himself, and that the essence of each claim is not the speaker's own achievements, i.e. boasting, but the abuse and derision of his opponent.[11]

However, it is easy to see that Halli's final attack, which crowns the entire scene, does not entirely fit within the frame of this genre. Here we find a retrospective story, which unlike other accusations of this type which commonly refer to the opponent's past, has all the characteristics of a fully-fledged narrative. In response to the king's demand to prove the truth of his assertion concerning the excessive cruelty of Þjóðólfr's revenge, Halli does not confine himself to mentioning grotesque details of the incident that may discredit his opponent. Instead, he relates these facts in a coherent narrative intended for an audience unfamiliar with the information he is making public. Whereas in the classical *senna* any appeal to the past takes the form of hints about well-known circumstances, and the centre of gravity is naturally transferred from the reported facts to their unfavourable interpretation, Halli's story is entirely self-sufficient in that all the facts speak for themselves. Although Halli's story preserves both the conventional subject matter and pragmatic intent of the accusation—one of the moves of the *senna*—at the same time it demonstrates a new syntagmatic dimension previously unknown to this genre.

What we have here apparently constitutes a significant transformation which occurred because a detailed linear retrospective account, resembling first-person narratives such as are found in a number of "king-and-Icelander *þættir*", supplanted the partially articulated references to the opponents' previous histories (or hints of some shameful past events) typical of the *senna*. How can this be explained? There are grounds to believe that one of the major reasons for this transformation lies in the impossibility of appealing to the collective memory of the audience. This difficulty arises as a consequence of the inclusion of a verbal duel between heroes who are Icelanders in a narrative whose action is set out-

[11] In this respect the scene differs from the verbal contest between the two royal brothers, Sigurðr and Eysteinn (see *Mork*: 186 f.), whose participants not only speak favourably of themselves but derogate their opponent. In contrast with this famous *mannjafnaðr* episode, the quarrel in the *þáttr* contains no explicit boasting.

side of Iceland. Hence the other characters of the story, who are witnesses to the unfolding scene, do not possess any preliminary information about relevant past events. A no-less-important influence on the transformation of the *senna* in this particular case is exerted by the specific generic frame of the contest between Halli and Þjóðólfr: *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* is a collection of amusing anecdotes whose main character is a trickster.

It is precisely this confluence with anecdote that must have added certain features not previously possessed by the *senna* to the confrontation between the two skalds. The most significant innovations are the acuteness and absurd irony of Halli's statement. From these innovations result such properties of Halli's final accusation as its power to bring about a sudden turn that changes the entire situation and ultimately establishes the truth. Neither of these properties was characteristic of accusations levelled in the course of a traditional *senna*, but they are more often than not peculiar to the retrospective stories found in the *Íslendingaþættir* (such as *Halldórs þáttr Snorrasonar hinn fyrri, Þórarins þáttr Nefjólfssonar* and *Hrafns þáttr Guðrúnarsonar*). In fact, Halli's tragicomic story of the miserable fate of Þjóðólfr's father is at the same time a cunning defamation of the offender. It functions as a final (fatal) stroke in the verbal duel as well as an unexpectedly witty – anecdotic – resolution of a misunderstanding caused by the wrongful interpretation of Halli's claim that the chief court skald had eaten his father's killer. (We should also note that the reaction of the king's men who had so far been passive spectators of the action added to the acute stress of the situation.) It is not the grotesque nature of this tale itself that indicates its origins in some other genre, since this feature actually is the property of a *senna*, but its suddenness and novelty, characteristic of an anecdote. In this connection it does not matter whether Halli's report is factually true. Unfortunately, there is no biographical data beyond this story at our disposal; however, we know from *Skáldatal* that Þjóðólfr's father's name was not Þorljótr but Arnórr, which possibly implies that Halli is lying.[12] What actually matters is the suspense created by Halli's misunderstood allegation and its subsequent resolution, which occurs when he has related the story about Þorljótr's misadventure, and the decisive role of this abusive tale

[12] In the *Morkinskinna* version of the story, the name of Þjóðólfr's father is also Arnórr. Either the compiler has corrected the mistake of the author of the *þáttr*, or this discrepancy indicates that in some respects the *Morkinskinna* redaction of the story is closer to the original than the *Flateyjarbók* redaction.

in the context of the *senna* as a whole. It is with its aid that Halli succeeds in overwhelming his opponent.

In conclusion, my attempt to analyse the quarrel between the two skalds does not aim "to fix" the moment of the emergence of a retrospective story in the *Íslendingaþættir*. The issue is only to suggest the very possibility that a detailed linear first-person retrospective narrative containing some previously unknown information could arise from one of the conventional moves of an Old Norse *senna*, i.e. from the accusation – an insulting statement referring to the past of the opponent. As part of a *senna*, abusive allusions to certain past events were neither linear nor possessed such a quality as informational novelty; on the contrary, accusations normally appealed to the collective memory of the audience. As I have attempted to show, the episode from *Sneglu-Halla þáttr*, in which the retrospective story was actually the direct product of a *senna*, provides us with the evidence that a first-person narrative could originate from an accusation. One of the main conditions for realizing this possibility was the elimination of the Icelandic setting of the *senna*, which led to a significant change in the character of the third traditional member of verbal duel, i.e. the audience watching the entire debate. The very fact that the dispute between Icelanders has been transferred to a *þáttr* whose action is set in Norway had a destructive effect on the established communicative mechanism of the *senna*. The contestants could no longer appeal to the shared knowledge of their audience who were unaware of the opponents' history. This circumstance naturally entailed some further innovations. First of all, the formerly silent third party of the *senna*, the spectators, who were traditionally only watching the contest, were now given a chance to have their say. The necessity of dealing with this lack of knowledge required the introduction of a question (or remark) from a representative of the audience. Then, being deprived of its former support in the collective memory of the audience, an abusive statement about the opponent's personal history was forced to acquire descriptiveness and narrativity, or, in other words, the indispensable properties of a first-person retrospective story which were originally unnecessary for the moves of the Old Norse *senna*.

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Summary

The paper examines the transformation of the *senna* genre in the "king-and-Icelander *þættir*". Scholars define a *senna* as a stylised verbal duel which follows a traditional pattern. In the descriptions of the quarrel between the two skalds of Haraldr harðráði in *Sneglu-Halla þáttr*, the *senna* has acquired some novel features. First of all, the king, the representative of an otherwise silent audience, plays an important role in the conflict, for his questions and remarks shape the whole argument between the skalds. Most significantly, instead of the partially articulated references to shameful past events typical of the *senna*, a detailed linear retrospective story is introduced which bears striking similarities to other first-person accounts found in *Íslendingaþættir*. One of the possible reasons for this transformation may lie in the impossibility of appealing to collective memory, since the witnesses to the dispute no longer possess any preliminary information about relevant past events. This ignorance of the past arises from the inclusion of a verbal duel between Icelanders in a narrative whose action is set in Norway. Finally, another genre, the anecdote, exerts a no-less-important influence on the transformation of the *senna* in *Sneglu-Halla þáttr*.

The Formation of the Kings' Sagas

THEODORE M. ANDERSSON

For almost a hundred years now, that is to say for almost as long as saga research has existed as an autonomous field, there has been what might strike the outsider as an obsessive interest in the prehistory of the sagas, the period before the sagas actually reached parchment. The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a vigorous, albeit somewhat oblique, debate between the advocate of fully evolved oral sagas, Andreas Heusler, and the various representatives of the "Icelandic School," notably Björn M. Ólsen, Sigurður Nordal, and Einar Ól. Sveinsson, who emphasized the creative and literary role of the saga authors.[1] A strong voice on the oral side of the debate was the Norwegian folklorist Knut Liestøl, whose book was translated into English and probably reached a larger audience than the Icelandic and Swiss contributions.[2] My own summary of the research became largely a critique of the Icelandic School.[3] But at the same time Lars Lönnroth was publishing his dissertation serially.[4] Rather than considering the sagas in the context of the native Icelandic tradition, Lönnroth explored possible European roots, but his emphasis remained literary in the tradition of the Icelandic School. More recently the indig-

[1] I have summarized Heusler's work on the sagas in "Heusler's Saga Studies" in *Germanentum im Fin de Siècle. Wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Studien zum Werk Andreas Heuslers,* ed. Jürg Glauser and Julia Zernack (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2005), pp. 194–209. For a survey of the field as a whole see Carol J. Clover, "Icelandic Family Sagas (*Íslendingasögur)*" in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide,* ed. Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, Islandica 45 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985; rpt. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2005), pp. 239–315.

[2] Knut Liestøl, *The Origin of the Icelandic Family Sagas,* trans. A. G. Jayne (Oslo:Aschehoug, 1930).

[3] T. M. Andersson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins: A Historical Survey,* Yale Germanic Studies 1 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964).

[4] These studies were summarized in Lönnroth's *European Sources of Icelandic Saga-Writing: An Essay Based on Previous Studies* (Stockholm: Thule, 1965).

enous Icelandic tradition has come to the fore again in Daniel Sävborg's compendious book from 2007.[5]

The question of literary versus oral origins was quiescent for the rest of the twentieth century, with the notable exception of Óskar Halldórsson's small but transformative book on *Hrafnkels saga*.[6] It was a counterthrust to Sigurður Nordal's epoch-making monograph on the same saga, which was translated into English and thus became the international voice of the Icelandic School.[7] That voice became less audible in the wake of Óskar's book. In the meantime Else Mundal compiled an extensive anthology, in 1977, of many of the key contributions to the debate, and Carol Clover surveyed the field in 1985.[8] Clover also contributed a broadly conceived and well argued paper in 1986 suggesting that the sagas are in some sense conglomerates of shorter oral stories.[9] I replied in 2002 with a paper that tried to assemble the evidence that there were long oral stories as well as short ones.[10] But the field did not really move until the appearance of simultaneous books by Gísli Sigurðsson and Tommy Danielsson in 2002.[11] Gísli worked with saga variants that seem quite likely to be oral and therefore presuppose stories that we might refer to as oral sagas. Danielsson's approach was more panoramic, but it focuses once again on *Hrafnkels saga*. The combined effect of these books was to put oral sagas back in the center of the discussion.

It may be noted, however, that, throughout this long-standing debate, very little has been said about the kings' sagas. The only exception to this

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[5] *Sagan om kärleken. Erotik, känslor och berättarkonst i norrön litteratur,* Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Historia Litterarum 27 (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2007).

[6] Óskar Halldórsson, *Uppruni og þema Hrafnkels sögu.* Rannsóknastofnun í bókmenntafræði við Háskóla Íslands, fræðirit 3 (Reykjavik: Hið Íslenzka Bókmenntafélag, 1976).

[7] Sigurður Nordal, *Hrafnkels saga freysgoða,* trans. R. George Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1958).

[8] Else Mundal, *Sagadebatt* (Oslo, etc.: Universitetsforlaget, 1977). Carol J. Clover as in note 1.

[9] Carol J. Clover, "The Long Prose Form," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 101 (1986), 10–39.

[10] "The Long Prose Form in Medieval Iceland," *JEGP* 101 (2002), 380–411.

[11] Gísli Sigurðsson, *Túlkun Íslendingasagna í ljósi munnlegrar hefðar. Tilgáta um aðferð* (Reykjavik: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 2002); trans. Nicholas Jones as *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method,* Publications of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature 2 (Cambridge MA: The Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, Harvard University, 2004). Tommy Danielsson, *Hrafnkels saga eller Fallet med den undflyende traditionen* (Hedemora: Gidlunds Förlag, 2002) and *Sagorna om Norges kungar. Från Magnús góði till Magnús Erlingsson* (Hedemora: Gidlunds Förlag, 2002). I have discussed these books in "Five Saga Books for a New Century: A Review Essay," *JEGP* 103 (2004), 505–27.

was Siegfried Beyschlag, who tried to show that the synoptic histories inherited their uniformity from oral tradition.[12] This thesis appears not to have gained adherents. We are therefore in the anomalous position of believing that there were fullblown stories about Saga Age Icelanders but no stories about Norwegian kings. Scholarly silence on this question has been as curious as it has been universal, and the silence was broken only in the last ten pages of Tommy Danielsson's second volume. The body of the book is devoted to a long series of specialized king's saga problems, but, almost as an afterthought, the author opens large horizons in the conclusion (pp. 385–95). Here he surveys the evidence that the Norwegian kings also lived on in memory and tradition. He reminds us of the prominent place occupied by the Norwegian kings in *Laxdæla saga* and other predominantly Icelandic sagas, then goes on to review the meetings of prominent Icelanders with Norwegian monarchs particularly in the short, self-contained stories called *þættir*. These contacts could have served as the point of departure for the Icelandic interest in the kings and the growth of oral narrative.

Danielsson also reviews the named Icelandic bearers of royal tradition: Þorgeirr afráðskollr, Oddr Kolsson, and Hallr Þórarinsson, all of whom were among Ari Þorgilsson's sources. Included is the young Icelander who learned the story of Haraldr harðráði's early adventures from Halldórr Snorrason and performed it at Haraldr's court. We do not know the exact form of such transmissions, but Danielsson takes due note of the comments made by Theodoricus and Saxo indicating that the Icelanders were well known for cultivating rich traditions, a reputation confirmed by the prologues in *Heimskringla* and by the *þættir* in *Morkinskinna*.[13] This narrative material is generally assumed to have provided a rough basis for the accounts later shaped by writers, but Danielsson asks whether this quite loose and general assumption is adequate and whether the underlying narrative could not have been in the form of fully developed storytelling (p. 392: "ett ytterst avancerat berättande"). Such stories do not surface in the early period because there would have been

[12] Siegfried Beyschlag, *Konungasögur. Untersuchungen zur Königssaga bis Snorri. Die älteren Übersichtswerke samt Ynglingasaga.* Bibliotheca Arnamagnaeana 8 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1950).

[13] Ármann Jakobsson, *Staður í nýjum heimi. Konungasagan Morkinskinna* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2002), pp. 78–86, has argued with good reason that the *þættir* were part of the original composition. I have tried to isolate the *þáttr*-like oral components in *Óláfs saga helga* in "The Oral Sources of *Óláfs saga helga* in *Heimskringla*," *Saga Book* 32 (2008), 5–38.

no reason for Ari or Sæmundr or the later synoptic historians to reproduce stories that everybody knew.

At about the same time as these stories were circulating, domestic Icelandic sagas would have been evolving on the basis of legal disputes and feud stories, as Danielsson argues in his first volume. A likely venue for the exchange of such stories would have been the Icelandic thingmeetings, just as the young Icelandic storyteller in *Morkinskinna* learned the story of Haraldr harðráði at thingmeetings over a series of summers. The evolution of royal stories is perhaps less easy to grasp than the evolution of native stories, but Danielsson suggests several possibilities. There could have been a tradition of comparing kings, or the kings could have been of ongoing and central importance to the Icelanders, or there could have been a concretization of royal stories analogous to the *þættir*. The kings´ sagas could also have been modeled on the agonistic patterns of the evolving Icelandic sagas. In turn, Danielsson points out, the growth of the kings´ sagas into large books could have paved the way for the large Icelandic sagas such as *Laxdœla saga* and *Njáls saga.*

The central issue in this argument is the existence of fully developed kings´ sagas in oral tradition. This is indeed a new perspective on the kings' sagas, and we may ask ourselves why it has not been aired before. One reason is surely that the very idea of an oral saga fell out of favor in Icelandic circles throughout the twentieth century. A leading project of the Icelandic School was to diminish our faith in the existence of full oral sagas about early Iceland, and it was only to be expected that the generations engaged in this project would not contradict themselves by advocating oral kings' sagas. On the contrary, they focused on the development of the sagas as a purely literary enterprise, perhaps ultimately based on scattered oral traditions, and certainly on whatever skaldic stanzas were available, but carried out exclusively with quill and ink. Naturally the same assumption would have carried over to the kings' sagas.

But an analogy with the native Icelandic sagas is not the only justification for believing in the piecemeal literary composition of the kings´ sagas. Our information about the latter begins in fact almost a century earlier than the information on the native sagas and gives every appearance of suggesting a gradual literary evolution from smaller written denominations to larger denominations. The process began with Sæmundr and Ari at the beginning of the twelfth century and culminated in the Norwegian synoptics at the end of the century. That this

was a literary sequence is supported by what seems to be a growing consensus that there is a continuity between the early epitomes and the later ones. Despite Theodoricus's protestations that he based himself not on "visa" but on "audita," it seems likely that he also used written sources and that these sources are most likely to have been Sæmundr and Ari.[14]

The picture that emerges from the twelfth century is therefore a puzzling together of information, including oral sources, but collected by writers who converted what they could learn into little digests and summaries, not stories. This picture is reinforced by the shape of the first full-length kings' sagas, Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* and "The Oldest Saga of Saint Olaf" largely represented by *The Legendary Saga.* To be sure, these are full-blown biographical stories, but they are quite awkwardly composed, as I argued in 2006.[15] They do not suggest authors recording flowing narratives but rather writers who are trying to fit and join scraps of tradition. That might lead us to believe that writers in the twelfth century began by condensing the main points provided by the oral transmissions and ended by trying to expand these early indications somewhat artificially into real books, an entirely literary project. The tacit assumption might then go on to stipulate that when the master narratives appear, largely in *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*, they again perfect the form of the older written narratives using strictly literary methods.

How does Tommy Danielsson's suggestion of ready-made, full-fledged oral narratives about the kings comport with this picture of writers struggling to achieve a literary form for the royal biographies from scattered traditions? If the first biographers were faced with the simple task of setting down well articulated oral stories in writing, why did they perform the task so poorly? Perhaps an analogy will help us out of this dilemma. Since the publication of Gísli Sigurðsson's and Tommy Danielsson's books no one seems any longer to have difficulty with the

[14] See Bjarni Guðnason, "Theodoricus og íslenskir sagnaritarar," in *Sjötíu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20 júlí 1977,* ed. Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson (Reykjavik: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977), vol. 1, 107–20; T. M. Andersson, "Ari's *konunga ævi* and the Earliest Accounts of Hákon jarl's Death," in *Opuscula* 6, Bibliotheca Arnamagnaeana 33 (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1979), pp. 1–17; Gudrun Lange, *Die Anfänge der isländisch-norwegischen Geschichtsschreibung,* Studia Islandica 47 (Reykjavik: Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóðs, 1989), pp. 166–71, 177–78.

[15] See *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas (1180–1280)* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 21–59.

idea that there were fully developed sagas about early Iceland, but we must remind ourselves that these sagas also had an awkward beginning.

The question of which *Íslendingasögur* came first is of course a subject of dispute, and I can only say which sagas I think came first. I think that *all* the skald sagas, including *Gunnlaugs saga*, were early, and to that group of four I would add *Fóstbræðra saga, Víga-Glúms saga,* and *Reykdœla saga*.[16] What these sagas have in common is that they are not gracefully composed, unlike the great sagas of the next generation, *Egils saga, Gísla saga,* and *Laxdœla saga.* The early sagas are in some cases quite short and in other cases rather mechanically constructed around skaldic stanzas. They are not ranked among the saga masterpieces.

Accordingly we find both among the sagas about early Iceland and the kings' sagas a prefatory period of experimental and rather problematical composition before the perfected form emerges. There can now be little doubt that the domestic Icelandic sagas were drawn from oral tradition. It therefore seems clear that the transposition from oral stories to written stories was by no means straightforward. It required practice. By analogy we can suppose that oral kings' sagas would have been no easier than the *Íslendingasögur* to convert smoothly into written sagas at the first attempt. That means that the awkward first biographies of Olaf Tryggvason and Olaf Haraldsson do not exclude the possibility that there existed full oral sagas about these and other kings. It was only a question of learning to recast these oral prototypes into written sagas.

Nor should we forget that there were stories intermediate between the domestic sagas and the kings' sagas, to wit the *þættir*, in which equal space is given to the Norwegian kings and the Icelandic adventurers. The *þættir* are very much at the center of Tommy Danielsson's discussion and are at least one secure key to the operations of oral transmission, inasmuch as they can hardly be explained by any other conveyance. They provide information on the kings and their attitudes, character, and politics, as well as on their contacts with Icelanders. The warrant that they were circulated in the earliest period of saga writing

[16] I argue the case of *Víga-Glúms saga* and *Reykdœla saga* in "*Víga-Glúms saga* and the Birth of Saga Writing," *Scripta Islandica* 57 (2006), 5–39, the case of *Gunnlaugs saga* in "The Native Romance of Gunnlaugr and Helga the Fair" in *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland: Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke,* ed. Kirsten Wolf and Johanna Denzin, Islandica 54 (Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 2008), pp. 33–63, and the case of *Fóstbræðra saga* in a paper that awaits publication.

(1200 to 1220) is the preservation of a number of such tales in *Morkinskinna.*[17] Their focus is the Icelandic experience of the outside world, and they must therefore have been handed down in Iceland, perhaps in the families of those who experienced them. The dual focus on kings and Icelanders assures us that at least some memory of the kings would have stayed alive in Iceland.

As Tommy Danielsson points out, they also illustrate the general Icelandic preoccupation with Norwegian kings. In the early twelfth century, both Sæmundr and Ari directed their attention to the neighboring kings in Norway. If their books had been preserved, the task of understanding Icelandic thinking about the Norwegian kings would perhaps have been facilitated, but even the bare existence of these books tells us something. The kings seem to have been Sæmundr's sole preoccupation, and though we may be apt to think of Ari's "konunga ævi" as a supplement to his *Íslendingabók*, simply because we have one and not the other, the situation may have been reversed. Perhaps the "konunga ævi" were the primary undertaking, and perhaps we should consider *Íslendingabók* as the supplement. In either case the Norwegian kings were a dominant factor when the Icelanders first began to write.

We are not told much about the interaction between the Norwegian kings and Iceland under the early kings down to 995, but after the advent of the conversion kings the interaction becomes charged. Olaf Tryggvason appears to have been an energetic proselytizer well beyond the shores of Norway, and that may perhaps understate the case. He was credited with the conversion of five lands in such texts as Ari's *Íslendingabók*, Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, *Kristni saga*, and *Laxdœla saga.*[18] Whether or not Olaf's efforts at proselytizing were really so effective, later writers thought they were, and they must have believed that Olaf exerted strong pressure on the Icelanders to convert. In their minds this was the point at which Norway becomes a real, not to say a menacing, factor in the political life of Iceland.

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[17] The most clear cut examples are "Hreiðars þáttr," "Halldórs þáttr Snorrasonar," "Auðunar þáttr vestfirzka," "Brands þáttr örva," "Sneglu-Halla þáttr," "Stúfs þáttr Kattarsonar," "Odds þáttr Ófeigssonar," and "Þáttr af Gullásu-Þórði."

[18] On the conversion of five lands see *Monumenta Historica Norvegiae. Latinske kildeskrifter til Norges historie i middelalderen,* ed. Gustav Storm (Kristiania: Brøgger, 1880; rpt. Oslo: Aas & Wahl, 1973), p. 116, and *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasǫgum: A Twelfth-Century Synoptic History of the Kings of Norway,* Viking Society for Northern Resaearch Text Series 10, ed. and trans. M. J. Driscoll (University College London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1995; rev. and rpt. 2008), p. 30.

The threat materializes palpably under Olaf Haraldsson, who, according to *Heimskringla*, not only tries to cajole the Icelanders into making him a gift of the island Grímsey but later holds distinguished Icelanders hostage to increase his leverage.[19] Subsequently Haraldr harðráði is said to have been a great friend of the Icelanders, but given his record of deceitfulness and his aggressive foreign policy, we would like to know what motivated his friendship.[20] Adam of Bremen states that Harald extended his rule as far as Iceland.[21] This corresponds to nothing in the indigenous sources, but we may well wonder where Haraldr's contemporary Adam may have gotten the idea. Could it signal that Haraldr indeed had designs on Iceland? In the twelfth century the Norwegian kings were sufficiently preoccupied with other matters that they did not pose much of a threat, but the very fact that the Icelanders had such a clear memory of Norwegian aspirations under the Olafs indicates that they must have had a watchful eye on Norway. Add to this that, whatever the actual history of immigration to Iceland may have been, the Icelanders clearly thought of themselves as kin to the Norwegians by lineage and culture.[22] The national umbilical cord seems not to have been severed, and Norway remained much more than just a horizon.

We can be in no doubt that information on Norway was plentiful in Iceland, but the question to be dealt with is not one of information but of literary form. The Icelanders could of course have known a great deal about Norway without ever casting anything in narrative form. That they did think in terms of literary form is sufficiently demonstrated by the *þættir* with their identifiable morphology,[23] but the oral existence of short *þættir* may not justify the assumption of longer sagas.

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[19] See *Heimskringla,* Íslenzk fornrit 27, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (Reykjavik: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1945), pp. 214–18, 240.

[20] *Morkinskinna,* ed. Finnur Jónsson, SUGNL 53 (Copenhagen: J. Jørgensen, 1928–32), p. 170.

[21] Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum; Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte,* Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in Usum Scholarum, ed. Bernhard Schmeidler, 3rd ed. (Hannover and Leipzig: Hahn, 1917; rpt. 1977), pp. 159, 267.

[22] Perhaps the most striking expression of the Icelandic claim to genealogical equality with the Norwegians may be found in "Halldórs þáttr Snorrasonar" in *Morkinskinna,* ed. Finnur Jónsson (note 20), pp. 149–55.

[23] Joseph Harris's relevant article "Theme and Genre in Some *Íslendinga þættir*" (1976) has been reprinted in *"Speak Useful Words or Say Nothing": Old Norse Studies by Joseph Harris,* ed. Susan E. Deskis and Thomas D. Hill, Islandica 53 (Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 2008), pp. 97–126.

Even so, the evidence for oral kings' sagas is rather better than the evidence for oral sagas about the early Icelanders. This evidence resides largely in the *útferðarsaga* of Haraldr harðráði that Halldórr Snorrason teaches to a young Icelander, who in turn recites it at Haraldr's court.[24] Tommy Danielsson refers to this recital in both of his volumes, but it may lend itself to further exploitation. At the very least the episode suggests that such stories were formally composed with enough detail so that they had to be learned, that they were formally recited to a large group, and that they were long enough to be presented for two weeks. They were formal stories, not just random accounts.

Not only that, but the story of Haraldr's adventures in the Mediterranean, as they are told in *Morkinskinna* and by extension in *Heimskringla*, was clearly a highly dramatic story of intrigue in the Byzantine court, military prowess and ingenuity, and the accumulation of fabulous wealth, a thirteenth-century counterpart to *The Count of Monte Cristo*. The oral version that held the attention of King Haraldr's court for two weeks must have shared some of these qualities; it too must have been a rousing tale of daring and high romance.

I have indicated that there seems to be a tacit assumption that the evolution of the kings' sagas from notes and summaries in the twelfth century to epic canvases in the thirteenth century was a strictly literary process. That is to say, people simply learned to write better and better and more fully as time went on. At the same time we have evidence that there were full-blown, dramatic tales in oral form. The awkward formulations in the twelfth-century epitomes and the first attempts at biography teach us that the ostensibly simple option of transcribing oral stories was not adopted. The first efforts at duplicating what may have been rather good oral stories fell short and converted good stories into not very successful books. The art of capturing good stories on parchment was a gradual process, learned slowly and a little painfully. It seems to have combined a knowledge of stories with a faltering acquisition of writing skills.

Vésteinn Ólason has recently used the word "imitation" to describe this process and refers to Preben Meulengracht Sørensen's earlier use of the same term: "The narrative style and technique of the sagas shows every sign of being an imitation, conscious or unconscious, of oral nar-

[24] *Morkinskinna,* ed. Finnur Jónsson, pp. 199–200.

rative."[25] "Imitation" may well be as close as we can get to a resolution of this problem. Vésteinn uses it with reference to the *Íslendingasögur,* but, following Tommy Danielsson, I have no difficulty in extending the usage to the kings' sagas as well. Indeed, it seems to me that the kings' sagas reveal the nature of the imitation more clearly and more fully by making the stages in the development more palpable. The first stage was to skim the highpoints by way of a summation. The second stage was to add detail in order to approximate at least the length of the oral sagas. The third stage was then to imitate the narrative style as well as the narrative dimensions of the oral stories.

The progress from brief summary of the main points in the oral transmission to a fuller recapitulation in the first biographies and finally to a recreation of the dramatic story line is clearer in the kings' sagas than in the *Íslendingasögur,* but the same line can also be detected, though more tentatively, in the latter. The famous summary of *Hœnsa-Þóris saga* found in Ari´s *Íslendingabók* is analogous to the epitomes on the Norwegian kings and represents the first stage in the narrative development. The second stage is more difficult to match because the differences in the quality of composition among the early *Íslendingasögur* are less palpable than in the kings' sagas. We can nonetheless make it plausible that the earliest *Íslendingasögur* were less well assembled than the later masterpieces. If I were to choose one *Íslendingasaga* to illustrate the original defects of composition, it might be *Kormáks saga*, a saga that does not so much tell the story as it extracts the main moments of the biography from a large collection of stanzas. Dialogue and drama are largely missing.

There is also a good match in the chronology of these developments. If *Egils saga* was written as early as the 1220s, we might infer that the third stage in the *Íslendingasögur* was reached in the same time frame as the culmination of the kings' sagas in *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla.* These were the highpoints in both genres and they represent a level seldom attained again.

In conclusion I propose that there was not only a significant similarity between *Íslendingasögur* and kings' sagas at the literary stage in the thir-

[25] Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling og ære. Studier islændingesagaerne* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1993), p. 78; Vésteinn Ólason, "The Icelandic Saga as a Kind of Literature with Special Reference to Its Representation of Reality," in *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, ed. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), p. 34.

teenth century but that there must have been a real similarity at the oral stage as well. To imagine that the king's saga masterpieces (*Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*) acquired their art by imitating written *Íslendingasögur* is not practicable because the early *Íslendingasögur* were not well put together and cannot have stood model for *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla.* Both types are more likely to have acquired their narrative art from an increasingly skillful imitation of oral storytelling. Their affinity to this narrative tradition explains the much-praised uniqueness of the *Íslendingasögur,* but it also explains why the best, though less frequently praised, kings' sagas are the most readable chronicles of the Middle Ages.

Summary

Following the lead of Tommy Danielsson, the present paper tries to focus the oral prehistory of the kings' sagas. The relationship of the *Íslendingasögur* to putative oral traditions has been at the center of saga debates for two centuries, but this preoccupation has not extended to the kings' sagas. To correct such an imbalance we need to evaluate the evidence of an oral substratum in the kings' sagas as well as the Icelandic sagas proper. This paper makes a beginning and theorizes that the evolution from oral story to written saga is similar in both types.

Law recital according to Old Icelandic law:
Written evidence of oral transmission?[1]

HELGI SKÚLI KJARTANSSON

1. Introduction

In pre-literate Scandinavia – including its emigrant communities as far afield as Greenland or the Isle of Man – the law doubtless comprised an important body of oral lore which was shared and developed by acknowledged experts who deliberately passed it on to their successors. Distinct legal traditions were a fundamental feature of political geography, defining such regions as Dane*law* in England or Trønde*lag* in Norway (ON *Danalǫg, Þrændalǫg*). Even if the law was – in contrast to modern statute law – based on tradition rather than active legislation,[2] it could be deliberately adapted; it was even seen as man-made enough for tradition to trace it back to individual law-givers:[3] *Úlfljótr* (early 10th century) in the case of Iceland, who "first brought laws out here from Norway"[4] (Íslendingabók 2006:4); *Lumb(r)* (late 10th century?) in the case of Västergötland who "is reported to have thought up and made a great part of our law".[5]

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[1] Shorter versions of this paper were presented at the 14th International Saga Conference in Uppsala, August 2009, one in the conference preprints (Á austrvega 2009, Vol. 1:373–379), another orally. I wish to thank participants in the session, Professor Gunnar Karlsson who commented on the written paper, and Scripta's two reviewers for valuable suggestions.

[2] Icelandic scholars used to emphasise the legislative process and the oral preservation of formally adopted rules rather than the preservation and manipulation of tradition until Sigurður Líndal (1969, 1984), drawing on the conclusions of continental scholars such as Fritz Kern, shifted the focus towards traditional law.

[3] Sigurður Líndal (1969:22–24) argues that the idea of law-giver was suggested in the first place by Christian literature.

[4] "… hafði … fyrst lǫg út hingat ýr Norvegi". (Íslendingabók 1968:6–7, Ch. 2)

[5] Yngre Västgötalagen, Ch. 14: "Han sighs hawæ huxæt oc gört en mykin loth aff laghum warum." References in the Norwegian Older Gulaþingslǫg (Norges gamle Love 1:104) to the lawyers "Atli" and "Bjarni Marðarson" need not refer to such lawgiver figures but rather to the informants on particular rules of law.

Just how fixed or how flexible the transmission of law may have been is a perennial question, answered in widely different ways by individual scholars and generations of scholars. The current generation is torn between a resurgent interest in oral culture and a critical aversion to conjectures not directly supported by the sources at hand. Similarities in written law – within Scandinavia and even beyond – may suggest an unbroken chain of transmission over many centuries.[6] Often, however, it is difficult to determine whether similarities arise from common origin, parallel development or borrowing. Or, indeed, whether borrowing involves one Scandinavian tradition influencing another or both depending on the same, perhaps Latin, sources.[7] Similarly, differences between recorded legal traditions may reflect a slow drifting apart by independent development or more recent legal creation – perhaps inspired by a foreign model.

Whatever the proportions, recorded Scandinavian law doubtless contains some traditional matter of very old origin, reflecting painstaking efforts by generations of aspiring young men to acquire – more specifically, to memorise – the legal wisdom of their elders. While the form of that wisdom and the mechanism of its transmission belongs to the realm of conjecture, one particular mechanism, known from the written sources, may have been crucial for passing down the later codified legal knowledge, i.e. the official *law recital* by the *lawspeaker* at the *assembly*. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the development of that mechanism.

2. Law, Assembly, Lawspeaker

For Viking Age Scandinavians the regional or provincial assembly was a key social institution. The region sharing an assembly also shared a legal tradition, the assembly serving as the official venue to clarify and standardise its law. We may presume that any Scandinavian community with any degree of permanence and organisation would either join an

[6] See Amira 1960:222 for an example of verbal similarities in Scandinavian, Frisian and even (despite the Latin) Langobardian law.

[7] The probability of late borrowing, perhaps only at the stage of codification, is the theme of Sjöholm (1976). Sveinbjörn Rafnsson (1990) reaches a similar conclusion regarding certain similarities in Scandinavian (Icelandic, Norwegian, Danish) and Latin (Roman and barbarian) law.

existing assembly or establish its own. The development was towards ever-larger areas, each sharing a legal tradition and a common assembly (on top of a layer or two of local assemblies with less authority in legal matters). While island communities, like Gotland or Iceland, would soon unite around one "general assembly" (ON *alþing(i))*, mainland Scandinavia saw a more protracted process of consolidation.

The *lawspeaker* was an official of the province or region, the leader of its assembly and responsible for its law. Written provincial laws make no mention of lawspeakers in Denmark, while in 13th-century Norway and to some extent Sweden the office was under royal control. It is tempting, however, to assume that before the development of the three centralised kingdoms, the office of lawspeaker was a common Scandinavian tradition, his function more like what we know from Gotland and especially Iceland.

The exact term "lawspeaker" (*lǫgsǫgumaðr*) is peculiar to Iceland; Norway and Sweden[8] used the shorter "lawman" (*lǫgmaðr/laghmaþer*). But the difference in terms is hardly relevant since in Norway and Sweden the office or province of the "lawman" was known as *lǫgsaga/laghsagha,* corresponding to Icelandic *lǫgsǫgumaðr*. I shall, therefore, use "lawspeaker" for both.

The lawspeaker's central duty was to know the law and pronounce on legal matters, giving his opinion or ruling on legal disputes. For Norway and Sweden this is known mainly from narrative sources (some of them admittedly Icelandic). For Iceland it is spelled out in the written law code, "Grágás":

> It is also prescribed that there shall always be some man in our country who is required to tell men the law [segja lǫg mǫnnum], and he is called the Lawspeaker.[9] (Grágás 1:187) The Lawspeaker is required to tell everyone who asks him what the article of the law is [segja … lǫgmál], both here and at his home …[10] (Grágás 1:193)

[8] And Iceland to some extent. In standardised editions it is editorial practice to blame the copyist for any instance of "lǫgmaðr" in an Icelandic context and substitute the presumably original "lǫgsǫgumaðr". In fact we do not know how early or how widely the Icelandic office was referred to by the alternative "lǫgmaðr".

[9] "Svá er enn mælt at sá maðr skal vera nǫkkurr ávallt á landi óru er skyldr sé til þess at segja lǫg mǫnnum ok heitir sá lǫgsǫgumaðr." (Grágás 1992:459) Here and henceforth I use the normalisation of this edition while replacing its Modern Icelandic spelling with a more familiar Old Norse standard.

[10] "Þess er lǫgsǫgumaðr skyldr at segja ǫllum þeim er hann spyrja hér lǫgmál, bæði hér ok heima …" (Grágás 1992:465)

It was from this function of telling the law, "segja lǫg", that the office of *lǫgsǫgumaðr* derived its name.

3. Law recital

The English term "lawspeaker" (like its German equivalent: "Gesetzsprecher") is slightly misleading in referring not to the central function of "telling the law" but another one, the so-called "law *recital*" (*uppsaga*, from *segja upp* = 'recite'), meaning official proclamation of the law, for instance newly adopted law or proposed law. In Iceland, the recital of oral law at the general assembly was a function of the lawspeaker[11] while the reading out of written law was also called recital without implying that it was necessarily the lawspeaker who did the reading. The crucial evidence here is Ari the Learned's account, in his *Íslendingabók,* of the first attempt at official codification of Icelandic law. According to his contemporary (1133 or earlier) account a proposal was adopted in 1117:

> … that our laws should be written down in a book at the home of Hafliði Másson the following winter, at the dictation and with the guidance of Hafliði and Bergþórr [the lawspeaker] as well as of other wise men appointed for this task. They were to make new provisions in the law in all cases where these seemed to them better than the old laws. These were to be proclaimed [*segja upp*] the next summer in the Law Council, and all those were to be kept which the majority of people did not oppose. And it happened as a result that the Treatment of Homicide Law and many other things in the laws were then written down and proclaimed [*sagt upp*] in the Law Council by clerics the next summer.[12] (Íslendingabók 2006:12)

Ari, recognised as being a remarkably careful historian, is in this case not only a contemporary source – as likely as any to have been among the clerics who took turns reciting the newly codified law to the Law Council in 1118 – but closely involved with the system as a member of a family of chieftains.[13]

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[11] The same term, *segja upp* = recite, could refer to the official proclamation of other matter besides the law, in which case it was not necessarily the lawspeaker who recited.

[12] "… at lǫg ór skyldi skrifa á bók at Hafliða Mássonar of vetrinn eptir at sǫgu ok umbráði þeira Bergþórs ok annarra spakra manna, þeira es til þess váru teknir. Skyldu þeir gørva nýmæli þau ǫll í lǫgum, es þeim litisk þau betri en en fornu lǫg. Skyldi þau segja upp et næsta sumar eptir í lǫgréttu ok þau ǫll halda, es enn meiri hlutr manna mælti þá eigi gegn. En þat varð at framfara, at þá vas skrifaðr Vígslóði ok margt annat í lǫgum ok sagt upp í lǫgréttu af kennimönnum of sumarit eptir." (Íslendingabók 1968:23–24)

[13] Chieftaincies (*goðorð*) were units of political power held by aristocratic families, entitling them, among other privileges, to seats in the Law Council.

Outside Iceland, the evidence on law recital is much more patchy.[14] It is, in fact, largely confined to the indirect evidence of style and vocabulary.[15]

The rhetorical flavour of much of the codified law, together with the use of first-person address (the law speaking as "I" addressing the "you" of the community[16]), may reflect a style developed by the lawspeaker reciting the law at the assembly. More general oral features, however, attest only to a style carried over from oral tradition, no more appropriate to the lawspeaker in his official function than the lawyer training his apprentice in a more private setting.

There are also a few instances where the law refers to itself as "(law) recital": Norw./Icel. *uppsaga*, Sw. *laghsagha*. In Sweden the *Östgötalagen* concludes with the words: "Now your law recital [laghsagha] is finished and brought to the end."[17] The Church Section of the Småland law (Tiohäradslagen) begins with:

> Now let people travel to the assembly and listen to our law recital [laghsagha]; let those listen who are present and tell those who stay at home; our law recital starting thus:[18]

In Norway, one part of the older *Frostaþingslǫg* begins with a phrase which similarly seems to refer to the law (or that particular part of it) as "recital".[19] Finally there is the Norwegian term *lǫgtala,* apparently also

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[14] And yet crucial for an evaluation of the problem. I have earlier (Kjartansson 1989, a study in turn inspired by Líndal 1984) discussed the Icelandic evidence for law recital and have been justly criticised (most recently by Karlsson 2004:53) for disregarding the evidence from mainland Scandinavia.

[15] See Fritzner for definitions and examples of Icelandic and Norwegian terms and Fornsvensk lexikalisk databas for Swedish ones.

[16] Frequent not least in Danish provincial law despite the lack of evidence for the office of lawspeaker at Danish assemblies.

[17] "Nu ær laghsagha iþur lyktaþ ok ut saghþ." Östgötalagen, final chapter.

[18] "Nw sculu mæn till thingx fara. oc laghsaghu waræ höra. höra the som hær æru. oc sighiæ them som hemæ sitiæ. æn laghsagha waar hoon byrias swa." Smålandslagens (Tiohäradslagens) Kyrkobalk, Ch. 2.

[19] "Þat er uppsaga laga várra í lögum manna at engi skal …" (Norges gamle Love 1:217). The phrase seems corrupt, perhaps conflated from two variants, but the meaning of *uppsaga* is reasonably clear. This may be compared to a clause in *Grágás* which contains the following reference to law recital:

> When men are to publish assault or injury, then it is lawful to do so on the same day as the action, during the following night, and during the two days and two nights thereafter. Then the publishing has been done before the third sunrise, as the law recital's phrase has it – if what it says there is rightly understood. (Grágás 1:143) // Þar er menn skulu lýsa frumhlaup eða áverk, þá er rétt at lýsa þaðan frá er sá atburðr gerðisk, þann inn sama dag ok þá nótt er þá kemr eftir ok tvá daga þaðan frá ok tvær nætr. Þá er lýst fyrir hina þriðju sól sem at kveðr í uppsǫgu ef þat er rétt skilt sem þar kveðr at." (Grágás 1992:223).

Here, the "law recital" (*uppsaga*) is a given text, containing the exact phrase "before the third sunrise" which the author is trying to clarify. By author, I mean a legal expert rather than the legislature itself; see, however, Finsen (1883:684) for a contrary view.

meaning "recital". It occurs in a variant reading where the bishop is supposed to come to the assembly and listen to the *lǫgtala* instead of the *lǫgbók* ('law book') of the main manuscript (Norges gamle Love 1:378). Here, the recital is definitely from a book, presumably read by a clerically trained person rather than the lawspeaker, cf. another piece of Norwegian law (Norges gamle Love 1:128) where the written law code is to be brought to the assembly by "the priest who is to read the book".[20] The same might be true of the other examples as well, which were phrases probably formed at the time of codification rather than copied exactly from oral tradition.

Nevertheless, the very concept of law recital suggests a traditional practice, involving some sort of solemn declaration of legal matter by the lawspeaker at the assembly. Such tradition, shared by Sweden, Norway and Iceland, would probably go far back in time, at least to the early Viking Age, rather than being a more recent innovation which spread over such a large area.

4. Reiterative law recital

What the common tradition of law recital involved is hard to tell because the Swedish and Norwegian evidence does not reveal any particular features. The Icelandic evidence, by contrast, is remarkably detailed about one particular feature of law recital which we may call *reiterative*: the periodic recital, over and over again, of the entire corpus of Icelandic law. The practice is described in the older (ca 1250) of the two main manuscripts of the law collection *Grágás*:

> It is also prescribed that a Lawspeaker is required to recite all the sections of the law over three summers and the assembly procedure every summer.[21] (Grágás 1:187) … It is also prescribed that the Lawspeaker shall recite all the sections so extensively that no one knows them much more extensively. And if his knowledge does not stretch so far, then before reciting each section he is to arrange a meeting …with five or more legal experts, those from whom he can learn most …[22] (Grágás 1:188) All men with seats on the Law Council

[20] "Prestr sá er bóc scal ráða". While the verb "ráða" might mean "be in charge of" and the "book" then be the Bible used to swear oaths upon, the sense of "read" and "law book" is more straightforward.

[21] "Þat er ok mælt at lǫgsǫgumaðr er skyldr til þess at segja upp lǫgþáttu alla á þrimr sumrum hverjum, en þingskǫp hvert sumar." (Grágás 1992:460).

[22] "Þat er ok at lǫgsǫgumaðr skal svá gørla þáttu alla upp segja at engi viti einna miklugi gørr. En ef honum vinst eigi fróðleikr til þess, þá skal hann eiga stefnu við fimm lǫgmenn … þá er hann má helst geta af …" (Grágás 1992:460)

> are also required to be always present at the reciting whenever the Lawspeaker wishes to recite the laws, whether that is at Lögberg or in the Law Council or in the church if the weather out of doors is unpleasant.[23] (Grágás 1:192) … the Lawspeaker … is also to recite the assembly procedure every summer and all the other sections so that they are recited every three summers if the majority wish to hear them. Assembly procedure is always to be recited on the first Friday of the assembly if men have time to hear it.[24] (Grágás 1:193)

In the same manuscript a stray provision is inserted at the end of the Christian Laws Section:

> All the laws are to be recited over three summers. … No new law is to have effect for more than three summers and it is to be announced at Lögberg the first summer … All new laws become void if they are not included in the recital every third summer.[25] (Grágás 1:51)

This provision assumes a law recital not only given regularly but so keenly observed that it would be immediately noticed if a given piece of legislation had gone unrecited for three consecutive years. Although it is hard to imagine such a rule being very effective in practice, this does not lessen its value as evidence of the reality of law recital: whoever framed the rule was in no doubt that the law would be regularly recited in the foreseeable future.

Law recital is also implicitly assumed in a number of expressions in the written law such as "here", i.e. at the general assembly, or "today/tomorrow", i.e. the same day or following day, counting from the day the assembly procedure was supposed to be recited. Such expressions are not used consistently, however, and the lawspeaker himself is always referred to in the third person (in contrast to the first person common in some Scandinavian law codes), also in the chapters which use "today/tomorrow" (e.g. Grágás 1:54). All the same, the written law definitely contains remnants of text that was written either to be delivered as law recital or in word-for-word imitation of the recital. In either case it serves as evidence that law recital actually took place.

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[23] "Þat er ok skylt þeim mǫnnum ǫllum er lǫgréttusetu eigu at fylla uppsǫgu ávallt er lǫgsǫgumaðr vill lǫg upp segja, hvárt sem þat er at Lǫgbergi eða í lǫgréttu, ok þótt í kirkju sé ef veðr er ósvást úti. … " (Grágás 1992:465)

[24] "… lǫgsǫgumaðr … skal ok upp segja þingskǫp hvert sumar ok aðra þáttu alla, svá at þeir verði upp sagðir á þrim sumrum hverjum, ef meiri hlutr manna vill hlýtt hafa. Fǫstudag inn fyrra í þingi skal þingskǫp ávallt upp segja ef menn hafa tóm til at hlýða." (Grágás 1992:465)

[25] "Lǫg ǫll skulu vera sǫgð upp á þrimr sumrum. … Nýmæli ekki skal vera lengur ráðit en þrjú sumur ok skal at Lǫgbergi it fyrsta sumar upp segja … Laus eru ǫll nýmæli ef eigi verða upp sǫgð it þriðja hvert sumar." (Grágás 1992:35)

One possible assumption is that the laws were written to imitate the recital as closely as possible because that was how people always tried to learn them. Each legal provision, then, was felt to exist in one precise verbal form – just like modern statute law – of which the lawspeaker's recital was the official manifestation. Such law might be compared to a church hymn where terms like "we" (the congregation), "here" (in church) and "now" (during service) belong to the text in any circumstances, whether it is being sung in church or, for instance, being copied in the solitude of a monastic cell. However, considering how often the same substantial rules appear in very different verbal form in the two preserved *Grágás* versions, it is not likely that verbal fidelity was much more highly valued at an earlier stage of transmission.

The other possibility, that these clauses were originally penned to be recited, would put them in a class with a rather stern letter received by the Icelandic aristocracy from their outraged archbishop, probably in 1180 (DI 1:262–264). Although the letter was written in Norway,[26] its preserved (Icelandic) copy uses the terms "here" and "this country" to mean Iceland, appropriate to the situation when the letter was to be presented to the recipients – perhaps by reading aloud at the general assembly. A similar concern might have directed the pen of some legal codifiers.

5. A short-lived practice?

The above-mentioned provisions on law recital were, when copied in the preserved manuscript, clearly not practised law. The very phrasing betrays the growing gap between intention and reality: "if his knowledge does not stretch so far"; "or in the church if the weather out of doors is unpleasant"; "if the majority wish to hear them"; "if men have time to hear it". What in fact replaced the law recital is described in yet another provision, in between the ones already cited, which must be of a more recent provenience:

> It is also prescribed that in this country what is found in books is to be law. And if books differ, then what is found in the books which the bishops own

[26] Probably in Latin. While the archbishop's correspondence might be in either language, in this case the "here" for Iceland is more likely to be the idea of a domestic translator.

> is to be accepted. If their books also differ, then that one is to prevail which says it at greater length …[27] (Grágás 1:190; cf. Foote 1984)

When this provision was drafted, the law was subject to written transmission which already had resulted in a bewildering variety of legal texts – a stage reached, perhaps, around 1200. No longer would the lawspeaker compare his own remembered version of the law with those of other legal experts; he had to compare manuscripts in order to give a ruling on what really was law.

The practice of reiterative recital must, on the other hand, have been active during at least part of the 12th century, after the codification of law began. All the provisions with "here", "tomorrow" etc. must have been recorded by lawyers who knew such recital as a living practice.

So what of the 11th century, when Icelandic law was preserved as a purely oral tradition? Was it already then being officially recited by the lawspeaker at the general assembly as a complete corpus, repeated every year or every three years? I think not.

6. What happened?

In one sense, law had always been recited. The functioning of assemblies, courts and the like might entail the reciting of procedural rules – similar to the lawspeaker's annual reciting of the assembly procedure. When people needed to change, fix or clarify the law, one or more versions would be stated and the accepted law publicly recited – just like the written law at the Icelandic general assembly in 1118. This is the common Scandinavian practice, confirmed by comparative evidence from Norway and Sweden. Then there is the specific question of law recital in the narrow sense of *repeated official recital by the lawspeaker of* (ideally) *the entire body of accepted law*.

There is no direct evidence of any such procedure anywhere except in Iceland or anytime prior to the 12th century. On the other hand, such law recital belongs to the intangible cultural features which do not easily leave traces except in written sources. Obviously, we must not conclude from the absence of such sources that nothing intangible happened in

[27] "Þat er ok at þat skulu lǫg vera á landi hér sem á skrám standa. En ef skrár skilr á, ok skal þat hafa er standr á skrám þeim er biskupar eigu. Nú skilr enn þeira skrár á, þá skal sú hafa sitt mál er lengra segir …" (Grágás 1992:463)

prehistory. Assuming, for the sake of caution, nothing which is not directly supported by the sources must not lead us to automatically assume the latest possible date for any development.

One possible reason to assume the practice of reiterative law recital to be old is that it would have been even more useful in a preliterate society.[28] If one of the advantages of written law was the possibility of standardising an official code of law, the official law recital would have been the next best thing, a sort of oral substitute for an official written code. While the recital at the assembly could never have been the main channel of transmission – the master-apprentice relationship would surely have been the bread and butter of legal study – and it is rather doubtful how effective it could have been in standardising the corpus of law as remembered by different experts, there is no doubt that the arrangement embodies the *ambition* of an orally transmitted standard code of law. It was an ambition, however, which had not been realised by 1117, to judge from Ari's description (already cited) of the codification effort of that year. If the law already existed as an established oral text which the legal experts, and above all the lawspeakers themselves, had for generations taken care to know by heart (incorporating any amendments), then it would be a simple matter for the lawspeaker and a scribe to record it. And even if the opportunity was taken to subject the law to revision by a committee, why wouldn't the lawspeaker learn the amendments by heart like his predecessors had always done, rather than leave the recital to clerics, reading from the book? Probably because the oral tradition had always been much more fluid than the new written law was intended to be.[29]

I would (following Sigurðsson 2004:55–60 and *passim*) rather expect pre-literate society to appreciate, or at least be tolerant of, the fluidity and variety inherent in oral tradition, also in the transmission of law. Not knowing the standardisation made possible by the written text, it had no reason to aspire to a similar effect by oral means.

Around 1100, Iceland had been a Christian country for a century and

[28] Counting Scandinavian society as preliterate for the present purposes because runes seem not to have been an option for the preservation of law prior to the adoption of the Latin alphabet.

[29] If the literate 12th-century experts contributing to the codification of Icelandic law "probably … felt … free to vary and extend the wording in response to the casuistical queries that might occur to them or be put to them by other people" (Grágás 1:11, Introduction), surely the preliterate expert felt even more free, whether he was the lawspeaker acting in his official capacity or a lawyer training his apprentice.

had seen how the Church used its fixed written texts. These were not only in incomprehensible Latin; even the illiterate public were kept informed by the regular recital of vernacular texts: the charter of their local church, say, or the saga of its patron saint read out on his or her feast day. Clerically educated men, including an influential minority of the country's aristocracy, were involved in law-making and must have written down such basic texts as the first tithe-law (1096 or '97).

It is at this stage that we can expect the idea of a standardised law code to appeal to leading men in Iceland. Some would advocate planned codification; they got their chance in 1117–'18 but failed to finish the project (in the short run because of political turbulence; then we do not know why it was not revived). Others would prefer the oral tradition (a thesis thoroughly developed by Sigurðsson 2004:53–92) and devise the system of reiterative recital in order to achieve the standardisation by oral means. Perhaps these were two competing ideas even before 1117; perhaps the oral solution was tried only after the failure of codification. At any rate, systematic recital was adopted and developed.[30] There was a problem, however: the law as remembered by the lawspeaker did not include everything which other experts had learnt as part of the law. The pre-recital consultation was adopted as a remedy and oral recital went on.

Meanwhile, the law was being privately codified, using a variety of informants, and collected in ever-larger and ever-more diverse legal manuscripts,[31] with the resulting mess eventually accepted by the already-cited provision on "what is found in books".

While reiterative recital must have been conceived of as a purely oral exercise, the question remains as to whether in its final stage it was still done from memory or from a written text.[32] In his account, Ari uses the term for "recite" (*segja upp*) when describing the reading aloud by clergy of proposed legislation. *If* the lawspeaker was, at some stage, supposed to recite the law from a book, and *if* the preserved provisions on law recital were drafted at that stage, we would not know because their language does not distinguish between recital from memory and recital from a written copy.

[30] Perhaps in 1123–1138, under lawspeakers with no known connections with the clerical or literary elites (Sigurðsson 2004:79–86).

[31] For a striking example, see Sanders 1991, developed by Karlsson 2007:225–228.

[32] Or a bit of both, if the lawspeaker's memory was supported by written notes as suggested by Karlsson 2007: 222–234; an illiterate lawspeaker might even have had an assistant (a *souffleur* of sorts) managing his notes.

If law recital was, at its final stage, intended to entail the reading out of a written text, how, then, did written law make it redundant? Looking at the sheer volume of the preserved *Grágás* text, the answer is obvious. The great bulk of Icelandic law probably developed during the 12th century and even later (which explains the relative lack of obvious oral features). Even if the system of reiterative recital was devised as late as the 1120s, the oral code envisaged need not have been of unmanageable length. By comparison, the written Gotland law (Gutalagen), not strikingly incomplete, is less than half the length of the unabridged "Hamlet", and only slightly longer than the single part of Hamlet himself – surely not an overexertion to recite from memory when spread over three years. But once the written law took over, it simply outgrew the stamina of the lawspeaker and the patience of his audience. Not only did it grow in magnitude but also, as witnessed by the two preserved versions, in variety. Given the lawspeaker's duty to recite "all the sections so extensively that no one knows them much more extensively", his "five or more legal experts" would be able to refer him to an ever-increasing variety of legal texts, each of which contained some extra material and not necessarily in agreement as to what belonged to each section. Sooner or later, recital was doomed.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to suggest that reiterative law recital – the repeated official proclamation of the entire body of recognised law – was not necessarily a deep-rooted Viking Age tradition. Rather, it may have been an isolated Icelandic experiment, commencing perhaps either shortly before or shortly after the codification effort of 1117–1118, both initiatives reflecting the same motivation to modernise and standardise the country's law.

My doubts about the reiterative law recital as an age-old transmission mechanism of oral law do not imply that no oral law was ever transmitted. The private tutoring of aspiring lawyers by acknowledged experts, together with the "in-service education" of experts conferring with each other, would in any case be more effective to ensure the preservation of legal knowledge than recital at the assembly.

People are perfectly capable of learning by heart entire volumes of

complicated prose. But it is literate culture that prompts them to do so, whether it is Avicenna reciting the Koran from memory at the age of ten, or a modern actor learning his part in play after play, or the opera singer able at any time to perform any of dozens of memorised roles. For such learning, the written text is not only an indispensible tool for student and teacher alike; it is also the model which in the first place suggests that even a prolonged stream of prose ought to exist in a strictly permanent form. While preliterate culture may operate with any amount of poetry, more or less permanently memorised, and any number of fixed phrases, we should not expect it to aspire to the word-for-word fixation of long pieces of prose. Nor should we expect it to adopt a mechanism, like the official law recital, to ensure the exact transmission of such fixed prose. No such assumption should be made unless the sources definitely point in the opposite direction which they, in the present case, do not.

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Summary

The practice of reiterative law recital, i.e. the periodic recital of the entire body of accepted law by the lawspeaker at the general assembly, is provided for in detail in a 13th-century manuscript of Icelandic law. Such recital, obsolete by the time the manuscript was written, must have been actively practised well into the 12th century. It is commonly assumed that the systematic law recital was as old

as the Icelandic general assembly, and perhaps based on a common Scandinavian tradition. The present paper proposes rather that it was an 11th-century innovation, restricted to Iceland, arranged as an alternative to codified law and temporarily successful, even though codification was to prevail eventually. While not denying the common Scandinavian tradition behind the office of lawspeaker and the practice of law recital in the sense of the official proclamation of particular provisions being amended, clarified or established, the author sees the periodic and exhaustive recital of existing law as a specific and much later development. Further, he stresses the possibility of "recital" in particular instances referring to the reading out of codified law.

Ansgar's Conversion of Iceland

TERRY GUNNELL

In his *Conversion of Iceland* (1975), Dag Strömbäck states that "The Alþing's decision to accept Christianity as the state religion of Iceland [in the summer of AD 999/ 1000] leaves us perplexed, mystified" (Strömbäck 1975:26). More recently, in *The Christianisation of Iceland*, Orri Vésteinsson describes the same event as "one of the really strange events in the history of Christian missions" (Orri Vésteinsson 2000:17). In the paper that follows, I would like to argue that considering both the nature of religious belief in the Old Nordic (and apparently also much of the Germanic) area in pre-Christian times, and the nature of many of the Christian missions issuing from Hamburg-Bremen during this period, there is actually comparatively little to be perplexed or mystified about. In fact, almost everything about the process of what happened at the Alþing on the days in question seems to have followed Rimbert's comparatively well-known "case-study" textbook on how best to convert the Nordic peoples without bloodshed,[1] in other words, by using insiders, and by making good use of the weaknesses inherent in "pagan" native practices. Indeed, this was an approach Pope Gregory had previously suggested in his letter to Mellitus in 601 AD (see Bede 1965:86 [ch. 30], and something the Romans seem to have even earlier demonstrated in their effective use of the Bructeri seeress, Veleda (see Simek 1993:356).

To a large extent, I will be following the arguments set forward by Jón

[1] As is well known, Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii* was one of the key sources on the early missionary activities in Scandinavia in Adam of Bremen's *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen* (c. 1072–1076): see Adam of Bremen 1959:19–34. In addition to the work's importance as a hagiographic work written about one early Hamburg-Bremen bishop by his successor, it seems to have been the only work available containing detailed information about missionary activities amongst the Nordic peoples for those planning similar activities from Hamburg-Bremen in the ninth and early tenth centuries. It is near unthinkable that the work did not serve as some form of textbook for potential German missionaries.

Hnefill Aðalsteinsson in his *Under the Cloak: A Ritual Turning Point in the Conversion of Iceland* (originally published 1979; revised and extended 1999) about the course of events in Iceland. Indeed, Jón Hnefill's proposal for what happened at the Alþingi on this occasion is well grounded in comparative materials and makes good sense in the light of what we know of pagan religious practice. The main section of Jón Hnefill's outline of "the probable passage of events at Þingvellir" is based largely on Ari *fróði*'s comparatively trustworthy account in *Íslendingabók* (1968:16),[2] but also draws on material from *Kristni saga* (1858:22–25) from the mid thirteenth century and *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (1958–2000:1, 187–198), composed soon after 1300,[3] especially concerning the idea of human sacrifice taking place and the idea of the Christians arranging a comparable symbolic "sigr gjöf" ("victory gift"). The key part of the outline runs as follows:

2: Síðu-Hallr gets the Christians to release him from the official position of lawspeaker and comes to an agreement with Þorgeir the Lawspeaker that he will recite those laws that the Christians should follow….

3. The pagans sacrifice eight men, two from each quarter, in order to prevent Christianity from taking over the country. Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði, who according to Ari was still pagan when he made the agreement with Síðu-Hallr, takes an active part in this sacrifice, probably a leading role. When the sacrifice has been completed, Þorgeir lies down under the cloak in his booth, and gengr til fréttar (asks the pagan gods about the future), as usually took place at the end of each sacrifice.

4. Þorgeir, as lawspeaker, had the role of being chairman in legal matters, as well as being the political leader of the pagans. As such, he had the

[2] Regarding Ari's comparative trustworthiness, there is still good reason to bear in mind his statement at the start of *Íslendingabók* that "hvatki es missagt es í fræðum þessum, þá es skylt at hafa þat heldr, es sannara reynisk" (whatever is wrongly stated in this work, it is a duty to have instead what proves to be more true) (*Íslendingabók* 1968: 3). Clearly Ari was doing his best to keep as close to the facts he knew as possible: see further Sverrir Tómasson 1992: 292–298.

[3] The events are also covered in Theodoricus' Monachus' *Historia De Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium* (1177–1188), but only very briefly, suggesting that the whole course of events was essentially the work of God ("the Grace of the Holy Spirit" and "divine intervention"): see Theodoricus Monachus 1998: xxii and 15–16. Another early source which seems to borrow from both *Íslendingabók* and Theodoricus is Oddur Snorrason's *Saga Ólafs Tryggvasonar*: See Oddur Snorrason 1932: 128–130 (written in the late twelfth century). On the relationship between all of these sources (including *Njáls saga*), and their comparative values, see further Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1999: 55–62.

final say in any conventional dispute. Through the execution of the sacrifice, he also earned himself the right to have the final say in matters concerning the pagan religion.

5. The morning after, Þorgeir awakes, sits up and tells people to come to Lögberg. There he announces his decision based on what the gods revealed to him during his time beneath the cloak.

6. The pagans accept Þorgeir's decision, strange as it may sound to them.

(Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1999:214):

In short, Jón Hnefill is arguing that a particular religious "performance" took place at Þingvellir, designed to win the peaceful formal acceptance of Christianity by those who were opposed to it (and avoid the possibility of civil war).

While he is less convinced than Dag Strömbäck (1975:30–31) and Bo Almqvist (1974:19) that any form of bribe took place when Hallr "keypti at Þorgeiri lǫgsǫgumanni" (paid money to Þorgeir the Lawspeaker) (*Íslendingabók* 1968:16; cf. *Kristni saga* 1858:22; *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* 1958–2000:1, 191; and *Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954: 271), Jón Hnefill nonetheless believes that Þorgeir's famed (and clearly publicly-noted) day and night beneath the cloak (*Íslendingabók* 1968:16) was related to a semi-shamanistic consultation with the gods, an activity paralleled in Irish, Scottish, Sámi and Native American tradition, and echoed in a classical account in Geoffery of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannie* (see Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1999:115–117, and 213–214; Wood 1987:56–57; Martin 1999:79; and Turner 1977: 167). According to Jón Hnefill, the period under the cloak was the final step of a recognised sacrificial activity (a *blót*, or sacrifice), in other words, that of interpreting the "*fréttir*" ("news" or "tidings") from the gods, the sacrifice and interpretation being something which Þorgeir would have been expected to carry out at a time of crisis, since Þorgeir in his role as *lögsögumaður* (lawspeaker) had the role of "chief priest" at the Þingvellir gathering. Indeed, the law and legal decisions appear to have belonged to a sphere that was closely associated with the sacred (see further Brink 2002: 105–108; and 2008: 26).

The question of whether large-scale human sacrifice actually took place at the Alþingi on this occasion is, of course, open to discussion (partly because of the questionable reliability of *Kristni saga* and *Ólafs*

saga Tryggvasonar en mesta). Nonetheless, there is natural logic behind the idea that believers in the gods (Þór, Freyr and Freyja having central roles in Iceland at this time) would have expected some form of sacrifice to be carried out at such a time of decision (if not at all pagan Alþingi meetings), and that an outcome, in the form of a deciding contest or another kind of reading of the "*fréttir*" should have followed this. Parallels might be seen in the sacrifices related to the ritual duels described in *Egils saga* (1933:209: the *blótnaut* (sacrificial bull) which "skildi sá hǫggva er sigr hefði" [the victor should strike down]) and *Kormáks saga* (1939:290: another *blótnaut*), in which the same elements are involved, if inverted (the decision apparently preceding the offering). There is also natural logic in the idea that the end result of a sacred ritual "performance" of this kind, conducted on the national stage of the time, would have been accepted without any question by "pagan" believers, simply because this is the way decisions seem to have been made for centuries among the Germanic and Nordic peoples.

The fact that the Germanic tribes and Nordic peoples used and trusted lot-casting (Latin: *sortes*; Old Icelandic: *hlutan*; cf. the throwing of *blótspán* [sacrificial sticks] or perhaps *teinlautar* [stick offerings]) as a means of making decisions is well documented from the time of Tacitus onwards. As Tacitus notes in *Germania*, ch. 10, "For auspices and the casting of lots, they have the highest possible regard" (Goetz & Welwei 1995:1, 134–135; trans. Tacitus 1948:108). Similar behaviour is reflected in Willibald's *Vita S. Bonifacii* (from the eighth century) which tells how, even after conversion, some Germans:

> … continued secretly, others openly, to offer sacrifices to trees and springs, to inspect the entrails of victims; some practised divination, legerdemain and incantations; some turned their attention to auguries, auspices and other sacrificial rites; whilst others, of a more reasonable character, forsook all the profane practices of heathenism and committed none of these crimes (*The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries* 1954: 10–11).

Similar practices and beliefs are reflected in a number of key works such as the Annals of Xanten (see Wood 1987:47), where a group of Vikings facing disease in Paris (in 845) cast lots to find out whether the gods would help them; in Alcuin's *Vita Willibrordi*, ch. 11 (from the late eighth century), which describes how lots are chosen to decide sacrificial victims in Forsiteland/ Heligoland (see *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries* 1954:10–11); in Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii* (c. 880: chs. 18, 19, 26–27, and 30: see *Boken om Ansgar* 1986:34; 40; 54–55; and 58–60), where lots are

used several times to decide a key plan of action; *Hervarar saga ok Heiðriks* 1943:208, where lots (*blótspán*) are used to decide an appropriate sacrifice when a harvest fails; *Landnámabók* 1968:234 (S 198), where *blótspán* are used to decide the right time to take land; *Völuspá*, st. 62 ("Þá kná Hænir/ hlautvið kiósa" ["Then Hænir could choose/ sacrificial twigs"]); and Einar Skálaglamm's *Vellekla*, st. 30 (possibly from the tenth century, and quoted in *Fagrskinna* [1984:118]), where lots (*blótspán* in the prose, *teinlautar* in the poem) seem to have been cast in an open space or field ("gekk til fréttar/… á velli;/ …teinlautar…." [went to read the omens/ … in an open space;/… twig offerings…]: *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* 1912–1915: A1: 129–130; B1: 122). In all of these cases, the *reading* of the lots is followed without any question, echoing Tacitus' and Alcuin's general statements. It is also hard to attribute all of them to hagiographic borrowings. Quite obviously the casting of lots was a sacred moment, creating its own sacred space. It involved the entrance of the holy into the everyday, and involved several levels of participants, most particularly those key readers/ interpreters/ performers who handled the lots, and the audience that waited to hear their announcements, trusting their expertise, and the fact that the lots represent a line of communication between this world and that beyond ordinary sight.

A similar trust in using objects to make decisions is seen in the family legends of new Icelandic settlers throwing their high-seat pillars into the sea to decide where to settle in *Landnámabók* (1968:42–45, 124–125, 163–164, 232, 302–303, 312 and 317 [S 8–9; 85; 123; 197; 289; 307; and 310]). This legendary tradition, also connected to divination (directly referred to several times as "að fregna til öndvegissúlna" [to follow the message/ omen of the high-seat pillars]), is almost certainly based on actual practice: it is echoed in a range of later oral legends concerning how people decided church sites from northern Sweden and Norway [related to the deciding of a church site]: see Campbell and Nyman 1976: 1, 12–15, and Strömbäck 1976[4]). It can also be seen in other accounts from *Landnámabók* showing people using *blot* or following the behaviour of horses for a similar purpose (*Landnámabók* 1968:42–44 and 96–97 [S 7–8 and 68]); and in the practice of *seiðr* being carried out at the beginning of winter (i.e. the start of the year: see *Eiríks saga rauða* 1935:206–209).

[4] That similar legends also existed in northern Norway was confirmed by Reimund Kvideland in an unpublished lecture held in Tartu, Estonia, in the summer of 2005.

Like those described by Tacitus and Alcuin, these were clearly people who trusted in following omens from the higher powers. This idea that fate is preordained and can not be avoided is, of course, well reflected in the Fáfnir's statement in *Fáfnismál*, st. 11, that "í vatni þú druknar/ ef í vindi rær/ alt er feigs forráð" [you will drown in water/ if you row in a wind/ everything is decided beforehand], and in the comment in *Grettis saga* (1936:62), that "verðr hverr þá at fara, er hann er feigr" [each must go when his time has been decided]. That this view of life was deeply rooted in the Nordic peoples, and difficult to eradicate is also reflected in the range of divinatory folk customs that used to be practised across Scandinavia during Christmas and the New Year period (see, for example, Bø 1974:99–108; and 1985:35–40), and can even be seen in the results of a recent survey of modern Icelandic folk beliefs and belief attitudes (Gunnell 2007).

All in all, it can be argued that anyone who knew the Germanic and Nordic peoples would have been well aware that this near blind-trust in augury was their key weakness. This is well demonstrated by the sarcastic comment made by Hrólfr, the son of Helgi *hinn magri*, when his father started sailing towards the Arctic ocean after a advisory consultation with Þórr (whom Helgi diplomatically only trusted when at sea). Hrólfr, the archetypal member of the younger generation, watching the icebergs approach, wanted to know "hvárt Helgi mundi halda í Dumbshaf, ef Þórr vísaði honum þangat" [whether Helgi would go on into the Artic Ocean if Þórr told him to go there] (*Landnámabók* 1968:250 [S 218]).

There seems little doubt that some Romans were also well aware of the importance of dealing directly with those who did the readings for the Germanic tribes, as can be seen in the accounts of their interactions with the Bructeri prophetess Veleda, who was based in the area around Köln in the first century AD. Of Veleda, and the reason for her respect, Tacitus writes in Book 4 of his *Histories* that she was:

> an unmarried woman who enjoyed wide influence over the tribe of the Bructeri. The Germans traditionally regard many of the female sex as prophetic, and indeed, by an exercise of superstition, as divine. [...] Veleda's prestige stood high, for she had foretold the German successes and the extermination of the legions" (Tacitus, Book 4, ch. 61, in Goetz & Welwei 1995:2, 220–221; trans. Tacitus 1975:247).

Veleda's importance is also demonstrated by the fact that in AD 69, Civilius, leader of a revolt against Rome (unsuccessfully) sent her a defeated legionary commander along with other gifts (Tacitus, Book IV,

ch. 61, in Goetz & Welwei 1995:II, 220–221; trans. Tacitus 1975:247). At a later point, she was presented with a complete Roman galley as part of the war spoils taken by her people who placed trust in her to make decisions for them (Tacitus, Book V, ch. 24, in Goetz & Welwei 1995:II, 252–253; trans. Tacitus 1975:285). Tacitus notes:

> … any personal approach to Veleda or speech with her was forbidden. This refusal to permit the envoys to see her was intended to enhance the aura of veneration that surrounded the prophetess. She remained immured in a high tower, one of her relatives being deputed to transmit questions and answers as if he were mediating between a god and his worshippers (Tacitus, Book 4, ch. 65, in Goetz & Welwei 1995:2, 224–225; trans. Tacitus 1975:250).

The account brings to mind the archaeological evidence of Danish Iron Age bog offerings of weapons and ships to what appear to have often been female deities (see further Glob 1977). It also offers immediate parallels not only to the figure of Þorbjörg *lítilvölva* on her own raised platform in *Eiríks saga rauða* (see reference above), but also Þorgeir's isolation beneath his cloak. Of particular interest, however, is that Tacitus' account tells how a Roman commander contacted Veleda directly using secret messages, aiming to persuade her to change the "fortunes of war" (Tacitus, Book V, ch. 24, in Goetz & Welwei 1995:2, 252–253; trans. Tacitus 1975:285–286). Also of interest is Statius' revelation that in AD 77, the Romans seem to have captured Veleda, and instead of killing her, decided to keep her as hostage (Statius, *Silvae*, 1, 4, 88–90, in Goetz & Welwei 1995:2, 260–261; see also Simek 1993:356). It then seems that she might have been directly involved in getting her people to accept a pro-Roman king in AD 83 or 84 (see, for example, Todd 1975:203).

This account leads us directly to other accounts of outsiders apparently getting local Germanic/ Nordic people to change opinion by means of "taking the radio station" (in other words, controlling the information reaching the people from the gods). The most obvious examples in this regard are those contained in Rimbert's account of Ansgar's attempts to convert Sweden in *Vita Anskarii* (c. 880) which repeatedly underlines how lot casting seems to work in Christian favour (by some miraculous means). Most noteworthy is the description of Ansgar's second mission from Hamburg to the Swedes in 851–852, which, like the rest of the book, would surely have been well known by anyone in close contact with the archbishopric in Hamburg-Bremen and its Nordic missionary activities in the tenth century. Hamburg's early involvement in the con-

version of Iceland is well demonstrated by the mentions of the failed missionary work of both bishop Friðrekr of Saxony (see *Kristni saga* 1858:1, and *Íslendingabók* 1968:18), and Þangbrandr, who in both *Kristni saga* and *Njáls saga* is said to have been Saxon (see *Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954:256; and *Kristni saga* 1858:8). Neither man can have been unaware of Rimbert's book, even if they seem to have failed to read (or listen to readings of) it well enough. Others, however, seem to have paid better attention.

As noted above, Rimbert makes several mentions of how lot casting seems to have played a key role in how the Swedes gained access to the will of the gods (or perhaps the decisions of Urðr and her female friends). In *Vita Anskarii*, ch. 26, Rimbert describes in some detail how Ansgar, newly returned to Birka in 851–852, was facing the slightly difficult situation of a renewal of pagan faith (apparently in ancestors). The bishop then visited the local king, Ólafr, bringing him gifts, and offering him a good meal. The king accepted the presents and the meal, but said that he personally had no final say in religious matters. He says simply:

> "I neither can nor dare give your mission any promises, without first casting lots to ask our gods for advice, and getting to know the will of the people. Let your mission follow me to the next *Þing* and I will put your case before the people, and with the gods' permission follow your wishes, and then your desire will work out. If not I will also let you know."

Rimbert then explains that "it was the tradition in that country that any official matter depends more on the will of the people than the king's power" (*Boken om Ansgar* 1986, 54; original Latin in Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1999:128). The following day at Birka:

> The king first of all assembled his chieftains and began to discuss our Father's mission with them. The conclusion was that through the casting of lots [*sors*] they would find out what the will of the gods was in this matter. As was their usual custom, they went out into the open air and threw lots, and the lots showed them that it was the will of the gods that Christianity should be allowed to be founded there.

The *þing* then somewhat grudgingly accepts the return of priests to the area (*Boken om Ansgar* 1986, 55; original Latin in Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1999:128).

As Ian Wood (1987:55–56) has noted, Rimbert's account may contain echoes of earlier hagiographic works like Alcuin's aforementioned *Vita Willibrordi*, but nonetheless, this account seems to reflect local practice,

if only because of its emphasis on the lot casting taking place in the open air (*in campum*), something that reflects the comment about "teinlautar… á velli" (twigs offerings … in an open space) in *Vellekla*, st. 30 (see above). Both comments echo the respect for liminal areas and the "wild" reflected in other accounts of religious practice, echoed in the talk of *örskotshelgi* ("þar sem hvárki er akr né eng" [where there is neither field nor meadow]) in *Hrafnkels saga* 1950:120; Skírnir's rune work involving him going off to a nearby *holt* (copse/ wood) to get *hrá við* (raw wood) [*Skírnismál*, st. 32]); and even Sigrdrífr's situation on Hindarfialli in *Fáfnismál*, st. 42.

Rimbert's account of the decisions made via lot casting in Birka is echoed shortly afterwards in another conversion account involving referral to the gods (ch. 30; *Boken om Ansgar* 1986, 58–60). This second account tells of how, in 854, a Swedish raiding party found itself in a difficult position in Kurland. The warriors, besieging a city but far away from their ships:

> … decided to find out by way of throwing lots whether their gods would help them in such a way that they would either win a victory or escape from there alive. And so they threw lots, but could not find any of the gods who was prepared to help them.

Someone suggests that they next try the Christian god by means of the lots, and "it was discovered that Christ would help them." Following this, they convince the city to pay them off with a ransom, and return home peacefully. In gratitude to the Christian God, they agree to take up fasting and giving alms to the poor because "this was dear to Christ" (thereby demonstrating what they saw as being the chief aspects of their new Christian faith).

As Ian Wood (1987:56–57) writes:

> The augury could […] be no more than a set of variants on a literary *topos*. […] For an author trying to depict the Danes as being only just beyond the pale of civilisation auguries could be a useful narrative device. They were observed by pagan Germans. [...] Despite this there is a case for thinking that auguries did play a part in the Scandinavian's search for divine protection, even if the particular anecdotes recounted by Rimbert are no more than literary constructs. […] Augury and divination […] may well have been employed by the Scandinavians as a means of adopting a new deity. Moreover the emphasis on augury in the *Vita Anskarii* may be taken as an indication that the Christians were prepared to accept the *sortes*, at least on those occasions when they supported the process of evangelization; in such circumstances they might be regarded as the manifestation of divine, as opposed to diabolic

> will. […] This apparent acceptance of the *sortes* in Scandinavia is a further indication of the overlap between pagan and Christian worlds. The missionaries seem to have been content to work within social norms rather than in opposition to them....

Wood (1987:56) notes that the conversion activities in Iceland in 999/ 1000 also seem to involve divination, and, in *Under the Cloak*, Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson (1999:127–128) also points to parallels between Þorgeir's behaviour and the role of the oracle in Rimbert's account. However, neither scholar notes exactly how close the overall performance (for that is what it seems to be) that took place at Þingvellir is to what Rimbert describes as having happened at Birka. Both performances involve the following features:

a) Awareness that the acceptance of Christianity (or a new god) can not take place without the formal general acceptance of the people (or their representatives) at a *þing* meeting.

b) The passing of gifts to the person in charge of interpreting the will of the gods (via lot-casting or a *blót*), a person officially recognised as being a pagan believer, and a priest/ leader/ representative of the people.

c) The performance of a recognised ritual ceremony of divination in a sacred space (recognised and known about by those at the *þing* meeting), carried out by those local people respected by the *þing* as having the ability to interpret the will of the gods, i.e. by those previously given gifts.

d) The apparent message from the pagan gods (or other divinatory powers) that Christianity should be accepted (something interpreted by the person given gifts earlier).

d) The same representative's announcement of the sacred decision of the gods in a different public space in which legal decisions are taken.

e) The official acceptance of this interpretation by those present.

If we accept Jón Hnefill's description of the course of events in Iceland, the parallels between the two series of events in Sweden and Iceland (linked by the likely involvement of Hamburg-Bremen in both) are striking (see further Sawyer 1987:82). Whether the conversion accounts in *Íslendingabók*, *Kristni saga* and *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* are a literary motif based on Rimbert's work or not (I think it unlikely), they

certainly seem to suggest that those responsible for the Icelandic conversion would appear to have known Rimbert's work – or heard stories from it – and were following the peaceful approach to conversion (via local means of divination) hammered home there on several occasions (see above). To my mind at least, the parallels are more than a coincidence. Indeed, the approach used in Iceland also reflects the statement later attributed by Adam of Bremen to King Sveinn Estriðsson of Denmark (d. 1076), who reminded Bishop Aðalbert that "barbarian peoples could more easily be converted by men like them in language and customs than by persons unacquainted with their ways and strange to their kind" (Adam of Bremen 1959: 180; and Sanmark 2004:106).

Over and above this, it is worth remembering that, as in Birka, for most people at the Alþingi, the so-called "conversion" was actually little more than an official performance. As Orri Vésteinsson (2000:18) argues:

> There is more reason to think that an official change of religion held no great significance for those involved and was probably not expected to affect people's lives greatly […]. That it did not is supported by the slow development of Christian institutions in the eleventh century.

According to Rimbert, for the Swedes in Kurland, Christianity seems to have involved little more than avoiding meat regularly for a few days, and giving alms to the poor. For those at Þingvellir in 999/ 1000, the only real consequence was a need to be baptised (the more sensible seem to have waited until they found some warm water to do this in Laugarvatn: *Kristni saga* 1858:25). There were no priests, hardly any churches and few could read. Everyone was allowed to go on eating horse meat, bearing out children (the banning of which could have caused practical problems for many farmers), and worshipping in private (at this time, most autumn, winter and spring worship seems to have taken place indoors) (see *Íslendingabók* 1968:17; *Kristni saga* 1858:25; *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* 1958–2000:1, 197). For most people there was little immediate change. Nonetheless, the formal performance at Þingvellir (closely following Rimbert's model which encouraged deliberate use of traditional modes of local religious practice) in the long term paved the way for people to be allowed to take up and encourage the new belief in comparative peace, as it did in Sweden. It also allowed Christians from home and abroad (and most noteworthy Hamburg-Bremen, where Ísleifr Gizurarson later went to study) to extend their sway and to enter into in-

fluential positions at the Alþing. This was to have much greater cultural and political consequences.

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Summary

The official conversion of Iceland has been discussed in some detail in works by Strömbäck, Wood, Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson and others. However, in their explanations for what happened at the Alþingi in 999/ 1000, none of these scholars has paid much attention to the obvious similarities between the successful method of official conversion apparently adopted by the Christian faction amongst the Icelanders (apparently under some influence from Hamburg-Bremen) and that equally successfully, and peacefully, applied by Ansgar at Birka in the ninth century. Both "conversions" make effective use of one of the main weak points of pre-Christian Nordic religious belief referred to and exemplified in a number of contemporary works, namely a near blind acceptance of omens and other forms of prophecy which was based on a strong sense that fate was decided beforehand. In other words, as Ansgar is indirectly advised, the "seer/ seeress" in contact with the gods actually had more power than a king or chieftain when it came to getting people to make decisions. In short, it is argued here that the "prophetic performance" which is said to have effectively taken place at the Alþingi should be seen in the context not only of Old Norse religious belief (as Jón Hnefill argues), but also Rimbert's casebook study of other early successful missionary activities in the North.

Border Crossings
Landscape and the Other World in the *Fornaldarsögur*

HELEN F. LESLIE

This essay explores how landscape facilitates the construction of different worlds in the texts of the *fornaldarsögur* and the use of landscape to indicate how, when and why borders between worlds are created, maintained or closed. I have chosen to focus on *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* and *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* since between them they are representative of most of the *fornaldarsögur* genre in terms of landscape depiction, and both have a wide-ranging use of landscape in constructing This World and the Other World.[1] With their narrative worlds rooted in our reality, the *fornaldarsögur* display some of the gritty realism of the *Íslendingasögur* but blend it smoothly with fantastic occurrences, supernatural beings and a multitude of Other Worlds to create some of the most enjoyable Old Norse fiction. However, the realistic paradigm of the narrative world is modified, and "the characters develop in a world that is not altogether the same as ours" (Torfi H. Tulinius 2002, 18). Although the difference between This World and the Other World is apparent in the *fornaldarsögur*, both are presented as essentially real places.

Notions of This World and the Other World created by the landscape in the *fornaldarsögur* operate in a matrix of interactions and this multiplicity calls into question the dichotomous world-view frequently read

[1] It is, of course, difficult to pinpoint exactly what features and literary approaches make up the concept and feeling of the *fornaldarsögur* as a genre, although "with their traditional heroes, eddic-style poetry, wide-ranging geography, and occasional trips to the Otherworld" (Mitchell 1991, 13) these sagas undoubtedly constitute a group (see Mitchell 1991, 8–43 for a detailed assessment of this problem).

into the genre: the two notions of This World and the Other World or the natural and the supernatural.[2] A particularly striking example of this is found in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*:

> Tók ek hann þá í fang mér, ok þóttumst ek hlaupa fram á sjóvarhamra, ok ætlaða ek at drekkja honum, svá at engi skyldi mega njóta hans. En þá er ek þóttumst sleppa honum ofan fyrir hamrana, þá varð eigi betr en svá, at ek kasta honum þá upp yfir fortjaldit, ok kom hann niðr í sængina hjá brúðinni, en ek var fangin griðalaus, ok mátta ek þá hvergi undan komast. (12:176–7)[3]
>
> [Then I took him in my arms, and it seemed to me I was running to the sea-cliffs, and I intended to drown him so that no one else should be able to enjoy him. But when it seemed to me I slipped him over the cliffs, than nothing better than thus happened: that I then threw him up over the bed-curtain, and he came down in the bed with the bride, and I was captured without quarter, and could not then escape by any means.]

The crone, his would-be murderer, seems as surprised as us, the audience, at this peculiar occurrence. The bridegroom here does not cross realms from This World in the bridal chamber into the Other World of the hag. It is she who sees the cliffs, and it is this landscape feature that marks the boundary of This World with The Other: the real world and the Other World are touching but not overlapping, so the bridegroom can be grabbed by the Other World but not thrown into it. Such landscape features are key narrative elements in generating the world-view of the *fornaldarsögur*.

I would like to modify the idea of the dichotomous world-view of the *fornaldarsögur* containing borders between This World and The Other, and instead, drawing my examples from *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* and *Egils saga einhenda*, argue that a narrative "Real" or "Our" World exists in the *fornaldarsögur* along with one or more Other Worlds and that all of these worlds are real places, accessible under the right conditions and via the right routes. The interplay of This World and The Other is frequently framed as human characters of This World interacting with supernatural inhabitants of The Other, and although this dichotomous

[2] By "world-view" I mean impressions in the text of their being multiple different worlds, a This World and Other Worlds. There can be more than one Other World in a text, and it is ambiguous as to whether the narrative "This World" coincides with the "Real World"; for my purposes, This World refers to the Real World of the saga protagonist as portrayed within the text.

[3] All quotations of *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* and *Egils saga einhenda og Ásmundar berserkjabana* are taken from *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* (1944). References are chapter and page number. Translations are my own. I have sacrificed elegance for a more literal rendering.

world view is present in Norse mythology in a wider context, as analysed by John McKinnell (2005), it is particularly extensive in the *fornaldarsögur*. The interaction is in the context of an apparently natural fusion of the supernatural Other World and This World (based on reality), very similar to that found in fairy-tales and folktales (see Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2006, 33). In both of these genres, the boundary between the two worlds no longer exists and instead a special "fairy-tale" narrative world is created. Max Lüthi has suggested that this idiosyncratic world is marked by one-dimensionality and in this special world anything can happen, since it is free from our perceptions of what is real and unreal, natural or supernatural (Lüthi 1982, 4–10). Although it is valuable to understand the *fornaldarsögur* from a folkloric point of view (for a particularly interesting approach see Mitchell 1991, 49–59), as Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir has drawn attention to, the world of the *fornaldarsögur* merely resembles the one-dimensionality of the world of the folktale but yet is something else (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2006, 33–4).[4]

Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns: landscape and matrices of worlds

The landscape plays an important role in *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* in determining the boundary and passage between worlds and in the identification of inhabitants as otherworldly. The *þáttr* survives in fifty-three manuscripts of which five are from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: AM 343 a 4to (1r–5v), AM 577 4to (65r–71v) and AM 589 e 4to (1r–5v) are all from c. 1450 to 1500, AM 571 4to (6r–6v) is thought to be from c. 1500–1600, and AM 510 4to from c. 1550 (*Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog: Registre* 1989, 415–6). The protagonist Þorsteinn engages in a series of four adventures: in the first, he rides to the underworld on a stick, steals a ring and a jewelled tablecloth and must depart in haste; in the second episode he rescues a dwarf child and is rewarded by the dwarf; in the third and longest, most complex section, Þorsteinn kills the giant Geirrøðr; and in the fourth, minor portion, Þorsteinn kills the *draugr* [ghost] Agði, a dead giant who will not rest in his grave. The

[4] For discussion of Lüthi's work and a thorough analysis of the supernatural and geographical aspects of distance and borders in the *Íslendingasögur*, see Sävborg (2009).

þáttr has previously been fruitfully interpreted in terms of its transformation of earlier material relating to Þórr and in terms of the narrative pattern of the journey to the Other World and its possible Icelandic and Celtic analogues (Simpson 1966 and Power 1985). Through a close reading of the series of adventures in *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*, I suggest below that the matrices of worlds collude to form the world-view of the *þáttr*.

The First Adventure

One method of portraying Other Worlds as real places in the *þáttr* is by building up a series of inset worlds. In the first section – Þorsteinn's ride to the underworld – there are three, possibly four, Other Worlds which are all accessed and recognised by different means. The first Other World appears in chapter two: Þorsteinn arrives at a "hóll fagr…í rjóðrinu" [beautiful hillock…in the clearing] (2:398) implying a forest setting. Þorsteinn does not need to take any action to initiate the encounter with the Other World; an elf-boy is simply standing atop the *hóll*.[5] These *álfar* [elves] can interact with other supernatural creatures:

> "Móðir mín," segir hann, "fá þú mér út krókstaf minn ok bandvettlinga, því at ek vil á gandreið fara. Er nú hátíð í heiminum neðra." (2:398)
>
> ["Mother," he says, "give me my crooked stick and knitted woollen gloves, because I want to go on a witch-ride. There is now a high-day in the underworld."]

There is a clear distinction not only between the world of Þorsteinn and the *álfar* from the mound, but also between the *álfar* and those "í heiminum neðra" [in the underworld]. As Þorsteinn reached the locality by sailing "austr fyrir Bálagarðssíðu" (to the Finnish coast, 2:398), so too the elf-*piltr* [boy] must undertake a *gandreið* to meet those in the underworld.[6] Þorsteinn is able to obtain the necessary trappings of a staff and gloves for the journey by announcing himself as "Bjálfi, sonr þinn" [Bjálfi, your son] (2:398) and can thus join him. The world of the *álfar* in the hillock is inset into Þorsteinn's world and it is from his world that

[5] As to the exact nature of the elf-boy see Simpson (1966, 2) who concludes he is a young troll, and Einar Ól. Sveinsson (2003, 170–1) who suggests these elves are nature spirits.

[6] For a more general discussion of *gandreið* in *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*, see Eldar Heide (2006, 222–228).

he and the elf-boy journey to the underworld, the transition between worlds marked by the landscape in each case.

Changing worlds in the *fornaldarsögur* is frequently marked by mist or by the characters being unsure of their exact location. The underworld is separated from that above by a *móða* [large river] (2:398), as is common in many mythologies (compare, for example, the River Styx in Greek mythology), but here it is not clear whether the river Þorsteinn encounters consists more of water or of fog: "steyptu sér ofan í hana, ok var því líkast sem þeir væði reyk" [they flung themselves over into it, and it was like they waded through smoke] (2:398). The mist thus simultaneously indicates and conceals the border between This World and The Other, and it is only when the mist abates ("því næst birti þeim fyrir augum" [shortly it lifted before their eyes] 2:398), that they are able to see clearly. The mist and river's appearance is a good signal to the audience that the character is making the transition into the Other World, regardless of whether or not the transition was caused by a deliberate action of the character. This is parallel to Þorsteinn's experience with the *hóll*; he did not see the actual border of the World, only the elvish occupants through the window. The underworld is situated at the foot of "sem á fell fram af hömrum" [where the river falls down over cliffs] (2:398). A drop in the topography of the land is used in the *þáttr* to make physically real what is in some traditions allegorical or metaphorical: this is a journey literally down, over a cliff.

It becomes clear that otherness is relative when Þorsteinn and the elf-boy venture into a *höll* [hall] in this second Other World. As the focus of the narrative gets narrower and narrower, from the *byggð mikla* [thickly populated area] to the *borg stóra* [big town], *höll*, *silfrker* [silver vessels], *trapiza* [table] (2:398) and bits of food on the floor, a sense of confederacy develops between the boy and Þorsteinn; they are both invisible, alien creatures inside an underworld hall. Into this matrix of three World landscapes is suddenly introduced a fourth, also delineated by its landscape feature:

> …maðr kom í höllina ok kvaddi konung ok kveðst vera sendr ok til hans utan af Indíalandi ór fjalli því, er Lúkanus heitir, frá jarli þeim, er þar réð fyrir, ok segir konungi, at hann var huldumaðr. (2:399)
>
> […a man came into the hall and greeted the king and said he had been sent to him from Indíaland out of that mountain called Lúkanus, from the earl who rules over there, and says to the king that he was one of the hidden-people.]

The idea of which world should be a benchmark for reality and normality becomes more unstable as more worlds are added.

Landscape also signals the end of episodes in the Other World as well as their beginning. Upon Þorsteinn's return to his own world after he has disrupted feasting in the underworld, the elf-mound is clearly open, since "kastaði piltrinn þá inn stafnum ok klæðsekk þeim, … ok svá gerði Þorsteinn" [then the boy threw in the staff and the sack, …and so did Þorsteinn] (2:399). The Other World, not Þorsteinn, has opened the mound, and whilst the elf-boy "hljóp inn" [ran inside] (2:400), Þorsteinn cannot use or see into the entrance to the knoll but remains on the outside peering through the window: the landscape concludes his and the elf-boy's interaction as the mound closes.

The Second Adventure

Chapter three of *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* recounts Þorsteinn's second adventure into yet another Other World, a briefer episode in which he saves the child of a distressed dwarf and which has typical motifs of transition into an Other World. Þorsteinn's encounter with the *dvergr* [dwarf] again takes place "í eitt rjóðr" [in a clearing] (3:400) into which Þorsteinn randomly wanders, and "einn mikill steinn" [a great stone] (3:400) marks the boundary between worlds here. This large stone is a typical abode or entry to the Other World for a dwarf (compare the experience of Egill in *Egils saga einhenda* discussed below). The dwarf-child saved and Þorsteinn rewarded, Þorsteinn sets out to sea and loses his way: "Koma nú á fyrir þeim myrkr ok hafvillur, ok vita þeir ekki, hvar þeir fara, ok var þat hálfan mánuð, at þessi villa helzt" [Now fog comes before them and they lost their course, and they don't know where they're going, and it was half a month that this loss of bearings continued] (3:402). The mist returns as a boundary feature, similar to its employment in chapter two where it marked the underworld, and after having been lost at sea for two weeks, signalling the third adventure in the sequence, Þorsteinn arrives in another land.

The Third Adventure

Landscape also plays an important role in the cultural construction of Other Worlds as well as showing that a character has entered one. Þorsteinn's third adventure is the longest and sees Þorsteinn again travel to another world to interact with supernatural creatures in the distinct landscape of Giantland and also explains the division of the giant race into different types and territories. The opening of this adventure is entirely based around a pleasant landscape:

> Þat var eitt kvöld, at þeir urðu varir við land. Köstuðu þeir nú akkerum ok lágu þar um nóttina. Um morguninn var gott veðr ok sólskin fagrt. Váru þeir þá komnir á einn fjörð langan, ok sjá þeir þar hlíðir fagrar ok skóga. Engi maðr var sá innanborðs, at þetta land þekkti. Ekki sáu þeir kvikt, hvárki dýr né fugla. Reistu þeir nú tjald á landi ok bjuggust vel um. (4:402)
>
> [It was one evening, that they realised they had come close to land. Now they dropped anchor and lay there through the night. It was good weather in the morning and bright sunshine. They had come into a long fjord, and they saw there beautiful wooded slopes. No man onboard knew this land. They didn't see anything alive, neither animal nor bird. Now they raised tents ashore and settled themselves down well.]

The appreciation of the weather, the sun's illumination of the fjord and the area's pleasing wooded slopes gives some indication of Þorsteinn and his men's aesthetic tastes, and landscape and its variations were evidently carefully looked for by sailors such as Þorsteinn and his men: they specifically keep watch for animals and birds in the above quotation. Regional differences and distinct characteristics of landscape in localities were evidently used in deciding where they were or recognising if they were in the right place: "Engi maðr var sá innanborðs, at þetta land þekkti." Since the description is very generic the landscape does not help them, although, as we have seen, adventures tend to take place when arriving at a new destination by boat or when going into a forested area. The description given here is commonplace in the *fornaldarsögur* but very indicative of an arrival into an Other World.

In *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* the motif of different footpaths in a woodland, broad, narrow and entangled, signals a transition to the Other World. Predictably, Þorsteinn must enter the forest in order to "kanna land þetta" [explore this land] (4:402), since the landscape, clearly based on the scenery of Norway, offers no clues as to their location. In previous chapters, neither the forest nor Þorsteinn's entry

into it were described, but here the border of the woodland is clearly delineated ("Gengu þeir þá með honum upp á skóginn" [They went with him up into the forest] 4:402). Upon going among the trees he wanders around:

> Nú er at segja af Þorsteini, at allan þann dag gengr hann um mörkina ok verðr við ekki varr. En at áliðnum degi kemr hann á eina braut breiða. Hann gekk eptir brautinni, þangat til at aptnaði. Gekk hann þá brott af brautinni ok víkr at einni stórri eik og stígr upp í hana. Var þar nóg rúm í at liggja. Sefr hann þar um nóttina. (4:402–3)
>
> [Now it is to be said about Þorsteinn, that all that day he walks around the forest and doesn't become aware of anything. But towards the end of the day he comes onto a wide road. He walked up the road and followed it until evening. Then he went off the road and made for a large oak and went up it. There was enough room to lie down. He sleeps the night there.]

The forest and the footpaths represent Þorsteinn's movement out of This World into The Other. When he turns off the road and goes down a less travelled path, he enters a wilder landscape where fewer people venture: the transitory landscape of the Other World. The footpaths are broad in This World because lots of people travel on them: humanity intrudes on the landscape to make it more accessible to them, and the more people who go down a footpath, the wider it gets. These subtle landscape changes used by the saga author indicate Þorsteinn is arriving in the Other World. An apparently worthless piece of landscape description, explicitly saying Þorsteinn notices nothing in particular, actually cleverly reveals an important indication that the world of the supernatural has materialised. In Þorsteinn's previous journey to an Other World, a great river falling over cliffs marked the border with the underworld – the *hóll* inhabited by elves, however, was not strongly delineated as being in a different world, it simply must have been because the *álfar* are not occupants of ours. Here, although supernatural creatures by definition must appear in the world of the supernatural, there is no strong dichotomous world view – only the landscape and the roads carved into it really indicate what the mist on the inward journey hinted at. The Other World is confirmed when three riders go by who are "svá stóra, at enga menn sá hann fyrr jafnstóra" [so big, that he had not seen men before who were equally large] (5:403) and they too immediately mark Þorsteinn out as alien: "Sjaldsénir eru oss þvílíkir menn" [we seldom see men like you] (5:403); Þorsteinn himself is an Other World creature intruding on their reality.

The landscape in the remainder of this section divides Other Worlds from Other Worlds by focusing on the cultural construction of giant-lands and what the saga redactor considers to be different types of giant. Einar Ól. Sveinsson comments on the general use of the designations for giant:

> From time to time stories from the late thirteenth century onwards differentiate between *risar* and *tröll* or *jötnar*. *Risar* come to be thought of as gentler, less ugly and less dangerous to humans. This appears, however, to have been only a temporary device of people who felt that ideas about giants were rather inconsistent, and wanted to make them more logical by this distinction. (2003, 164)

In *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* this is the case to the extent that the different kinds of giant are given to mutual distrust and dislike:

> "Goðmundr heiti ek. Ræð er þar fyrir, sem á Glæsisvöllum heitir. Þar þjónar til þat land, er Risaland heitir. … Þat land liggr hér næst, er Jötunheimar heitir. Þar ræðr sá konungr, er Geirröðr heitir. Undir hann erum vér skattgildir. … en þó unum vér illa við at þjóna Jötnum." (5:403–4)
>
> ['I am called Goðmundr. I rule what is there in front of us, which is called Glæsisvellir. It is a dependancy of that country which is called Risaland ... The country that lies nearest to here is called Jötunheimar. That king rules there who is called Geirröðr. We are tributaries under him. ... but nevertheless we are hardly content with being ruled by giants.']

A third giant-related country is Grundir, ruled over by Earl Agði: "Þat er á millum Risalands ok Jötunheima. Hann hafði atsetu at Gnípalundi. Hann var fjölkunnigr, ok menn hans váru tröllum líkari en mönnum" [That is in-between Risaland and Jötunheimar. He had set up home at Gnípalundi.[7] He was a sorcerer, and his men were more like trolls than men.] (5:405). The races of giants are distinct and there is a clear boundary between the Other Worlds of the giant countries: "Mikil á skilr land vort, … Sú heitir Hemra. Hún er svá djúp ok ströng, at hana vaða engir hestar nema þeir, sem vér kumpánar eigum" [A great river divides our countries, … that one called Hemra. It is so deep and strong, that no horses can wade it except those which we companions own.] (5:404). This boundary is not one between This World and an Other World, but instead divides an Other World from an Other World, and even the *risar*

[7] Compare here the first line of stanza 44 of *Völuspá*: "Geyr Garmr miöc fyr Gnipahelli" [Garmr barks greatly in front of Gnipahellir] (*Edda* 1962, 10). *Gnipahellir* is likely to be some sort of over-hanging cave and could be the entrance to Hel, thus very much marking the border to an Other World.

with whom Þorsteinn rides must protect themselves from harm when crossing its supernaturally cold waters.

The Fourth Adventure

Chapter thirteen emphasises that Þorsteinn is a Christian and that the power of God (represented earlier in the tale by appeals to God's earthly representative King Óláfr) alone is enough to prevent undesirable supernatural creatures from (re)appearing. After killing Geirröðr and marrying Agði's daughter Goðrún, Þorsteinn embarks on his fourth adventure and goes back to live in the Other World of the *risar*. It is significant that Þorsteinn is able to go back and live permanently in the Other World, since he is a Christian character and the Other World, inhabited by giants and dwarves, is represented as pagan. However, throughout the saga Þorsteinn has had King Óláfr's blessing, and the King himself stands guard on Þorsteinn's wedding night in chapter twelve. When Þorsteinn's permanent settlement in the Other World is imminent: "Konungr bað hann halda trú sína vel, – "ok eig meira undir þér en þeim austr þar"" [The king told him to keep his faith well, – 'and have more dependency on yourself than on those there in the east'] (12:416). By keeping his Christian faith strong, Þorsteinn can enter the Other World and rid it of is undesirable aspects, such as the *draugr* Agði. This creation of a Christian This World inside a pagan Other World is the ultimate matrix of intrusion of worlds.

Þorsteinn firmly establishes a This World inside the Other World by creating a gated farm enclosure with crosses over all the gates. The *tröll* Agði must be prevented from entering the farm enclosure of the Christian World inset into the pagan Other World, and the *haugr* he inhabits is a foil to the elvish *hóll*, whose occupants present no threat. Agði is excluded from the farm by crosses over all the gates and is sealed in his mound by Þorsteinn who "setti kross í dyrrnar" [set a cross in the door] (13:417). The crosses emphasise that even in the midst of the unknown and the frightening, Christianity is sufficient to keep the Other World at bay. As Christianity has been linked to the figure of kingship through Óláfr throughout the saga, the figure of the king very strongly represents This World in the *þáttr*.

The landscape of *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* thus enforces the separ-

ation of landscapes and mythologies of two very different world-views: the world-view of Christianity and a world-view that can include giant-lands and dwarves; Christianity prevails over the pagan and the *draugr* Agði is never seen again. There are thus different mythological world-views as well as different landscape views. The enclosure of This World sealed with crosses inside the Other World provides more than just a fence to exclude *draugar*; it is a very strong boundary indeed. Þorsteinn's action of sealing the *draugr* inside the *haugr* with a cross links the threads of the landscape, world boundaries and mythologies together: a human commands an Otherworldly creature to stay in his own domain by actively setting a cross on the boundary between This World and the Other World.

Although this *þáttr* refers to King Óláfr, the emphasis is on the overlapping of worlds. The landscape signals the end of each episode that constructs Other Worlds: a mound (a *hóll* then a *haugr*) closing ends the first and fourth episodes, whilst the second and third episodes are ended by loss of sight: Þorsteinn is lost in the mist at sea and Agði goes blind in the wood upon seeing the Christian Þorsteinn's ship, conveying spiritual as well as physical blindness. The world-view here is not dichotomous since many different Other Worlds intrude upon one another and supernatural creatures can travel out of their own world into another world, yet nor have the worlds fully converged. The landscape of the saga constructs a fractured reality that questions firm notions of This World and The Other.

Egils saga einhenda: Gradual Convergence of Worlds

I began with a strange scene from *Egils saga einhenda* and suggested that This World and the Other World were touching but not overlapping near the beginning of the plot. This saga exists in sixty-eight manuscripts, the principal vellum being AM 343 4to, fols 14r–21v (c. 1450–1475) (*Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog: Registre* 1989, 234). The narrative is structured by a sophisticated conceit of the interaction of Other Worlds: a frame narrative contains a series of external analepses which become complex and intermingled. These flashbacks to before the beginning of the narrative build up the entire story of Egill's encounter

with the Other World, and the characters realise what is happening, or what has happened, alongside the audience as the two worlds that are constructed converge over time, eventually portraying This World and the Other as parallel universes. The stories of a number of different characters are mixed together, so here I will concentrate on Egill's narrative thread, and show how Egill's interaction with the landscape demonstrates that he too becomes more Other as time progresses.

Egill is marked out as somewhat Other from the moment we meet him and must demonstrate that he initially belongs to This World rather than The Other. Whilst the portrayal of Ásmundr is entirely positive (he arrives in a ship "allt gulli búit fyrir ofan sjó" [all finished with gold over the water-line] and "hugnaðist Ásmundr þar vel ok hans menn" [Ásmundr and his men were thought well of there] 2:156–7), Egill announces his presence by plundering the kingdom he has arrived in, is "illr viðreignar" [bad to encounter] (3:157) and physically different:

> "En Egill þessi hefir aðra hönd ok er kallaðr Egill einhendi, ok vinnr hann meira sigr með þeiri, sem af er. Er þat búit um eitt sverð, ok er dverga smíði, ok er því læst at fyrir ofan úlflið, en hans högg standast engir menn." (3:157–8)
>
> ['But this Egill has one hand and is called Egill one-hand, and he wins more victories with the one that's missing than with the other. It is equipped with a sword which is made by dwarves, and it is clasped over the wrist, and no man can withstand his blow.']

Initially hostile, Egill must confirm his acceptability in This World by wrestling with Ásmundr and demonstrating exemplary bravery and courtesy: "Hljóp [Ásmundr] þá eptir sverði sínu ok hljóp at Agli, en hann lá svá kyrr sem hár hans væri skorit" [Then [Ásmundr] ran after his sword and ran to Egill, but he lay so still, like his hair was being cut] (4:159). The scene is injected with humour when the attack is compared to a haircut, and Egill's bravery and good manners in the face of death is enough not only to seal his friendship with Ásmundr but also to mark Egill as firmly belonging to This World despite his dwarf-made hand.

Egill and Ásmundr's aimless searching for abducted princesses fulfils the same narrative function as the hero lost at sea; as they could be going anywhere, they are brought ashore in Jötunheimar. The place-name probably indicates they have reached an Other World, and the ubiquitous forest also appears as an indication they may be passing through a border between worlds. The border between This World and the Other, how-

ever, is marked: "Eitt sinn kómu þeir í dal einn. Á ein var þar ok eyrar sléttar, en upp yfir skógr ok hamrar. Þar sá þeir margt geitfé ok feita hafra" [One time they came into a valley. A river was there and level banks, but above a forest and cliffs. They saw there many she-goats and fattened bucks] (5:161). The river, forest and cliffs are familiar border motifs from *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*.

The Other World is a positive place and its friendly inhabitants have a fondness for autobiographical story-telling that allows the threads of the plot to be drawn together. The *kerling* and her daughter Skinnefja are polite and hospitable to Egill and Ásmundr and the location does not appear to be hostile; indeed, they seem to have entered a land of plenty:

> Þeir sögðust eigi hafa etit mat á sjau dögum. Kerling var at at renna mjólk. Hún átti fimm tigi geita, ok mjólkuðu sem kýr. Hún átti ketil stóran, ok tók hann alla mjólkina. Hún átti hveitiakr stóran. Tók hún þar svá mikit mjöl, at hún gerði hvern dag graut í katlinum, ok höfðu þær þat til viðrlífis. (5:162)
>
> [They said of themselves that they hadn't eaten food in seven days. The hag was pouring out the thin-milk. She had fifty goats, and they produced as much milk as cows. She had a large cauldron, and it took all the milk. She had a large wheat-field. She got so much meal from there, that she made porridge every day in the cauldron, and she and her daughter had that as sustenance.]

The abundance of food contrasts with the paucity of food they experienced in passing the border into Jötunheimar. It is not immediately clear what sort of creatures they are. The mother is described simply as a *kerling* rather than a monster and it is only Skinnefja's shape ("meira á þverveginn en hæðina" [more in breadth than height] 5:161) and that Arinnefja is "drottning hér í Jötunheimum" [queen here in Jötunheimar] (5:161), that marks them initially as Other World creatures. The stories-within-stories the characters all tell whilst waiting for the food to cook all include flashbacks but by means of these the characters and the audience are able to tie together all the strands of the story's plot.

Egill's Inset Story

Boundaries involving mists, darkness, forest and frequently cliffs and water are generally not declared explicitly by saga redactors to be boundaries between worlds and likewise Egill's inset story begins with an unspoken boundary between worlds. During a swimming competition mist

comes down so dark that he loses his companions and wanders around in the water for two days until he comes to shore. However, an audience familiar with boundary crossing patterns in the *fornaldarsögur* would have been aware that these landscape elements were indicative of a shift in the narrative world.

In order to be able to establish contact with the Other World, Egill must receive an otherworldly wound and become somewhat Other himself. Egill goes ashore into a wood with a clearing and sees a *hóll* (a sign of the Other World, as in *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* with the elf-boy and the *hóll*), and on it a great *jötunn* and a *flagðkona* fighting over a gold ring. Both the giant and the female monster are clearly of the Other World and it is an indication of Egill's courtesy that he chooses to defend the *flagðkona* since otherwise he is in no way bound to intervene. Indeed, his intervention results in his hand being cut off ("Jötunninn hjó til Egils, ok kom á höndina við úlfliðinn ok tók af. Fell á jörð bæði höndin ok sverðit" [The giant hacked at Egill and caught him on the arm and took it off at the wrist. Both the hand and the sword fell to the ground] 11: 174). Here the Other World mutilates a denizen of This World with lasting consquences that do not fade even when Egill leaves the Other World: "Egill fekk mikinn verk í höndina" [Egill was in a lot of pain from the arm] (11:174). Because of the pain keeping Egill awake, one night he takes a walk into a forest, where he finds a stream: the darkness, forest and water all indicators of an Other World boundary. Egill sticks the stump of his arm in the beck, the flowing-water world-boundary, and this opens up a door to the Other World. Egill's invitation into a rock by a friendly dwarf is the ultimate boundary crossing, although there is no sense in the narrative of transgressing the limits of normality. Egill displays no surprise or hesitation at following the dwarf into the rock, nor is it presented as a foolhardy act, unlike the drunken charging of King Sveigðir to his death in *Ynglinga saga*, and Egill comes out alive and with a healed arm and a sword attached. This is comparable to the elf-boy shouting into the *hóll* in *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* to open it. The characters who can initiate contact with the Other World possess some qualities of the Other World themselves: the bald-headed boy is some kind of elf and Egill has a wound inflicted on him by the Other World.

It is clear from Arinnefja's contribution that This World and the Other World have become closer in recent times with the marking of Egill as Other with an injury inflicted on him by the Other World and its semi-re-

pair by a dwarf. It appears prior to these events, the two worlds touched but did not interact or overlap with each other and the bridegroom whom the crone tries to throw over cliffs in chapter twelve does not make the border transition into the Other World. The revelation that the bridegroom who was thrown over the cliff but landed in his bed is Egill's father ties together the threads of the analepses, the narrative frame and the interaction of This World and the Other World. Egill can enter the Other World but only because he has some element of the Other about him. This has been built up by cumulative effect, first by the hag grabbing Egill's father, secondly by Egill's ear being sliced off by a giant and thirdly by having his hand cut off and replaced by a dwarf-made sword. Each contact enables the subsequent contact. The merging of the worlds is also sealed by the exchange of favours between the characters: Egill has his hand chopped off then gives the dwarf's child a ring, so the dwarf in the rock forges him a socket-sword. The hag, who has the hand preserved in a box, reattaches it, and in return Egill helps her conquer her brothers. The reattachment of Egill's hand seals the convergence of the worlds, for now boundaries do not even need to be crossed in order for This World and the Other World to interact: the two worlds are fully merged and all that remains of the injury is a red scar around Egill's wrist. The serious injury of the loss of a hand and the resulting stump being dipped into the Other World river-border is the key to the narrative that opens up Egill's free passage to the two Other Worlds of the dwarf and the hag. The distinction between This World and the Other World has collapsed, and there are no longer any landscape border motifs.

Conclusions

I argued that in *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* characters move in matrices of worlds. These can contain more than one Other World and the characters journey over existing, natural borders between worlds to have adventures. In the kaleidoscopic, fully realised Romance world of Egill einhendi, the categories of This World and the Other World have collapsed, since the two world-views have converged. By the end of the saga, the convergence of the two worlds is achieved by the absence of landscape border motifs known from other *fornaldarsögur*. Typically these elements are forests, cliffs, streams, hillocks, mist and darkness. This

cultural landscape is fashioned from the natural landscape by a cultural group, and how characters control the borders between worlds can be seen as negotiations between different worlds, "our" world and "their" world, separated and sometimes opposed, but equally real. From this perspective, there is no dichotomous world view in the *fornaldarsögur* and there is no distinction between the real and the unreal. Borders do exist between Our World and the Other, but they are organic and develop with the text: the natural fusion of the two worlds (or more) exists because the Other World is conceived of a real place you can journey into with borders that can be crossed, closed, opened and maintained.[8]

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[8] Material in this paper has been presented in my unpublished M.A thesis *"Heima í millum": Landscape and the Other Worlds of the Fornaldarsögur* (2008, Háskoli Íslands), at a presentation for Durham University Medieval and Renaissance Postgraduate Discussion Group (June 2009) and as "Landscape and the Other World in the *Fornaldarsögur*" at the 14th International Saga Conference, Uppsala 9th–15th August 2009. I would like to thank Donata Kick for extensive discussion of this theme and Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir for her feedback on the thesis.

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Summary

This article argues that both This World and the Other World are presented as real places in the *fornaldarsögur* and examines how landscape is used to facilitate the narrative construction of different worlds and to indicate how, when and why borders between worlds are created, maintained or closed. By analysing the landscape in the adventures to the Other World in *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* I show that matrices of worlds operate. Other Worlds can be set inside Other Worlds, and characters must always traverse the borders of these worlds marked by the physical landscape. I then examine the converging worlds of *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* and conclude that once a character of This World has been sufficiently marked as Other the distinction between This World and the Other World collapses and there are no longer any typical landscape border motifs, such as mist, forest, darkness, cliffs and streams. The world-view of the *fornaldarsögur* is built up by a fusion of This World and the Other World, worlds which are separated but equally real and whose borders must be negotiated.

The Gosforth Fishing Stone and *Hymiskviða*: An Example of Inter-Communicability between Old English and Old Norse Speakers[1]

TSUKUSU ITÓ

0.1 Introduction

When John McKinnell discusses two of the Eddic poems, namely *Völundarkviða* and *Þrymskviða*, which he assumes were composed and circulated in Anglo-Scandinavian England, he also lists the examples of Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture that contain iconographically identifiable Scandinavian mythological scenes (McKinnell 2001, 343–44). In his argument, McKinnell concludes that "some eddic poetry was composed in Anglo-Scandinavian England" (McKinnell 2001, 339). The Fishing Stone in Gosforth is included in his list of Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture. This tells us that the mythological episode of Þórr's fishing adventure with Hymir was known in Gosforth. The episode is now known to us mainly by way of three works of literature: the Eddic poem *Hymiskviða*, Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa*, and Snorri's 'Gylfaginning'.[2] This paper will not discuss the possibility of *Hymiskviða*'s Anglo-Scandinavian composition but deals with its possible circulation among the Anglo-Scandinavian society in Gosforth. This possi-

[1] This article is based on the preprint version of my paper for the 14th International Saga Conference in Uppsala (presented on 13 August 2009). I am indebted to those who gave various comments at and after the conference, including the Chair Svante Fischer, who introduced me to an archaeological find from Askeby, Solberga Parish, Östergötland (SHM 21921) showing that the fishing narrative pre-dates *Hymiskvíða*. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Prof. John Scahill of Keio University, Japan, who read and gave helpful comments on the content and the language of the first draft.

[2] These three and further sources of the episode are discussed in Sørensen 2002. I am grateful to Margaret Clunies Ross for generously showing me a draft of 'Ragnarsdrápa' in her forthcoming edition of *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*.

bility also implies that two-way communication between the Old English [henceforth OE] and the Old Norse [henceforth ON] speakers in Cumbria can be proved through comparing the narrative picture in Gosforth with the poetic narrative preserved in Iceland, i.e. *Hymiskviða*.

0.2 The Fishing Stone

For whom was the Fishing Stone in Gosforth made in the first place? Admitting the picture dealt with both pagan and Christian themes, we might simply ask whether it was made for a converted pagan individual, or for the laypeople of the parish in general? The assumption that the Fishing Stone was not a monument produced for a particular individual but belonged to the decorations in the church is made by Richard N. Bailey in his exhaustive study of sculpture in the Viking Age Danelaw. In his examination, Bailey considers that "[t]he dimensions of this carving suggest that it was not part of a cross or slab but originally formed a section of an architectural frieze or wall-panel" (Bailey 1980: 131). According to Bailey's interpretation, the stone consists of upper and lower panels, both of which symbolize the Christian struggle with the diabolical enemy. The upper panel shows a hart controlling a serpent by blowing water at it through its nostrils, which may accord with Pliny's History. The iconography of the upper panel harmonizes with the fishing scene on the lower panel, in which an angler tries to catch a huge snake, namely Leviathan (*Job* XLI,1). Bailey concludes that the Gosforth church of the tenth century may have been decorated with a continuous line of such narrative sculptures which united both Christian and pagan symbols to explain Christian doctrine to the people of the parish in the tenth century (Bailey 1980: 131–32).

We may also assume that the Gosforth parish church belonged to the English ecclesiastical organisation. The place-name *Gosforth*, which is an unequivocally English name, indicates the Englishness of the parish. Rollason, though with "some rather disparate evidence", attempts to prove that the churches in Cumbria had since the eighth century maintained a connection with the Northumbrian Church: "it would appear likely that all the lands west of the Pennines were also part of Northumbria and that the western frontier extended to the coast" (Rollason 2003:

28). We may then well be tempted to read between the lines that it is likely that the laypeople in the Gosforth parish were OE speakers before the time of the Viking settlement.[3]

With regard to the linguistic question, Fellows-Jensen finds that Gosforth is in the area "where Scandinavian inflexions survive in place-names and which are most remote from, or inaccessible to, the influence of Standard English" (Fellows-Jensen 1985, 412). It is very likely, therefore, that the Viking settlement affected the linguistic situation of the inhabitants of the Gosforth area. The Fishing Stone must have been appreciated by the parishioners who spoke either OE or ON, or both, or at least an OE dialect peculiar to this region.

As Bailey shows, the picture on the Fishing Stone can be given both a pagan and a Christian interpretation: Þórr's fishing expedition to catch the miðgarðsormr, and the hart, the symbol of Christ, fighting against the infernal serpent (Bailey 1980: 131–32). It is true that the parish folk could interpret the picture in a Christian fashion since the church with its Northumbrian connection had taught the scripture, its anecdotes and symbolism. How could they then be aware of the Scandinavian mythological interpretation, unless they had heard the narrative of the pagan god Þórr going on an expedition with Hymir the Giant? Today we know the story, thanks to Snorri's prose retelling of the whole story in detail. Yet the people in Cumbria in the period of Scandinavian settlement cannot have known Snorri's version for two reasons: firstly, Snorri was not yet born at the time; and secondly, the picture on the Fishing Stone seems to depict a version different to Snorri's.

Two further pieces of sculpture that can be interpreted as telling the story of Þórr's expedition to catch the miðgarðsormr are preserved in Sweden and Denmark: the former in Altuna and the latter in Thy (Hørdum).[4] Significantly enough, in both pictures, Þórr is depicted with his foot beneath the base of the boat. Likewise, in Snorri's version, Þórr is said to have "forced *both of his feet* against the boat and kicked the bottom (hljóp báðum *fótum gögnum* skipit ok spyrndi við grunni)" (Snorri

[3] Despite a number of Celtic place names and the survival of Celtic elements in Cumbrian dialect, in Ferguson's analyses (1873) we find out of 1708 Cumbrian dialectal words 1418 Germanic words (83.02%), with 84 Germanic words (78.5%) out of the 107 words in 'additions and corrections'. A further 24 words (plus 7 in 'additions and corrections') are of uncertain or of either Germanic or Celtic origin.

[4] Incidentally, Peter Vang Pedersen has recently realized that the head of the miðgarðsormr carved on the Hørdum monument has the bait already in its mouth. I owe this information to Michael Lerche Nielsen.

1988: 45; emphases added).[5] Despite the difference in the number of feet coming through the boat, both Scandinavian picture stones show that Þórr's foot crashes through the bottom of the boat, which can be interpreted as a simplified iconographical style according with Snorri's narrative.[6]

In the Fishing Stone in Gosforth, on the other hand, there is no trace of Þórr's foot under the boat, which suggests that the narrative version which the Gosforth sculptor made use of in his work was different from those of the Altuna and Thy sculptors. In fact we have another narrative that tells the story of Þórr's attempt to catch the miðgarðsormr: *Hymiskviða* in the so-called Elder Edda.[7] In this version, Þórr is not said to have pushed his foot (or feet) through the bottom of the boat. Thus it is quite feasible that the Gosforth sculptor heard a narrative of the same version of Þórr's expedition as that in *Hymiskviða*. We can only speculate on whether the parish folk in Gosforth actually heard an earlier version of *Hymiskviða* and whether, if so, they could understand the contents of the verse. While the examination of this possibility does not aspire to prove this hypothesis, it does support the notion of intercommunicability between the speakers of OE and ON during the amalgamation process in Viking Age England.

1.1 Þórr's Hunt in *Hymiskviða*

Terry Gunnell, in his introduction to Eddic Poetry, draws our attention not merely to the content and metre of the poetic works but to their man-

[5] While Faulkes in his edition interprets the *bottom* as that of the sea, the picture stones in Altuna and Thy do not seem to indicate that Þórr's foot or feet reach(es) the sea-bed. I would therefore deduce that the sculptors of either stone, if they had heard Snorri's version of the narrative, might have thought of the *grunni* as the ship-bottom. Still, this needs further study.

[6] Though Snorri cites Bragi's 'Ragnarsdrápa' and Ulfr's 'Húsdrápa' in his *Edda*, neither mention Þórr's feet (Sørensen 127–28). The difference in number of penetrating feet on these picture stones from Snorri's version might have been motivated by artistic sensibility: if both feet had been depicted as going through the boat, Þórr would have appeared to have let himself off the boat. Only one foot suggests that he is partly on the boat. Sørensen refers to Wolf's idea that "Snorri took this detail over from the pictures" (Sørensen 137, note 11).

[7] The terminus ante quem suggested is the 12th century (Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, 277), while the inference of later composition based on the fact that Snorri does not make use of *Hymiskviða* is mentioned in *KL*, s.v. *Gudediktning*.

ner of performance in the recital of Eddic Poems, Songs, Chants or Dramas (Gunnell 2005: 95–97). The metre of *Hymiskviða* is *fornyrðislag* and the subject deals with how Þórr obtains Hymir's cauldron to brew mead for the Æsir. This song consists of three parts: the first part tells the story of Týr coming home with Þórr to see his mother; the second deals with the contest between Hymir and Þórr; and the third describes how Þórr breaks Hymir's treasured cup while bringing the cauldron after killing all the giants. This part ends with the narrator's request for another narrative about Þórr and his servants, Þjalfi and Röskva, and announcing the beginning of the brewing feast. The whole structure is, however, loose and not well integrated. The extant form of the poem may not be original.[8] Furthermore, I suggest that the part about Þórr's hunting with Hymir must have been an earlier narrative inserted into a later version. We can never know whether the whole story of *Hymiskviða* was told in Scandinavianized Cumbria, but at the very least the story of Þórr's rowing the boat with Hymir to catch the miðgarðsormr is known in sundry lands of Scandinavian culture.

Examination of the possibility that the OE speakers in Cumbria could have understood the meaning of *Hymiskviða* if they had heard it allows us to focus on only the episode of Þórr's launching the boat with Hymir, because the rest of the song was not certainly known to the English people during the Viking period.

1.2 An Old English version of *Hymiskviða*

The following hypothetical stanzas are the part of *Hymiskviða* which the OE speakers in Cumbria might feasibly have heard and understood. The possibility of two-way oral communication between the OE and ON speakers in the Danelaw is persuasively argued by Townend in his monograph. I owe much to his theory and have constructed my hypothesis by transliterating the ON text into OE. My argument, however, is theoretically based on the recent scholarship on language contact.

The first basis on which my transliteration from ON to OE was made are the theories of 'code-switching' and 'dialect congruity' (Townend 2002: 43–46). As is often stated, the "lexical substitution of cognate OE words for ON words" (Townend 2002: 108) was the very key to open the

[8] See Carolyne Larrington's introduction to Sørensen and previous studies: Sørensen, 119–20.

channels of communication between the OE and ON speakers. The text, and context, of this paper's material is what the laypeople in Cumbria, where the parish churches had been secured for hundreds of years, would have understood when they heard the song about Þórr's attempt to fish for the miðgarðsormr. When newcomers came to their parish, presumably they accepted them if the strangers wanted to join their community. The linguistic medium between the two peoples, thanks to dialect congruity, must have been equipped with 'inherent learnability' (Townend 2002: 45–46).

The second basis of my hypothetical reconstruction of *Hymiskviða* was inspired by a suggestion in Dowson's 2001 unpublished thesis. Winford (2003: 82) recaps his suggestion: "the variety of Northern English that emerged from the contact between Viking Norse and Northern Old English was in fact a koiné". The usage of the term *koiné* is not new in reference to the result of linguistic contact between Old Norse and Old English speakers in the Danelaw, but it has been used rather negatively (Hines 1991: 411). Most scholars of the history of English describe the process of language contact between them principally from the English point of view. Typically, Crystal argues that the Nordic character of the language "disappeared by the late twelfth century" (Crystal 2005: 85).[9] Such an argument seems natural since the language of the region today is called 'English', and the Scandinavian vikings were only ever regarded as invaders at worst, or foreigners at best. This is a problem with the study of the history of the Northern English dialect in the Old English period, caused largely by the paucity of information with regard to the process of production of such a koiné.

Both languages did, however, have cognate vocabularies as well as systematic sound correspondences, which may have encouraged both indigenous and newly-arrived peoples in Cumbria to use their language varieties as mere dialects rather than as two distinct languages. Even though some of the phonetic differences may have caused slight misunderstandings at the earliest stage of their daily communication, as is shown in the following arguments, the everyday vocabulary of modern English reveals not merely the immense amount of Old Norse words incorporated into English, but also that a considerable number of cognates

[9] There is a longstanding debate on the length of "the survival of the Scandinavian language" (Ekwall, Page, Parsons). The debate is worth arguing further, but it is beyond the scope of this paper.

in OE and ON survived in the common vocabulary. Thus, from the Scandinavian point of view, the new inhabitants of the Danelaw seem to have changed their daily tongue no more than the Old English speakers. In other words, the Scandinavian language survived by way of phonetically mixing into a new *koiné* in the shape of Middle English. In the following sections, an experiment in theoretical two-way communication through language contact will be made. The hypothetical correspondence is based on the OE cognates of ON as well as, in some examples, on semantic similarities which may have caused the loss or change of certain sounds in later medieval English, e.g. *djarflega-deorlice* in line 24.

2.1 A Hypothetical Version of *Hymiskiviða*[10] for OE speakers

The episode dealing with Þórr's expedition starts from the 15th stanza and ends at the 25th. Most of the OE words able to be rendered in Northumbrian are transliterated as such, e.g. the *Rushworth* 2 form of *heofde* as a substitute for the *Lindisfarne* form *heafde* (Campbell §§278 (a), (b); Cook 111–12) in the 2nd line of the 15th stanza.

In the following lines of verse, the correspondence between the vowel systems of OE and ON is not always consistent. In fact in the last line of the 25th stanza, we can see how the ON weak verb *sökkva* in middle voice could have been understood by the OE speakers. There need to be two syllables in the first half of the long line in order to *switch the code* of ON middle voice into an OE *reflexive phrase*. The problem is not limited to the number of syllables, as cognates shared by the two languages do not always show the expected phonemically regular vowel correspondences, but the fact that there existed cognate words in both languages must have allowed the speakers of either language to seek pragmatically plausible substitutes for each word that would make sense in their attempt to effectively communicate; an example can be observed in a case such as *seoslig/sysliga* in the 19th stanza. Nevertheless, the hearing process could eventually enable the audience to understand the narrative story chanted by the singer/reciter. It is not impossible to assume the existence of people who could provide comments on the text

[10] The ON version is cited from the Sijmons and Gering edition, with reference to Jón Helgason and Detter and Heinzel.

and who taught some of the younger generation to understand specific poetic devices such as kennings and alliteration during the recital. Therefore, this OE hypothetical version will not exemplify the first contact between OE and ON speakers but will illustrate the linguistic situation of the earliest stage of their communication where even those Christian OE speakers had an occasion to hear the newcomers' pagan narrative.

ON version	OE version
15.	
hvern láto þeir	hwæne leton hie
hǫfði skemra	heofde sceortran
ok á seyði	ac on seaðe
síðan báro.	siððan bæron.
át Sifiar verr	æt Sife wer,
áðr sofa gengi.	ǣdre swefa geng
einn með ǫllo	ān mid ęlle
øxn tvá Hymis	oxum twæm Hymes

In the 15th stanza, we can easily find the different 3rd person plural pronouns in both languages. Interestingly enough, the OE speakers eventually adopted the ON pronoun *þeir* in the course of time.[11] This is a natural process considering that, apart from the pronoun, the first line shows how similar the two languages were even before the borrowing. Note that the nasal sounds appear differently in each version. In OE it is the 3rd person plural preterite inflectional suffix of *lætan* that has a nasal sound, while in ON it is the indefinite pronominal adjective indicating accusative *hwæne*. They may be acceptable examples of the process by which the English language eventually lost many of its inflectional suffixes.

In line 6, *ædre* in OE is the cognate of ON *áðr* 'before', but the meaning of the OE word is adverbial 'immediately, at once'. In this context, however, either will fit, and the whole story will not be affected by the difference in meaning of the words, i.e. two-way communication may be thought to have been established. In the Northumbrian dialect of OE, again, the infinitive suffix *-n* had disappeared by the time the Scandinavian settlers started living in the Danelaw. The Northumbrian forms in the line shown above, rather than 'ædre swefan geng', the standard West-Saxon forms, fundamentally reveal how oral communication between the Cumbrian people and the ON speakers could be more realizable. The same is true of the *-n* sound in the 3rd person plural suffixes in

[11] For more detailed considerations, see Werner (1991: 382–88).

the OE conjugation in the 1st and 4th lines as well as in the adjectival suffix of the weak declension found in the 2nd line. They show explicitly the future process of losing the nasal sound in the history of English.

In line 7, we have a phrasal adverb *með ǫllo* in the ON text. In OE, both a single word *ealle* (Campbell, §668) and an adverbial phrase *mid eallum, ealle* (Bosworth 'mid' XI (a)) could be used. There is a Middle English adverbial phrase *mid ealle* with the meanings 'altogether, completely, wholly' (*MED* 'mid' 11 (a)) found in the *Peterborough Chronicle* 1121 (an. 1110). The usage of a simpler form *ealle* may have been strengthened through weakening of the dative suffix *-um* to *-e* in the mingling process of OE and ON communications. Not only each cognate word pair, but also the existence of such phrasal cognate pairs in both OE and ON must have facilitated oral communication in the Danelaw.

16.

þótti három Hrungnis spialla	Þohte harum Hrungnes spillere
uerþr Hlórriþa	weorðung [wraðu]Hlowriddan
vel fullmikill:	well fullmicel:
'Munom at apni ǫþrom uerþa	'Munon æt æfne oþrum weorþan
við veiþimat vér þrír lifa.'	wið waþmæt we þrie libba.'

In the 16th stanza, the cognate pair *spillere* and *spialla* may have been understood in almost the same meaning as 'interlocutor', though ON *spialla* may indicate a more intimate friendship. An example of a more problematic interpretation is in the second line. ON *verþr* 'food' has its cognate *weorð* in OE, but the latter had become different in meaning: 'worth'. OE *weorðung* 'celebration, feast' would have been closer in meaning, but the difference in sound would be too large. OE *wraðu* 'maintenance, support' with metathesis might well be another substitute in this context, and it would disturb neither the tone nor the intent of the poem.

There is one more problem in the 16th stanza. It contains an ON idiomatic phrase, *verþa + infinitive*. OE does not seem to have had such an expression, and eventually the verb disappeared from English. In Scottish dialect, however, *word* has been used to mean 'it behoves' with an infinitive (Trewis it wordis tak[e]; Jamieson, *WORD, Wordis*). This may suggest that the northern English dialect may have borrowed and kept the ON idiom until later periods.

17.

Véorr kvazk vilja á vág roa,	Wih-weorðung cwæð ic willo wæg rowan
ef ballr jǫtonn beitor gǽfe.	gif beald eoten báte gefe.

For the 17th stanza's first word, *Véorr*, in ON, *Kommentar* gives several etymological hypotheses, most of which, regardless of the different nuances among the assumed etymologies, explain the meaning of the word as 'the protector of the sanctuary' (*Kommentar*: 301–02). It has a cognate word in OE: *wih*. Yet in the Christian Anglo-Saxon context, the word 'wih' means 'idol' (Bosworth-Toller) and the obvious inference would have been an interpretation as 'wih-weorðung' with the meaning of 'honour to idol', while in the pagan context it would have had the meaning of 'glory of holiness', which is close in meaning to ON *Véorr*. Nevertheless, the ON *Véorr* might have sounded like OE *weorr*, which in turn would have signified as an adjective 'bad, grievous' (Bosworth-Toller). If West-Saxons had heard this phrase, they would have decided unequivocally that the newcomers' god was of an evil nature.

18.

Hymir kvaþ:	Hymir cwæð:
'Hverf til hjarþar, ef hug truer,	'Hweorf to hiorde, gif hyge trywez
brjótr bergdana, beitor søkja!	breotere/brytere beorg-Dana, báte gesecan!
þess vænter mik at þer myne	þeos wene ic þat þu mynege
ǫgn af uxa auþfeng vesa.'	egenu of oxan ead-fong wære.'

The 18th stanza is an interesting example of how the prejudice of the locals towards the Danish people might have influenced their interpretation (*Kommentar*: 310). Þórr here is regarded as the destroyer of the Mountain–Danes, which must signify the giants. It must be either the Norwegian poet/recitalist, as is said in *Kommentar*, or the English audience/interlocutor that composed this phrase. At least when the people in Cumbria heard this phrase, they would not have been displeased if they had long been living with Norwegian settlers among them. Fellows-Jensen asserts that the Danish settlements in the west of the Pennines started at a comparatively early date, yet "the settlement of western and central Cumberland seems likely to have been basically the work of Norwegians" (Fellows-Jensen 1985: 412). The fact that the extent text of *Hymiskviða* has a Norwegian flavour does not disallow my hypothesis that the Gosforth parish-folk might have heard a narrative of Þórr's expedition very similar to the *Hymiskviða* version.

I should comment on the usage of the ON impersonal phrase *væntar mik.* No equivalent phrase can be found, even though OE has several impersonal phrases. I replace it with *wenan* in a personal construction.

I also replace ON *munu* with OE *mynegian*, though the cognate of *munu* in OE is *munan* (de Vries: *munu, muna*), as the difference in mean-

ing is too large. In Middle English, however, the auxiliary *mouen* has as one of its forms *mowne* (attested in *Ludus Coventriae*, 274/20) though *Middle English Dictionary* does not list the form as a variant of *mouen*. If *munu* had been borrowed into English, the English speakers would eventually have come to understand the word, and I would not need to replace it, except that a finite verb is required. Whether ON *munu* affected the form and meaning of eME *mouen* is beyond the scope of this paper.

On the other hand, the ON infinitive *vesa* corresponds to OE subjunctive *wære* because of its similarity in sound as well as its appropriateness in the subordinate clause with either *mynegian* or *munu.* Furthermore, ON *beitor*, pl. would be transliterated into OE *bát*, a feminine word, though it has the meaning of 'what can be bitten, food'. In this context, its meaning can be either a lunch for Þórr on the sea, or the bait for fishing. After all, the modern English word *bait* derives from a Scandinavian loan word: we could simply borrow this ON word for it. It is not to be expected that at this point in the story Hymir would expect that an ox head would be the bait for Þórr's fishing. Therefore the English speakers would have understood it if they had the chance to hear this song repeatedly, or after they had learned the word for 'bait' from their neighbours.

19.

Sveinn sýslega sveif til skógar,	Sven seoslig swaf to sceagan
þars uxe stóþ alsvartr fyrer:	þær se oxa allsweart forestod[12]
braut af þjóre þurs ráþbane	abreat *dior [þir?] þyrses rædbana
hǫtún ofan horna tweggja.	heah-tun ufan horna twegra.

In the 19th stanza, OE *seoslig* has the meanings of 'afflicted, vexed', which is not the same as ON *sýsliga* 'busily, smartly, speedily'. Still these meanings may be appropriate in the context, and the OE speakers might have understood the word in their own ways.

Another crux is ON *þjórr*. In OE we find no cognate, and OE *dior* / *deor* 'animal' may be a sufficient substitution. The Scottish word *tirr* is ambiguous with regard to its etymology, and I assume it may be derived from ON *þjórr*. According to *The Scottish National Dictionary*, the definitions of *Tirr* as verb, noun, and adj. have meanings as follows:

> I. v. To snarl, to speak in an irritable, bad-tempered way.
> II. 1. A passion, a fit of bad temper or rage, an excited angry condition; a quarrel. 2. An irritable, quarrelsome child.

[12] As regards the treatment of ON phrasal verbs with adverbial as transliteration into affixation, see Ito 1993.

> III. adj. Bad-tempered, quarrelsome, of a passionate, irritable nature. … [Orig. somewhat uncertain, poss. different words having fallen together. For I. Sc. forms of Norw., Dan. *tirre*, to tease, irritate, *tirren, terren*, peevish, fractious. …]

The characteristics of *þjórr* 'a bull' might be deduced as Scottish *tirr*, though not without more solid evidence.[13]

20.

Hymir kvaþ:	Hymir cwæð:
'Verk þykkja þín verre miklo,	'werk þyncað þin wirs micle,
kjóla valde, an kyrr siter.'	ceolwalda, þanne *cusc sitst.'

The 20th stanza is a syntactically debatable example, showing the genitive pronoun 'stylistically' separated from its object (*Kommentar*: 315). Whether this word order can be understood in an OE context awaits further argument. Yet considering the more intricate syntax in skaldic verses, *fornyrðislag* is easier to understand.[14] There is a kenning for Þórr which is coincidently the same as the name of Ceolwald, son of Cuthwulf, an ancestor of West-Saxon kings.

21.

Baþ hlunngota hafra dróttenn	Bæd hlynn-gate hæfera drihten
átrunn apa útar føra;	*ætren apan uta-faran
en sá jǫtonn sína talþe	ond se eoten self talde
lítla fýse lengra at roa.	lytel fus lengra rowan.

Another crux is found in the 21st stanza. ON *hlunngota* would sound like OE *hlynn-gat*. ON *hlunnr* + *goti* 'Rolling + Horse' is a famous kenning. Yet in OE *gat* would have sounded like 'goat' or 'she-goat', while *hæfera drihten* would have had almost the same meaning as the ON. Whether the OE speakers would have misunderstood or not is not established; nor is *how* they might have misunderstood. 'The lord of he-goat requests a "rolling-she-goat" to go out *átrunn* of a monkey' does not make sense, unless the poisonous ape implies the miðgarðsormr, since the worm is later depicted as dyed or shining with poison (st. 24). ON *átrunn* does not have an exact equivalent in OE, but it would sound like OE *ætren* 'poisonous'.

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[13] OE þeor is a word dubious in meaning. Bosworth and Clark Hall suggest that it means an inflamed swelling.

[14] On skaldic verses made for Anglo-Scandinavian England, see Jesch 2001, and Townend 1998.

22.

Dró mærr Hymer móþogr hvale	Drog mære Hymer modig hwalas
einn á ǫngle upp senn tvaa;	an on angle up sona twegen
en aptr í skut Óþne sifjaþr	and æfter in *skut Wodene sibling
Véorr viþ vélar vaþ gørþe sér.	Wih-ward wið *wiglu waþe gierwede sealf.

The 22nd stanza is the crucial one. It tells us that Hymir caught two whales. On the Fishing Stone, there seem to be three huge fish under the boat, and two of them are trying to bite the bait of the ox head. The sculptor of the stone must have known the number of whales that should be caught by one of the sailors on the boat he carved.

Photo: The lower panel of the Fishing Stone, detail. (Tsukusu Ito 2006)

The ON adverb *senn* is transliterated into OE *sona*, only the consonants of which correspond to the original. Nevertheless, the progression of two-way communication must have entailed such 'code-switching'.

The word *skut* is not attested in the OE corpus, but *The Scottish National Dictionary* indicates that a noun *skoot* (also *skut, skuit*) was borrowed from the Scandinavian word, meaning 'a projection, anything

which sticks out or forward; specif. the angle of projection of a boat's stem or stern, the rake' (viz. skoot).

ON *vél* is another word borrowing, but the story is a complex one. According to the OED, the ModE *wile* might be derived from Proto-Old Icelandic **wihl-*,[15] by association with ModE *wiel* derived from OE *wig(e)l, wigle* n. 'divination'. The speakers of English may well have understood the word in a slightly different way by using their original *wig(e)l* after they heard the Scandinavian word.

23.

Egnde á ǫngol sás ǫldom bergr	Agnade on angel se is aldrum beorgare
orms einbane uxa hǫfþe:	wurmes anbana oxan heofde;
gein viþ ǫngli sús goþ fiá	gān wið angel seo þe is goda fiond
ubgjǫrþ neþan allra landa.	ymbgyrd beniðan allra landa.

The ON relative clauses are recognizable as contracted forms compared with the OE version. The difference in number of syllables in ON *bergr* and OE *beorgare* would be reconciled after a period of time. The OE prefix *ymb-* corresponds to ON *ub-*. The OE adverb *niðan* needs the prefix *be-* when used as a preposition, while ON *neþan* can be used as either an adverb or a preposition with a genitive object.

24.

Dró djarflega dáþrakr Þórr	Drog deorlice dædranc Þurr
orm eitrfaan upp at borþe;	wurm attorfag up at borde
hamre kníþe hǫfjall skarar	hamere cnuwode heah-fell *skare
ofljótt ofan ulfs hnitbróþor.	ymblyt ufan wolfes hnitu-broðor.

Another example of the 'code-switching' function can be observed in the first line of the 24th stanza. ON *djarflega* would have its etymological cognate in OE *þearflice*. The meaning of the latter, however, 'necessarily, usefully, profitably', is again very different from that of ON, and it would be out of context if the OE speakers recognized it that way. OE *deorlice* would be more appropriate in both meaning and phonetic correspondence. The people might not always have used their linguistic instincts systematically but in more pragmatic ways. Actually, the late 10th-century Northumbrian glosses reveal that the OE speakers borrowed the ON adjective *djarfr* as *dearf* for Latin 'audax' (Hines 424; Cook 38). In this manner, though they may initially have resorted to semantic similarity with the inferably closest phonetic correspondence between

[15] Cf. OED *wile*: "Origin and early history obscure. The earliest examples are from regions subjected to strong Scandinavian influence".

djarflega and *deorlice*, after their miscommunication was resolved, OE *dearflice* could have been coined from ON *djarflega*.

ON *skörr* in the third line of the stanza does not seem to have a cognate in English. Moreover, it is part of the kenning 'a high-mountain of hair = head', and the audience must have known the expression. Unfortunately, the English people do not seem to have borrowed the kenning phrase, but the word itself seems to have been imported into Cumbrian and Scottish dialects, though the meaning of 'cliff, ridge; a bare place on the side of a steep hill' tended to prevail (Jamieson 1882: 'Scar, Skair, Scaur'). We cannot tell whether the OE speakers could understand the meaning of this kenning, but at any rate, the story remains easy to follow.

The last line of the 24th stanza includes a difficult word: *ymblyt*. Clark Hall defines it as 'circle, circuit, circumference', but Bosworth-Toller does not offer a definition. My transliteration is based on its etymological correspondences, and the meaning of the ON *ofljótt* has been given as 'grimmig, graus' by Sijmons and Gehring, 'stygg' by Heggstad, 'very hideous' by Cleasby-Vigfússon, and 'widerwärtig' by *Kommentar*. However, the subject matter of this passage deals with Þórr's attempt to hit the head of the miðgarðsormr with his hammer (although he actually missed, and the serpent sank into the sea rather than floated lifelessly). I would rather take the word literally as 'too shiny for its venomous gloss (*eitrfaan*, l.2) to hit the very head of the *ormr*', and my OE transliteration is intended to convey that meaning.

The last word of the 24th stanza is of interest. In ON, *hnit* is 'a clasp', and *hnitbróþir* is 'clasp-brother', i.e. a tightly related brother. In OE, however, *hnitu* means 'an egg or a young form of louse, a nit'. In this context, it would have the meaning of something like 'a dismal brother of the wolf'.

25.

Hreingǫlkn hlumþo, en hǫlkn þuto,	Hran-gal hlemmade, and holc þuton.
fór en forna fold ǫll saman:	for seo fyrn folde allu samen:
. . .	. . .
søkþesk síþan sá fiskr í mar.	sanc sealf siðdan se fisc in mere.

The 25th stanza is very difficult and full of cruces. ON *galkn* has been discussed by scholars but its etymology remains uncertain. We must be content with an obscure meaning 'a monster', though OE has a suffix *-gal*, indicating something long. Interestingly, ON *hrein* would have sounded similar to OE *hran* [whale] in the English context. Intriguing

enough, but perhaps merely a result of stylistic coincidence, the head of the miðgarðsormr on the Fishing Stone in Gosforth appears to be rather whale-like, or at least it resembles his fellow monster fish on the panel.

2.2 A Translation from Old English.

The following section shows a Modern English translation from the hypothetical OE version. This is an attempt to reveal how the OE speakers may have understood the ON version when they heard it. The translation is highly literal and archaic in some cases, in order to highlight the strangeness the OE speakers might feasibly have felt in their contact with the Scandinavian language.

15.
They let each head shorter and into a pit, after bearing (them).
Sif's man ate alone and all two of Hymir's oxen immediately went to sleep.

16.
Hrungnir's hoary interlocutor thought that celebration of Bellow-rider well full-much:
In tomorrow (another) evening, we three *word* live with sea-food.

17.
'Honour-to-idol'/Evil-idol quoth: 'I will row away, if a bold eten give a bit/bait.'

18.
Hymir quoth: 'Turn to meadow, if the destroyer of the Mountain-Danes trusts a thought, seek for baits!
I ween this that you bear in mind a husk from oxen be easy to get.'

19.
A vexed man swept to the wood, where the ox all-black stood in front.
Thur's council-killer destroyed a bull/animal, high-borough from the two horns.

20.
Hymir quoth:
'Your work seems much worse, Ceolwalda, than thou modestly sittst.'

21.
A lord of he-goat requested the rolling-she-goat to go out to poisonous ape (poisonous monster?)
and the eten told to himself unwilling to row longer.

22.
Moody and famous Hymir drew whales, one on the angle up and soon other two,
and after in the boat stem, Woden's sibling, 'honour-to-idol' himself prepared for hunting with wile.

23.
Serpent's enemy who is a saver of princes attached a head of ox on the angle;
The fiend of gods yawned with the angle, the one of surround-round under all the land.

24.
Bravely drew the deed-brave Thur the worm dyed/shining with poison up at the board;
(He) pounded with hammer on high-fell skare, a (head-)circle of wolf's tie-brother.

25.
Whale-long resounded, and the cavities howled,
the old ground all together departed,
...
Then the fish sank itself into the sea.

3.0 Conclusion

This paper is intended as an experiment into how much 21st-century scholars can reconstruct of the situation in Gosforth when OE speakers evidently heard and saw performed the recital of a song about the Scandinavian pagan god Þórr rowing out to sea to catch his rival, the miðgarðsormr. When we see both OE and ON texts side by side, it is obvious how the two languages resemble each other in written form. If we hear the sound, though only theoretically reconstructed as it may be, the similarity is more striking. As Gunnell notes, if we could have seen the performance of the recitalist who undoubtedly did not merely sing the poem but also used his body to act out the story, then we should have been able torecognize how much the human performance would have contributed to the audience's understanding of the words.

After all, the Fishing Stone in Gosforth, Cumbria, is the only monument which depicts the type of large fish Hymir catches, an episode which was preserved only in *Hymiskviða*. Other features of *Hymiskviða* are also shown on the surface of the stone. Although we cannot know for certain what song the sculptor of the stone had heard before he started his

work, it is quite possible that *Hymiskviða* was a remnant of the version that the people of Gosforth had heard.

As was stated above, mutual intelligibility does not work if there is no flexibility of interpretation between the two languages, no matter how linguistically close they may be. The two-way communication between two peoples of different backgrounds living together requires not only dialect congruity but also sympathetic human accommodation, in which some aspects of religious differences might be obstacles to be overcome. In the case of Gosforth parish church, the remnants of the famous cross, the hog-backs and the Fishing Stone all represent the collaboration between the two peoples and their two religions and two languages. If this paper can add something to our appreciation of their collaboration, it is due to their efforts to produce their devotional monument in their home parish.

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Summary

This paper is intended as an experiment into how much today’s scholars can reconstruct the linguistic situation of Gosforth, whose indigenous inhabitants spoke a Northumbrian dialectal variant of Old English and were evidently able to hear and witness the recital of an Old Norse song about the Scandinavian pagan god Þórr rowing out to sea to catch the miðgarðsormr. The two-way communication between the Old English and the Old Norse speakers in Cumbria may have been established through ‘code-switching’ and ‘dialect congruity’ as well as the process of producing a koiné of Old English and Old Norse. This paper provides a hypothetical Old English version of *Hymiskviða* to demonstrate how much the existence of cognate words could be utilized in the establishment of communication. The process must have required dialect congruity as well as sympathetic human accommodation. In the case of Gosforth parish church, the Fishing Stone is a representation of the collaboration between the two people, the two religions, and two languages.

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Tate, Eldorado and the Garden in Laxness' *Paradisarheimt*. – *Þorleifur Hauksson*, Vildvittror och Mattisrövare i isländsk dräkt. Ett kåseri kring en översättning av Ronja rövardotter. – *Michael Barnes*, A note on Faroese /θ/ > /h/. – *Björn Hagström*, En färöisk-svensk ordbok. Rec. av Ebba Lindberg & Birgitta Hylin, Färöord. Liten färöisk-svensk ordbok med kortfattad grammatik jämte upplysningar om språkets historiska bakgrund. – *Claes Åneman*, Rec. av Bjarne Fidjestøl, Det norrøne fyrstediktet.

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