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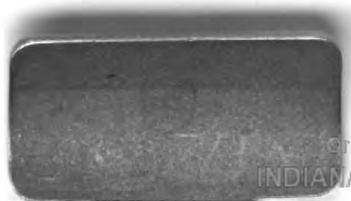
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**THE TRADITIONAL
BALLADS OF ICELAND**

VÉSTEINN ÓLASON

THE TRADITIONAL
BALLADS OF ICELAND

HISTORICAL STUDIES



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Reykjavík, 26. ágúst 1982

*Gunnar Karlsson
deildarforseti*

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PREFACE

Icelandic ballads are often referred to in studies of the Scandinavian ballad tradition. Although the number of traditional ballad types collected in the country is not very high, scholars have tended to consider them as important comparative material in studies of the origin and development of the Scandinavian ballad, believing that they were split off from the rest of the tradition relatively early and preserved without many changes up to the time when they were recorded.

Icelandic scholars have not contributed much to the discussion about the significance of Icelandic ballads for the study of the Scandinavian ballad tradition in general. Apart from an article published by Finnur Jónsson in 1914 and an unpublished and almost unknown M. A. thesis by Ólafur Marteinsson from 1929, their contribution has been limited to stray remarks on the subject in general and a few studies on isolated problems. Consequently, the above-mentioned assumptions about the general nature of the Icelandic ballad tradition have not been scrutinized with the care they deserve. It seems obvious that the Icelandic ballad must be studied both in the context of the Scandinavian ballad tradition and in the context of Icelandic literature and folklore. After all, the ballad was functioning as an element of Icelandic traditional culture, albeit with foreign roots, during the period of its collection.

The conditions for a comprehensive study of the Icelandic ballad have certainly been improved in recent years. For a whole century, ballad scholars had to rely on the excellent but incomplete edition by Svend Grundtvig and Jón Sigurðsson; but, since 1962, a new, complete edition by Jón Helgason has been appearing. Almost all existing texts had been published by 1970; and a final volume appeared while the proof-reading of this book went on. The new edition contains all the primary material edited according to the strictest demands of philology, and it is accompanied by information on manuscripts, collectors and informants as far as such information is available. The present work rests entirely upon the base laid by Jón Helgason with his edition.

My own preoccupation with ballads goes back to my years as a stud-

ent of Icelandic literature at the University of Iceland and especially to a year spent studying Norwegian literature and folklore at the University of Oslo in the early sixties. My studies during this period resulted in an M. A. thesis on the origin and characteristics of Icelandic ballads supervised by Professor Steingrímur J. Þorsteinsson and finished in 1967.

Most of the primary research for this volume was done during my period as Lecturer in Icelandic Language and Literature at the University of Copenhagen in 1968–72; but in its present form it was written during leaves from other duties at the University of Iceland in 1974 and 1978–9. The manuscript was delivered to the publisher and submitted to the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Iceland in February 1981; and I have not been able to take into account literature appearing after that time, except in a few minor changes in the manuscript and notes. Some aspects of the Icelandic ballad, which I had originally planned to deal with in this work, have been left out and treated in the introduction to a popular edition which appeared in 1979.

During my years in Copenhagen I had the benefit of a daily contact and much encouragement and advice from Professor Jón Helgason, then Director of the Arnarnagænan Institute. When I returned to Iceland, Professor Jónas Kristjánsson, Director of Stofnun Árna Magnússonar offered to publish the work under the auspices of that Institute; he has followed my work with interest ever since; and, at the final stage, he pointed out to me many inconsistencies and obscurities in the manuscript. Vísindasjóður Íslands has given financial support to the work.

Chapters III and IV were, apart from a few pages, translated into English by Sverrir Hólmarsson. Mary Guðjónsson has revised the language and punctuation of the whole book; and if the parts drafted in English by myself are presentable, it is entirely thanks to her efforts. Along with Örnólfur Thorsson, Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson and Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, she has also assisted in the proof-reading. Peter Dronke and S. F. D. Hughes read a draft of Chapter II and offered valuable suggestions for its improvement. To all those people, and many others who have helped me directly and indirectly, I am deeply grateful.

Reykjavík, May 1982

VÉSTEINN ÓLASON

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ABBREVIATIONS

- CCF = *Føroya kvæði. Corpus carminum færoensium*. Ed. by Chr. Matras & N. Djurhuus.
- Child = *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. Ed. by F. J. Child.
- DGF = *Danmarks gamle folkeviser*. Ed. by S. Grundtvig *et al.*
- DV = *Deutsche Volkslieder mit ihren Melodien*. Ed. by J. Meier *et al.*
- EETS = Early English Text Society.
- ÍF = *Íslenzk fornkvæði. Islandske folkeviser*. Ed. by Jón Helgason.
- ÍGSVÞ = *Íslenzkar gátur, skemtanir, vikivakar og þulur*. Ed. by J. Árnason & Ó. Davíðsson.
- Íslenzk fornkvæði₁ = *Íslenzk fornkvæði*. Ed. by S. Grundtvig & Jón Sigurðsson.
- JÁ₂ = *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri. Safnað hefur Jón Árnason*. Ed. by Árni Böðvarsson og Bjarni Vilhjálmsson.
- NB = *Norske balladar i oppskrifter frå 1800-talet*. Ed. by Å. G. Blom & O. Bø.
- NFS = Norsk folkemminnesamling. The archives of the Folklore Institute, University of Oslo.
- TSB = *The Types of the Scandinavian Medieval Ballad*. Ed. by B. R. Jonsson, S. Solheim & E. Danielson.
- Utsyn = Heggstad, L. & H. Grüner Nielsen: *Utsyn yver gamall norsk folkevise-dikting*.
- Visböcker = *1500- och 1600-talens visböcker*. Ed. by Schüeck *et al.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Traditional Ballads of Iceland

This monograph consists of a series of attempts to throw light on the history of the ballad genre in Iceland, particularly on the oral pre-history of individual ballads and the genre as a whole. The relationship of the ballad to other genres is treated as an essential part of this history. Before one can embark upon the studies themselves, certain questions must be posed: What is a traditional ballad? What distinguishes it from other poetic types current in Iceland at the same time? What kinds of problems are involved in their study? What methods of analysis will be used? The reason for posing and discussing these questions is to make clear from the start the framework within which these studies are made; it is not my intention to make a contribution to the theoretical and methodological aspects of ballad studies.

The records dealt with in this book are primarily the texts published by Jón Helgason in his edition of Icelandic ballads, *Íslensk fornkvæði* (hereafter ÍF).¹ It is, however, unavoidable to discuss briefly his criteria for inclusion and exclusion in the edition, all the more so because he has nowhere stated them explicitly. Furthermore, there are some borderline cases which must be discussed separately.

The category of the traditional, or popular, ballad has been variously defined by scholars, and, while there is a great bulk of material which everyone agrees belongs to this category of poetry, definitions vary a great deal depending upon the scholar's nationality and how the ballad is distinguished from other types.² The definition of G. H. Gerould, since it first appeared in 1932, has been widely accepted. And, when one looks at the European ballad as a whole, it is no doubt wise to concentrate upon characteristics of style and narrative structure:

¹ Seven volumes appeared in the years 1962–1970. The eighth volume appeared in 1982, though it has 1981 on the title-page.

² The studies by Entwistle 1939 and Vargyas 1967 are among the most comprehensive treatments of the European ballads. Entwistle is much more inclusive and consequently his ballad concept is more vague.

A ballad is a folk-song that tells a story with stress on the crucial situation, tells it by letting the action unfold itself in event and speech, and tells it objectively with little comment or intrusion of personal bias.³

R. W. Brednich's definition in the recent *Handbuch des Volksliedes* is similar in content:

Als *Ballade* bezeichnen wir in der Volksliedterminologie heute allgemein ein mündlich überliefertes sangbares (meist strophisches) Lied erzählenden Inhalts mit einer dramatischen Zuspitzung der Handlung auf eine entscheidende Konfliktsituation.⁴

These definitions suit a great majority of Scandinavian ballads quite well, although some of the West-Nordic heroic ballads (*kæmpeviser*) often lack a crucial situation but consist of a sequence of relatively independent episodes. Scandinavian scholars, therefore, usually include in their definitions metrical criteria which, indeed, are a common characteristic of Scandinavian ballads. Thus, Erik Dal in *Nordisk folkevise-forskning siden 1800* bases his definition mainly upon a description of the ballad metres;⁵ and Bengt R. Jonsson, in what may be considered the most satisfactory definition of Scandinavian ballads, uses metrical criteria along with characteristics of style and structure:

Ballad . . . är en i Nord. oftast *folkvisa* benämnd strofisk slutrimmad visa av berättande karaktär, försedd med ett eller två omkväden av lyrisk art.

Balladen är en objektiv berättelse, där händelseförloppet läggs fram på ett konstaterande sätt utan värderingar. Dess teknik är dramatisk snarare än episk med snabba scenflyttningar och en koncentration på de avgörande momenten.⁶

In the Icelandic context, the most practical definition of a ballad is that it is a poem in ballad metre. Since there are, however, a few poems in this metre in Icelandic which it is impossible to designate as 'genuine' ballads, the epithet traditional is added in the title of this book to indicate sufficiently vaguely that the poems belonging to the genre are

³ Gerould 1957, p. 11.

⁴ Brednich 1973-5, I, p. 160.

⁵ Dal 1956, p. 18.

⁶ *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*, art. *balladdiktning*.

without known authors or original texts and that they have been collected from oral tradition, as a rule in variants. Both 'ballad' and 'traditional' are occasionally used in English with somewhat different meanings, but the ones used here should need no further explanation.

The Icelandic ballad metres are the same as those used in Scandinavia, viz., either couplets with four-stress lines rhymed *aa* accompanied by a refrain, usually split (the first half of which is inserted between the lines of the couplet), or quatrains rhymed *xaya*, in most cases with a refrain following upon each strophe, the usual number of stresses in each half-strophe being 4 + 3, but in some cases 4 + 2, or occasionally 3 + 3. Apart from a few late imitations, these metres are not used in other kinds of Icelandic poetry; and they are distinguished from almost all Icelandic verse before the 20th century by using no regular alliteration.

The criterion 'traditional' helps to exclude late imitations. But, since most of the ballads are preserved in manuscripts without any comment on the informant or how they were collected, it may be difficult to decide whether a ballad is really traditional or only a literary imitation. The doubtful cases are, however, so few that Jón Helgason has in most instances given them benefit of doubt and included them in his edition. I have followed his example except in a few cases where I have been able to verify doubts about their traditionality. (See pp. 383, 397–8.) Jón Helgason's choice of texts for inclusion in his edition is in most cases indisputable and is borne out by distinct characteristics not only of metre but also of style and treatment of the narrative material. He prints, in small type, a great number of translations of Danish ballads which in many cases were done by the same people who collected the Icelandic ballads. These translations are written; and their style distinguishes them unmistakably from traditional ballads, even in the few cases where they have been transmitted orally after their first written stage. Incidentally, these semi-oral examples are not always in pure ballad metre.⁷

The editors of *The Types of the Scandinavian Medieval Ballad* have excluded a few more of Jón Helgason's types for stylistic or similar reasons. These instances are certainly borderline cases, but I have taken the pragmatic view that some comment on each of the types included by Jón Helgason would in any case be useful for ballad scholars.

⁷ See ÍF, V, pp. 176–204.

The Collection of Ballads in Iceland

Most of this book is devoted to an attempt at recreating, as fully as possible, the history of the oral tradition of ballads in Iceland. The basis for such a history is, of course, written texts. Ballad manuscripts and ballad collections have been edited and thoroughly commented upon by Jón Helgason in ÍF, which forms the basis for this book. Apart from printing separately each text that can be supposed to stem from oral tradition, he furnishes all the available information about the writers of these texts and whenever possible their dating, the informants, etc. Every serious student of Icelandic ballads must refer to this work, and there is no reason to do any more here than give a very short summary of the most important information the edition contains. Apart from making this monograph more readable, this summary may serve as a guide to the vast amount of information which can be found in Jón Helgason's work.

The great 19th century editions of ballads, those started by Grundtvig and Child, are arranged according to types and most other ballad editors have followed this model. Jón Helgason has chosen another method, i.e., he proceeds according to written source and in chronological order. Each of these approaches has its advantages for the student; and, in each case, the disadvantages can be easily overcome with the help of a concordance. The obvious advantage of the editorial principles of ÍF is that it focuses on the tradition itself instead of on a super-imposed scholarly concept. Because most of the present work is centred on types, it is necessary to begin with a short look at what Jón Helgason's introduction and commentary can tell us about the tradition itself.

The first stanza belonging to a ballad later recorded as a whole is found in a 16th century manuscript of miscellanea.⁸ In the first half of the 17th century, someone has written two ballads, *Óláfs vísur* (ÍF 50) and *Kvæði af syndugri konu* (ÍF 77), on empty pages of a 16th century manuscript. The ballad texts were copied by the collector Árni Magnússon, and the original was subsequently destroyed. Árni Magnússon's copy of *Óláfs vísur* is preserved, but the other has been lost. The text

⁸ See ÍF, IV, p. 6. Most of the manuscript is written in the 1540's, but its scribe died c. 1590; for further information on the age of this ms. see Jón Helgason 1979, p. 6 ff.

of *Óláfs vísur* is thus the oldest text of a genuine ballad we have, although a few jocular poems in ballad metre were written down at approximately the same time.⁹

We do not know why these pieces were written down so early. No doubt the religious content of both these ballads played a part, but we cannot maintain that these recordings show any general interest in or respect for ballads as such. However, suddenly, in the last 35 years of the 17th century, the real collection of ballads began, almost exclusively through the efforts of one family living in the North-Western peninsula, the descendants of one Jón Magnússon: the Rev. Gissur Sveinsson of Álftamýri, and his cousins Magnús (in Vigur), Oddur, and possibly Guðbrandur, all sons of the Rev. Jón Arason in Vatnsfjörður.

The man who started the collection was undoubtedly Gissur Sveinsson. His collection of ballads, written down in 1665, contained 44 ballad texts apart from some other poems and written translations of Danish ballads. This collection was copied and expanded by his relatives in Vatnsfjörður to whom he sent a copy of his work. Apart from the collections of Gissur Sveinsson and the brothers from Vatnsfjörður, there is one 17th century ballad collection of unknown provenance but probably written down around 1680. It contains 16 ballads.

These 17th century collections are of paramount importance for the study of the Icelandic ballad tradition, as can be shown by some figures. Out of the 110 types edited by Jón Helgason, 74 are found in the 17th century tradition. Of the 36 remaining types, 6 are only fragments consisting of one stanza; another 12 have been excluded from TSB for stylistic and other reasons; and, the majority of the rest are jocular or heroic ballads. If we look at the two main groups, ballads of the supernatural (incl. legendary ballads) and ballads of chivalry, only 4 new types are discovered after the 17th century. On the other hand, there are, in the 17th century collections, 24 types which have not been found later, and an additional few, of which only fragments have been found. In most cases, the texts from the 17th century are fuller and better (even if one must be wary of such a notion when comparing ballad versions) than those later recorded.

As Jón Helgason has pointed out, there can be little doubt that it was the example of A. S. Vedel that influenced Gissur Sveinsson and

⁹ See ÍF, IV, pp. xiii–xv and 11–15, and V, pp. xxx–xxxI and 160–75; see also below, pp. 383, 398.

made him start his collection of ballads.¹⁰ Then other people followed suit. We cannot conclude that the North-West was any richer in ballads than other areas of the country, however. In the 19th century, when ballads were being collected throughout the country, the harvest from this area is relatively meagre, while the East has yielded much more. But, the collection in the 19th century was conducted by volunteers and the results may have differed a great deal because of accidental factors. It is hardly possible to single out especially rich ballad areas in Iceland, as has been possible in many other countries. The ballad tradition has probably been fairly evenly distributed in the country, even if it seems to have been somewhat more tenacious in the East than in other places.

In a letter written to Árni Magnússon in 1708 by one Snæbjörn Pálsson, who was son-in-law of Magnús Jónsson in Vigur, there is a very interesting statement about the ballad tradition of the 17th century. Snæbjörn is talking about his father-in-law's ballad book which was by far the largest of the 17th century collections, containing, as it did, 183 poems of which the great majority was either ballads or ballad translations:

Fornkvæða bokenn þiker mier ecke so rijk af fornkvædumm sem hiórtu og briöst attrædra kerlinga hef eg vitad nær jeg var barn, enn þær med þeim frödleik eru flestar i jórd grafnar nu.¹¹

(I do not think that the ballad-book is as rich in ballads as I have known the hearts and minds of eighty year old women to be when I was a child, but most of them have now been buried in the earth with their knowledge.)

This statement is interesting for many reasons: it indicates that the ballad tradition was already on the decline in the early 18th century, although we cannot be sure that Snæbjörn was right in attributing more knowledge of ballads to these women than the ballad collections show; knowledge of ballads is explicitly connected with (old) women which indicates that in the 17th century the main function of the ballads was not that of dance-songs, but more of that later.

Just after the period of collecting in the North-West, Árni Magnússon started his collection which was made during the first two decades of the 18th century. As a royal emissary investigating the state of the

¹⁰ *Kvæðabók séra Gissurar Sveinssonar. B. Inngangur*, pp. 53–4.

¹¹ ÍF, I, p. xx.

administration all over Iceland, he had a unique opportunity for collecting. Although manuscripts were his passion and main interest, he was by no means blind to the importance of oral traditions. His ballad collections, which fill the main part of the IVth volume of ÍF, seem to come from various parts of the country, although the sources are not always ascertainable. However, a majority of the ones that can be located comes from the West. What mainly distinguishes his collections from those of the NW are some poems not found outside Iceland but structurally and partially thematically related to the West-Nordic *kæmpevise* and recorded without refrain, viz. *Þorgeirs rímur* (ÍF 82), *Eyvindar ríma* (ÍF 81), *Óláfs vísur* (ÍF 50), and *Kvæði af sankti Hallvarði* (ÍF 78). Although the last two are about Norwegian saints, their narrative technique and structure link them to this West-Nordic type of ballad, which shall be treated to some extent later.¹² None of these poems is recorded again. One can speculate whether they were not known by the 17th century collectors, which is most likely, or whether they were not considered to be ballads but simply carelessly composed *rímur* or religious poems.

Two of the manuscripts in Árni Magnússon's ballad collection must be especially noted. These are AM 153 8vo V 1, in an unknown hand, containing the first stanzas of 66 ballads and other poems, and AM 153 8vo V 2, written by one of Árni Magnússon's secretaries and probably a copy of a manuscript someone had sent to him. This latter manuscript contains the first stanza of 14 ballads and other poems. No doubt, some people had sent Árni these lists of poems which they either knew or were able to collect. He then must have asked for complete recordings of at least some of the poems; but he only got a few, which is a pity, because some of the ballads have been lost, although they can be seen to have been versions of known types. Some of the strophes which look like ballad strophes cannot be identified as belonging to a known type.¹³

Apart from the collections of Árni Magnússon, there are only a few not very voluminous ballad manuscripts from the 18th century; and they

¹² It may seem strange to link together heroic ballads and ballads about saints, but as I have argued in my introduction to *Sagnadansar* 1979, pp. 70–71, all these poems differ in narrative technique from the usual type of ballad, using quite a lot of commentary, as well as in theme, which is not a concentrated conflict of emotions, but the excellence of an individual, be it hero or saint.

¹³ See ÍF, IV, pp. xxxix–xl, xlvi–xlviii, 114–27, 178–81.

can be traced to the East or the North; one with only three ballads can be traced to the North-West.

As is well known, the collection of folklore had a great upswing in most of Scandinavia in the 1840's and onwards. The same thing happened in Iceland. The most systematic efforts were made at the instigation of the *Oldskriftselskab* (The Antiquarian Society) of Copenhagen and of the collector Jón Árnason. In 1846, the *Oldskriftselskab* distributed a circular in Iceland in which people were encouraged to collect various kinds of folklore and to send these to the society. In the first years, substantial results were obtained and much of the material was printed in the society's journal, *Antiquarisk Tidsskrift*, 1846–51. The ballad material was subsequently made use of by Jón Sigurðsson and Svend Grundtvig in the first edition of *Íslenzk fornkvæði*.¹⁴

In the year before the circular of the *Oldskriftselskab* appeared, two young Icelanders, Jón Árnason and Magnús Grímsson, had started collecting Icelandic folklore. They collected only a few ballads themselves; but they succeeded in finding collaborators widely spread over the country; and much of what was collected around and after the middle of the century can be traced to their efforts, either directly or indirectly.

The number of ballad-types found in the 19th century is about 50, but some of these were collected only as fragments. The only significant addition to earlier collections is a number of jocular ballads which had not been recorded before, probably because they were not considered worthy of being written down. Among the 50 written down in the 19th century, 14 are jocular in nature; and some of these can hardly be considered to be traditional ballads.

The ballad versions of the 19th century are, as a rule, shorter than earlier versions. Although there is little stylistic change, nonsensical refrains are more frequent. The texts are often incomplete, i.e., they were considered as fragments by the singers themselves who often indicate when they think they have forgotten something from the ballad they had heard. This shows that the tradition was decaying, especially

¹⁴ See ÍF, IV, pp. xxiv ff. *Íslenzk fornkvæði*, I–II (1854–85), starts the ordering into types of Icelandic ballads which is continued in ÍF. Apart from that there is no direct relation between these editions. All the texts edited by Jón Sigurðsson and Grundtvig are edited again, directly from the sources, by Jón Helgason.

the creative power that allows the singer to recreate his ballad as a whole even if he may not remember everything that he originally heard. But one must also bear in mind that the informants were no doubt harder pressed by the collectors to dig up everything they could remember, and, possibly, even reminded not to change or invent anything.

Very few ballads have been collected in the 20th century. However, when people started collecting folklore systematically in the 1960's and early 70's with tape-recorders, some vestiges of the tradition could be found: versions of about 10 types plus a couple of short fragments. The texts are of little value from a comparative point of view; but the melodies are important because so few ballads had been written down with melodies before; and, in those cases, the notation is unreliable.¹⁵

The Singing of Ballads: Function and Setting

The information given in Icelandic ballad manuscripts about the texts is disappointing. In the 17th century manuscripts, there is no information whatsoever on who had sung the poems; nor, indeed, on whether they were sung or recited or on what occasions. We have, therefore, no idea whether Gissur Sveinsson knew some ballads himself, whether he collected his ballads from many people, or, which is conceivable, from only one person. It is possible that a close study of the language, use of formulas, etc., of his ballad collection could supply evidence on this point.

In the Introduction to the facsimile edition of Gissur Sveinsson's ballad book, Jón Helgason points out that, on two pages inserted into the book but not originally belonging there, the initial lines of the stanzas of two ballads are written in Gissur Sveinsson's handwriting. His explanation, that this must be the first draft of a recording, is no doubt correct; and this means that Gissur must have been recording from someone else's performance.¹⁶ Another feature of Gissur's, as well as all the early ballad collectors' work, may be of importance: in the Icelandic ballad manuscripts, the refrain is always written out or indicated by abbreviation with each stanza. One wonders if such a procedure

¹⁵ Icelandic ballad tunes are edited and commented upon by Hreinn Steingrímsson in *Sagnadansar*, pp. 395–435.

¹⁶ *Kvæðabók. Inngangur*, pp. 51–2.

would have been found necessary if the ballads had been recited but not sung. Since the ballads recorded in this century have always been sung, the natural conclusion is that the Icelandic ballad was a song.

Árni Magnússon occasionally gives information on the sources of the ballads he collected; the informants he mentions were women, and information on their ages and the places where they lived is sometimes given. Only one of his informants, however, is mentioned by name, Guðrún Hákonardóttir, who furnished him with five ballads. She was the mistress of a large farm in the South and the daughter of a well-off farmer in the West.¹⁷ One can only guess that the 'old women' without names referred to in Árni's notes, one of them eighty years old and living at Álftanes in the South-West, were of a somewhat lower social status.¹⁸

When more systematic collecting started in the 19th century, the informants are more often mentioned by name, but the information is always meagre. One of the most energetic collectors of the mid-century was Gísli Konráðsson. Only once does he mention his sources, stating that the poems are written down as delivered by some old women.¹⁹ Jón Helgason points out that Gísli seems not always to have followed his sources in detail because he knew the poems himself.²⁰

It is not always easy to determine whether the collectors knew the ballads themselves or had collected them from other people, although the latter was probably frequently the case. The Rev. Benedikt Þórarinsson of Ás in the East says in a letter to the *Oldskriftselskab*:

Kvæði þessi eru flest numin eptir Mad^{me} Björgu sál: Pétursdóttur konu Prófasts sál: S^{ra} Arna Þorsteinssonar á Kyrkjubæ, hún var fróð kona, minnug og óskreytin.²¹

(Most of these poems were learnt from the late Madame Björg Pétursdóttir, the wife of the late Rev. Árni Þorsteinsson in Kirkjubær; she knew much lore, had a good memory and did not alter anything.)

From this, we can see that he probably had written the ballads from

¹⁷ See ÍF, IV, pp. xli–xlvi.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxxviii.

¹⁹ See ÍF, VI, p. xviii.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xix.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. xxxi.

memory, although he originally had learnt them from Madame Björg who had been dead for ten years when he sent his letter to Denmark.

When collecting was done again in the 1960's women again appear as the main bearers of the tradition. In the few cases where ballads were collected from men, these men had learnt them from women.

One striking fact emerges from the information we have about the people who collaborated in the collecting of ballads in the 19th century, and we can be almost certain that things occurred in the same way in the 17th and 18th centuries: the ballads were collected by men from the singing of women. The first and only woman mentioned as a collector of ballads in the seven volumes of ÍF is Torfhildur Hólm, the first woman novelist in the Icelandic language. She lived in Canada for a number of years; and, while staying there, she recorded one ballad from an Icelandic immigrant in the 1870's or 80's.²² The only other woman to collect ballads that I know of is Helga Jóhannsdóttir, who collected with a tape-recorder in the 1960's and 70's.

The ballad informants, except for the cases previously mentioned, have been women. There is, however, one further exception, the text of *Konukaup* (ÍF 94), a poem in which women are belittled.

The women who sang these ballads must have belonged to all classes of society. They were the wives of clergymen and rich farmers, some were servants, and one informant is said to have been a pauper (*niðurseta*).

Now, what conclusions can be drawn from the different roles of the sexes in the collecting and singing of ballads? There is nothing surprising in the fact that the ballads were put to paper by men; at this time men were more likely to be practised writers and to be the ones who responded to a call from the learned men of Copenhagen or Reykjavík. Such behaviour on the part of a woman at that time would no doubt have been considered both rash and pretentious. The fact that the tradition was carried by women is much more important. It indicates that during the centuries of collection not much prestige could have been attached to the knowledge of ballads as one might have expected if they had been sung publicly, e.g., at dance-gatherings. In the Faroes, where the ballads were sung to the dance, it was much more common that the ballad singers were men than women.²³

²² See ÍF, VII, pp. lviii–lix.

²³ See Thuren 1908, p. 8. Thuren is speaking about ballad singing in accom-

When and where did Icelandic women sing their ballads? We do not know; but it is likely that they were sung during working hours, while children were being put to sleep, etc.²⁴

It is only natural, when we have realized the importance of women as bearers of the ballad tradition, that we conclude that it is not a coincidence that in no other type of poetry from the late Middle Ages or the subsequent centuries do women play such a decisive role. Nor is their fate elsewhere described with as much sympathy as in the majority of ballads. A detailed thematic study of ballads in relation to this is called for.²⁵ Apart from its general interest, a thematic study would be essential in dealing with the general function of ballads in society and their connection with the dance. Were ballads ever primarily dance-songs? If they were, were they mainly sung in the women's dance which we hear of in some sources?²⁶ We know that in the Faroes men were usually leaders of the dance, and we also know of the predominance of the heroic ballad in this area. In recent times, Faroese collectors have gathered evidence that while the heroic ballad was generally favoured by men, women often preferred ballads with erotic themes, supernatural or chivalric.²⁷ It is, therefore, only natural to assume that the thematic

paniment to dance, but it is known that ballads were sung on other occasions in the Faroes, esp. during winter evenings on the farms while people were making clothes from wool, see Hammershaimb 1891, p. 390, and Andreassen 1979.

²⁴ We have no evidence that ballads were sung during the *kvöldvaka* (Icelandic parallel to Faroese *kvøldseta* and Danish *bindestue*), where men and women sat together at their work, although this may well have happened. On these occasions *rimur* and *sagas* seem to have been the most popular form of entertainment, see Magnús Gíslason 1977, pp. 88–115, and Jónas Jónasson 1961, pp. 7, 245–8. Magnús Gíslason quotes one informant who says that the reading aloud or singing at a *kvöldvaka* was done by one of the men (p. 88).

²⁵ On the description of and attitude to women in Danish ballads see Præstgaard Andersen 1978.

²⁶ See *Kvæði og dansleikir* 1964, I, pp. xxxiv, lii–liv.

²⁷ In a letter to me, dated 17. 12. 1979, Mr. Mortan Nolsøe of Fróðskaparsetur Føroya gives very interesting information on this subject. I quote directly from his letter: “. . . í sambandi við eina upptöku av CCF 31 *Margretu kvæði* í 1962 í Hvalba, Suðuroy, hoyrði eg heimildarmannin Jens Holm (Jenis á Heyggi, sáli) siga, at hetta var sovorðið, sum konufólkini plagdu at kvøða, meðan mannfólkini hvíldu seg millum tey longu kvæðini. Sagt á annan hátt: meðan mannfólkini skipaðu helst kappkvæði, skipaðu konufólkini helst onnur slög av kvæðum. Hetta er kortini ikki so at skilja, at tað hevur verið nakað skarpt mark kynjanna millum hesum viðvíkjandi. Frá savningararbeiði mínum sunnanfjörðs, t. e. helst í Suðuroynni og

differences between these kinds of ballads are partly due to the fact that they were cherished, perhaps even created, by people of different sexes. This can, however, only be suggested; and one must warn against hasty conclusions or generalization. With the relatively limited information one has of the informants of Icelandic ballads, it would be necessary to approach this problem from a wider point of view, taking into account material from other areas.

Ballad Performance: Oral Composition vs. Memorization

It is not my aim here to analyze the ballad as a form of narrative art. In such an analysis, it would be impractical to limit the study to Icelandic material, since the Icelandic ballad differs only insignificantly from the mainstream of Scandinavian ballad tradition. Research into the narrative art of the ballad coupled to some sort of interpretation of its function and significance in different periods is certainly called for, but it would have to be put off by promising a second and possibly a third volume. Such a promise I find it prudent not to give. However, in order to be able to use the extant ballad texts as evidence of a pre-existing oral tradition, it is unavoidable at least to indicate an attitude to the problem of oral composition in performance, vs. that of memorization, in the Icelandic ballad tradition. There can be no doubt that the ballads have been recorded from oral tradition; but this does not

Sandoyinni, eri eg sannfördur um, at tað, sum Jenis á Heyggi segði, sipar eisini til tað, sum var vanligt aðrastaðni í nevndum oyggjum.” (When recording CCF 31 [ÍF 14] in 1962 in Hvalba on Suðuroy, I heard the informant Jens Holm say that this was the kind of ballad women liked best to sing while the men rested between the long *kvæði* [heroic ballads]. In other words: while men mostly sang heroic ballads, women preferred other kinds of poetry. This is not to be taken to mean that there was any clear dividing line between the sexes in this respect. My field work in Suðuroy and Sandoy has convinced me that Jens’s statement is valid for what was the rule in other parts of these islands.)

The list of informants found in the manuscript of Bloch’s *Føroya kvæði* (Copenhagen 1872–6) shows that c. one out of four informants was a woman. An analysis of the Faroese material collected from women and printed in CCF or DGF, undertaken by Mortan Nolsøe, shows that the percentage of heroic ballads collected from women is much lower than the percentage of this group of ballads in the corpus as a whole.

necessarily mean that the tradition has been 'oral' in the sense given to the term by Parry and Lord and used in the context of ballad studies by David Buchan and Wolfhart Anders, to mention two examples.²⁸

The Icelandic ballad texts are not well fitted for a formulaic analysis of the type invented by Parry because we do not know any one informant with a repertoire of sufficient quantity. A possible candidate would be Guðrún Hákonardóttir, mentioned above, who in the first decades of the 18th century furnished Árni Magnússon with 5 ballad texts. However, these texts are rather different from each other in nature; and no special uniformity of language seems to be found in them.

Almost all Icelandic ballads contain some formulas or what I call formulaic stanzas (commonplaces), and some of them are indeed composed almost entirely of such material. It may be doubted, however, that there is any way to decide whether these formulas are 'genuine', i.e., parts of a dynamic system used for oral composition in performance, or fossils, preserved by passive bearers of tradition. At any rate, no attempt will be made here to reach any decision on this issue, although it is necessary to comment shortly upon the general likelihood of how the Icelandic ballad tradition has functioned.

Even if one concedes the point that oral composition in performance may produce texts "remarkable for stability rather than innovation",²⁹ it is hard to believe that this mode of performance was dominant in Scandinavia at the time the ballads were recorded. The verbal parallels in texts recorded in different countries and different centuries are so numerous and sometimes so detailed, as is demonstrated in this book, that one must believe that the ballads were, to a great extent, memorized. However, this does not mean that the memorization was of the same sort as when a person learns a poem from a written page. Certainly, most performances of ballad-singers contain some variation. The great number of ballads in Scandinavia show beyond doubt that there must have been a long period when ballad formulas, ballad language, and ballad conventions in general were made use of for the creation

²⁸ See Lord 1973, Buchan 1972, Anders 1974. David Buchan and Wolfhart Anders have undoubtedly contributed significantly to our understanding of ballad language and its nature, although it is difficult to accept many of their conclusions, esp. because they follow the methods developed in the study of Balkan epic too closely. For a different approach, see Holzapfel 1980.

²⁹ Buchan 1972, p. 166.

and recreation of ballads. The wide distribution of formulas and commonplaces along with other common characteristics is a strong indication of this. It must also be considered likely, when the Icelandic ballad tradition is looked at as a whole, that there was a period of ballad-singing in Iceland when some people were exceptionally capable of recreating ballads when they had memorized the story and the names, and had absorbed a series of rhymes and poignant phrases. Nevertheless, there are indications that the transmission of ballads in Iceland, never was of the same kind as the composition in performance or formulaic improvisation described by Lord.

David Buchan has in his inspiring book, referred to above, made some very interesting observations on 'aural patterns' as an aid to memory or rather to recreation in the Scottish tradition.³⁰ I have a strong feeling, which I shall not try to substantiate here, that the aural patterns in Scandinavian ballads are much more diverse than in the Scottish ones, and that an aural pattern in many cases was a part of the identity of a ballad no less than the story and that it was in exceptional cases even better preserved. This book is full of examples of how rhyme-words and, indeed, whole series of rhyme-words have been preserved as part of the same ballad with astonishing continuity through centuries and carried across geographical borders. And, in at least one case, we can see how a story was so totally transformed as to be almost unrecognizable while a number of rhymes and even some lines were preserved intact.³¹

It is obvious that in comparing different recordings of a ballad, one has to be very cautious in attributing significance to the fact that two versions use the same single formula or formulaic stanza in the same place. However, it so frequently occurs that the same formulaic stanzas are used in the same places in the narrative in an Icelandic, Faroese, Norwegian, and even in a Danish and a Swedish version, that one must find it much more likely that this is a result of memorization rather than of a creative use of formulas.³² If ballad singers in Norway and the Faroes in the 19th century use the same sequence of formulas as an Icelander did in the 17th century in the same places in a narrative, it is

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 150–65.

³¹ See below, p. 325–33.

³² Such parallels rarely appear in the comparison below, because they yield no information on the question of origin.

unthinkable that all these persons are recreating a ballad story or a ballad theme from their own stock of formulas or out of what Anders calls 'sängereigene Balladensprache'.

One must, on the whole, be sceptical of attempts to distinguish between ballad texts recorded from 'genuine' oral tradition and what might be called 'verbal' tradition in Buchan's terms. The divergent results of Anders and Buchan in analyzing the ballads of the Scottish ballad singer Bell Robertson seem to prove this. One has only to contemplate how the 'fall' from oral to 'verbal' could possibly have taken place to see this: someone memorizes a 'genuine' oral version of a ballad and transmits it *with its oral characteristics* to another person who again memorizes it.

In the case of short poems in rhymed stanzaic form, as the ballads are, the conditions of transmission are certainly widely different from the case of long epic poems. Nevertheless, there was of course a ballad 'language', in the widest sense, consisting not only of a certain vocabulary and formulas, but also of certain structural preferences and a certain schematized 'world'. The mastery of this language might be called ballad competence. In an audience used to listening to ballads, everyone must have had a passive competence in ballad language; but the singers were bound to have differing degrees of more active competence which we could classify as 1) creative, 2) recreative, and 3) repetitive.

The Icelandic ballad corpus shows that there have never been many creative singers in the country who could compose new ballads. On the other hand, the recreative element must have been quite strong at the time the ballads were being transferred into Icelandic, and possibly, in some cases, as late as the 17th century. These singers took considerable liberty with what they heard but nevertheless retained unchanged many of the stanzas they had heard. Even during this recreative period, it is very likely that there also were persons who were only repetitive singers: i.e., they repeated to the best of their ability what they had heard. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the ballad singers seem to have been mainly or exclusively of this type. The disappearance of the recreative element could have had many causes, e.g., in changes of the function of the ballad, but also in increased literacy among the Icelandic population. Although Icelanders enjoyed a relatively high degree of literacy quite early, there were undoubtedly in the Middle Ages, and in the 16th and

17th centuries, large groups of people who could neither read nor write. In the 18th century, the church increased its efforts in education, and literacy had become nearly universal by the end of that century.³³

However, the numerous and often exact verbal parallels between texts recorded in different Nordic countries in the 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries and undoubtedly preserved in separate branches of tradition since before 1500 is a strong indication that recreation was limited and repetition or memorization a strong element in the West-Nordic area, and indeed all over Scandinavia from the end of the Middle Ages onwards.

The Comparative Method

Svend Grundtvig's edition of the Danish ballads was a basic and pioneering work in ballad studies. Editorial method and principles were, however, not his only important contribution to this field. Equally important, and more original, was his contribution to folkloristic methodology, namely the comparative method. As this method was conceived by Grundtvig, it was of course in accordance with his general attitude toward culture and history which was based on Romantic idealism. He believed firmly in a great age of folklore such as ballads and heroic legends, and one of the main objects of his studies was the reconstruction of proto-texts. However, and in this he differs from many of his contemporaries as well as many later scholars using the comparative method, he was also keenly interested in the later changes or the evolution of tradition and its 'life' in the culture of particular societies at particular times. This means that many of his criteria for comparative research, especially as applied in his study of *Elveskud* (DGF 47, ÍF 1), retain their value even today.³⁴ In contrast to much of the work done by the so called historical-geographical school, he always shows respect for the totality of each item of tradition, whereas most of the scholars practising the method came to rely almost entirely on abstractions from each text, i.e., on its motif-sequences.³⁵ An important criticism of this

³³ See Hallgrímur Hallgrímsson 1925.

³⁴ DGF, IV, pp. 852–65. For an assessment of Grundtvig's work as folklorist, see Piø 1971.

³⁵ An extreme example of this method applied to ballad studies is Kemppinen 1954.

line of scholarship is found in H. O. Nygard's introduction to his study of the ballad *Heer Halewijn*.³⁶ It is not necessary to repeat Nygard's arguments here; but he argues very convincingly that the usual methods of the historical-geographical school, which may be justified to some extent in the study of folklore with limited verbal fixation like folktales, may prove fatal in the study of ballads. After the publication of Nygard's book, there has appeared in this field yet another study of the historical-geographical school. Alfild Forslin's "Balladen om riddar Olof och älvorna", which may be said to demonstrate Nygard's case. In this study, which incidentally treats the same ballad as Grundtvig did in his model study, Forslin on the basis of abstractions of motif-sequences in some cases reaches conclusions which are obviously untenable.³⁷

The main lesson to be learnt by Forslin's and other similar studies of ballads is that in no case should a comparative ballad study be based on abstractions from the texts; it must be based on the texts themselves. The verbal structure, or the texture, of a ballad is always an important, often the most important, part of its totality, although this does not of course mean that an analysis of narrative elements should be neglected.

The classification of folklore into types is an important part of the comparative method; but even this operation must be looked upon critically and recognized for what it is, a scholarly classification of recordings based on fundamental characteristics of the individual items of tradition. The usual procedure in comparative studies has been to try to collect all variants of a type from as wide a geographical area as possible. The approach in Chapter IV of this book had to be a different one for obvious reasons. Instead of trying to analyse a type, its history and geographical distribution as a whole, I have concentrated on the Icelandic recordings of each ballad-type found in Iceland and tried to show their relationship to other branches of the tradition by comparing them to foreign variants. In practice, this means comparing the Icelandic variants to variants found in other Scandinavian countries, since all Icelandic ballad types which have parallels outside Iceland have proved to belong to the Scandinavian ballad tradition. The particular problems of these studies are discussed in the introductory remarks to Ch. IV. The method as practised here is particularly indebted

³⁶ Nygard 1958.

³⁷ Forslin 1962-3; see further below, pp. 114-15.

to Svend Grundtvig, Axel Olrik, and Knut Liestøl. Since my ideas about the stability of the texts and the role played by recreative singers in their transmission are in important points different from theirs, I have tried to apply more cautiously than these scholars methods and criteria deriving from textual criticism. The parallels found and quoted are only interpreted as evidence that the Icelandic branch of a ballad tradition is most closely related to a certain other branch of that tradition and is consequently indicative of common ancestry. The idea of common ancestry, however, should not be interpreted as belief in a common archetype, much less as giving a reason for attempts at the reconstruction of such an archetype.

When comparing variants, I have tried to take into account every aspect of a text which has seemed relevant in each case, whether it has been on the level of expression or of content. However, the recordings we have never represent the totality of a ballad as it lived and functioned in its time. The texts which are most important from a comparative point of view were never recorded with their melodies, nor do we have any information about their function or meaning to the ballad singers and their audiences. But, while this is detrimental to our possibility to really understand the ballad, it does not greatly affect the possibility of writing its history in the way I am here attempting.

The Danish folklorist Axel Olrik opens his classic, *Nogle grund-sætninger for sagnforskning*, with these words, which I should like to subscribe to: "Sagnforskningens hovedopgave er at forstå sagnet som del af menneskeligt åndsliv."³⁸ As his work shows, he was well aware that such an understanding could only be brought about by careful analyses of the formal as well as the historical aspects of the material, and he included the function and meaning of the traditional items in his concept of an historical study. Where many historical studies fail, however, and where the present work is more incomplete than its author would wish, is in the latter stage of such a project, where the results gained in studies of the parts should be fitted into the whole, i.e., at the stage of historical and cultural interpretation in the widest sense. It appears that scholars often have to choose between a scrupulous and even pedantic study of a limited aspect of a cultural phenomenon and a general and often highly speculative synthesis of a great number of studies. Such a division did not seem very dangerous at a time when

³⁸ Olrik 1921, p. 33.

most scholars had few doubts about reaching some, if not final, then at least approximate, objective truth about history. Such a belief is hard to sustain today. One has to admit that there are many potential 'truths' to be found by the interpretation of historical data depending on the premises and the aims of the interpreter. But even if we admit the impossibility of establishing *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, we cannot deny the necessity of detailed studies which aim to draw lines between what we know with reasonable certainty about the past, what we can consider possible or even likely concerning the past, and what we cannot know about it. As experience has shown, such lines are by no means easy to draw in the study of ballads.

The Icelandic ballads have been a relatively little studied branch of the Scandinavian ballad tradition; and experts in the field have stressed the need for clarification of the history of ballads in Iceland and expressed a hope that such a study, as well as studies in related genres from late medieval Icelandic literature, may throw some light on the history and origins of the Scandinavian ballad tradition as a whole.³⁹ In Chapter II, I shall therefore study the information we have about dance and about poetry sung to dance in Iceland with a special emphasis on *rímur*, a medieval genre frequently connected with ballads by scholars in the field. The main objective of the chapter is to define the cultural context of the ballad in Iceland. Although peripheral to the study of ballads proper, this digression from the main theme seems unavoidable. In Chapter III, the external evidence for the age of the ballad in Iceland is weighed with these questions in mind: how early did the traditional ballad arrive in Iceland and for how long did its flow into the country continue? In fact, these questions cannot be separated from the questions of how and from which countries the ballad came to Iceland, and these questions can only be answered on internal evidence: by comparing Icelandic ballad texts to texts collected elsewhere. These last questions are consequently studied in Chapter IV which consists of separate studies of each ballad type found in Iceland. Such an approach seems more satisfactory than a study of a selection of ballads chosen at random. In order to make these studies possible within the framework of this book, they have to be greatly condensed and limited to a rather narrow comparative aspect. This means that other aspects which are

³⁹ See Dal 1961, p. 122.

per se interesting will have to be left out.⁴⁰ It is my hope, however, that this work will prove to be a stimulus and a sound basis for further research.

⁴⁰ I have discussed several aspects of the Icelandic ballads in *Sagnadansar*, pp. 33–86, which are not at all or only lightly touched upon in this work.

II. BALLAD ORIGINS AND MEDIEVAL ICELANDIC LITERATURE

Introductory Remarks

The scholarship dealing with ballad origins and the relation of ballads to medieval literature is impressive because of its quantity and occasionally also for its quality. The most striking thing about it, however, is its lack of progress towards any sort of consensus or unanimity. It would be altogether beyond the scope of this book to try to reach conclusions for this field as a whole, but since the Icelandic literature of the period is relatively rich, it seems to be important to try to squeeze from it all the evidence that can have relevance for the discussion both of ballad origins in Scandinavia, and elsewhere for that matter, and of the relationship of the early popular ballad to medieval lyric and romance. This will, for most of this chapter, take us away from the ballad itself, but I hope that the results of this excursion can, at the end of the chapter, be shown to have some significance for the ballad scholar.

Apart from the age of the ballad, which is still a much debated question on which disagreement seems to be increasing at the present time,¹ two of the main problems are the relationship of the ballad to

¹ The disagreement about the age of the ballad is, without doubt, partly a result of the difficulty of defining the concept, as well as of the fact that some scholars look at the question of origins from a narrow national viewpoint while others think of the ballad as an international or at least pan-European phenomenon. But even if we limit the question to asking when the combination of ballad-themes or ballad-stories with the stylistic and metrical form they have in Britain and Scandinavia took place, the differences of opinion are far greater than is usual in literary history. Thus, Fowler 1968 and S nderholm 1978 both look at the British (Fowler) and Scandinavian (S nderholm) ballad primarily as a post-medieval phenomenon, while most of the authorities of ballad scholarship in Scandinavia think that the ballad had appeared in Scandinavia no later than the 13th century (See Hildeman 1955, Dal 1956, and Jonsson 1967 and 1978). At the same time, a German scholar (Metzner 1976) reaches the conclusion that ballads in this form were in existence

dance and the dance-lyrics of the high Middle Ages, and its relationship to medieval romance. As will be discussed in the next chapter in more detail, the Icelandic ballads themselves offer no clue to the enigma of the age of the ballad. On the other hand, Icelandic sources about dance have played an important part in the reconstruction of the early history of the genre in Scandinavia, and a type of Icelandic narrative poetry, the *rímur*, found in written form as early as the 14th century, has been thought to be modelled upon ballads and thus taken as one of the proofs of their early existence in Scandinavia. Both these fields deserve scrutiny, and the second is highly relevant to the discussion of the relationship between ballad and romance.

Dance in Iceland

Icelandic sources from the 13th century frequently mention dance and, occasionally, even poetry sung in accompaniment to dance. In some cases, the accounts concern events that took place in the 12th century. In fictional works from the late Middle Ages, dance is sometimes mentioned in such a way that these works can be considered to be indirect evidence of its existence at the time. Direct descriptions of the dance do not, however, appear before the last decades of the 16th century and later. All these sources have been printed and are easily accessible.

Obviously, descriptions from c. 1600 should be used with caution as evidence for medieval customs, but since they give much more detailed information than the old sources and definitely have the appearance of being trustworthy accounts of well established customs thought to be old by their authors, their evidence cannot be rejected altogether. The whole of this material has been treated most recently by Jón Samsonarson in his *Kvæði og dansleikir* (1964). In this work, he prints all the primary sources and discusses their value as evidence in an admirably balanced and critical way, enabling us to go quickly through the main points here.

Three sources mention dance in the 12th century. The Saga of Bishop Jón relates that when he became bishop in 1106 he forbade the then in Northern Germany as early as the beginning of the 11th and, therefore, probably also in the 10th century.

very popular game (*leikr*) that men and women recited or sang to each other “klækiligar vísur ok hæðiligar ok óáheyriligar”,² which obviously refers to ribald or obscene poetry; moreover, it is said, he wanted no love-songs (*mansöngs vísur*) to be heard or composed. This saga was written in Latin in the very beginning of the 13th century, but the Latin original is lost. In one of the three 13th century translations, the translator speaks about “kveða í dans”, sing to the dance, when he is translating the above mentioned phrases about the singing of men and women. Scholars agree that this saga is not reliable as a description of events and customs of the early 12th century. The customs mentioned must, however, have been fairly well known about 1200, for otherwise the anachronism would have been too striking.

In an account in the Saga of Þorgils and Hafliði of a wedding that took place at Reykjahólar in the year 1119, we read the following:

Par var nú glaumr ok gleði mikil, skemtan góð ok margskonar leikar, bæði dansleikar, glímur ok sagnaskemtun.³

(There were now great festivities, good entertainment and various games, dancing, wrestling and story-telling.)

This saga, which seems to be based on very reliable oral tradition, is considered to have been written in the first half of the 13th century, at the latest, and some scholars even place it before 1200.^{4a} However, the author could, of course, have used his own ideas of what would have been likely to happen at such an event at that time to enliven his story without having any certain evidence to this effect.

Put together, the testimony of these two sagas makes it highly probable that, no later than the latter half of the 12th century, people had acquired the habit of dancing in Iceland. The third and most reliable source confirms this conclusion. In *Sturlu saga* the following is narrated about events taking place in 1171:

Ok um kveldit eptir náttverð mælti Sturla við Guðnýju húsfreyju, at slá skyldi hringleik, ok fór til alþýða heimamanna ok svá gestir.^{4b}

(And in the evening after supper Sturla said to his wife Guðný, that

² *Biskupasögur* 1858–78, I, p. 165.

³ *Sturlunga saga* 1906–11, I, p. 22.

^{4a} See *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* 1952, pp. ix–xxix.

^{4b} *Sturlunga saga*, I, p. 87.

people should start a ring-dance, and the people of the farm and the guests did so.)

Sturlu saga is undoubtedly old and historically very reliable. The above is almost certainly based on an eye-witness account, probably that of Guðný herself. The only problem is the meaning of *slá hringleik*. Does this mean to dance? We can not be absolutely certain of that but by far the most likely explanation is that it refers to ring-dance, the *carole*, known to have been popular in France and Germany at this time. In the medieval Bible translation *Stjórn*, the same words, *slá hringleik*, are used about dancing; *slá* is used both in the 13th and 14th centuries about dancing, and similar use of words occurs in related languages, e.g., “dans sláið í ring” in a Faroese refrain, and the word ‘slátt’ meaning dance-tune in Norwegian and Swedish. *Ring* is used both in English and German of the *carole*. In the early 13th century, an English cleric uses the expression “gon o þe ring” when he is referring to the *carole*.⁵

Since there are from the 13th and 14th centuries a number of contemporary testimonies about the practice of dancing in Iceland, we can conclude that it is historically established from the 1170's onwards. But can we be sure that the dance in question really was something new and foreign in the country in the 12th century? Could it not equally well have been an ancient Scandinavian dance brought to the country by the settlers in pre-Christian times? This possibility is suggested by Dag Strömbäck in his treatment of Icelandic dramatic dances.⁶ It is probably not possible to get a definitive answer to these questions, but two arguments seem to me to give strong support to a negative answer: 1) Dance or dancing is nowhere mentioned in the Icelandic literature dealing with the period before 1100, nor is dancing referred to in foreign descriptions of viking culture.⁷ This absolute silence of 12th and 13th century writers about dance in earlier times contrasts with the frequent mentions of it in the 13th century. Moreover, sources which originate farther back, i.e., skaldic poetry, do not touch upon it either. 2) Not only the word *danz* (dance), but also the earliest examples we know of poetry sung to the

⁵ Greene 1971, p. 1.

⁶ See Strömbäck 1948 and 1953.

⁷ The ‘Gothic’ game described by Constantin VII in his *Book of Ceremonies* (ed. Vogt 1935, pp. 182–4) cannot with any certainty be connected with the Varangians, cf. Sigfús Blöndal 1954, pp. 290–91.

dance, link it to traditions in France, Germany, and England, which enjoyed wide popularity in all circles of society in the 12th century and could, therefore, easily have come to the knowledge of Scandinavians and even Icelanders and have been imitated by them.⁸

What mainly interests us here is, of course, not primarily the dance itself, but the poetry sung in accompaniment to it. In a few places in the contemporary sagas of the 13th century, singing to the dance is mentioned. We can see that one kind of poetry that could be sung to the dance was the mocking or defaming of certain individuals. (It would be rash to generalize from this, because such poetry was most likely to be mentioned in the literature, since it could deal with memorable events or even itself become the cause of such events.) When relating certain events of the years 1220–21, Sturla Þórðarson, the author of *Íslendinga saga*, the longest and most detailed chronicle of the 13th century, writes:

Ok hér með færðu Breiðbælingar Lopt í flimtan ok gerðu um hann danza marga ok margs konar spott annat.⁹

(And moreover, the people of Breiðaból mocked Loptr, composed many dances and other kinds of satire about him.)

A bit further on, when the same conflict is being discussed, we read:

Þá var þetta kveðit:

Loptr er í Eyjum,
bítr lunda bein.
Sæmundr er á heiðum
ok etr berin ein.¹⁰

(Then this was composed:

Loptr is in the Islands
gnawing puffin-bones;
Sæmundr is in the mountains
eating berries alone.)

One should note that it is not explicitly stated that the quoted strophe is

⁸ Early dancing in Europe is discussed in many scholarly works, see e.g. Böhme 1886, pp. 23–33, Chambers 1903, I, pp. 160–172, and Greene 1971, pp. xliv–l.

⁹ *Sturlunga saga*, I, p. 342.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 348. *ok* in line 4 is missing in some mss.

a *danz*, but the connection with the previous mention of “*danza marga*” and the peculiarities of the metre make this assumption almost inevitable. There is at least one other mention in *Sturlunga saga* of dance-poetry as *flimtan* (mockery).¹¹

The second preserved example of dance-poetry is not of this type. In the year 1264, the chieftain Gizur Þorvaldsson, who at that time was the most powerful man in the country as he was the representative of King Hákon of Norway, took as his prisoner one Þórðr Andrésson, the chieftain of a family who had until then denied its loyalty to King Hákon. When Þórðr was taken away, he is reported to have said:

“Ek mun drepinn verða,” segir Þórðr, “en bræðr mínir munu fá grið.” Ok þá hrökti Þórðr hestinn undir sér ok kvað dans þenna við raust: Mínar eru sorgir þungar sem blý.¹²

(“I shall be killed,” said Þórðr, “but my brothers will be given quarter.” And then he spurred his horse and sang this dance in a loud voice: Mine are sorrows heavy as lead.)

This line of poetry is obviously not of the same kind as *Loptr er í Eyjum*; the subjective lyrical expression can most easily be explained as a refrain of a love-lyric, or possibly, as has also been done, as a ballad refrain. We shall return to that problem later.

In Icelandic prose romances or legendary sagas of the 14th and 15th centuries (*viz.* the *fornaldarsögur*, supposed to have taken place in Scandinavia and Northern Europe, and *riddarasögur*, Icelandic imitations of chivalrous romances), dance is occasionally mentioned, and it appears that there existed different types of dances with different names. More important are the references to dance in the metrical romances (*rímur*). The *rímur*-poets sometimes refer to their poetry as dances, which indicates that they could be used in accompaniment to dance. This function is directly mentioned in *Sörla rímur*, a cycle possibly dating from the 14th century, although it is found only in a 16th century manuscript.¹³ In the so called *mansöngur* (a sort of prologue to a *ríma*), the poet says among other things:

¹¹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 87.

¹² *Ibid.*, II, p. 316.

¹³ On the age of *Sörla rímur*, see Björn K. Þórólfsson 1934, p. 298, and 1950, *passim*.

Því má eg varla vísu slá,
veit eg það til sanns,
þegar að rekkar rímu fá
reyst er hún upp við dans.

Gapa þeir upp og gumsa hart
og geyma varla sín,
höldar dansa hralla snart
ef heyrst vísan mín.¹⁴

(For I may barely strike up a verse,
I know that for sure,
as soon as men catch the rhyme,
it is shouted out to the dance.

They mouth in the air and rant with zest
and hardly hold control,
the gentlemen dance hard and fast
once my verse is heard.)

These verses show clearly that a *ríma* could be sung to dance. We cannot, however, conclude from them that this was ever their main function or indeed a proper treatment of a *ríma*. It is possible to interpret the words “því má eg varla” and the ironic description of the dancers to the effect that the *rímur* were indeed too good and too fine to be sung to the dance.

From the post-Reformation descriptions of the dance, which unfortunately leave much to be desired in clarity, we can see that there were at least two main types of dance to which poetry was sung: on the one hand, a dance where people danced silently, staying in the same place, to the song of one, two, or even three males who did not themselves take part in the dance; and, on the other hand, the so called *vikivaki*, a ring dance where the dancers moved in a circle and accompanied themselves by singing. Undoubtedly, there were some variations, and more than one type of poetry could be sung to each kind of dance. Sometimes people seem to have danced to rhythmical shouts that had

¹⁴ *Rímnasafn* 1905–22, I, p. 86.

no meaning; sometimes only men danced, at other times, only women, but sometimes both together.¹⁵

Apart from the dances themselves, several dramatic games were played at the dance-gatherings, often centring on someone masquerading as an animal or grotesque figure. These games are closely related to dramatic games played in many places in Europe in the Middle Ages, e.g., in England, and some of them survive into modern times in remote places. Although these games may ultimately be of pre-Christian origin, in the Middle Ages they were often played in connection with feasts of the church, and it must be considered most likely that they were brought to Iceland in Christian times, probably sometime during the late Middle Ages.¹⁶

Most of the discernible elements of what happened at Icelandic dance-gatherings seem to have quite close parallels with European dances and dance-games of the Middle Ages. The oldest descriptions of the *carole* show that there could be either an open or closed ring of dancing people and that there was one leader who sang the dance-song while the others joined in the refrain. Thus, the *carole* appears in pictures and descriptions from the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries. In the 12th century, the *carole* seems to have been popular with all classes in France, and this is, therefore, a time when it would be likely to spread to other countries.¹⁷ It so happens that the first exact descriptions of French ring-dances are contemporaneous with the oldest descriptions of the dance in Iceland, viz. from the last decades of the 16th century, in the *Orchésographie* by Thoinot Arbeau (pseudonym of Jehan Tabourot).

Tabourot speaks of the two most simple types of ring-dances, which he calls *branle simple* and *branle double*. The step in *branle simple* is exactly the same as the one we know from the Faroese ring-dance, and this could be the step that was used in the *vikivaki*, even if this does not appear clearly from the descriptions: they only say that the ring moved in one direction, which does not necessarily exclude the possibility that

¹⁵ See *Kvæði og dansleikir*, I, pp. xxviii–cxliii. The word *vikivaki* is puzzling and scholars have had difficulties in deciding its etymology and origin; recently, Michael Chesnutt has argued that it is a West-Germanic loanword of the 16th century. For further details see his article in *Arv* 1978.

¹⁶ See Strömbäck 1948.

¹⁷ See Böhme 1886, pp. 31ff, and Verrier 1931–2, I, pp. 25–8.

one step out of three was in the opposite direction. In *branle double*, the ring dances two steps to the left and then two steps to the right. If the steps to both sides are equally long, it is obvious that the ring does not proceed in one direction, and such a step could easily have developed into a static dance like the one described in the Icelandic sources.¹⁸

The Icelandic descriptions of dance invite a more detailed comparison with European parallels than is possible here, but it is most likely that the dance, the games, and the whole cultural phenomenon of dance-gathering (*gleði*) was imported to Iceland in the period from the 12th to the 15th or even early 16th centuries. An element which could possibly have an Icelandic or Scandinavian origin is man and woman addressing each other alternately with ribald verses, which would not necessarily have to be accompanied by any sort of dance. Obscenities or ribaldry are however found elsewhere. In the complaints of clergymen, which are the first mentions of dance in the early Middle Ages, this type of poetry is frequently mentioned. This was not only a feature of Icelandic dance lyrics, designated by bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson as “klám, nið ok keskni” (obscurities, defamation and mockery) in the late 16th century, because similar German poetry from the same period could shock honest scholars dealing with it in the 19th century. Franz M. Böhme writes in his history of the dance:

Dass aber viele Tanzlieder, namentlich die mit erotischem Inhalte, im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert wirklich *schlüpfrig* und *unsauber* waren, das dürfen wir schon den vielen Strafpredigten glauben, in denen gegen ‘der tanzreime unflätigen gesang’ und die ‘vnkuschen’ schamperlieder mit Recht geeifert wird. Aber wir können es sogar selbst beurtheilen, da viele derartige schandbare Tanzgesänge in Handschriften und Drucken vorhanden sind.¹⁹

It is, therefore, not possible either to claim Icelandic or Scandinavian origin for this custom with any certainty, although the possibility is there.

¹⁸ See Verrier, *ibid.*, pp. 33–8, Bakka 1977, and Espelund 1979.

¹⁹ Böhme 1886, p. 236.

Types of Poetry in the Dance

What the post-Reformation sources say about poetry sung to the dance indicates that it was mainly lyrical and dealt with a wide variety of themes. Most of the dance poetry seems to have had erotic themes, sometimes even obscene ones; themes of defamation of character are also mentioned, but there have obviously even been some religious pieces. On the other hand, there are no direct statements to the effect that narrative poetry was sung at the *gleði* at this time, although one must consider it very likely that ballads and even *rímur* were used at such gatherings. There is a striking uniformity in the comments on this poetry of the 13th and 16th centuries, viz. the stress is on erotic themes and those of personal abuse. We can, therefore, be fairly certain that strophes or short poems of this character were used in the dance all through the Middle Ages, and there is no reason at all to assume that the epic ballad in any way replaced or absorbed this lyric poetry as often seems to be maintained by the advocates of the so called 'stev-stammeteori'.²⁰

It may be fruitless to ask whether lyric poetry of the sort described above played some part at the dance-gatherings of people in the rest of Scandinavia, but this must be considered likely since it did so both in Iceland and Germany. The old jocular ballads of Denmark, as also to a lesser degree the jocular ballads of the rest of Scandinavia, are full of obscenities; the Norwegian 'stev', as Steffen has pointed out, have much in common with what we have left of lyrical dance-poetry in Iceland,²¹ and the Faroese *tættir* (pl. form of *táttur*) seem to belong to the same tradition of personal abuse or deriding as the *Loptr er í Eyjum* strophe, although the ones preserved are quite young. Obviously, this poetry is part of the Norse tradition of *níð*.²² It is only natural that individual cases of such poetry should die away with the memory of the trivial incidents they deal with, although the tradition itself lived on.

In Icelandic manuscripts from the late 16th, the 17th, and 18th centuries, there is preserved a great number of lyric poems which are called *vikivakakvæði*. The name shows that these poems, or at least this

²⁰ See further below, pp. 50–51.

²¹ Steffen 1898, p. 172, cf. Jón Samsonarson in *Kvæði og dansleikir*, I, pp. xx–xxiv.

²² See Almqvist 1965, pp. 39, 61.

kind of poetry, were actually used as dance-songs. *Vikivakakvæði* treat various subjects, but a majority of them are love-songs of a kind. Although they sometimes are addressed to a certain (unnamed) girl, professing the love of the poet and praising the girl's beauty, they also often treat amorous matters in an irreverent vein which may verge on the obscene. Quite frequently there are references to the dance. There are also many *vikivakakvæði* with religious or moral themes.

The authors of some of these poems are known and, as a whole, the preserved poems seem not to be much older than the manuscripts that contain them. Unlike the ballads, they are very much dependent upon Icelandic tradition in style and diction and preserve the alliteration, but their language is as a rule more simple than that of the contemporary *rímur*.

Every *vikivakakvæði* has a prelude, a strophe in a metre different from the poem itself. Either this strophe as a whole or a part of it is then repeated with every stanza as a refrain. The refrain is always connected with the stanza by rhyme. In late *vikivakakvæði*, the refrain is often split into several parts, each of which rhymes with a different part of the main stanza; this may result in very complicated rhyme-schemes. This complexity seems to be a development of the 17th century; the oldest preserved poems are rather simple in this respect.

Vikivakakvæði are, without doubt, popular poetry in the sense that they were intended to be enjoyed communally. People must have committed them to memory; they cannot have been improvised on the spot. The poet had prepared his poem carefully (whether he wrote it down or not) before he brought it to the *gleði*, often using a well-known prelude or burden. In the dance, the procedure seems to have been that at first the leader sang the first half (usually two lines) of a stanza, which then was repeated by the ring; then he sang the second half, the second line of which was rhymed to the refrain. This second half was repeated by the ring, and then everyone sang the refrain. This could become more complicated when the refrain was split, but the basic method was the same.²³

The most characteristic feature of this stanza form is the way stanza

²³ The metrical form of *vikivakakvæði* is analysed by Jón Samsonarson 1964, pp. cxxxiii–cxli. In vol. II of his *Kvæði og dansleikir*, he has edited a number of *vikivakakvæði* but the largest collection of these poems is in *Íslenzkar gátur, skemtanir, vikivakar og þulur*, III (1894).

and refrain are connected by rhyme. About 1600 the simplest variant of this structure is the one most commonly found, and it is also popular later on: it is a four line stanza rhymed *aaab + b* (refrain), as in this short poem, which is preserved in a 17th century manuscript and may serve as a general example of the early *vikivakavæði*:

Angur er mér, ef annar þér
ætla hýru að sýna.
Við stúlkuna vil eg stíga sjálfur mína.

1. Fengi eg þig með kærleik kysst
þegar kvendið yrði úr hendi misst,
við munum ekki, vífið, fyrst
vináttu okkar týna.
Við stúlkuna vil eg stíga sjálfur mína.

2. Hvör sem í því sýnir sig,
seljan gulls, að blíðka þig,
veit eg sannliga að vill sá mig
til vonzku og hugmóðs brýna.
Við stúlkuna vil eg stíga sjálfur mína.

3. Tregað hefur mig tigið sprund,
trú eg það búi fast í lund.
Vitja mun eg vífs á fund
vor þegar gjörir að hlýna.
Við stúlkuna vil eg stíga sjálfur mína.²⁴

The teasing playful tone of this little love-song seems to fit very well the atmosphere of the dance-gathering, and we find a similar approach again in a great number of *vikivakavæði*. The stanza form is certainly much older in Iceland than from 1600. It is the same as that of a religious poem on St. Barbara, *Barbárudiktur*, which was written down from oral tradition about 1700 and again in the 19th century but must belong to the first half of the 16th century or earlier.²⁵ In an effort made by bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson and other members of the

²⁴ *Kvæði og dansleikir*, II, pp. 57–8.

²⁵ *Íslensk miðaldarkvæði* 1936–8, II, pp. 330–341.

clergy about 1600 to divert people from idle poetry, this form is much used for religious songs, as e.g., in the Nativity poem by the Rev. Einar Sigurðsson printed in *Vísnaþók* (1612): *Kvæði af stallinum Kristi*.²⁶ It was a common feature of their efforts that they made use of stanza forms already popular in secular poetry.

There are other relatively simple stanza forms, e.g., with cross-rhyme, and sometimes a two line refrain. There are also instances where the refrain does not rhyme with any line of the stanza, though these are an exception.

These simple forms have many parallels in medieval lyric poetry and do, in fact, belong to a whole family of dance-lyrics, which we can call the carol form. Peter Dronke has this to say about it in *The Medieval Lyric*:

The two most frequent lyrical forms in medieval dance-song, the rondeau and the carol, can be characterised by the ways that they use the refrain. Each of these forms has a number of more or less closely related variants; neither form, in my view, can be reduced to a single archetype. What is constant in the rondeau range is the use of a refrain *within* the stanza; one of the best known kinds uses the whole refrain at the beginning and end of the stanza, and only its first half in the middle . . . The most constant element in the carol range of forms is the use of a *vuelta* ('turning line')—that is, the practice of making the last line of each strophe rhyme with the refrain.²⁷

About this latter form, which obviously is the basic form of the *viki-vakakvæði*, Dronke adds:

These formal characteristics (the triple segments, followed by *vuelta* and refrain) are found not only in many Italian secular *ballate* but in nearly all the Italian religious *laude*; similar features can be found in the French *virelai* and the English carol, in the Galician *Cantigas de Santa María*, and in the colloquial Arabic *zajal*.²⁸

²⁶ An account of bishop Guðbrandur's efforts is found in Páll Eggert Ólason 1919–26, IV, pp. 420–441; a survey of Einar Sigurðsson's poetry is in the same work, IV, pp. 548–69.

²⁷ Dronke 1968, pp. 190–91.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

Most of the poetry mentioned by Dronke seems rather remote as a potential source of influence on *vikivakakvæði*; the French *virelai*, e.g., is courtly poetry. Yet, it is thought to have taken its basic form from popular dance-lyrics.²⁹ More interesting for comparison with *vikivakakvæði* are the English carols. There also, the most common form is a four line stanza rhymed *aaab + b(b)*, even if other forms such as cross-rhymed stanzas are also frequently found. An English carol from the 15th century, chosen almost at random from Greene's large collection of early (before 1550) English carols, shows a striking similarity to the quoted *vikivakakvæði*, not only in metre and rhythm, but in content as well:

Thei Y synge and murthus make,
It is not Y wolde.

1. Myn owne dere ladi fair and fre,
Y pray yow in herte ye ruwen on me,
For al my lykyng is on the
Wan Y on yow beholde.
They y etc.

2. Were we togadere beyne,
Thou myst me lysse of my peyne;
Y am agast; it wol not geyne;
Myn herte falluth colde.
They y synge &c.

3. Myself Y wol myn arnde bede;
The betur Y hope for te spede;
Non so wel may do myn nede —
A womman so me tolde.
They y &c.³⁰

The English carols show a variety of subject matter, from the religious to the amorous and humorous, in much the same way as the *vikivakakvæði*. The religious moment is, however, more prominent in the English carols, and it can be seen from the numerous Latin words and phrases found in many of the carols that they were often composed

²⁹ See Greene 1977, lxiii.

³⁰ Greene 1977, p. 269, No. 441.

by educated people, certainly often men of the church. Among the religious carols, those on Nativity often stand out for their simple beauty, as does indeed the above mentioned Nativity carol by Einar Sigurðsson.

However well educated some of the English carol poets may have been, the genre is obviously popular 'by destination', as R. L. Greene puts it,³¹ in exactly the same way as the *vikivakakvæði*. There seems to be little if any doubt that the English carol is originally a dance-song, even though some of the later carols have never been sung to the dance.

Tempting though it might be to undertake a closer comparison between the English carol and the *vikivakakvæði*, this will not be done here. Their kinship seems indisputable.³² A question that remains to be answered, however, is the nature of this relationship. Can we assume that the carol form was brought to Iceland in the 13th or 14th century, as early as or even earlier than the ballad; or is it more likely that English carols influenced Icelanders in the 15th or early 16th century when there was considerable contact between the two countries?³³ This problem must await a closer study, and all that can be offered here are some speculations.

When *vikivakakvæði* are written down, they conform to Icelandic literary tradition both in metre and diction in a way the ballads never did. This indicates that the form had existed for a considerable time in the country, although it is of course possible that the difference is partly due to different methods of composition. However, it is impossible to conclude from the texts themselves how much older this type of poetry is in Iceland than the oldest manuscripts. It could have developed within the 16th century.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. cxviii.

³² On the whole question of the carol as dance-song, see Greene 1977, pp. xliii–lxxx. Dronke 1965–6, I, pp. 52–4, doubts that the use of 'vuelta' plus refrain can be interpreted as evidence for a genetic relationship between two genres. (He is discussing the hypothesis of the influence of Arabic on medieval Western love-poetry.) However, the metrical kinship gains in importance when a number of other features connects the two genres, as is the case with carol and *vikivakakvæði*. In a review of *Sagnadansar*, Jón Samsonarson comes to the same conclusions as the ones presented here on the relationship between English and Icelandic lyrical poetry. He points out several interesting examples in Greene 1977; see *Skirnir*, 154, 1980, pp. 187–91.

³³ About the connection between Britain and Iceland in the late Middle Ages see Björn Þorsteinsson 1970.

Now, the 13th century 'dance', *Mínar eru sorgir þungar sem blý*, looks very like either the first line or the refrain (burden) of a dance-song. It can hardly have been a whole 'dance'. The style of this line certainly is not of the kind usually found in ballad-refrains, although this has been suggested.³⁴ The style of the ballad refrains could be characterized as communal and objective, instead of personal and subjective, as the case is here and in *vikivakavæði* and other medieval Icelandic love-lyrics.³⁵ Admittedly, the style of this single line of verse offers only tenuous evidence to support a hypothesis that the carol form was known in Iceland as early as the 13th century. Nevertheless, one must consider it likely that lyrical poems with or without refrains were sung to the dance all over Scandinavia all through the Middle Ages, as early as the epic ballad if not earlier. After all, lyrical poetry was sung to the dance in all the countries from which the dance could have come to Scandinavia. Love poetry appears in Danish and Swedish song books at the same time as the ballads and is mingled with them. In these lyrics, German influence is dominant, and we do not find the carol form there, but that could easily be explained by changes in fashion. If people are prepared to reconstruct a history of the Danish ballad as far back as the 13th or even 12th century, they ought to be prepared to accept the likelihood of the existence of lyrical love-songs in this same period. If the widely accepted conjecture that the metrical form of the Scandinavian ballad has developed out of a much more lyrical dance-song is correct, one has to assume that it developed more narration, possibly under influence from other narrative genres, such as romance. However, it is also likely that the more lyrical type of song lived on, although individual pieces did not have the same chances of survival through centuries as narrative poems.³⁶

When we look back upon the types of lyric poetry sung to dance in Iceland, we see a diversity of form as well as of content. The main emphasis here has been on *vikivakavæði* because a study of their metrical form reveals connections with dance-songs elsewhere; but there were other types of love poetry, the so-called *brunakvæði* (passionate poems, lit. burning-poems) or *afmorskvæði* (amorous poems), which

³⁴ See, e.g., Liestøl 1945, pp. 77–8.

³⁵ See *Sagnadansar* 1979, pp. 56–7.

³⁶ Early Danish and Swedish love-poetry is discussed by Frandsen 1926, 1935, and 1954, and by Hildeman 1958. Neither mentions the carol form.

may well have been sung to the dance even though they did not always have refrains.³⁷

One further speculation which the existence of the carol form in Iceland raises is whether it can be called upon to explain a problem much discussed by Scandinavian ballad scholars, viz. the lyrical preludes or *stevstamme* that stand at the beginning of a limited number of Scandinavian ballads, mostly Icelandic and Danish. This has puzzled ballad scholars for a long time. Moltke Moe and, after him, Richard Steffen, believed that these preludes were what was left of a type of dance poetry older than the epic ballads, the *enstrofingar* or independent-strophes. Their theory is that these lyrical strophes were, for the most part, absorbed by the epic ballads, being at first used as their preludes and furnishing them also with their refrains, which then remained when the preludes were dropped.³⁸ In recent times, most scholars have rejected this theory and have been of the opinion that the preludes are of rather late origin and were never a general phenomenon in the history of the Scandinavian ballad.³⁹ A possible solution of this problem would be that the preludes originally belonged to the carol form, where they are a constant feature, and that their appearance in occasional ballads is due to influence from simultaneously existing carols, whose lyrical images and exclamations were a model or even a source for ballad refrains. The form of some of these preludes seems to support this hypothesis.

One of the most elaborate and subjective preludes of an Icelandic ballad is the following:

Viðurinn vex en völlurinn grór
 í lundi,
 harpan er mín hugarbót,
 við skulum mæla með okkur mót,
 við skulum mæla með okkur mót,

³⁷ See *Kvæði og dansleikir*, I, pp. cxliii–cliv, and II, pp. 37–52. Although the word *vikivaki* may not be older in Icelandic than the 16th century, the carol form itself could be older; the words *brunakvæði* and *afmorskvæði* may have been used to designate love-songs in this form.

³⁸ See Steffen 1898, pp. 143–151; Moe's ideas are discussed by Dal 1956, 299–301.

³⁹ See, e.g., Frandsen 1969 (1935), pp. 142–154, Hildeman 1958, pp. 94–109, Vinten 1973, *passim*.

munu þá hittast fundir.
Jómfrúin gleður menn allar stundir.⁴⁰

The last line of the prelude functions as a refrain in the ballad. If we straighten this strophe out a bit and drop repetitions, we get a strophe rhymed *abba + a(r)*, which could very well be a stanza from a *vikivakakvæði*, although it is not rhymed in the most common way. The most frequent form of the prelude in Icelandic ballads is a three line strophe; and its most common rhymes are *xaa*, for example:

Svanurinn syngur víða,
alla gleðina fær.
Blómgaður lundurinn í skógi grær.⁴¹

Such a prelude as a whole is then usually, although not always, used as refrain, the first line being inserted in a couplet. If we look at this strophe with the characteristically long and self-contained last line, we note that it has a striking similarity to the latter half plus refrain of a carol strophe of the most common type: *(aa)ab + b(r)*.⁴²

If this hypothesis is accepted, it proves Moe and Steffens correct in so far as it implies that the preludes have their origin in dance-lyrics, while it accepts their critics' case that the preludes were never a characteristic of the ballads nor necessarily very old as such. Another conclusion would follow from it as well: since the preludes are found in Scandinavia outside Iceland, albeit not as frequently, the carol form would also have been known in these countries.

This must, of course, remain hypothetical, although a closer formal analysis of the preludes is possible and may, at some later date, shed more light on the matter.

⁴⁰ ÍF, III, p. 182.

⁴¹ ÍF, IV, p. 97.

⁴² This was suggested to me by a remark by Jón Samsonarson in *Kvæði og dansleikir*, I, p. cxli: "Ef litið er á R-hlutann einan, virðist honum bregða nokkuð til viðlaga og ýmissa kviðlinga."

Rímur

The word *ríma* (pl. *rímur*) has already occurred several times in this book. It is now time to take a closer look at this phenomenon, but space allows only a relatively short description.⁴³

The oldest preserved *ríma*-text is *Ólafs ríma Haraldssonar* by Einar Gilsson in *Flateyjarbók*, written c. 1390–95, but a great number of *rímur*-cycles is preserved in manuscripts from the end of the 15th and first half of the 16th centuries. Since these manuscripts evidently often contain copies of older texts, the written tradition of a large number of *rímur* must go back well into the 15th century. Most of the preserved *rímur* show numerous signs of having been written down as soon as they were composed, but their style is simple, and they do not need to be far removed from oral composition and transmission, even if such composition could, in this case, only have been individually prepared before a performance, not improvised.⁴⁴ Such a method of composition before performance must have been used by the skalds, and could thus have been part of the skaldic inheritance of the oldest *rímur*-poets, but it is also highly probable that such a method was used by the unlettered minstrels of the Northern European countries. It was, however, natural that the *rímur* poets should, very quickly, find it easier to put their efforts on paper when the results satisfied them, since the stories they told were, in most cases, taken from books and were often so long and complicated that they would have been difficult to memorize.

It is very difficult, indeed, to find in the *rímur* any internal evidence for the age of the genre. Einar Gilsson probably composed *Ólafs ríma* in the years 1350–1370.⁴⁵ We have no positive evidence that any *rímur*-cycle is as old or older than this, even if some of them could be. The main characteristics of *rímur*-style and their most popular metre, the *ferskeytt* (square-metre), are, however, fully developed in *Ólafs ríma*, and we must, therefore, conclude that the composing of narrative poetry in rhymed stanzas, probably initially with a simpler style and narrative technique than we now have, could hardly have been begun much later

⁴³ A detailed treatment of the genre is found in Björn K. Þórólfsson's *Rímur fyrir 1600* (1934), to which this chapter is greatly indebted.

⁴⁴ For a description of such methods of composition, see e.g., Finnegan 1977, pp. 73–5.

⁴⁵ Björn K. Þórólfsson 1934, p. 299.

than about 1300. In looking for a possible influence that could have initiated this development, we must think of the late 13th and early 14th centuries; but we must also bear in mind that new metres and new features of style could have been adapted from foreign models all through the 14th and well into the 15th century. Many independent innovations, especially in the stanza forms, must also have taken place during this period.

The post-medieval history of the *rímur*-genre does not concern us here, but the *rímur* proved extremely popular and durable. The metres are still widely used in popular Icelandic poetry, most notably in the so-called *lausavísa* (single stanza). The number of *rímur* composed during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries is enormous. The number of manuscripts indicates their popularity, as does the fact that, throughout the 19th century, they were printed in commercial editions.⁴⁶

The *rímur* are narrative poetry, and the choice of subject matter reflects what kind of stories were most popular with the Icelanders at the time of their composition. As a rule, *rímur* poets did not make up their stories themselves but retold an already existing prose-narrative in verse. It is obvious that the ambitions of the poets did not lie in the field of invention, since only rarely did they add anything of significance to the already existing stories. Their achievements were in the fields of style and versification, and this eventually led to intricacies of style and metre (rhyme-schemes and stanza forms) which frequently make it difficult for modern readers to enjoy the story. However, the oldest *rímur* show respect for good plain narrative. The metres and style are relatively simple, and the stories that interest the poets are more varied and are treated more freely than they were in later *rímur*. There is, in this group, a *rímur* cycle based directly on an eddic lay, i.e., *Þrymlur* (telling the same story as *Þrymskviða*), and another based on a myth told in the Prose-Edda, i.e., *Lokrur*. Moreover, *Völsungs rímur* combine material from *Völsunga saga* and the Poetic Edda. Among the oldest *rímur*, there are some with material from King's Sagas and from a lost Saga of Icelanders. Later, it is almost exclusively the prose romances, viz. *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*, which furnish the *rímur* poets with their material.

⁴⁶ Finnur Sigmundsson 1966 is a valuable catalogue of the corpus. The early *rímur* are edited in *Rímnasafn*, I–II (1905–22), and in *Íslenzkar miðaldarímur*, I–IV (1973–5), but c. 1/3 of the *rímur* older than 1600 are still unpublished.

As a consequence of their reliance on written sagas, the *rímur* are usually quite long. As a rule, each story is told as a cycle of poems, each *ríma* dealing with a part of the story. Among the oldest *rímur*, only two are single poems, *Ólafs ríma*, which is 65 stanzas, and *Skíða ríma*, a travesty of mythological stories in 200 odd stanzas. The latter is probably the only example of a medieval *ríma* where the story is invented by the poet himself.⁴⁷ It is, of course, a striking fact that the only *ríma* found in a 14th century manuscript does not form part of a cycle; yet the great number of *rímur*-cycles, also among the ones likely to be of the oldest layer, indicates that from the beginning of the genre, the poems were generally so long that a division was found practical.

The narrative technique of the old *rímur* is straightforward and rather simple. The flow of events can become quite rapid, but usually there is such a quantity of description that the action seems quite slow. The literary origins are evident in information which is not strictly necessary for the unfolding of the action, though it furnishes a broad and epic-like setting for the story. The narrator usually speaks in the first person at the beginning and end of each *ríma*, where he addresses the audience directly. Apart from that, he does not intrude much in the narrative except in formulaic 'fillers' which most frequently occur in the second line of a stanza. However, there is no attempt at a neutral or impartial narrative, even if a certain *impassibilité* inherited from saga-style may make a *ríma* appear to be rather objective. The partiality of the narrators appears most clearly in the descriptions of heroes and villains, where laudatory and derogatory adjectives are lavishly used, and in occasional direct comments on the action. Because of its base in prose stories, the narrative has a relatively wide scope. This often results in a double thread of narrative, where the narrator has to deal with simultaneous lines of events. This is done simply by saying, e.g.: 'Now we turn back to N.N. where he is fighting the berserks . . .' Descriptions of persons and things in *rímur* may, at times, become more lengthy and detailed than in their prose counterparts. For instance, in what is considered one of the oldest cycles, *Sörla rímur*, there is a description of a ship in 14 stanzas, dealing mainly with the ship's various ornaments. Although the *rímur* poet often retards the action in this way, as a rule he also adds some information in each stanza. Repetitions of stanzas with variations but having approximately the same content, well known

⁴⁷ See Björn K. Þórolfsson 1934, p. 20.

from many kinds of popular poetry, are not used, although of course in the descriptions of battles one blow may be very similar to another.

One of the most remarkable features of the *rímur* is the *mansöngur* or love-song. The poet or singer usually addresses the audience directly at the start of each *ríma*, evoking each time a performance where the singer confronts an audience. The direct contact thus established is then often used by the poet to burst into love-song; i.e., he leaves the story for a while—or delays its beginning if it is the first *ríma*—and speaks about his own feelings, a special love-affair, his general misfortunes in dealing with the other sex (always women, i.e., the poet is a man), or makes some comments on love in general; he may mention famous lovers or refer people to Ovid's book about the art of love. Occasionally a *mansöngur* may consist of comments on the story about to begin or being told, but this is rare in the old *rímur*.

In the 16th century, it had become almost a fixed rule that every *ríma* should start with a *mansöngur*, but in the oldest *rímur* this seems not to have been so. There, some *rímur* cycles seem to have been without *mansöngur*, while in others only the first *ríma*, or maybe two out of five, had one. There were also, at the beginning, great differences in the length of these introductory love-songs; this became somewhat more uniform later on.

The love-song is clearly an integral part of the *ríma*, even if it is outside the narrative. The metre is always the same as in other parts of the *ríma*, and the beginning of the *mansöngur* and its end clearly connect it to the rest of the poem.⁴⁸ This is not to say that the poets could not compose an independent love-song, but in fact all medieval examples of such songs are in metres other than *rímur* metres. As Björn K. Þórólfsson shows, the *rímur* love-songs are clearly derived from a tradition of love poetry originating in the poetry of the troubadours and the *Minnesinger*. Yet, the *rímur* use only a narrow selection of the themes of this poetry. There is, for instance, nothing about nature or the coming of spring. The custom of starting a *ríma* with a *mansöngur* seems to have arisen very early as one can see, because in *Sörla rímur*, usually considered rather old, the author excuses his not composing a love-song, as do some other poets.

⁴⁸ It has been suggested (Rokkjær 1964) that a *mansöngur* in a *rímur*-metre could have existed as a separate poem and been more frequently used in the dance than the narrative, but I have not been able to find any evidence to this effect.

The style of *rímur* is obviously an inheritance from skaldic poetry; it uses the kenning of skaldic poetry with all its mythological references as its main poetic embellishment. The kennings of *rímur* are usually rather simple and frequently betray a faulty knowledge of the mythology they are based on. They seldom come close to the vigour and originality found in skaldic poetry, where the formation of original and complicated kennings seems to have been the primary aim of many poets. In *rímur*, the metaphorical quality of the kenning is nearly lost; instead, it serves as a medium that unites a certain idea or theme and a metrical unit. In this respect, the kenning serves much the same function as the formula in the oral style of epic poets, but while formulaic style is characterized by thrift, the *rímur* poet has to vary his kennings, or he would be found boring and blamed for lack of skill.⁴⁹

It has been customary with scholars to interpret almost all figures of speech in the *rímur* as kenning-style. Recently, however, Davíð Erlingsson has convincingly demonstrated that certain constructions in the *rímur* language are more correctly explained as influenced by German 'geblühmter Stil' than as kennings.⁵⁰ Both types of style are, of course, far removed from the simplicity of most popular poetry, and indicate that the skill of the poet is an individual craft acquired only by training.

The style of the early *rímur* is not nearly as far removed from ordinary speech as the style of skaldic verse, although occasional skaldic verses have a similar style. This is only natural, since the skaldic style would have proved an almost unconquerable difficulty in telling a story that in itself had to attract the attention of the audience. Gradually, however, the *rímur* style was removed from ordinary speech again, not least because of the demands for intricate rhyme-schemes that enforced unnatural word-order and called forth grotesque kennings and other periphrases.

The most characteristic feature of *rímur* is their metres; they are always stanzaic and never use a refrain. Each line of a stanza is connected to another by alliteration and rhyme. The lines of the stanzas are invariably short, and there are never more than four lines. However, there gradually developed a great number of stanza forms with different rhyme-schemes and rhythm. It is impossible to decide definitively which of these forms are derived from other pre-existing *rímur*-metres and

⁴⁹ The thrift of oral formulaic poets is discussed, e.g., in Lord 1973, pp. 50–53.

⁵⁰ Davíð Erlingsson 1974.

which of them should be considered basic. It can be reasonably assumed, though, that there are four basic forms and that the remainder should be considered derivations. The grounds for this assumption are, on the one hand, that these basic forms are found in the oldest *rímur* and, on the other hand, that they all have parallels in European poetry in the 12th, 13th, and 14th centuries.

One of the rules of *rímur* poetry which was soon established was that two adjacent *rímur* in a cycle should not be in the same metre. Among the oldest *rímur* cycles there are, however, quite a few that do not follow this rule. *Ólafs ríma* is in *ferskeytt*-metre, and this is, by far, the most commonly used metre in the *rímur*. Some of the oldest *rímur* use it exclusively (e.g., *Völsungs rímur* which have a good claim to having been composed in the 14th century), and in most cases it is the metre of the first *ríma* of a cycle.

Ferskeytt-metre has alternately four and three stresses in each line and is rhymed abab, as in this stanza from *Ólafs ríma*:

Dögling helt svá dýran heiðr
drottni himna hallar,
engi skýrir örva meiðr
öðlings frægðir allar.⁵¹

The rhymes of the 2nd and 4th line are feminine here, as is the rule in later times but one cycle of *rímur*, the *Sörla rímur*, have a *ferskeytt*-metre where there seems to be a free choice between masculine and feminine rhymes. The reverse is true about the 1st and 3rd lines, which are always masculine, except in *Sörla rímur* where there is free alternation, as these examples show:

Milding átti marga gripi,
mætir voru að sjá,
enginn var þó öðlings skipi
jafn er þar kann fá.

Skorin og steind eru borðin björt,
bitarnir silfri varðir,
en um söxin gulli gjört
og grafnir steinar harðir.

⁵¹ *Rímnasafn*, I, p. 1.

Fjárins auðr ok fagrlig víf
fróm með blóma skrýtt
sitja um það lausa líf,
ljótum harmi er prýtt.⁵²

It is, of course, possible that this irregularity was allowed in the metre from the beginning, but since it is only found in one *rímur* cycle, it could also be interpreted either as influence from some foreign poetry, or as just an idiosyncrasy of the poet.

Another basic stanza form which is among the oldest is *stafhent*, four four-stress lines rhymed aabb; *samhent* is the same metre but rhymed aaaa. The rhymes are always masculine.

Stafhent:

Víkjum nú til Íslands út,
öngu var þar minni sút;
Þorkatla bar þrá fyrir hann
og þýddist öngvan lifandi mann.⁵³

Samhent:

Fram skal setja enn fjórða þátt,
fyrðar hlýði vísu brátt,
Sörli spurði herinn hátt:
“Hver á gylltan dreka við mátt.”⁵⁴

Quite common in old *rímur* is the *skáhent*-metre where the length of the lines is the same as in *ferskeytt*, but where the second stress in the 1st and 3rd lines rhymes with the last stress of the same line (the end syllable), but these lines do not rhyme with each other. The 2nd and the 4th lines, on the other hand, rhyme together. This stanza form could also be described as a ‘tail-rhymed’ stanza in six lines rhymed aabccb, as in this opening stanza from *Friðbjófs rímur*, IV:

Greina skal eg úr góma sal
gildligt ása minni;
ristill hlýði en rímu eg býð
rétt í fjórða sinni.⁵⁵

⁵² *Ibid.*, II, pp. 96, 85.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, I, p. 149.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 99.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, I, p. 434.

The fourth and last of the metres here considered basic is the *úrkast*. Like *ferskeytt*, it is rhymed abab, but the 2nd and 4th lines only have two stresses. The rhymes are either masculine in all the lines or only in the 1st and 3rd lines. This was later systematized as two different stanza forms, but in the old *rímur* the two forms can be found side by side in one *ríma*, e.g., in *Áns rímur*, VI:

Fullar könnur fengu þeir
af Fjölnis gildi;
annar fekk þar mælsku meir
og mjög sem vildi.

Allt var upp með öllu skenkt
að eg kom þar;
kvæða fann eg kvartel eitt
að kastað var.⁵⁶

Apart from these basic forms, the *braghenda*, usually printed in three lines with 6 + 4 + 4 stresses and rhymed aaa, is frequently found in the oldest *rímur*. The most plausible explanation for this form is that it is a cross between *úrkast* and *stafhent*.⁵⁷

Ólafs ríma Haraldssonar was composed by Einar Gilsson, who was a *lögmaðr* and, thus, the highest official in Iceland at that time. Few medieval *rímur* are attributable to specific poets. Among the known authors are people from the richest and most powerful families in the country, probably at least one monk, but also ordinary farmers. Many of the clichés in the introductory love songs indicate that, in the earlier period, the poets were generally or always men; however, we know of women who composed *rímur* in the post-Reformation period. The art of *rímur* was both respected and immensely popular, and the efforts of clergymen like bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson to replace them by religious poetry around 1600 were futile. It was only in the 19th century that educated people started to disapprove of them, but in some rural communities their popularity lasted well into the 20th century.

How did this enduring and popular genre come into being? In spite of certain continuities in style and diction and the preservation of the

⁵⁶ *Íslenzkar miðaldarímur*, II, 1973, p. 145.

⁵⁷ See Verrier 1931–2, III, p. 232, and Vésteinn Ólason 1976, p. 76.

old system of alliteration, this poetry looks and sounds very different from the eddic and the skaldic poetry, and people have, naturally, looked for foreign influence to explain this fundamental change in poetic taste and practice.

In the late 19th century, one can find some remarks made by scholars explaining *rímur* metres as having grown out of the skaldic metrical system. These ideas were rather mechanistic and are probably no longer accepted by anyone.⁵⁸ At approximately the same time, there were put forward two theories on the origin of the *rímur* which are still worth discussing.

In *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, Guðbrandur Vigfússon has this to say about the origin of *rímur*, and in particular about the oldest metre:

Besides the 'danz' songs, there is another type of poem, which was adapted by Icelandic poets under the influence of French models. This is the 'Ríma', the very name of which points to its foreign origin.

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There are many varieties of metre employed in *Rímur*. The early and original one is commonly called 'square verse,' 'fer-skeytt-visa,' from the alternate rhyme, the model being the well-known mediæval hymn-measure used, for example, in —

'Mihi est propositum: in taberna mori
Vinum sit appositum: morientis ori,' etc.⁵⁹

The French models referred to must, of course, be French narrative poetry, *chansons de geste* and courtly romances, but we cannot be certain that the influence mentioned is thought of as being direct; in the same context, individual *rímur* are spoken of as 'fyttes', which of course is a word used to designate a similar phenomenon in English metrical romances.

Later, the literary historians Finnur Jónsson and E. Mogk subscribe to Guðbrandur's ideas, at least as far as the metre is concerned. They both point out that the Latin hymn-metre mentioned by Guðbrandur Vigfússon was known and used in Icelandic, in the *officia* of the saintly bishops Jón and Þorlákr. Mogk then combines this with the fact that

⁵⁸ See Wisén 1881, p. v, and Jón Þorkelsson 1888, p. 124.

⁵⁹ *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* 1883, II, pp. 392–3.

the oldest *ríma* is about the saintly king Ólafr of Norway and suggests that the oldest *rímur* were hymns about Icelandic and Norwegian saints.⁶⁰ This idea is not supported by the character of *Ólafs ríma* which is mainly concerned with the military aspect of the battle of Stiklarstaðir, where Ólafr was killed, although it also praises his saintly qualities.

Although Guðbrandur Vigfússon's ideas have occasionally been mentioned and even supported by later scholars,⁶¹ they have, for more than half a century, been largely overshadowed by another theory to the effect that the foreign influence behind the *rímur* was the popular ballad. Already in the late 19th century, Norwegian and Danish scholars had come upon the idea that *ferskeytt*-metre was formed by adding alliteration and rhyme to the ballad quatrain, while *stafhent*-metre was formed by the joining of two ballad couplets.⁶² This idea was taken up and argued in detail by several scholars, among them Erik Noreen and Björn K. Þórólfsson. Noreen has this to say about the development:

Om balladformen nu kommer till Island och där börjar på att användas, så är det synnerligen naturligt att den apteras efter isländsk formkänsla. För de formdyrkande islänningarna med deras yppiga och utbredda litterära kultur kan den enkla balladformen antas ha förefallit alltför konstlös. Den utvecklas alltså i riktning mot större konstfullhet: stavelseantalet blir regelbundnare, rim införes i alla fyra verserna — och detta blir då med nödvändighet [??] korsvis rimning, — alliteration i enlighet med de vanliga isländska reglerna införes, och även stilistiskt ses påverkan från äldre isländsk poesi, särskilt genom kenningbruket.⁶³

Sigurður Nordal, who wrote at approximately the same time, seems hesitant to believe in such great age for the epic ballad as would be necessary for this theory, but prefers to think that the first dance-lyrics were models for the form.⁶⁴

In its most coherent form, this theory of the origins of *rímur* is put forward in Björn K. Þórólfsson's work on *rímur*, where he divides the

⁶⁰ See Mogk 1904, pp. 722–3, and Finnur Jónsson 1920–24, III, pp. 26–7.

⁶¹ See Lehmann 1936–7, p. 58, Jón Helgason 1953, p. 168, and Toldberg 1958, p. 34.

⁶² See Storm 1874, pp. 213–14, Rosenberg 1878–85, II, p. 544.

⁶³ Noreen 1923, pp. 58–9.

⁶⁴ Sigurður Nordal 1924, p. xviii.

formative influence on *rímur* between skaldic poetry and the ballad. His conclusions are as follows:

Þegar frásögudansar tóku að berast til Íslands, hefur dróttkvæðagerð eftir sögum staðið í blóma. Hinir nýju dansar munu framan af hafa átt örðugt með að ná vinsældum Íslendinga; fornar bragreglur voru mönnum svo kærar, að þeim hefur lítt getist að kvæðum án stuðla og höfuðstafa og með ófullkomnum samrímunum. Hinsvegar vildu menn gjarnan kvæði, sem hægt væri að dansa eftir, og nú tók sú stefna að ryðja sjer til rúms, að ljóð skyldu vera sönghæf, en ekki, eins og forni skáldskapurinn, gerð til þess að segja fram. Þessi stefna varð, sem kunnugt er, ofan á í helgikvæðagerð; menn fóru að yrkja helgikvæðin undir aðkomnum söngháttum. Nú voru frásögudansarnir um lík efni og innlend sögukvæði; einkanlega á þetta heima um norska dansa, því að þeir eru langflestir út af sögum og sögnum. Hinn ferkvæði háttur frásögudansanna var auðveldur viðfangs, hægra að yrkja löng kvæði undir honum en háttum dróttkvæðanna. Hjer var því farinn sá merkilegi meðalvegur á milli dróttkvæðagerðar og erlendrars dansagerðar, að tekið var að yrkja sögukvæðin, sem áður voru kveðin fornum innlendum háttum, undir dansahætti, en erlendi hátturinn stuðlaður eftir íslenskum bragreglum. Og skáldmáli dróttkvæðanna var haldið.⁶⁵

(When narrative dance-songs (i.e., ballads) began to appear in Iceland, the making of skaldic poems on the basis of sagas must have been flowering. The new dance-songs will, in the beginning, have had difficulty in gaining popularity among Icelanders; people had been so fond of the old rules of versification that they would have been antagonistic towards poetry having no fixed alliteration and with incomplete rhymes. On the other hand, there was demand for poetry that could be danced to, and so the custom gained ground that poems should be singable, but not, like the old poetry, composed for recital. As is known, this is what happened in the field of religious poetry; people started to compose religious songs in foreign metres. Now, the ballads treated similar subjects as indigenous narrative poems; this was above all the case with Norwegian ballads, because most of them are based on sagas or legends. The ballad quatrain was an easy measure, better fitted for long narrative

⁶⁵ Björn K. Þórolfsson 1934, pp. 45–6.

poems than the skaldic metres. Thus, people found this remarkable compromise between skaldic poetry and foreign balladry, i.e., to compose in ballad metre but with alliteration according to Icelandic rules such narrative poems as had previously been composed in old native metres, and they retained the diction of skaldic poetry.)

Since Björn K. Þórólfsson's book appeared, his conclusions have hardly been questioned until recently, although attention has been drawn to facts that tend to strengthen Guðbrandur Vigfússon's arguments. In the Introduction to his anthology of *rímur*, Sir William A. Craigie states that

in the copious ballad-literature of Denmark, Norway, and England the only ballad-sequence of the same type as the *rímur* is the English (*Lytell*, or *Mery*) *Geste of Robyn Hode* of the fifteenth century . . .⁶⁶

He then mentions that the structural characteristics common to *rímur* and the *Geste* are found in some of the English metrical romances. He also points out several minor similarities between the genres. Nevertheless, he seems to accept, without reservation, the theory that the *rímur* metres, as well as the genre as a whole, originated in the ballad, considering the similarities of *rímur* and metrical romances either as a coincidence or as a result of later influence:

Whether the *rímur*-poets were conscious of it or not, they had now added to Icelandic poetry something which it had previously lacked and which had already been created in some of the neighbouring countries, viz. the long narrative poem in a fairly easy metre. In France the *chansons de geste* had been produced in profusion from the twelfth century onwards; in Germany long poems on national and foreign subjects had their beginnings about the same time, and England had a large number of metrical romances (both rhyming and alliterative) composed towards the close of the thirteenth century and throughout the fourteenth. The existence of the French *chansons* was well known in Iceland through the translations of a number of them which were made in Norway at the instance of King Hákon from about 1225 onwards. Apparently the copies of these did not come directly from France but from Norman Eng-

⁶⁶ *Sýnisbók íslenskra rímna* 1952, I, p. 285.

land, and some knowledge of the English romances (which in several respects more closely resemble the *rímur*) might easily have been acquired at a later date. It is also improbable that the compiler of *Piðrikssaga*, who knew the separate Low German poems on which this was based, should have been ignorant of the longer epics on similar themes.

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That the difficulty of finding suitable form of verse for narrative poetry could be solved by the use of the *rímur*-metres was a real discovery on the part of the Icelandic poets, and was evidently made without being suggested by any foreign model.⁶⁷

As Craigie indicates, *rímur* are in fact the same kind of poetry as the metrical romances. We must therefore ask: Can all their characteristics be traced to direct influences of the metrical romances of other countries? Was such an influence possible or likely at the time the *rímur* were taking form? Is the popular ballad a necessary or even likely intermediary in the formation of *rímur*?

The narratives of the *rímur* and their narrative technique are in most, if not all, ways so evidently more closely related to the romance than to the ballad that it should need no detailed demonstration. However, this fact does not furnish us with any decisive proof of the origin of *rímur* since they are, as we have already seen, frequently based on prose romances, and this can have influenced their plot construction and narrative technique. Let us, therefore, leave this aside for the moment and turn to the most characteristic features of *rímur*, their metres and their introductions, the *mansöngvar*. Can these features possibly be explained as direct influence from metrical romances? Are there any parallels?

In an article published in 1976, I demonstrated that all the basic stanza forms of *rímur* mentioned above existed and were used in European poetry in the 12th and 13th centuries, and in some cases even earlier, in secular and religious poetry in Latin as well as in the vernacular.⁶⁸ There is no reason to repeat this demonstration, but what has to be looked at here in more detail is the use of these metres in metrical romances. The *rímur* poets' preference for heavily rhymed stanzaic

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, I, p. 284.

⁶⁸ Vésteinn Ólason 1976, pp. 70–76.

forms for narrative purposes is by no means such an exclusively Icelandic tendency as Craigie seems to believe.

Rhymed stanzas with short lines are originally lyrical forms. And, the basic stanza forms of *rímur* are only examples of an almost endless variety of stanza forms and rhyme-schemes found in the poetry of troubadours, trouvères, *Minnesinger*, and their successors, as well as in hymns and religious and secular lyrics in Latin. It is not impossible that some of the original *rímur* metres were borrowed directly from lyrical poetry by the *rímur* poets themselves. The *mansöngvar* of *rímur* provide irrefutable evidence that the love lyrics of the high Middle Ages were known to these poets. However, rhyme is also used in medieval narrative verse, the most frequently used metre being the octosyllabic couplet rhymed aa. This is indeed the same metre as *stafhent*, although the first unstressed syllable of the (originally?) French metre is more often than not dropped in Icelandic verse in accordance with a general preference for trochaic rhythm more natural than iambic rhythm for the Icelandic language, where the first syllable of a word is always stressed. The joining of two couplets into a four line stanza is known in lyrical as well as narrative poetry elsewhere, and the *rímur* poets seem to have preferred stanzaic forms from the beginning.

The division into stanzas must have been connected to the delivery of the poetry by singing or chanting. In the Icelandic tradition of *rímur*-chanting, the end of a stanza is always clearly marked, and there is no reason to believe that this is the result of a late development. If the *stafhent* metre had been a result of the joining of two ballad couplets, leaving the inserted refrain out would have presented a difficulty in adapting the melody. The inserted refrain is almost invariably found in Scandinavian couplet ballads, but never in the *rímur*. Consequently, the *rímur* are metrically much closer to the couplet as it is used in the metrical romances.

Since the *ferskeytt* is the oldest and most important of the *rímur* metres, it particularly needs to be accounted for. Its rhythm is the same as that of the ballad-quatrain and, therefore, also the same as in the *Geste* of Robin Hood. There is the difference, however, that, while the ending of the 2nd and 4th lines in *rímur* is almost always feminine, a masculine ending is dominant in the ballads and in the *Geste*.⁶⁹ The

⁶⁹ As demonstrated by Widmark 1970, feminine rhymes are frequent in heroic ballads of West-Nordic origin.

basic scheme with cross-rhyme is frequently found in lyric poetry, in hymns as well as secular lyrics, in Latin as well as the vernacular.⁷⁰

The use of rhymed stanzas of lyrical character in narrative poetry is found outside Iceland and at an earlier time. W. P. Ker has pointed out that such a use is not infrequent in English metrical romances as early as c. 1300. In *Sir Beues of Hampton*, e.g., which is composed about 1300, the the tail-rhyme stanza, or *rime couée* is used.⁷¹ This stanza form was so popular with the minstrels of the 14th century that Chaucer used it in his parody of popular romances in the *Canterbury Tales*.

At approximately the same time as the tail-rhyme stanza becomes popular, other heavily rhymed stanza forms appear in English narrative poetry; *Sir Tristrem*, thought to be from c. 1300, has cross-rhyme but its stanza form is more complicated than the quatrain.⁷² There is a number of poems in cross-rhymed quatrain with four stresses in each line from the 14th and 15th centuries. The one which is probably oldest is a short narrative poem from about 1300, *Als y yod on ay Mounday*, but the same metre occurs in the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, in *Appolonius of Tyre*, in one version of *Partonope de Blois*, in *The Knight of Curtesy and the Fair Lady*, and in the *Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoun*.⁷³ This last poem was, in the form it now has, composed in the period 1400–1430 but probably stems in part from the 14th century. It is interesting to note that it is divided into *fits*, has a prologue reminiscent of a *mansöngur*, and uses beginning and ending formulas similar to those found in *rimur*. As an example of this, one can take the first and last stanza of the 1st *fit*:

Lystyns, lordyngs, bothe grete & smale,
And takis gude tente what j will saye:

⁷⁰ See, e.g., *Analecta hymnica* 1886–1922, I, p. 96, III, pp. 35ff; *Carmina Burana* 1904, p. 124, p. 191. Other examples are quoted in Vésteinn Ólason 1976, pp. 73 and 86.

⁷¹ *Cambridge History of English Literature*, I (1932), pp. 290–91; *Beues of Hamtoun* 1885–94.

⁷² *Die Nordische und Englische Version der Tristan-Sage*, II, *Sir Tristrem* (1882).

⁷³ All these works are described and discussed briefly in Severs 1967; for further reference see the bibliography. Emily B. Lyle, who has written about *Als y yod* and *Thomas of Erceldoune*, thinks that both these poems are based on older oral poems which she considers to be more like the ballads than the romances; see Lyle 1970 and 1976.

I sall yow telle als trewe a tale,
 Als euer was herde by nyghte or daye.

— — —
 ‘ffare wele, Thomas, j wend my waye,
 fforme by-houys ouerthir benttis browne.’
 loo here a fytt more es to saye,
 All of Thomas of Erselldowne.⁷⁴

Although cross-rhyme occurs most frequently in a metre with four stresses throughout, it is also found in a metre with 4 + 3 stresses, i.e., exactly as in *ferskeytt* metre. In the so-called Ashmole version of the Charlemagne romance *Sir Ferumbras* (translated from the French *Fierabras*) from c. 1380, the first 3410 long-lines (equals 1705 quatrains) are in this metre, but then the metre turns into tail-rhyme.⁷⁵ In the cross-rhymed part, the rhyme at the end of the long-line seems to be feminine more often than masculine, if the editor is right that “as a rule the final e is pronounced.”^{76a} This poem seems not to be divided into stanzas, but one must think it likely that its metrical model was a quatrain with 4 + 3 stresses. A few lines from the poem suffice to demonstrate the exact parallelism in metre between this poem and *rimur* in *ferskeytt*, despite the fact that there is a somewhat greater frequency of unstressed syllables in the English poem and that more lines are iambic. To make the process of comparison easier, each long-line from the edition is printed as two lines here; and this procedure is, in fact, justified by the words of the editor, who in his preface talks about the poem as “for the most part written in short alternately rhyming lines.”

Now by-gynt a strong batayl
 be-twene þis knightes twayne;
 ayþer gan oþer harde assayl
 boþe wyþ myght & mayne.
 Pey hewe to-gadre wyþ swerdes dent,
 faste with boþen hondes,
 Of helmes & sheldes þat fyr out went
 so sparkes dop of brondes.^{76b}

⁷⁴ *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoun*, pp. 1, 16.

⁷⁵ *The English Charlemagne Romances*, I, *Sir Ferumbras*.

^{76a} *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

^{76b} *Ibid.*, p. xviii, and ll. 602–6.

In another *Fierabras*-translation, *The Sowdon of Babylon*, the same metre occurs irregularly.⁷⁷

These *Fierabras*-translations are, of course, too young to have served as models for the very first *rímur*, but there could well have been earlier instances of a similar type. In any case, we have seen that the use of cross-rhymed quatrains in narrative poems was no rarity in English poetry of the 14th century.

The *skáhent*-metre has a number of parallels in French as well as Middle English poetry. The internal rhyme of the 1st and 3rd lines has sometimes been attributed to the influence of the skaldic metre *hryn-hent*,⁷⁸ but it differs strikingly from the internal rhymes of this metre, because in *skáhent*-metre each line ends on a stressed syllable, and there is a pause after the rhyming syllable in the second stress. This shows that the stanza form is most accurately described as a six line tail-rhymed stanza or a *strophe couée* with two stress lines in the couplets but three stresses in the 3rd and the 6th lines. The tail-rhymed stanza is of course one of the most popular stanza forms in Middle English metrical romances, but there the couplet lines are always longer, most frequently four stresses or more and only occasionally three stresses.

However, the *strophe couée* with two stress lines in the couplets is an older form and is more frequently found in lyric genres. A. Jeanroy has this to say about its oldest form:

... les vers 1–2, 4–5 ne sont pas sur les memes rimes; ... ils sont sensiblement plus court que le vers 3 et 6; ils ont ordinairement trois ou quatre syllabes, et les autres sept ou huit. Voici le premier couplet d'une des pièces les plus anciennes qui nous offrent cette forme:

Tot a estru,
vei, Marcabru
que comjat voletz demandar.

⁷⁷ The metre of this version is described in this way in Severs 1967, pp. 82–3: "Predominantly four-stress and riming ordinarily abab. Number of verses, sometimes in considerable passages, contain but three stresses; when these verses occur as b lines they make the stanzas approach the regular 'ballad stanza'."

⁷⁸ See Björn K. Þórólfsson 1934, p. 54, Finnur Jónsson 1920–24, III, p. 27, Stefán Einarsson 1949, p. 118, and Craigie in *Sýnisbók íslenzkra rímna*, I, p. lvi.

Del mal partir
 non ai corsir,
 tan sabetz mesura esgardar.⁷⁹

The same stanza form, with the same number of stresses and the same rhyme-scheme, is frequently found in English carols, the oldest of them from the 14th century; see, for example, Greene no. 271, which, incidentally, has a burden in a cross-rhymed quatrain:

Luueli ter of loueli eyghe,
 Qui dostu me so wo?
 Sorful ter of sorful eyghe,
 Thou brekst myn herte a-to.

Thou sikest sore;
 Thi sorwe is more
 Than mannis muth may telle;
 Thou singest of sorwe,
 Manken to borwe
 Out of the pit of helle.⁸⁰

The religious theme of this poem reminds us that the metre is frequently used in religious poetry in Latin, and that it can be seen as one of the forms of the sequence.⁸¹ In medieval Icelandic religious poetry, there are some instances of the *strophe couée* with a slightly different rhythm.⁸²

In English poetry, this stanza is found outside the carols; the best known poem in exactly the same metre as the *skáhent*-metre is probably *The Notbrowne Mayde*, which was printed in 1502 and probably composed late in the 15th century.⁸³ The metre seems to crop up occasionally in ballads and the significance of this will be discussed below.

The only remaining basic metrical form of *rímur* is the *úrkast*. As I

⁷⁹ Jeanroy 1925, p. 365.

⁸⁰ Greene 1977, p. 170.

⁸¹ See Norberg 1958, pp. 174–5.

⁸² See, e.g., *Íslenzk miðaldakvæði*, I:2, p. 144ff, 207ff, II, 342ff.

⁸³ *Remains of the Early Popular Poetry of England*, II, p. 271ff; a discussion of the metre and parallels found elsewhere is found in Moore 1951; see also Vésteinn Ólason 1976, pp. 74–5, and Verrier 1931–2, II, pp. 224–6, III, p. 59.

have demonstrated elsewhere, the metre itself, even with cross-rhyme, is old in lyric poetry.⁸⁴ However, I have not been able to find it used elsewhere in medieval narrative poetry, and this may indeed be the *rímur*-metre most likely to have been influenced by a ballad metre. In a few Icelandic and Danish ballads, e.g., *Tristrams kvæði* and the Danish *Aage og Else* (DGF 90), which has central motifs in common with an eddic lay, the quatrain has the same rhythm as the *úrkast*-metre. The quatrain is here rhymed xaya as always in the ballads. This metre is never found throughout a Faroese ballad, but single stanzas sometimes conform to it, not least in the Sigurd-ballads, which must be assumed to be rather old. An example of *úrkast* is given above; it can be compared to these stanzas from *Tristrams kvæði* and *Aage og Else*:

Tristram bjó til sendimenn
með skeiður þrjár:
“Segið henni björtu Ísodd
eg sé sár.”⁸⁵

Op staar stalten Else-lille
med taare paa kind;
saa lucker hun den døde mand
i buret ind.⁸⁶

A quick survey of the oldest *rímur*-metres, the ones here considered as basic, has shown that they are all known in lyric poetry at the time of and, indeed, long before the formation of *rímur*. The most common *rímur*-metres, *ferskeytt* and *stafhent*, also have parallels in narrative poetry. Moreover, the *rímur* poets' general use of rhymed stanzas is paralleled in many of the 14th century English romances. This raises the question whether it is possible to explain all the parallels between *rímur* and Middle English metrical romances as a result of English influence on the first *rímur* poets.

One of the most peculiar features of *rímur* is, without doubt, the prologue, the *mansöngur*. The style of these love songs and their treatment of erotic themes, especially the idea of the poet as the servant of women,

⁸⁴ See Vésteinn Ólason 1976, pp. 75–6, and Verrier 1931–2, II, pp. 269–275, III, pp. 227–35.

⁸⁵ ÍF, I, p. 138.

⁸⁶ DGF, II, p. 495.

show that this poetry is a descendant of the love-lyrics of the troubadours and the *Minnesinger*. Although a ballad occasionally begins with a lyrical stanza not related to the theme of the ballad itself, or only related to it in a general way, it never discusses the feelings of an individual poet in a similar way to that of *mansöngur*. These ballad preludes often contain images from nature or of people dancing in the open which have parallels in the love-lyrics of the high Middle Ages. But similar themes and images are never used by the *rímur* poets, who limit themselves to a discussion of feelings, the persons that evoke them, and abstract generalities about love, old age, etc.

Although we cannot, outside *rímur*, find a tradition of narrative poetry beginning with a love-lyric, it is nevertheless not uncommon in medieval romance that the poet addresses the audience directly in the opening stanzas of his poem, or even at the beginning of sections, to discuss his story or something vaguely related to it. In the German courtly epos, personal introductions are certainly known, although they seem to be exceptional. In one case, Wolfram's *Parzival*, there is quite a long prologue to the first 'book', and, in the third book, there is a prologue of 23 lines where there is a discussion of womanhood in general terms strikingly reminiscent of a *mansöngur*, even though it hardly qualifies as a love song. It begins like this:

Ez machet truric mir den lip,
daz also mangiu heizet wip.
ir stimme sint geliche hel:
genuoge sint gein valsche snel,
etsliche valsches lære:
sus teilent sich diu mære.
daz die geliche sint genamet.
wipheit, din ordenlicher site,
dem vert und fuor ie triuwe mite.⁸⁷

Similarly, one can find, in Middle English romances, several instances where the poet or minstrel addresses his audience at the beginning of a poem or of a *fit*, and then uses the opportunity to discuss something of general interest. This is, for instance, done in several of the Breton lays; but there the content of these prologues is religious and not very similar to what is found in the *rímur*. It is, however, easy to envisage that the

⁸⁷ *Wolfram's von Eschenbach Parzival und Titurel*, I, pp. 126–7.

expected audience of a poem, or eventually its readers, could influence the choice of subject matter. At the beginning of the second *fit* of Chaucer's *Sir Thopas*, there is a short address which, despite its brevity, contains some *mansöngur* elements:

Now holde youre mouth, par charitee,
Bothe knyght and lady free,
And herkneth to my spelle;
Of bataille and of chivalry,
And of ladyes love-drury
Anon I wol yow telle.

Men speken of romances of prys,
Of Horn child and of Ypotys,
Of Beves and sir Gy,
Of sir Lybeux and Pleyndamour, —
But sir Thopas, he bereth the flour
Of roial chivalry!⁸⁸

Now, Chaucer's romance about Sir Thopas is a parody, and for this reason, it can be taken for granted that comments of this kind were common phenomena in popular romances. The *rímur* poets tend to be more courteous in their address than Chaucer is here, but they certainly also ask their audience to listen:

Gomlis feng skal eg gumnum tjá
greina fram af skjóma,
höldar bið eg að hlýði á
hljóða rödd og góma.⁸⁹

And, they also mention that they are going to sing of great deeds:

Þar skal fríðust Frosta skeiðin
fljóta enn,
ýta fram á orða leið
um afreks menn.⁹⁰

The enumeration of famous figures, as in Chaucer's second strophe, is

⁸⁸ Chaucer: *Canterbury Tales* 1958, p. 388.

⁸⁹ *Rimnasafn*, I, p. 411.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, II, p. 5.

also frequently found in *rímur*,⁹¹ although the reason is usually that they remind the poet of his own destiny rather than that of his protagonist. Occasionally, however, the *mansöngur* is a real prologue to the *ríma* itself, and when this is so there may be occasion to discuss the fate of people comparable to the hero of the narrative. This is done in the *mansöngur* of a 16th century *ríma* about the battle of Roncevaux where the poet speaks of people who have lost their lives for their religion and how they obtain their reward in heaven.⁹²

The most likely explanation of the *mansöngur* is that the early *rímur* poets were familiar with a tradition of minstrelsy where it was customary, or at least not unusual, to begin a poem and, occasionally, some of its later sections with an introduction or prologue of this kind. Such a tradition would almost certainly have been either English or German, possibly both. When we take into account, however, that most of the other characteristics of *rímur* seem to have closer parallels to English metrical romance than to the German, we must conclude that Middle English metrical romance is the most likely source of influence for *rímur*.

Although we have pointed to a number of similarities between Middle English metrical romances and the Icelandic *rímur*, we have not been able to produce an example of direct transference or borrowing from a specific poem; and, in spite of the similarities, there are also some important differences. We must, therefore, ask: What kinds of romance were there in English about 1300 or in the early 14th century, and in what way could they have influenced Icelandic poets?

The concept 'metrical romance' is a wide one and the extant examples display great differences; there are romances with a strong courtly and learned flavour and others which are obviously addressed to popular audiences and often no doubt composed and transmitted by people of little learning.

English scholars seem to agree that a number of romances in English have been lost, and this is also very likely. In *The Lost Literature of Medieval England*, R. M. Wilson says about the romances on the so-called Matter of England: "Some half-dozen of these are still extant, but there are references to a much greater number which have since

⁹¹ See Björn K. Þórolfsson 1934, pp. 263–5.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 277–8.

been lost.”⁹³ On the other hand, he thinks that “on the whole it is unlikely that many of the romances of the three traditional Matters have been lost.”⁹³ Nevertheless, it is certain that there were more poems of this kind than those preserved, and at least one of them was known by Norwegians or Icelanders, viz. the lost English poem which is supposed to have been the source for the *Þáttur af Ólífu ok Landrési* in *Karlamagnús saga*. It is thought to have been “among the very earliest of romances in English and was much older than the surviving English Charlemagne romances.”⁹⁴ (One wonders if it was in the same metre as the later *Fierabras* romances, but this is of course fruitless speculation.)

One must suppose that both the Matter of England and the other Matters were often treated by minstrels in romances that were not written, and such romances must, of course, have varied in length and style. No doubt, they were often more similar to popular ballads than the translations from French made at a desk ever could be. It is very likely that whatever medieval poetry existed about Robin Hood and other popular heroes was of a kind that would be most correctly called popular romance. (Some scholars speak of ‘yeoman minstrelsy’.) That such poetry existed in England not later than the time we find the earliest *rímur* is witnessed by this well-known line from Langland’s *Piers Plowman*:

Ich can rymes of robyn hode and of Randolf, erl of chestre⁹⁵

Here, the word *rhyme* is used about narrative poems in what, no doubt by accident, is a perfectly correct half stanza in *ferskeytt*-metre with even the alliteration in accordance with Icelandic rules! Could such *rhymes* have been what influenced the first poets of *rímur*?

The poetry about Robin Hood is usually designated as ballads. These ballads are, however, in many ways atypical; and they have been called minstrel ballads or even romances. Nevertheless, they are, with one exception, rather short and much closer to ballads than romances in their narrative structure. The exception is the *Geste of Robin Hode*, which has exactly the same kind of narrative structure as a *rímur* cycle, and, besides, uses some formulas reminiscent of formulas found in *rímur*, as Craigie has pointed out. The other poems, which are more correctly called ballads, are written down from oral tradition, some of

⁹³ p. 112.

⁹⁴ Severs 1967, p. 81.

⁹⁵ Langland 1873, p. 121 (C-text, Passus VIII, l. 11).

them very late, and it is quite natural that they have been influenced by ballad style and structure.

The metre of the Robin Hood ballads is the ballad quatrain with rhyme xaya and 4 + 3 stresses in each half. But when we look closely at the oldest of them, several peculiarities meet the eye which indicate that the preserved poems may have been derived from poems in more intricate stanza forms, similar to the old *rímur* metres. In *Robin Hood and the Potter*, found in a manuscript from c. 1500, cross rhyme is found in about 20% of the stanzas.⁹⁶ Considering the likelihood that the poem was transmitted orally, possibly for more than a hundred years, and, moreover, considering the popularity of the ballad quatrain as witnessed by the *Geste*, it seems probable that *Robin Hood and the Potter* preserves remains of a 'rhyme' of Robin Hood in cross-rhymed quatrains. We have already noticed the popularity of the cross-rhyme in a number of romances from the 14th century.

In *Robin Hood's Death*, which is preserved in the Percy manuscript of ballads and is considered to be one of the oldest Robin Hood ballads,⁹⁷ there is quite a lot of internal rhyme of the same kind as in the *skáhent* metre, although it is sometimes only an assonance. There are seven lines in the poem with faultless rhymes of this kind and many more either with assonance rhyme or with lines where it is possible to restore such a rhyme with insignificant changes. The following stanza comes close to being in a correct *skáhent* metre, although the assonance in the first line would have been considered a poor show by a *rímur* poet. The rhyme in the b-lines is masculine, and this makes the rhythm differ somewhat from the usual *skáhent*:

I haue upon a gowne of greene,
Is cut short by my knee,
And in my *hand* a bright browne *brand*,
That will well bite of thee.⁹⁸

As early as 1429, there crops up in a manuscript a line from some poem about Robin Hood which seems to have been in this metre: "Robin Hood in Barnesdale stood." It was well known and is often quoted later.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Child 121, in Child, III, pp. 108–115.

⁹⁷ Child 120, in Child, III, pp. 102–107; see also p. 42.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, III, p. 105.

⁹⁹ Dobson and Taylor 1976, p. 3.

Quatrains rhymed aabb have also been used in poetry about Robin Hood. In a Scottish chronicle (Andrew of Wyntoun) from the beginning of the 15th century, there is a stanza in what would have been called *stafhent* metre in Iceland:

Litil Johun and Robert Hude
Waythmen war commendit gud,
In Ingilwode and Bernysdale
Thai oyssit all this tyme thar trawale.¹⁰⁰

Poetry in the same metre is, as a matter of fact, also found in the play of *Robin Hood and the Sheriff* from 1475.¹⁰¹

These parallels with Robin Hood poetry have not been quoted here in order to maintain that Robin Hood poems were known in Iceland, but to support a hypothesis that the basic *rímur* metres were used in English popular romance in the 14th century. Such popular romance is the most likely source of influence on early Icelandic *rímur* poets. How could it have reached their ears?

Foreign influence is, of course, a decisive factor in the development of Icelandic literature from its very beginning. Without it, there would have been no tradition of written literature. It is obvious that in the beginning, i.e., in the 12th and the 13th centuries, this influence was brought to the country by the church or by people who got their education through the church. Such influence was carried mainly through the medium of the written word, sometimes perused in solitude, at other times read to a number of people. Cultural influence of a more popular kind, when people learn new dances and games, new kinds of dance-lyrics, ballads, or popular narrative poetry, must be supposed to need a broader cultural contact than that which is established when a student or a scholar goes abroad, or when a country is visited by an envoy of the church. During the 13th century and, indeed, to the end of the Middle Ages, the towns of Norway were the places where Icelanders met the outside world. Bergen in particular played a role for Icelandic cultural life similar to that Copenhagen had after the Reformation. No doubt, Icelanders often visited more distant places: Britain, Germany and even southern Europe; but such travels frequently were begun and

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 203–7.

ended in Bergen, or Trondheim. In these towns, Icelanders stayed often and for prolonged periods so that they must have been thoroughly familiar with what was going on there.

As we have seen, the English influence we have detected in *rímur* must have been exerted during the 14th or even during the 13th century. This fits in very well with what we know about English presence in Norway in the Middle Ages. During the reign of King Hákon the Old and his son Magnús in the 13th century, there was a very close connection between England and Norway, diplomatically as well as commercially. Envoys went between the courts; there was constant contact between the churches; and there was a lively commercial traffic, conducted by both nations. This trade was often in the hands of well educated people of aristocratic families. A number of Norwegians were permanently living in English towns, such as Grimsby and Lynn, and both there and in Bergen there must have been many people who had good command of both English and Norse. The cultural interest of the Norwegian kings of this period is well known, and it is most concretely shown in the great number of prose romances which were translated into Norse during the 13th century, including all the three Matters of the romance. It is an accepted fact that the majority of these romances were translated from Anglo-Norman French and, in some cases, from English. It is, therefore, quite natural to assume that the art of the minstrels who composed and performed metrical romances of a popular kind was well known in Bergen.¹⁰²

From 1290, there was a break in the diplomatic relations between England and Norway, but trade continued and was of considerable importance during the first decade of the 14th century. From then on, it seems to have diminished because of the strong position of the Hansa union in Norwegian trade. Some trade continued, however, between the two countries for most of the century until about 1400 when it was completely broken off.¹⁰³ Even if diplomatic relations worsened about 1290, it seems natural to assume that the cultural contacts which had been formed by then continued to function to some extent while trade went on.

In Bergen, Icelanders were also bound to come into contact with people from the Shetlands and Orkneys, places which traditionally had

¹⁰² The main source for this paragraph is Leach 1921.

¹⁰³ See Leach 1921, pp. 36–72, Holmsen 1961, p. 364ff, Schreiner 1966, p. 204.

a great deal of contact with Scotland. They undoubtedly played some part as cultural intermediaries between Britain and Norway.

The possibilities of British cultural influence in Bergen have been stressed here, but it is obvious that, in the 13th and 14th centuries, there was no less, and, as time passed, even more, possibility for German influence; and there is no doubt that this influence was also strong in Icelandic poetry throughout the Middle Ages, although it is less felt in *rímur* than influence from Britain. It must be kept in mind, however, that cultural influence mediated through a commercial centre like Bergen is not likely to have distinct national characteristics.

Rímur and Heroic Ballads

If the metrical romances of Britain and, to a lesser extent, of Germany, had such a profound influence on the Icelanders that the much cherished and highly developed art of story telling changed its character in a fundamental way, one is bound to ask whether this literature left any visible traces in the culture of the Norwegians. This is indeed very likely, although it is understandable that Iceland, with its strong literary tradition, was better prepared to turn such influence to its own advantage. Now, we have postulated oral performance of metrical romances and other poetry as the main source of this influence, and we cannot conclude that the Norwegian poetry which might have arisen from it was necessarily written down, even though this soon became the method used by the Icelanders. It is a fact that there are no Norwegian metrical romances written down in the Middle Ages, and therefore the place to look for their influence is in the oral poetry recorded in later times.

Scandinavian scholars usually agree to classify all narrative oral poetry which is supposed to stem from the Middle Ages as ballads. Nevertheless, it is generally acknowledged that the heroic ballads of West-Nordic origin form a special branch of Scandinavian ballads, with structural and thematic characteristics that separate them from the main bulk of European ballads to which a great majority of Scandinavian ballads clearly belong.¹⁰⁴ These characteristics are most manifest

¹⁰⁴ See Recke 1907a, Liestøl 1915b and 1921, Ek 1921, Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1956, and Solheim 1970.

in the Faroese heroic ballad, but they can also be found in Norwegian, Swedish and Danish versions of heroic ballads of West-Nordic origin, as well as in *Þorgeirs rímur*, the only unequivocal case of this kind of ballad found in Icelandic.

It would take us outside the scope of this book to embark upon a full-scale description and analysis of the heroic ballad, the *kæmpevise*, which, in fact, has been dealt with by both Liestøl and Ek, but a brief enumeration of its chief characteristics immediately shows its close kinship with *rímur*: The *kæmpeviser* take their stories either from written Icelandic or Norse literature, mainly from *fornaldarsögur* but also from the Charlemagne romances, or from traditional tales of a similar kind; their plots are not as dramatic and concentrated as is the case with the usual ballad; they tend to have many episodes, sometimes only loosely linked; they usually deal with heroes whose glory is demonstrated by adding episode to episode where the hero proves his courage and physical prowess. Because of the length of the Faroese *kæmpevise*, it is frequently divided into parts each called a *ríma*. Each *ríma* often has beginning and ending formulas similar to the ones used in Icelandic *rímur* and English metrical romances. However, the style of the *kæmpeviser* is much simpler than that of *rímur*; its chief device is repetition used in a ballad-like manner which is not found in *rímur*; the story is more concentrated and has less description than is normal in *rímur*. The features that distinguish the *kæmpevise* from the usual kind of ballad are much less striking in the Norwegian *kæmpeviser* or those taken over by Danes and Swedes than they are in Faroese versions, although the same basic narrative structure is unmistakably there.

The *kæmpeviser* have been considered to be ballads influenced by West-Nordic prose literature. Since people agree that most or all of it is of West-Nordic origin, it is natural to assume the greater part of this poetry is Norwegian. However, we know that the Faroese continued to compose this kind of poem down to the nineteenth century when they drew on written saga texts or even printed books. When the same ballad type is found in Norway and the Faroes, the Faroese variants are often relatively close to written Icelandic works, while the Norwegian versions are so far removed from them as to be merely thematically related. This has sometimes been explained to be the result of a complicated process starting with a Norwegian composing a ballad from a traditional tale, which in a different version was recorded as a *fornaldarsaga* in Iceland;

the Faroese are then supposed to have recomposed the ballad under influence of the written Icelandic saga.¹⁰⁵

Much of the discussion of the *kæmpevise* has been characterized by a great belief in the stability of oral poems, which have almost been considered as 'texts'. Modern insights into the processes of oral transmission have undermined such a belief. Poems which we must believe to have lived in Norwegian oral tradition through four or even five centuries are bound to have been subject to some radical changes. When the medieval minstrel had disappeared, the conventions of popular romance gradually withered away through the influence of the more genuinely oral popular ballad. In the Faroese community, which was relatively isolated, the tradition was more conservative and preserved more of the original characteristics of the genre, although the general conditions of oral tradition as well as influence from the ballads have radically changed the style. Apart from beginning and ending formulas, the minstrel style has disappeared; a refrain has been added to each stanza, etc. The differences in style from the *rímur* have also been increased because the *rímur* soon came into the hands of scribes and were turned into written literature which adapted to its needs many features of Icelandic literary style.

It has puzzled scholars that Iceland has preserved none of the *kæmpeviser* found in other countries, although traces can be found of at least two such ballads.¹⁰⁶ Only two indigenous Icelandic ballads, *Þorgeirs rímur* and *Eyvindar ríma*, are most accurately classified as heroic, and these are the only Icelandic ballads called *rímur* by the collectors. If we accept that the *kæmpevise* was a popular metrical romance in the 14th century, but not a ballad, we can see the reason why the Icelanders did not bother to preserve any of the Norwegian or Faroese romances they heard. They regarded their own *rímur* as superior to the efforts of their neighbours, in contrast to the real ballads which they were happy to borrow from Norwegian or Faroese singers and seldom succeeded in imitating with good results.

In the light of this hypothesis, it is interesting to note that the existence of Scandinavian poems reminiscent of *rímur* in the 15th century has already been conjectured on the basis of a literary source, namely

¹⁰⁵ See, e.g., Liestøl 1970, p. 44ff.

¹⁰⁶ See ÍF, V, p. 211, and Davíð Erlingsson 1975; about the possible existence of a ballad about Roland in Iceland, see below, p. 217.

the Danish *Rimkrönike*. In a study published in 1958, Helge Toldberg argues that three passages in this work, which was printed in 1495, are based upon older poems which must have been very similar to *rímur*.¹⁰⁷ There, we find the quatrain with the same rhythm as in the *ferskeytt*-metre and with cross rhyme. Moreover, there are two instances of a direct address to the audience with similar phrases as those found in *mansöngvar*. It is not likely that the poems in question were Icelandic, but two were probably West-Nordic, and one may have been Danish.¹⁰⁸

The ballad has had such a strong position in narrative oral tradition in Scandinavia, esp. in Denmark, that it has, as it were, absorbed other narrative poetry; because of this absorption, the development of the poetic tradition has been towards uniformity of style. The final stage of this development was actually attained by ballad editors of the 19th century, like Grundtvig, who, in their work, were guided by a never clearly defined idea of 'the ballad'. Opposite tendencies, towards differentiation of the material, have appeared during this century: the first step was the recognition that the *kæmpevise* was a West-Nordic genre with its distinctive features, already referred to; in the 1950's, Karl-Ivar Hildeman sorted a number of political songs out from the mass of the historical ballads;¹⁰⁹ Toldberg's study is a further contribution to this line of research.

Conclusions

The ballad never had the same dominant position in Iceland as it enjoyed in the rest of Scandinavia. Many kinds of popular poetry had already been written down in the Middle Ages, and a variety of popular poetry, lyrical and narrative, flourished beyond the time ballad collecting was begun. It is very likely that this variety was, in fact, a feature of popular poetry elsewhere in Scandinavia in the Middle Ages, because it appears in post-medieval times when people begin to write down popular poetry.

The study of Icelandic poetic genres related to the ballad in one way or another has not solved the problem of the age of the popular ballad

¹⁰⁷ See Toldberg 1958, pp. 20–21, 29–35.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.

¹⁰⁹ See Hildeman 1950 and his contributions to DGF, X.

in Scandinavia, but it has thrown some light upon the literary surroundings of the ballad. It cannot be looked upon as something isolated and unique within the culture as a whole; it is only one of the forms of popular culture brought to the country during the late Middle Ages. The ballad's dramatization of emotional conflicts is thrown into relief by the much more epic style of the hero-centred romance, the *ríma*, on the one hand, and, on the other, by the dance-lyrics which deal mainly with subjective aspects of emotional life.

Ballad students have long been aware of the close kinship between British and Scandinavian balladry. This study has produced evidence for the influence of Middle English carols and romances on Icelandic literature, which shows that this kinship is no isolated phenomenon.

Icelandic literature in the late Middle Ages, and, indeed, in post-medieval times, testifies to the eagerness with which Icelanders received foreign cultural impulses, but this was not a question of cultural dependency or passive reception. On the contrary, foreign literary influence resulted in the creation of new poetical forms which enriched Icelandic cultural life through centuries.

III. THE BALLAD IN ICELAND: GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Introductory Remarks

This chapter will deal with the history of the ballad-genre in Iceland from a general point of view: When did the European ballad come to Iceland? During which period did the main flow of ballads to Iceland take place? For how long did this continue? In the next chapter, the origin of individual ballads is studied, and, as far as the conclusions reached there can be used to help answer the above questions, they will of course be taken into consideration. It is, however, obvious that the history of the genre as such cannot be built exclusively on studies of individual ballads but must be considered from a broader viewpoint.

The Icelandic ballad tradition is a branch of the Scandinavian tradition, which again belongs to the wider field of the European ballad as a whole. Consequently, one has to take into consideration the assumed age of the Scandinavian ballad and its relationship to the European ballad tradition. The age of the Scandinavian ballad is a highly controversial subject, and, since there is no consensus among scholars on this issue, the only possibility is to present one's own considered opinion. The period of the recording of ballads in Scandinavia begins in the 16th century, and Danish and Swedish ballad collections from that century show that the genre was a flourishing one in the Eastern part of Scandinavia at the time. Not a few of the ballads then recorded belong to a type of balladry, the heroic ballad, which, on good grounds, has been shown to be of West-Nordic origin. There are occasional traces of ballads in 15th century manuscripts, and, in the beginning of that century, a stanza from a still extant ballad of an undoubtedly West-Nordic origin was recorded by a Danish cartographer, Claudius Clavus.¹ This evidence is strong enough to verify a hypothesis that the ballad had reached Scandinavia by 1400. If one wants to go further back in time, the only tangible evidence is some ballad formulas occa-

¹ See *Danske viser* 1962, pp. 243, 289, and Hildeman 1958, pp. 155–61.

sionally used in translated metrical romances, the so-called *Eufemiasvisor*, dating from around 1300, and in a metrical romance on King Alexander from c. 1380. All these translations are Swedish.² Strictly, these traces of ballad-language only tell us that as early as 1300 there was popular narrative poetry in Sweden in a style similar to that of the ballad; but we do not know if this poetry had by then acquired all the characteristics common to ballad texts from the 16th century onwards. However, the simplest explanation of this phenomenon is that the ballad, more or less in its present form, was by then a living tradition, although one can hardly exclude the possibility that this poetry was different from ballads in some ways, e.g., that its metres were more varied than in the 16th century, as is the case with the German ballad tradition; that the ballad did not necessarily have refrains; and that the narrative structures were different in some ways from those of the later ballads. These possibilities are mentioned here only to demonstrate the difficulty of ascertaining the existence of a genre with distinct characteristics from a few formulas and stylistic peculiarities which other kinds of poetry seem to have borrowed from it.

The uncertainty and enigmas of the early history of the Scandinavian ballad tradition make the study of the origins of its Icelandic branch more difficult but also more interesting.

Since the Icelandic ballads are undoubtedly of Scandinavian origin, as will appear in detail in the next chapter, any trace of their existence in Iceland in the Middle Ages would be of great importance for the history of the Scandinavian ballad tradition as a whole. It is therefore necessary to examine closely the arguments and conclusions scholars have hitherto presented on the issue and subsequently to try to find new evidence.

Results of Earlier Research

When ballads were first recorded in Iceland in the 17th century, it was assumed that these were not new poems. The first collectors called them *fornkvæði* (ancient poems). There is, however, no reason to assume that the name indicates that people thought that these poems

² See Frandsen 1969, pp. 27–39, Hildeman 1958, pp. 161–75, and Jonsson 1967, pp. 15–17.

dated from ancient times. The name probably merely denotes old poems that have lived in an oral tradition, although the second part of this definition is rather uncertain.³

The first to advance an argued opinion on the age of ballads in Iceland was Svend Grundtvig. His main conclusion is that ballads were brought to Iceland in the early 13th century "for det meste fra Danmark, dog noget, saasom den fortrinlige Olavsvise . . . ogsaa fra Norge."⁴ Grundtvig's evidence for this is the fact that a few ballads of Danish origin, which he believes to have been composed in the 12th century because they deal with people who were alive at that time, have been preserved in Iceland. On the other hand, Iceland has none of those ballads about historical figures that he believes were composed in the 13th century. Grundtvig thus seems to assume that ballads were brought to Iceland from Denmark up to the first half of the 13th century, after which time transmission ceased completely.⁵

Grundtvig's ideas about the age of the ballads were, of course, tied up with his Romantic views and have not enjoyed general acceptance in later times; nor have his ideas about the historical nature of ballads dealing with persons who lived in the 12th and 13th centuries been accepted.⁶

After Grundtvig's time, various scholars came forward to cast doubt on his views about how early ballads came to Iceland and how little they changed there from the form they had in Denmark during the high Middle Ages.⁷ Still, it can hardly be claimed that other ideas about the age of the ballads were supported by substantial evidence until Finnur Jónsson published his thorough investigation in 1914. He writes:

Der er ingen tvivl om, at 'folkeviser' har været kendt på Island allerede i 13. årh. Det viser ubestridelig omkvædslinjen, som Tord Andrésson anførte i året 1264 lige för sin død.⁸

It is not clear what *folkeviser* means in this context, but it presumably

³ See *Sagnadansar*, p. 10.

⁴ DGF, III, p. xiv.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. xii–xiv.

⁶ See esp. the supplementary notes and references in DGF, X, pp. 241–479, and Dal 1956, pp. 257–74.

⁷ See, e. g., Recke 1906, p. 125, Jón Þorkelsson 1888, p. 187 and *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, II, p. 389.

⁸ Finnur Jónsson 1914, p. 2.

refers to a folk poem in a rhymed metre and with a refrain, but not necessarily a ballad. Finnur then studies the language of the preserved poems and reaches this conclusion:

Der kan ikke være tvivl om, at alle disse anførte ord og ordformer må siges at være utænelige i 13. årh. og 14. med. Men hertil kommer naturligvis også visernes hele diktion og stil, der i det hele ikke kan være ældre end omkr. 1400.⁹

At the beginning of his article, Finnur had declared that the ballads must have come to Iceland before the Reformation. His main argument for this is various traces of the Catholic faith that can be found in them, but he also supports his propositions by various linguistic arguments. His conclusion is that the ballads were brought to Iceland during the period 1400–1500/1525. Furthermore, he believes that the ballads were brought to Iceland from Denmark, as Norwegian versions of them are so different from the Icelandic ones that they could not have come from there. When the same ballads are found in Iceland and the Faroes, Finnur believes that they were carried from Iceland to the Faroes. After 1400, he thinks that closer links were formed between Denmark and Iceland than before as a result of Iceland's subjection to the Danish crown and also because some Danish bishops, accompanied by numbers of lay followers, resided in Iceland in the early 15th century.

A year after the publication of Finnur Jónsson's study, a paper by Knut Liestøl appeared as a kind of reply to it. Liestøl seriously doubts the value of Finnur's linguistic arguments. He says that the language of orally transmitted poetry follows the general linguistic development rather closely. Through textual comparison, he shows that some ballads must have been brought to Iceland from Norway, and also points out that there was a great deal of contact between Iceland and Norway in the 13th and 14th centuries, which is exactly the period when he thinks the ballad enjoyed its greatest popularity in Norway. Liestøl's conclusion is that a portion of the Icelandic ballads came from Norway, though ballads did also come from Denmark after the middle of the 14th century. But he also thinks that some ballads came from Norway in the 15th century.¹⁰

In an unpublished master's thesis from 1929, Ólafur Marteinsson

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰ Liestøl 1915a.

dealt with this issue. He bases his views on much more extensive studies of individual ballads than either Finnur Jónsson or Liestøl, but usually dates the ballads rather uncritically in accordance with the views of Axel Olrik, Liestøl or Sverker Ek. Ólafur assumes that some ballads, originally composed in Norway, were brought to Iceland in the 13th century. In this regard, he particularly singles out *Bjarnarsona kvæði* and perhaps *Tristrans kvæði*. He seems to believe that most other ballads were brought to Iceland during the 14th century, some during the 15th century, and a few ballads around 1500 or even during the first half of the 16th century. He furthermore thinks that, in the 14th century, a number of heroic ballads came to Iceland from Norway and were subsequently lost owing to their failure to compete with written *rímur*, which he believes to be the offspring of the heroic ballads.¹¹

Thirty years after Liestøl published the paper already described, he published a more thoroughly argued article on the origin of Icelandic ballads, and put forward much more clearly defined views. He thinks that the ballads started coming to Iceland in the 13th century and gives these main arguments: 1) In the 13th century, the ballad was flourishing in Scandinavia, and, as there was a great deal of contact between Iceland and Norway during this period, it is likely that the Icelanders by then also had started practising this fashionable type of poetry; 2) The Icelandic ballad *Bjarnarsona kvæði* (ÍF 21) is undoubtedly about events that took place in 1206 and was composed soon after that date. At the time when these events took place in Bohuslän, the area was much frequented by Icelanders, and there is reason to suppose that this ballad was brought to Iceland in the 13th century; 3) it is now generally believed that the *rímur* have their source in the ballad, and it must be assumed that the ballad had existed in Iceland for some time before the *rímur* came into being, and this leads us to a date fairly early in the 13th century.¹²

A year after this study of Liestøl's appeared, a Danish scholar, Gustav Albeck, published an investigation of *Knýtlinga saga*, in which he reached the conclusion that a handful of Danish ballads are the source for certain chapters of the saga. He does not state categorically that this has to mean that these ballads must have been widely known in Iceland at the time of the composition of the saga, but he nonetheless

¹¹ See Ólafur Marteinsson, pp. 256–68.

¹² Liestøl 1945, esp. pp. 93–6.

thinks that, because of his conclusions, it is possible to reconcile older ideas (those of Grundtvig, Finnur Jónsson and Liestøl) on the origin of the ballad in Iceland:

Nærværende Skriffs Undersøgelser har fremdraget Momenter, der taler for, at danske Viser er vandret til Island i det 13. Aarhundrede. Dermed være dog ikke sagt, at Viserne behøver at være blevet alment kendte paa Island i det 13. Aarhundrede. Snarere maa man antage, at Viserne har været kendte af Sagaens navngivne Hjemmelmænd og gennem dem er naaet til Sagaskriverens Kundskab. Er denne Antagelse rigtig, faar man Mulighed for at forlige S. Grundtvigs, Finnur Jónssons og Knut Liestøls Iagttagelser med Hensyn til Folkevisernes Forekomst paa Island. De historiske Viser, der fra Danmark er bragt til Island, er ført dertil i det 13. Aarhundrede af Islændere, som har været i Danmark. Fra det 13. Aarhundredes Midte, da Island og Norge gennem Haakon Haakonsøns energiske Stræben knyttes intimt sammen, foregaar der en Indvandring af norske (og danske) Folkeviser via Norge (jfr. Knud Liestøl, Edda IV Bd. 1914 p. 4 og 26). Fra sidste Halvdel af det 14. Aarhundrede knyttes en ny Forbindelse mellem Island og Danmark.¹³

Apart from Finnur Jónsson and Ólafur Marteinsson, no Icelandic scholars have given a clear account of their opinions on this matter, and have not put any particular arguments forward concerning it. Still, most of them would feel that ballads started to reach Iceland around or after 1300.¹⁴

The arguments concerning the dating of the ballad in Iceland can be classified according to their premises. First, there are arguments that refer to ballads that are believed to have a core of historical truth (Grundtvig, Albeck, Liestøl); second, there are arguments based on the language of the ballads (Finnur Jónsson, Liestøl); third, there are arguments based on the supposed influence of the ballads on other literary genres (Liestøl); fourth, arguments based on the world referred to and described in the ballads (Finnur Jónsson); and finally, ideas about dating based on the path taken by the ballads to Iceland, and thus on

¹³ Albeck 1946, p. 235.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Björn K. Þórolfsson 1934, p. 45, and Ólafur Briem in *Fornir dansar*, p. 380.

the history of cultural exchange between Iceland and other countries (Finnur Jónsson and Liestøl).

These categories of arguments will now be discussed, a position taken towards each of them, and new arguments added if possible.

The Evidence of 'Historical' Ballads

Grundtvig's arguments, summed up above, are obviously so vague that but little counter-argument is needed. The dating of these 'historical' ballads is a widely discussed problem, and Grundtvig's ideas about their age have generally been rejected. There is an excellent summary of the discussion in DGF Vol. X. But, as a matter of fact, the age of these ballads is not the main issue here. Of those ballads considered historical by Grundtvig and preserved in Iceland, five (ÍF 8, 52, 53, 54, 55) have solid roots in oral tradition in Denmark up to the time of the writing down of the Icelandic ballads, and they have in fact been recorded in all the Nordic countries. There is no particular reason to believe that these ballads must have been brought to Iceland immediately after their original composition in Denmark. The persons involved had no particular significance over and above other ballad characters for the Icelanders. Therefore, these ballads could have been brought to Iceland at any date from the time of composition to the time of writing. Although most of them probably reached Iceland fairly long before the time of writing, this has to be supported by evidence other than their connection to historical figures. Grundtvig's sixth example, ÍF 20 (TSB D 67), was recorded in Denmark and Sweden in the 16th century; but, in fact, there is nothing to connect it with historical figures or events except the name Ásbjörn, which is among the most common ballad names, and there is thus no reason to discuss it any further in this context.

Contrary to what has been the case with Grundtvig's views, there have been few objections to Albeck's ideas on the ballads as sources for *Knýtlinga saga*. They have been well received by two of the foremost scholars in this field. Erik Dal describes them as 'interessant', and seems to regard them as a valid contribution towards "at trænge bagom den foregående generations sene dateringer og skeptiske vurderinger til

mere konservative grundtvigske synspunkter".¹⁵ Bengt R. Jonsson describes the hypothesis as 'mycket intressant'.¹⁶ The only critical voice is that of Helge Toldberg who regards the hypothesis as worthless.¹⁷ For this reason, it is necessary to devote some space to an examination of the validity of Albeck's ideas. Although acknowledgement of the hypothesis does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that ballads existed in Iceland in the 13th century—informants could have memorized the main content of the ballads in Denmark—it undeniably increases this probability if it can be shown to be valid. But, of course, the hypothesis has greatest significance as evidence of the existence of ballads in Denmark during the 13th century, probably before the middle of that century.

Knýtlinga saga is, in fact, a compilation of the sagas of Danish kings, similar in structure to Snorri's *Heimskringla*. It spans the period from the reign of Haraldr Gormsson to that of Knútr VI (d. 1202). The chief manuscript, the lost *Codex Academicus*, is believed to have dated from around 1300, and there exists a fragment of another manuscript from the same time. *Codex Academicus* perished in flames in 1728, but Árni Magnússon had made a copy before the fire. The author of the saga has used written Danish sources and, presumably, some older Icelandic writings as well. He quotes many strophes of skaldic verse by Icelandic court poets, but also refers by name to Icelanders who had stayed at the Danish court, the most noteworthy of these being Ólafr Þórðarson hvítaskáld, nephew of Snorri Sturluson. Ólafr was at the court of Valdemar the Victorious (d. 1241), brother to Knútr VI, during the last years of the king's life and returned to Iceland in 1241. Ólafur died in 1259. Sigurður Nordal believed that Ólafr wrote *Knýtlinga saga* himself, and Peter Hallberg has published further evidence in support of this.¹⁸ Others have dated the saga around 1270.¹⁹ In any case, the informants of the saga's author and perhaps he himself, if he was Ólafr hvítaskáld, could have known oral narratives, more or less factual, of 12th century events.

The ballads which Albeck believes to have left traces in *Knýtlinga*

¹⁵ Dal 1956, p. 214.

¹⁶ Jonsson 1967, p. 28n.

¹⁷ Toldberg 1958, pp. 37–8.

¹⁸ See Hallberg 1963, p. 62, Sigurður Nordal 1953, p. 226.

¹⁹ See Finnur Jónsson 1900.

saga are *Erik Emuns Drab* (DGF 116), *Kongemødet i Roskilde* (DGF 118), *Riber-Ulvs Bedrift* (DGF 119), *Plóg og Ingimann* (FK 161), and perhaps *Valdemar og Tove* (DGF 121).

DGF 116 describes the killing of a king in 1138. Both in Saxo and *Knýtlinga saga*, as well as in the ballad, the killer is called Plógr. The narrative of the ballad and the saga are not similar except for the point that both assume that the killing was done in revenge, which is not mentioned in Saxo. *Knýtlinga saga* speaks of revenge for a father, the ballad of revenge for a brother. Now, it seems a fairly obvious choice for a narrator who wants to enrich his story to explain the killing as revenge for a father, though there was no support for this in oral tradition nor in his written source (Saxo). This is in full accordance with the conventions of the genre, and there is no reason to suspect influence from ballads as an explanation of the divergency from Saxo.²⁰

But what, then, is the probability that DGF 116 dates from the 13th or, perhaps, from the 12th century? The ballad exists in one manuscript from Vedel's collection.²¹ Vedel himself has then composed additions to it. It is strange that there should not be more recordings if Vedel's claim, in his Saxo translation, that the ballad was widely sung in Jutland in his time, is true.²² In all probability, this ballad was composed by an historically interested person in the 16th century; revenge for a brother could also in this case have been invented by the author.²³ Grüner-Nielsen, who obviously wants to believe that the ballad is old, suggests the possibility that the saga borrowed from the ballad, but seems more inclined to think that both saga and ballad used the same source: Danish

²⁰ Albeck seems to contradict himself when he says in support of his hypothesis: "Sagaens beretning . . . har desuden noget raffineret litterært over sig, der tyder paa, at den er sekundær. Der er Sagastil i den." (p. 215)

²¹ About this ms. see DGF, XII, pp. 309–11.

²² See DGF, X, p. 243.

²³ Ernst v. d. Recke had no strong belief in an early date for this ballad: . . . om det kun i Rentzels Hdskr. opbevarede tomme Rimeri, der her Kritikløst serveres som historisk Digtning, og af hvis 23 Str. neppe mere end 4–5 ville kunne antages at tilhøre en oprindelig Vise, er kun at sige, at det i heldigste Fald bevarer Erindringen om en saadan, hvor Enkelthederne næsten overalt ere fortrængte af Banaliteter, der tilhører en 3–4 hundrede Aar senere Tids mekaniske Visefabrikation. Steenstrup antager Visen — sikkert med Grund — for et sildigt Produkt, der helt og holdent er fremgaaet af en Smule historisk Kjendskab hos en enkelt Visemager. *Danmarks Fornviser*, IV, p. 417.

13th century oral tradition.²⁴ The point here is that, even if the ballad were old or had old roots, there would be nothing to prevent both the ballad and saga's having been based on an oral tradition, although it is also possible that both authors inserted revenge as motivation for the killing.

The ballad about Plógr and Ingimann is only preserved in the Faroes, but, in all probability, it is originally Danish. Albeck points out that Plóg's killer is not named anywhere else outside *Knýtlinga saga*, where he is called Yngvar kveisa. However, there is no agreement between the saga and the ballad. The ballad describes how a man betrays his comrade and immediately receives just retribution (the king has Ingimann killed). The saga does not relate this killing, only states that Yngvar killed Plógr. Later in the saga, it is related that Yngvar was killed in the battle of Grathe-heath. Grüner-Nielsen quotes an unprinted note by Axel Olrik in which he points out a probable source for the ballad in Saxo's account of a man called Ingimar who has nothing to do with Plógr.²⁵ If this is a sound explanation, it supports conclusions to the effect that the ballad is much younger than the 13th century, when memories of Plóg's killing were still very much alive. Grüner-Nielsen says about this ballad and the ballad on the killing of Erik Emun dealt with above:

Som det vil ses er det med denne Vise som med Erik Emuns-visen, at den næppe kan afledes direkte af nukendte skrevne og trykte Kilder. Der er derfor en vis Mulighed for, at den paa færøsk Grund trufne Vise om Sorteplovs Drab bør udledes fra en eller anden sagnagtig dansk Overlevering fra Midten af 13. Aarhundrede eller senere. De to Viser om Sorteplov er altsaa formodentlig ikke 'historiske' i anden Forstand, end at de giver en Afspejling af *Eftertidens middelalderlige mundtlige Overlevering* dels om Sorteplovs Kongedrab dels om den Hævn, der ramte Drabsmanden.²⁶

To this it should only be added that, although there is a 'certain possibility' that these are traditional tales, it is no less likely that they are the offspring of the historical enthusiasm and poetic traditions of the 16th century. However that may be, the ballad is certainly not a necessary

²⁴ See DGF, X, p. 245.

²⁵ See DGF, X, p. 246.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

or even a possible explanation of *Knýtlinga saga's* account of Plóg's killer.

In the ballad of *Riber-Ulvs Bedrift* (DGF 119), it is only the name of Rípa-Úlfr and the fact that he becomes the king's standard bearer that have correspondences in *Knýtlinga saga*. In other respects, the ballad narrative is totally unrelated to the saga, and in fact the ballad is a cliché-ridden heroic ballad. There exists a skaldic strophe containing Rípa-Úlfr's name which is quoted in *Knýtlinga saga* and there is no need for a further explanation of the occurrence of this name in the saga. Though Rípa-Úlfr, in the ballad, picks up the king's standard in a battle, this can most readily be explained as a purely literary motif, common as it is in West-Nordic literature for great champions to carry the king's standard.²⁷ On the probable age of this ballad, I shall merely refer to Grüner-Nielsen's comment:

Det er sandsynligt, at Visen aldrig har været sunget i Danmark, men er digtet af en Færing i 18. Aarh. (?) som et frit opfundet Modstykke til vort Nr. 120.²⁸

One of the features mentioned by Albeck as having possibly entered *Knýtlinga saga* from a ballad is the name of Tófa, mistress of Valdemar the Great and mother of his child, whose name is found only in *Knýtlinga saga* and in the ballad about her fate, DGF 121, which is, in fact, the only one of these ballads that has been found in Iceland, ÍF 53. Do we have to postulate the ballad as *Knýtlinga saga's* source for this name? Ólafr hvítaskáld, the author or one of the main informants of the saga, stayed, as mentioned above, at the court of Valdemar the Victorious, half-brother of Kristoforus, Tófa's son. Of course, it must have been common knowledge at the court what Kristoforus' mother was called, and, naturally, Ólafr must have inquired about it. Grüner-Nielsen points out that *Knýtlinga saga* evinces a thorough knowledge of Valdemar the Great's life, and has this to say about Tófa's name there:

Denne sikkert rigtige Oplysning gives i Sagaen endda som en tør historisk Notits uden mindste Oplysning om hendes Skæbne.²⁹

He thinks that the ballad was composed while people still remembered Tófa's name; and this is no doubt correct, although it does not make it

²⁷ Cf., apart from old sagas, e.g., CCF 174, *Tíðriks kappar*.

²⁸ DGF, X, p. 250.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

necessary to date the ballad as far back as the 13th century. It should be mentioned that the ballad is influenced by a vagrant story about an evil queen who kills her rival. It is out of the question that such a poem was sung at the court of Valdemar the Victorious with his mother in the role of the evil queen.

A study of the ballads DGF 116, 119, 121, and FK 161 shows that there is no probability that any of these ballads was among the sources used by the author of *Knýtlinga saga*, and in fact it is probable that all of them, except 121, were composed in the 16th century or, in one case, even later. One ballad remains to be investigated, *Kongemødet i Roskilde* (DGF 118). It describes the same events as chapters 114–16 of *Knýtlinga saga*. The saga could have got all the main points of the narrative from Saxo or other written sources, but the narration is more detailed in various respects. Albeck grants that some of this is conventional saga style, using Snorri as model, but refuses to accept the explanation advanced by Danish historians that *Knýtlinga saga* made use of fairly solid oral sources. However, Valdemar the Victorious and some of his courtiers were undoubtedly knowledgeable about these events, which were some of the most significant ones in the life of his father, Valdemar the Great. Nevertheless, Albeck believes that, in this section, the saga was influenced by the ballad and feels he can detect this in the wording. This warrants closer study.

The first feature pointed out by Albeck is the words of the saga, “hann stóð upp í móti þeim . . .”³⁰ Albeck’s comment is this:

Situationen minder om tilsvarende Type-Situationer i Folkeviser. Men Typeverset mangler i Visen, saadan som den er bevaret:

Her Nilaus (Ditlaus) ind ad Døren tren,
Kong Sven han stander ham op igen,

hvilken Strofe udmærket godt kunde have efterfulgt den eksisterende Strofe 4 . . .

Hvad der taler for denne Konjektur er Sagaens Udtryk *standa upp í móti*, der næppe har været almindeligt i Oldislandsk, og som derfor kan se ud som ‘en oversættelse’ af det gængse Folkevise-udtryk . . .³¹

It is undeniably a bit embarrassing that the stanza in question is missing

³⁰ *Sögur Danakonunga*, p. 252.

³¹ Albeck 1946, pp. 223–4.

from the ballad! But what is even worse is that we do not, in the first place, know what was “det gængse Folkevisedtryk” in the 13th century, and, secondly, the phrase *standa upp í móti einhverjum* is not uncommon at all; on the contrary, it is a natural phrase in Icelandic 13th century prose (See e.g., *Íslenzk fornrit*, V. p. 269, and XII, pp. 370, 371).

A second example given by Albeck of correspondences between saga and ballad is more interesting. He compares a passage from *Knýtlinga saga*,

Valdimarr konungr var nú kominn til Jótlands ok kærði sín vandræði á Vébjargapingi ok þat morð, er Sveinn konungr hafði gørt á Knúti konungi.³²

with two stanzas from the ballad:

21. Her Woldemor met sin eddelingh
de rider saa offte tell steffne-thinngh.
22. De klager fast paa det ynckelige mordt
her Suen hand haffuer i Roskyldt giort.³³

There are two interesting points here: first, that both the rhyming words of the latter stanza occur in the saga text at this juncture; and second, that the phrase *gera morð* is uncommon in Icelandic and might indicate that a Danish source has been used.

The conclusions reached by Danish ballad scholars concerning the dating of this ballad do not strengthen our belief that it might be medieval. Ernst von der Recke says:

Visen er . . . som særlig Steenstrup har dokumenteret, et sildigere Produkt af ubestemmelig Alder, der ikke bygger paa Samfundsbevidsthed on en nys stedefunden Tildragelse, men paa Enkeltmands — iøvrigt ret overfladiske — Kjendskab til Kildeskrifter, særlig til et enkelt af disse.³⁴

Grüner-Nielsen has this to say:

Denne Vise . . . er rig paa udanske og sene Ord, og bærer rent umiddelbart Præg af at være eftermiddelalderlig lærd historisk Rimeri . . . Spørgsmaalet er nu om den halvlærde Vise formodentlig

³² *Sögur Danakonunga*, p. 256.

³³ DGF, III, p. 13.

³⁴ *Danmarks Fornviser*, II, p. 3.

fra 16. Aarh.s sidste Halvdel, som vi kan skimte bag Opskriften i Ide Giøes Haandskrift, giver os Visens egentlige Grundform, eller om vi bag den Form maa forudsætte en gammel middelalderlig Vise. En saadan middelalderlig Vises Eksistens er dog vist lidet sandsynlig.³⁵

He points out various features in the ballad's diction which indicate that they are taken directly from written sources which existed in the beginning of the 17th century when the only text was written. Erik Sønnerholm dates the manuscript which contains this text c. 1640.³⁶ He describes this ballad in a letter to me dated 12.12. 1978 as "formentlig et sammenkog fra nedskrivelsestiden". He furthermore points out in his letter that in Vedel's Saxo translation, which seems to have had distinctive influence on this ballad, we find this: "Der traadde hand frem mit paa Viborg Lands ting/ oc klagede som hand vel maatte/ paa Kong Suends forræderi."³⁷ Sønnerholm also quotes a number of 16th and 17th century texts which show that nothing in the diction of the ballad bears any traces of antiquity. The only phrase in the saga which has a parallel in the ballad and which cannot be accounted for by the saga's use of Saxo is *gera morð*, and this must be seen as a mere coincidence.³⁸

To sum up: No evidence can be found to indicate that the ballads, which Gustav Albeck considers to be among the sources of *Knýtlinga saga*, are of such an early date; on the contrary, all except one seem very young and based on written historical works and literary traditions. The details of content in *Knýtlinga saga* which cannot be accounted for by written contemporary sources and which are under discussion here can most naturally be explained by assuming that the author obtained them from contemporary oral sources the form of which cannot be decided. The only point in Albeck's study which really brings up a

³⁵ DGF, X, 249–50.

³⁶ See DGF, XII, p. 383.

³⁷ *Den Danske krønike*, p. ccclii.

³⁸ I cannot resist the temptation to point out the possibility that the author of the ballad could have been influenced by *Knýtlinga saga*. In her youth, the first owner of the only manuscript in which the ballad is found, Ida Giøe, moved in the same circles as the historian Arild Huitfeldt and the historian and poet Claus Christophersen Lyschander. Both these gentlemen knew of *Knýtlinga saga* and its contents; and from 1588 Huitfeldt owned *Codex Academicus*, the chief ms. of the saga. If we want to point out a likely author of the ballad, Lyschander is as good a candidate as any we can think of!

question is the phrase *gera morð* in *Knýtlinga saga*. This cannot be derived from the ballad in question, but must either be influenced by a lost written source or simply by common Danish usage, with which the author must have been familiar.

Apart from the Danish ballads dealt with above, *Bjarnarsona kvæði* (ÍF 21) is the only ballad found in Iceland which is believed to have dealt with true events. This ballad is considered separately below, and here it should be sufficient to point out that, whatever connections the ballad has with the events of the year 1206, there are no valid arguments to indicate that it was brought to Iceland immediately after its composition.

Linguistic Evidence

The language of the Icelandic ballads is in itself an interesting subject, and the time must be approaching when linguists will study it more thoroughly than they have hitherto. The present work does not deal with linguistic history, but it is unavoidable to try to form some idea of the value of linguistic evidence for the investigation of the dating and origin of the ballads. Studies of individual ballads will mention linguistic characteristics of certain texts, and an attempt will be made to evaluate what indications they can give concerning the age of the texts or their longevity in oral tradition in Iceland. As appears in these studies, linguistic evidence is never sufficient by itself to determine the age of individual ballads, but it may be used as supporting evidence.

The language of Icelandic ballads has many features which distinguish it from both the prose and poetry from the time of writing of the ballads and the preceding centuries. It is, in most respects, more natural and undoubtedly closer to everyday language than the language of other poetry, both in syntax and vocabulary. Furthermore, it has many characteristics that are manifestly a result of the presence of words and grammatical features from other Scandinavian languages. On this Finnur Jónsson has the following to say:

I det hele og store kan visernes sprog siges at være godt og mundret. Men der findes i dem ikke få udtryk, der peger på den fremmede oprindelse, samt yngre ord og endelig forskellige for-

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vanskninger af islandske ord, fremkomne ved påvirkning af det fremmede (originale) sprog.³⁹

When the ballads were first brought to Iceland, they were not 'translated' in the same way as written literature is, but were recomposed in Icelandic in such a way that many of the words and sentences were allowed to stand unchanged. In medieval times, the differences among the West-Nordic languages were so slight that the changes needed were negligible; they were, however, somewhat more extensive in the case of an East-Nordic ballad version. Though the language differences were so slight, there appeared early on a diction peculiar to these ballads which people did not bother to give a completely Icelandic appearance; this language was fully comprehensible, and probably even took on a slightly poetic air because of its connection with exotic subjects. Here I am particularly referring to the use of adjectives and possessive pronouns without case endings, also the dropping of the nominative ending of nouns of two syllables normally ending in *-ingr*, *-ungr*, the verb forms *gá* and *stá* for *ganga* and *standa*, and a few other linguistic features which will frequently be mentioned below in the studies of individual ballads. These linguistic features may be referred to as conventional ballad language, and it is doubtful that they give any indication of the age or origin of the particular ballads in which they appear.

One can ask what significance this has for the problem of dating the ballad genre as a whole. It should be pointed out that all the main linguistic features of ballads are found in medieval *rímur*, though with much less frequency. It has been assumed that this is a case of the ballads influencing *rímur*,⁴⁰ but it is hardly necessary to assume the ballads as an intermediary link, if we accept the idea, discussed above, that other poetic genres known to Icelanders through recitals in Scandinavia played, from the beginning, a more important part in shaping the *rímur* than did the ballad. But this is not of crucial importance here, the basic question being whether we can fix some terminus for this language. Finnur Jónsson believed that it could not be present in pre-1400 Icelandic.⁴¹ Ólafur Marteinsson takes the opposite view, believing that there is no reason why the most prevalent features of ballad

³⁹ Finnur Jónsson 1914, p. 3.

⁴⁰ See Björn K. Þórolfsson 1934, p. 231.

⁴¹ See *op. cit.*, p. 4. Ólafur Marteinsson comments on Finnur's arguments on pp. 98–9 in his thesis.

language could not have come to Iceland in the 14th or even in the 13th century. The kind of study of Nordic linguistic history necessary to make a decision on this issue will not be undertaken here, but I feel that Finnur's contention will be hard to prove, as ballads originating in the East-Nordic area could easily preserve various original linguistic features in Iceland, even though they were transmitted through the West-Nordic area. On the other hand, it is easy to agree with Finnur that the main features of the ballad language are in agreement with its having taken shape during the 15th century. During that time, the other Nordic languages were undergoing changes which are not unlikely to have had some influence, though not permanent, on Icelandic. We can point out an example, although an apparently isolated and individual one, showing a person, writing a book around 1500, trying to imitate the Norwegian language in a number of ways.⁴²

The above treatment of ballad language is far from complete, though a few fairly common characteristics have been discussed. A good number of ballads are totally devoid of these characteristics, i.e., they are in a completely pure and unmodified Icelandic. This shows that the foreign elements in the ballad language are not so all-pervasive that they can be used to establish a *terminus post quem* for the whole genre, even if it were possible to date them with a higher degree of certainty. On the other hand, we have ballads where there is a much greater number of linguistic features of foreign origin, or various distortions which seem to derive from imperfect understanding of the foreign language. Ólafur Marteinsson puts a special emphasis on this in his thesis. He says:

If we are to use the language as evidence of the date and history of the ballads, a sharp distinction has to be made between two categories of solecism: those which are *systematic* and the *individual cases*. The former are the common property of all Nordic ballads which they will always retain. The latter are more a product of circumstances and give significant indications about individual ballads. These two categories have been thoroughly confused by Professor Finnur.⁴³

In the present work, Ólafur Marteinsson's precepts are adhered to in

⁴² See *Reykjahólabók*, I. pp. xxxix–xl.

⁴³ p. 98. Quotations from ÓM's ms. have been translated.

that it is assumed that the lower the quality of the language of a ballad and the greater the number of long and stilted lines, the greater is the likelihood that the ballad has had a comparatively short history in Icelandic oral tradition, even though it may have been brought to Iceland around or soon after the Reformation, i.e., in the 16th century. As we approach the time of writing down of the ballads, the languages grow farther and farther apart, especially Danish from Icelandic and Faroese and from Norwegian dialects, but also Norwegian from Icelandic. With regard to ballads brought from Norway, it can therefore be considered more likely that their language deteriorated in quality as time passed. For ballads derived from Danish in the 16th century or even later, there may be two divergent developments. On the one hand, a ballad might be sung in Icelandic with minimal changes which could easily result in meaningless lines, very distorted forms or stilted rhythms. On the other hand, it is possible that ballads were translated through a fairly independent approach. Then, the quality of the language may have been fairly high and there is also an increased probability of influence from Icelandic poetic traditions, on both metre and diction. A ballad which seems to be an example of the latter is *Þorkels kvæði Þrándarsonar* (ÍF 62). As will be pointed out in studies of individual ballads, a good number of the ballads recorded in the 17th century are marked by inferior language and stilted metres. Most commonly, comparative study indicates that these ballads came to Iceland from Denmark; in that case, comparison and linguistic evidence give mutual support. The general probability that these linguistic characteristics indicate that a ballad had a fairly short life in Icelandic oral tradition is increased by the fact that these characteristics diminish greatly or even disappear completely in recordings of the same ballads from the 18th and 19th centuries, when any such can be found.

The conclusions of this brief survey indicate that linguistic features cannot give any definite evidence of a *terminus ante quem* for Icelandic ballads, but they can give valuable support for deciding the age of individual ballads and thus help to determine when the flow of ballads to Iceland was strongest and where these ballads came from. However, one linguistic feature which has to be considered when an attempt is made to determine the age of the genre still remains to be discussed, viz. syllable quantity.

Medieval Icelandic verse was quantitative, making use of an opposi-

tion between long and short syllables, as well as the opposition between stressed and unstressed ones. In modern Icelandic, there is no quantitative opposition, and consequently, modern Icelandic verse is only rhythmical. Finnur Jónsson was able to show that in almost all Icelandic ballads the old syllabic quantity is preserved. However, his method was questionable because he did not hesitate to emend verse lines when they did not meet his demands; consequently, some of his conclusions must be modified.⁴⁴

Finnur Jónsson believed that in the ballads printed in the first edition of *Íslensk fornkvæði*, with one exception, ÍF 49, the old syllabic quantity rules were adhered to. Each stress required a long syllable or two short ones, in which case the former is stressed. He also points out that the rhyming feet of the couplet metre are interesting. They were shortened (masculine), and, therefore, a normal rhyming foot could be ˘ or ˘˘ (the length was immaterial here); it was also possible to use ˘x, which was equal in length to ˘. On the other hand, it was not permissible to use ˘˘x, for then the foot was unshortened. However, this only applies to lines with four stresses, which is the main rule. In Icelandic ballads, as in the ballads of other Nordic countries, and, in fact, in some other kinds of poetry, the rule is that a line with four stresses and masculine rhyme could be replaced by a line with three stresses and feminine rhyme; in practice, the penultimate syllable must then have been extended, as it still is in song. In these short lines, it was, of course, very important that the penultimate syllable was long, for, otherwise, it could not be extended.⁴⁵

Both Ólafur Marteinsson and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson have pointed out that the syllable length does not only influence Icelandic ballads but can also apparently be traced in Faroese and even Norwegian ballad recordings.⁴⁶ Ólafur Marteinsson shows that Finnur Jónsson generalizes too greatly when he thinks that quantity rules are equally valid for all feet in a line. Irregularities are frequently found in feet other than rhyming feet, particularly in such a way that there are more unstressed syllables between accents than Finnur assumes, but even in the other direction, so that some verse feet, not least the penultimate one, are

⁴⁴ See Finnur Jónsson 1914, pp. 16–24.

⁴⁵ There is a full account of this metrical variant in Kabell 1952a, pp. 93–7 and 158–84, and works referred to there.

⁴⁶ See Ólafur Marteinsson, pp. 30–35, and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1960.

short, $\simeq x$. Despite these discrepancies, adherence to the old quantity rules is the general principle, although we have to keep in mind that the ballad singers do not seem to have been rigidly bound by it. This principle is much more rigid in the rhyming feet, and this agrees with what examples have been found in other kinds of poetry: after the old syllable quantity rules began to break up, quantity rules were much more strictly adhered to in rhyming feet than in other feet.⁴⁷ It is only natural that irregularities should be found from early on in ballads, where the metres are comparatively free.

The exceptions from the quantity principle in rhyming feet are scarce, and usually seem to be obvious distortions. The only ballads where it is disregarded are of the 17th century.⁴⁸

What conclusions can be drawn from this characteristic of ballad language? It seems indubitable that the main body of ballads is older than the 17th century ballads just mentioned. It is hardly possible that no signs of the quantitative change would have appeared if it had already occurred in the speech of those who first gave the ballads their Icelandic form. Still, this point alone does not prove that the ballads must have been transmitted much earlier. It has been shown that the old quantity rules are functioning in original compositions of some Icelandic poets up to the 17th century, even though the works of other poets show that their influence had begun to weaken as early as the beginning of the 16th century.⁴⁹

Despite this general conclusion, it is doubtful if adherence to old quantity rules can be used as conclusive evidence of the age of an individual ballad. This adherence could have come about by coincidence. To take an example, in almost all the ballads that were translated from book to book in the 17th century, we can find examples of the quantity change, which of course gives support to the main conclusion. Yet, this group includes ballads where the old quantity rules seem to be kept. In *Kvæði um Mummering litla*, there are four stanzas with extended rhyming feet, and in all of them the stressed syllable is long according

⁴⁷ See Stefán Karlsson 1964, p. 23.

⁴⁸ This applies to *Gunnars kvæði*, ÍF 49, as Finnur Jónsson pointed out, but also to some of the jocular ballads based on 17th century written sources, ÍF 104 and 105.

⁴⁹ See Björn K. Þórolfsson 1929 and Stefán Karlsson 1964. Recent research has confirmed these results; see Kristján Árnason 1980, p. 160.

to the old rules. In the same ballad, there are, furthermore, four stanzas with four stresses and feminine rhymes, where the stressed syllable is short according to the old rules, and thus does not break the metrical rules.⁵⁰ Now, this ballad was translated in the latter half of the 17th century, probably by Gissur Sveinsson himself, as were the other ballads in the collection which stem from Vedel. The adherence to the old rule must, therefore, have come about by coincidence. It could also be pointed out that one of the texts of ÍF 70, which must have been translated into Icelandic in the 18th or possibly 19th century, seems to follow the old rules.⁵¹ This must also be a case of coincidence.

In the search for a *terminus ante quem* for the ballad genre in Iceland, there is limited support to be had from the quantity rules pointed out by Finnur Jónsson. Still, they present comparatively strong evidence for the main body of the ballads having been transmitted to Iceland before 1600.

The Influence of Ballads on Icelandic Literature

Ever since writing began in Iceland around 1100, and up to the end of the medieval period, new literature was continually being created in Iceland and written down on parchment, for the most part simultaneously with its composition, even though the original manuscripts were often lost and only copies preserved. A part of this literature is a fairly large body of poetry of a comparatively popular kind which, in many ways, stands close to the ballads. It would seem probable that this poetry was influenced by the ballads from the time their transmission to Iceland was begun, even though they were not recorded, but of course this cannot be stated with certainty without investigation.

There are two kinds of poetry in particular that scholars have long considered as evidence that the ballads were brought to Iceland in the high Middle Ages: the dance-lyrics and the *rímur*. As demonstrated in the last chapter, I see no reason to assume that the existence of such poetry in Iceland proves that there were ballads in the country, since both *rímur* and lyrics are modelled upon other kinds of poetry. However, both the dance-lyrics and the *rímur* show that, in the 14th and

⁵⁰ See ÍF, I, pp. 164–7.

⁵¹ See ÍF, VI, pp. 201–3, and below, pp. 354–5.

15th centuries, Icelanders received literary influence from abroad with an open mind, just as they had done in the 12th and 13th centuries. Consequently, it is probable that they soon took a liking to ballads when they had become popular with the people whom Icelanders visited most frequently. The literary historian can only regret that their influence on other genres is hard to detect.

The Ballad World

Is it possible to draw any conclusions about the age of ballads in general and in Iceland in particular from the world they depict? This world is of course an interesting subject in itself, and an attempt at describing the world of the Icelandic ballads has been made elsewhere.⁵² The world of the Icelandic ballads, as well as that of ballads from other countries, is traditional and described in accordance with strict conventions. Its forms have been remote from the forms of life of most people who sang ballads, and this certainly applies to Icelandic ballad singers. Setting, characters and narrative structures conform to fixed patterns. The truth of the poems for their singers and their audiences, their message, was not embodied in their reference to visible reality, but in their themes and conflicts, which deal almost exclusively with simple but strong emotions, love, hate, or revenge, and the clash of these with ties of blood, marriage, etc.

Obviously, the references to the world of chivalry, so frequently found in the ballads, belong to the Middle Ages; but one must bear in mind that chivalric images and ideals appealed strongly to peasants all over Europe long after the end of the Middle Ages, up to the advent of modern industrialization, in fact. They are, therefore, bound to be an inexact tool for dating. The same applies to the strong feelings for the ties of blood or clan and for family honour which can be found in many ballads. It certainly has its roots in medieval society, or even farther back, but in a peasant culture such as that of Iceland it has lasted into this century.

Direct references to features of the Roman Catholic faith, such as belief in saints and miracles, seems more promising evidence, because such beliefs were considered heresy by the Icelandic Reformed Church

⁵² See *Sagnadansar*, pp. 66–78.

after 1550. We must, however, bear in mind that such features can only be found in a minority of Icelandic ballads. Finnur Jónsson thinks it unlikely that people learnt and brought into the country poems with Roman Catholic references after the Reformation. This sounds plausible, but the fact remains that people did not stop singing these poems with the Reformation. On the contrary, such ballads were transmitted orally throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. Nevertheless, the popularity of a few religious ballads can be said to indicate that they flowered before the Reformation.

To sum up: The world of the ballads connects them with the Middle Ages in a general way as the period where their origins must be sought. But, medieval images or ideas found in a ballad do not prove that it was composed in the Middle Ages.

Connections with Other Countries

Comparative studies of individual ballads show that a majority of Icelandic ballads have parallels in other countries. In all those cases, the ballad has been brought to Iceland from Scandinavia, from Norway, Denmark, or the Faroes, the countries with which Iceland has had its closest connections. No example can be found of a ballad that has been transferred from Iceland to any of those countries, and relatively few ballads have been composed in Iceland. The studies further show that the ballads from Scandinavia can be divided roughly into two groups: ballads belonging to a West-Nordic tradition brought to Iceland from Norway, and occasionally from the Faroes; and second, ballads brought directly from Denmark. Many of the latter show linguistic indications of being relatively late.

Such a division of imported Icelandic ballads into two groups, one of Norwegian/Faroese origin and another of Danish origin, is of consequence for the dating of the genre. In the seventeenth century, when the ballad collecting started, Iceland was totally dependent on Denmark for foreign cultural influence, as well as in other ways. Direct communication with Norway or the Faroes was only accidental and infrequent. On the other hand, we know from rich sources that in the Middle Ages Iceland's main contact with other countries was through Norway, especially Bergen and Trondheim. The former was the centre for trade

on the Norwegian West coast, and the latter the seat of the archbishop of Norway, Iceland, and the Faroes. At that time, there was also considerable communication between the Icelanders and the Faroese. Boats on their way to and from Iceland frequently had to stop in the Faroes, and there are accounts of ships being wrecked there, or of Icelandic crews having to stay there during the winter because of bad weather. In addition, Icelanders and Faroese frequently met in Norway.⁵³

In the 17th century, the Danes had absolute command of all sailing to Iceland; their vessels were large and could reach their destination with more safety than those of former times. When Icelanders met people from Norway or the Faroes, it was most frequently in Denmark, and, in any event, Danish culture dominated the whole area.

The question then is: can we date the change when Iceland came under Danish cultural hegemony and ceased to belong to a West-Nordic cultural community? As mentioned above, Finnur Jónsson argued that this had occurred around 1400, when Norway and Iceland came under the Danish crown. Obviously, direct Danish cultural influence became a possibility in Iceland when the Danish king had become the highest authority over the country and his officials were ruling it. But while contemporary sources show that the close cultural contact, which is a precondition for the transmission of oral tradition from one country to another, remained intact between Iceland and Norway down to the fourth decade of the 16th century, it is doubtful whether any close cultural contact was formed between Iceland and Denmark during that time.

Although a few Danish bishops were situated in Iceland around 1400, as Finnur Jónsson points out,⁵⁴ there were also Norwegian bishops in the country in the latter half of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century. Of course, bishops may not seem the most likely people to bring ballads between countries, although some of their servants may well have played a part. It is, however, more likely that Icelanders staying abroad learnt ballads there and brought them to Iceland. Formally at least, Iceland was considered to be part of the Norwegian state down to the Reformation, and the two bishops of Iceland were members of the Norwegian state council in the first half

⁵³ See esp. Matras 1943.

⁵⁴ Finnur Jónsson 1914, pp. 7–8.

of the 16th century.⁵⁵ The influence of this council on Icelandic affairs ended when Christian III, king of Denmark, took away its powers and included Norway in the Danish state.⁵⁶ The Icelandic church was under the authority of the archbishop of Trondheim, and there was constant communication between the archbishop and the Icelandic bishops down to the moment when archbishop Olaf fled from Trondheim in 1537.⁵⁷ After this year, every tie of administration, religious or secular, between Iceland and Norway was broken. But up to then, the contacts had been constant and lively.

Trade with Iceland was gradually taken over by the English and the German Hanseatic townships in the 15th century. However, it is likely that the German trade went through Bergen to a certain extent, because it was the merchants of Bergen who were most often granted permission to trade in Iceland. From 1420 on, traffic from Norway decreased somewhat because of direct sailing from Germany to Iceland, but towards the end of the 15th century and in the beginning of the 16th, this connection was once again strengthened.⁵⁸

The study of Icelandic records (published in *Íslenzkt fornbréfasafn: Diplomatarium Islandicum*) from the 15th and 16th centuries reveals clearly that, throughout the 15th and during the first third of the 16th century, Icelanders had constant contacts with Norway. Norway was the destination of their voyages, and they often stayed there.⁵⁹ In the year 1450, Christian I issued permission for Gottskálk, bishop of Hólar in Iceland, to let a vessel belonging to his church sail to Bergen and other places in the Norwegian state.⁶⁰ In the year 1498, Hans, king of Denmark, authorized Stefán, bishop of Skálholt, to let his representative take a vessel belonging to the bishop's church throughout the king's realm. The letter is confirmed by the bishop and an officer of the law

⁵⁵ See Jón Jóhannesson 1956–8, II, p. 61.

⁵⁶ See Holmsen 1961, p. 395.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

⁵⁸ See Björn Þorsteinsson 1970, e.g., 94ff, 222ff. It seems to me that Björn Þorsteinsson in some of his statements exaggerates the connections with England and underrates the importance of a continued communication with Norway during the 15th century. See also Jón Jóhannesson, II, pp. 157–184.

⁵⁹ See *Íslenzkt fornbréfasafn*, IV, pp. 285, 321, 336, 559, 586, 734–5, V, pp. 184–5, 189–91, 551, 552, 560–61, 684, VI, pp. 156–7, 348–9, 559, VII, pp. 769–71, VIII, pp. 85–6, 496–7, IX, p. 71.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, V, p. 69.

in Bergen the next year. The ship seems to have had an Icelandic crew, and this applies to other vessels belonging to the Icelandic church.⁶¹ In the time of Jón Arason (bishop of Hólar 1523–50) and Ögmundur Pálsson (bishop of Skálholt 1521–41), the churches of both Skálholt and Hólar had ships of their own sailing regularly to Bergen, and at that time at least Skálholt had property there.⁶²

Communication between Iceland and Norway seems to have been finally broken off in the 1530's. Bishop Gissur Einarsson was placed in office in Denmark in 1543 and then sailed for Iceland from Hamburg. In his letters to the bishop of Bergen, where he, among other things, made arrangements for his church's property in Norway, it appears clearly that there is no longer any traffic between the two countries.⁶³

This close and constant contact with Norway for centuries must have made the Icelanders well acquainted with whatever poetry and entertainment there was in Norway, and it is obvious that Icelandic ballads with West-Nordic characteristics may have been brought to Iceland from Norway as late as the 1530's.

If we search in the records for evidence for direct cultural relations with Denmark in this period, the results are much poorer. Obviously, more Icelanders than the highest officials visited Denmark, and occasional direct transfer of ballads cannot be excluded. Nevertheless, it seems indisputable that the main cultural influence was channeled through Norway.

Now, one can ask whether communication with the Faroes was broken off at the same time as communication with Norway. Christian Matras, an expert on Faroese cultural history, thinks that this was the case.⁶⁴ At this time, sea-going vessels were larger and better equipped than before, as previously mentioned, and there was no need for a halt in the Faroes on a journey between Iceland and Denmark. However, it is possible that occasionally a Faroese came to Iceland, e.g., as an employee of the Danish merchants or as an official of the crown, and *vice versa*. Moreover, Icelanders and Faroese have usually had some contacts where they have been in the towns of Scandinavia, esp. in

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, VII, pp. 407–8, and *Saga Íslendinga*, IV, pp. 13, 31.

⁶² *Saga Íslendinga*, IV, p. 13.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, IV, p. 115, and *Íslenzkt fornbréfasafn*, X, pp. 337–8, 344, 399, IX, pp. 224, 370, 694.

⁶⁴ Matras 1943.

Copenhagen in later centuries, because of the ease with which they can communicate with each other in their own languages.

The conclusion of this brief look at the cultural relations of Icelanders with other Scandinavian peoples is that the ballads which have special West-Nordic characteristics must have been brought to Iceland no later than the first third of the 16th century. Since there are so many of them, it seems likely that the majority had already been transferred in the 15th century. Ballads brought directly from Denmark can have been transferred at any time after 1400, but the most likely time for their transfer is from the mid-sixteenth century to c. 1600.

Conclusions

It must now be considered certain that a considerable number of the ballads preserved in Iceland were imported from Norway or the Faroes no later than about or little after 1500. Other ballads of foreign origin must mainly have been brought directly from Denmark in the 16th century, although an occasional ballad or variant of a ballad could have come later, in the 17th or even the 18th century. No tangible evidence that ballads were known in Iceland before the 15th century has been found, but the question must be judged in the larger context of the problem of the age of the ballad in Scandinavia as a whole, and in Norway in particular.

In this chapter, the Icelandic ballad has been approached from a general point of view in an attempt to shed some light on the history of the genre by considering its general characteristics and conditions. A more detailed and accurate information on this history can be adequately acquired only by studies of individual ballads.

IV. INDIVIDUAL BALLADS

Introductory Remarks

This chapter consists of a series of essays dealing with each ballad-type separately. Put together, the results of these studies should answer questions about the origins and history of the Icelandic ballad, as far as they can be answered with the methods employed. Obviously, more or less the same results about the genre could be achieved by a selective approach where only, say, one third of the types was considered. But, in my view, each ballad type is not only interesting as an example, but also for its own sake. This chapter is therefore conceived as a work of reference for students of the Icelandic ballad, whether they want to make it the main object of their study or refer to it in a wider context.

At the beginning of each study there is, in small type, a fairly detailed summary of the ballad where major variation is taken into account. These summaries are intended to be of aid to scholars who do not know sufficient Icelandic to read the texts themselves easily; for the others, it should also make the studies more readable, because it can take considerable time to look up all the variants in ÍF, when a detail of content is being discussed. Although Volume VIII of ÍF has now appeared, a key makes it easier to find the variants of each ballad in the edition, and therefore such a key is given in a footnote at the beginning of each study, with references to volume and page. In these footnotes, each text has been assigned a capital letter to make reference to them easier. These letters are assigned in the same order as the texts, or fragments of text, appear in ÍF, and thus they are not necessarily the same as the letters assigned to the same texts in the first edition of *Íslenzk fornkvæði*. In fact, the approximate age of the texts can be deciphered from these references: Vol. I–III contain only texts from the 17th century; vol. IV contains texts from the 17th century up to p. 89, but the texts printed pp. 90ff. stem from Árni Magnússon's collections during the first two decades of the 18th century. Volume V contains mainly texts from the late 18th and from the beginning of the 19th centuries, while vols. VI and VII contain the collections from the 1840's

onwards. However, the age and origin of the texts is discussed in the main text when this is felt to be of consequence.

In each study, the main emphasis is on the origin of the ballad, its relationship to foreign versions of the same type, when such versions exist, and relations with legends or written literature. In the preparatory work, all the available material has been taken into account, but the results have not always been proportional with the effort, and I have tried to include in the text only such results and such documentation as lead us to interesting conclusions. In this respect, full consistency has not been aimed at because the ballad types are not all equally interesting from a comparative point of view.

In the previous chapter, a few remarks were made on the language of the ballads. In the studies of individual ballads, a full description of the language is not attempted, but attention is drawn to such linguistic features as seem to be of consequence for questions of age and origin.

Quotations from ÍF are printed here with a normalized spelling, and the refrains are omitted when they are of no consequence for the argument. On the other hand, I have not ventured to normalize quotations from texts in other languages because this would often have demanded knowledge of the history of these languages, which is beyond my competence.

Danish and Faroese ballads are quoted from the standard editions, *Danmarks gamle folkeviser* (DGF) and *Føroya kvæði* (CCF). There, all variants of a type are gathered under one heading and each assigned a capital letter. Therefore, the texts are referred to as d-A,B,C, etc. or f-A,B,C, etc., but references to volume and page are omitted. References to Norwegian texts have posed a few problems. When reliable texts have appeared in print, they are, of course, referred to here, but in many instances the references are to unedited texts kept in the archives of Norsk folkeminnesamling (NFS). In these cases, it can be problematic whether one should refer, e.g., to Sophus Bugge's first draft of a text, to his fair copy of the same text, or to the manuscript of a standard edition of the Norwegian ballads prepared by Liestøl and his successors. I have not been able to be fully consistent in this respect, but where there can be any doubt about the identity of the text I am referring to, I have added a reference to the informant in order that the references can always be followed up in the archives or in the edition, when it appears.

ÍF 1 Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós

Ólafur rides along a rocky hillside, meets four elf-maidens who welcome him and invite him to drink (or live) with them. He refuses to live with the elves and would rather believe in God (Christ). One of the elf-maidens asks him to wait, and goes to fetch a sword which she hides under her clothing as she asks him for a kiss. When Ólafur bends down to kiss her, she thrusts the sword under his shoulderblade to his heart. Ólafur spurs his horse and rides home to his mother; she asks why he is so pale; (he hedges at first); tells the truth; asks his mother to make his bed and his sister to dress his wounds. Thereupon he dies (and is buried along with his mother, and sister(?)).¹

This ballad has been popular all over Iceland and is still sung, but it is impossible to determine whether anything remains of a genuine oral tradition, as both the text and the melody have for a long time been widely available in printed form.

This song about a knight who is killed by an elf-maiden when he refuses to return her love has been popular in many countries, in all the Nordic countries, in Scotland, in Brittany and elsewhere.² The Icelandic variants have preserved the core of the ballad fairly well but lack material which is found in other versions. In the Faroese and the Breton variants, the ballad begins with Ólafur's setting out from home, and his mother then asks him where he is going. This introduces a conversation between them in which there are some indications that Ólafur has had previous contacts with the elves. It is disputed whether this is an original part of the ballad or not, but no signs of it are found anywhere else in the Nordic countries.³ Another point which is missing

¹ Texts: A = I, p. 24, B = IV, p. 116 (one stanza), C = IV, p. 257, D = V, p. 9, E = V, p. 69, F = V, p. 145, G = VI, p. 1, H = VI, p. 18, I = VI, p. 104, J = VI, p. 116, K = VI, p. 124, L = VI, p. 137, M = VI, p. 150, N = VI, p. 156 (one stanza), O = VII, p. 3, P = VII, p. 20, Q = VII, p. 29, R = VII, p. 46, S = VII, p. 98 (one stanza, a parody), T = VII, p. 107 (one line), U = VII, p. 117, V = VII, p. 141, W = VII, p. 146, X = VII, p. 153, Y = VII, p. 155, Z = VII, p. 172.

² In addition to Grundtvig's account of the distribution of this ballad theme in DGF, II, pp. 109–12, and IV, pp. 852–74, see Child, I, pp. 371–87.

³ In Villy Sørensen's opinion the idea that the killing is done from motives of jealousy is unnecessary and detracts from the artistic value of the ballad (cf. Sørensen 1965, pp. 163–4). But, even though this view is endorsed, it does not necessarily follow that this is a later addition. It is by no means unthinkable that the ballad may have existed for some time in oral tradition before its core and durable content were established.

in the Icelandic ballad must, on the other hand, be original: Ólafur's wedding is being prepared. In one Icelandic variant there is an indication of this feature:

E 22 "Sendu minni festarmey
gullhring fríðan af hendi mér."

But, this is too weakly supported by the ballad's tradition for the conclusion to be drawn that the wedding was originally mentioned in the Icelandic version. The stanza might have come from another ballad. Finally, there is, at the end of many variants of the ballad, both in the Nordic countries and elsewhere, a long passage that takes place after the protagonist's death, in which the bride plays the main role. His mother tries at first to keep her in ignorance of what has happened; but she discovers the truth, whereupon her heart breaks from sorrow, and the mother suffers a similar fate. In this case, the final stanza, which concludes five Icelandic variants, is very fitting, as it states that three bodies were buried in one grave. In the Icelandic variants, however, Ólafur's sister must be supposed to be the third victim, which seems an unnecessarily heavy burden to lay on one family. This passage may be considered to disrupt the unity of the ballad, but as it accompanies both various Scandinavian and Southern European versions of the ballad, it is not unlikely to have been a part of it from the beginning. Various features in this passage are related to ÍF 23, *Tristrans kvæði*, but this relationship is not so close that a direct connection must be assumed, although it is quite possible that *Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós*, in an earlier version, has been used as a model.

Some points in the Icelandic version are rather weak artistically, particularly the place where the elf-maiden asks Ólafur to wait while she goes to fetch the weapon;⁴ but the Icelandic version is tightly structured around the core of the ballad, which is the meeting between Ólafur and the elf-maiden and Ólafur's resulting death. Undeniably, it spoils the ballad that the impending wedding is left out and religious matter inserted instead.

A great deal has been written about this ballad, and Erik Dal has traced the history of its investigation in detail.⁵ Only a few points concerning the position of the Icelandic version need to be mentioned here.

⁴ Cf. Undset 1921, p. 5.

⁵ See Dal 1956, pp. 244–7.

The basic investigation of the transmission of the ballad still remains the one by Svend Grundtvig.⁶ In his opinion, the Icelandic variants are of the same type as other variants of the ballad in the Nordic countries; but his statements do not show clearly from where he thought it had reached Iceland. Finnur Jónsson states categorically that the ballad reached Iceland from Denmark and the Icelandic ballad was then brought to the Faroes. Knut Liestøl objected to Finnur Jónsson's view, especially because the epithet *liljurós* connects the Icelandic variants to the Norwegian and Faroese ones.⁷

Since Dal published his summary, an extensive study of the ballad by Alfhild Forslin has appeared.⁸ She investigates all the extant texts in Nordic languages (a total of 113; for comparison, it may be noted that Grundtvig used 68 texts from the same area), compares them with each other, with texts from Britain and America, and with texts from Bretagne. Her conclusions are in part different from those of earlier studies, not least concerning the Icelandic version. Alfhild Forslin thinks, with Grundtvig, that this ballad had its origin in or near Bretagne, and that the Breton version shows this in its most original form. But she thinks that it reached the Nordic countries through two routes: on the one hand to Denmark, either directly or through Germany, and on the other hand, through England or Scotland over to the West-Nordic area, even initially to Iceland; but in Norway the Danish version and the West-Nordic version met and were fused, the Norwegian version, however, chiefly deriving from the Danish one. She says:

Förmodligen utgör den norska visan en tidig derivation av Danmarks Elveskud.

Å andra sidan har vi kunnat påvisa, hur detaljutformningarna har sin egen norska prägel, i det att den berättelsestil och den stämning, som möter oss i Olav liljukrans . . . i stort sett är karaktäristiska för hela den västnordiska traditionen.⁹

When it comes to determining a place for the Icelandic version in the

⁶ DGF, IV, pp. 852–74.

⁷ See Finnur Jónsson 1914, pp. 47–53, and Liestøl 1915a, pp. 11–13. Liestøl's views are supported by Ek 1921, pp. 71–2, and Grüner Nielsen 1931, p. 32.

⁸ Forslin 1962.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

transmission of this ballad, she points out how little the ballad has changed from the 17th to the 19th centuries, and then says:

Denna fasthet i traditionen under de nämnda tvenne seklerna gör det troligt, att visan även dessförinnan — alltså före 1600-talet — har fortlevat tämligen opåverkad. Följaktligen torde den version av visan, som är oss bekant, kunna betraktas såsom en relativt ålderdomlig form, vars förebild hellre bör sökas söderut i Skottland eller Bretagne än i Skandinavien. Visserligen torde emellertid sedermera även skandinaviska (färöisk–norsk–danska) impulser ha inmängts i balladstoffet, som sålunda har fått sin nordiska prägel under anpassningen till isländska natur- och kulturförhållanden. Acklimatiseringen har skett icke blott i fråga om *innehållet* utan även beträffande *formen*. Ty det är den skandinaviska balladens tvåradiga strofform med omkväde, och det är slutligen den slentrianmässiga uppbyggnaden av formelstoff och parallelstrofer, som har gjort *Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós* till en genuint västnordisk ballad.¹⁰

It does not take lengthy consideration of this argument to see where it breaks down; this becomes increasingly evident when separate parts of the investigation are scrutinized. First we are told that the ballad was preserved in Iceland for a long time “tämligen opåverkad”, but later it is assumed that during its life in Icelandic tradition the ballad underwent a thorough transformation on account of West-Nordic influence. The extent of the postulated transformation is most easily seen by comparing the Scottish and Scandinavian versions with the Icelandic one. It is not until the narrative has been broken down into motifs that any particular relationship between the Icelandic and the Scottish versions can be seen, and even then the motif comparison has to be used fairly loosely for that conclusion to be reached. It is immediately evident on looking at the texts that *Ólafur liljurós* is of the Scandinavian family and only slightly related to the Scottish ballad. It is just as true of *Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós* as of other poetry that form and content cannot be regarded as two unrelated things that can be studied separately. Ballads are not transmitted from one country to another in such a way that the content comes from the East and the form from the West.

The method used here will, in all essentials, be of the same kind as that of Grundtvig, i.e., to compare individual stanzas in different vari-

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 64–5.

ants and versions. The Icelandic texts will be used as a basis, and an attempt will be made to find a place for the Icelandic version in the history of the ballad's tradition.

Before details of the ballad are considered, it is right to discuss the name of the protagonist. He is called Ólafur (Olav, Oluf, Olof, Ole) in all Nordic countries. In versions in English his name is Clerk Colvill, Colvin, Colin, etc., and in all probability, there is a connection here. In Norway, the Faroes, and in Iceland, Ólafur has an epithet: in Norway *liljukrans*, *liljugrein*, *liljutein*; in the Faroes *riddararós*, *rósinkrans*, *rósinkinn*; but in Iceland invariably *liljurós*. This points to a special relation between these countries, but the epithets themselves give no indication of the nature of this relationship.

The refrain in the Icelandic version varies slightly from one text to another, but it has no parallels in other countries. Two details in the refrain occur with greatest frequency: *rauður loginn*, the red flame that burns; and *björgin*, the rocks, both of which are connected to the story. The rocks are already mentioned in the first stanza, but the red flame is not mentioned in the narrative in the Icelandic variants; on the other hand, *elvelogji*, elf-flame, appears in Norwegian variants.¹¹

As stated above, the information that Ólafur's wedding is impending does not appear in the Icelandic version. If the opening of the Faroese version, the dialogue between mother and son, is original, this speaks against Finnur Jónsson's assumption that the ballad was brought to the Faroes from Iceland. Still, the wording of the first stanzas has its closest parallels in the Faroes:

i-A 1 Ólafur reið með björgum fram,
hitti fyrir sér álfarann.

f-A 7 Ólavur riður eftir björgunum fram,
fann upp á eitt elvarrann.

Related stanzas are found in all Nordic countries:

n-B 3 Ólav ríe mæ bergji blá,
der dansa elvarkvinnunne stóre á smá.¹²

¹¹ See, e.g., NB, p. 65.

¹² For the sake of convenience, Grundtvig's designation of Norwegian, Swedish and Danish variants in DGF, IV, pp. 853–66, is referred to in the study of this ballad.

4 Som Olaf han kom seg på bergið fram,
elvir og dvergir ikring honom sprang.

s-A 2 Herr Olof rider för bergja,
finner en dans med elfver.

d-A 2 Hr. Oluf rider frem ad bjærge,
der gik en dans med dværge.

i-A 2 Þar kom út ein álfamær,
gulli snúið var hennar hár.

f-A 9 Út kom eitt tað elvarfljóð,
flættað hár á herðar dró.

Here it appears as a special characteristic of the Icelandic and Faroese versions that the elves are supposed to live in rocks and emerge from them to tempt Ólafur.

In the Icelandic texts, there follow variations on this stanza, making the elf-maidens four in number, and it is the fourth one who addresses Ólafur. There are no parallels to this elsewhere, but in another Faroese ballad, FK 168 *Selamons ríma*, there are stanzas with the same rhyme-words. This ballad has been in existence in Iceland (ÍF 73), but has been lost, apart from the initial stanza. In its Danish version, DGF 206 *Vellemands vanvid*, these stanzas do not appear, and therefore there is no way of telling whether one ballad has borrowed from the other.

The dialogue between Ólafur and the elf-maiden is short in the Icelandic version and goes straight to the heart of the matter. Her address to him has parallels in the West- and East-Nordic areas, but the most closely related versions are the Norwegian and Faroese ones:

i-D 6 “Velkominn, Ólafur liljurós,
gakk í björg og bú með oss.”

f-A 11 Ver vælkomin, Ólavur Riddararós,
tú gakk í dansin og kvøð for os!

n-E 1 Vælkomen, Ólav liljegrein!
stíg av hesten, gakk í leik.

Here, as elsewhere, the Norwegian and Faroese texts are so closely related that it seems unlikely that an Icelandic version could have been

an intermediary link. This is also true of Ólafur's answer, where the wedding has been omitted from the Icelandic version and is replaced by a heavy emphasis on Christianity:

i-A 7 "Eg vil ei með álfum búa,
heldur vil eg á guð minn trúa."

f-A 14 Eg kann ikki meira hjá elvum bó:
í morgin skal eg mítt brúðleyp snó.

n-F 3 Eg vi' ikkje mæ elvó bú:
í morgó vi' eg flytje heim mi unge brúr.

It is somewhat strange that Alfhild Forslin should manage to come to the conclusion that Ólafur's meeting with the elf-maiden is more closely related in the Icelandic and Scottish version than in the Icelandic and Scandinavian ones. In the Scottish version, the supernatural being is a mermaid, and she addresses Clerk Colin with these words:

e-C 7 "Come down, come down, now, Clerk Colin,
Come down an fish wi me:
I'll row ye in my arms twa,
An a foot I sanna jee."^{13a}

Here, Clerk Colin does not give any answer to this invitation. One explanation of this is that Forslin cuts up the story into many small parts, which she then compares one by one. She classifies the dialogue in the Icelandic version with the first part of the dialogue in the Scandinavian versions, *naturväsendet lockar*, when Ólafur is invited to dance, but she does not compare it with the latter half of the dialogue where Ólafur is offered the alternative of staying with the elves or losing his life. Negative factors, such as Ólafur's not dancing with the elves neither in the Icelandic version nor the Scottish, appear to strengthen their relationship. In this way, a list of the motifs of the individual versions of the ballad can give a picture altogether different from that which is obvious to anyone who confronts the texts.

The description of how the elf-maiden asks Ólafur to wait while she goes to fetch a weapon is found nowhere except in Iceland, and is doubtless influenced by other Icelandic ballads.

There is a considerable difference from one country to another in the

^{13a} Child, I, p. 389.

way the elf-maiden kills Ólafur. In Breton and Scottish versions, she seems to do it by magic; in one Faroese variant she gives him poison to drink; but in all of them she kisses him, and it is the kiss which causes his death. In Scandinavian variants, he is usually struck a blow or stuck with a knife. In Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, there are many variants in which the elf-maiden stabs Ólafur with a knife, and these do in many respects resemble the Icelandic version. It also seems likely that the poisoned drink in the Faroese version has come in by the influence of other ballads, while the kiss was originally intended to deceive Ólafur, as in the Icelandic version. There are quite clear parallels in wording:

- i-A 12 “Þú munt ei so héðan fara
að þú munir oss kossinn spara.”
- 13 Ólafur leit um söðulboga (*laut, D et al.*)
kyssti hann frúna af heilum huga (*hálfum D. et al.*)
- 14 Hún lagði undir hans herðarblað,
í hjartarótum staðar gaf.
- f-A 27 Hoyr tú, Ólavur fríði,
tú kyss meg, áðrenn tú ríður!
- 28 Ólavur studdist við saðilboga,
hann kysti ta moy af lítlum huga.
- 29 Hann kysti hana so mjúkan,
hon sveik hann so sjúkan.
- n-H 11 Ólav han lútar ivi sadelen fram,
dei elveknívanne í hjarta'i rann.
- s-G 5 Herr Olof lutar sig öfver sölfsmiddan knapp,
en sölfboddan knif i hans hjerta hon stakk.
- d-Z 6 Saa slog hun ham over hans Hærde god,
at Slaget gjaldt i hans Hjærterod.

The relationship between these texts would seem to indicate that the Icelandic text has its origin in Norway rather than the Faroes, but of course it is possible that the stabbing disappeared from the Faroese version after the ballad came to Iceland. It is certainly improbable that

the kiss could have been dropped in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, if it ever appeared in those versions, but still, it was a natural occasion for Ólafur to have bent across his saddle. *Herðablað*, or *herðar* appear frequently both in Danish and Norwegian texts and are probably a very old feature, but when *hjartarætur* appears in the same stanza in a Danish text from the late 19th century, it is difficult to guess whether this is an original feature or a coincidence, for this detail is of too little weight to indicate a special connection between the Icelandic and Danish traditions.

Ólafur's journey home is described in similar terms everywhere, but the Faroese version is more closely related to the Scandinavian ones than to the Icelandic version.

Ólafur's conversation with his mother and sister is closely related in the versions of all Nordic countries, but in its inception there are a few stanzas that show the special position of the West-Nordic tradition:

i-A 19 “Hvaðan komstu, sonurinn minn?
Hvörminn ertu so fögur á kinn?”

20 So ertu blár og so ertu bleikur
sem þú hafir verið í álfaleik.”

21 “Mér tjáir ekki að dylja þig,
álfamærin blekkti mig.”

f-A 32 Hví ert tú so fölin, hví ert tú so bleik,
sum tú hevði verið í elvarleik.

34 Tí eri eg fölin, tí eri eg bleik:
í gjár var eg í elvarleik.

n-A 24 Dú tar ikkje undrast på, fer eg æ' bleik,
fer eg heve vori í den elvarleik.

n-G 12 Dí æ' eg så bleik, dí æ' eg så blá:
for elvekvinnunne mæ knívane smá.

Ólafur's death and the close of the ballad do not have as stable a form as other parts of the narrative in the Icelandic tradition. The reason for this instability might be the loss of the last part of the ballad, but it must be noted that the part about Ólafur's wedding is missing in many Scandinavian variants and all the Faroese ones, so it is not certain

that it was ever known in Iceland. Still, it seems in some places in the Icelandic version that there is an echo from this missing final part, although the mother has taken over the bride's role:

i-A 23 Leiddi hún hann í loftið inn,
dauðan kyssti hún soninn sinn.

Swedish, Danish and Norwegian variants describe how the bride finds Ólafur's dead body in the bed, kisses it and dies:

d-A 53 Hun minded liget så overbrat,
hendes hjærte det sønder i stykker brast.

n-F 11 Hass unge brúr hélt úti hass hánd,
Ólav snúdde veggjen te å gav upp sí ánd.

n-G 15 Då brúri kom seg í grønan lund,
då livd' ikkje Ólav ei líti stund.

n-A 29 Og då som presten kom fer lund,
då gav han Olaf up si ánd.

The rhyme words of these stanzas have parallels in Icelandic variants:

i-E 23 Þegar hann lagðist í mjúka sæng,
Ólafur gaf upp sína önd.

i-W 19 Ei leið nema lítil stund,
Ólafur ungi gaf upp önd.

The comparison of *Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós* with foreign parallels shows that it was brought to Iceland from Scandinavia, but not from Scotland or other countries where this ballad is known. The comparison furthermore shows that the ballad is most closely related to the West-Nordic, i.e., the Norwegian and Faroese variants. This relation must be such that both the Icelandic and the Faroese versions originally came from Norway, for the connections between Norwegian tradition and the East-Nordic are both closer and more varied than those of the Icelandic–Faroese versions. The question is then whether the ballad was brought to the Faroes straight from Norway or through Iceland, and to Iceland straight from Norway or through the Faroes. As for the Faroes, there are so many features more closely related between Faroese and Norwegian variants than between Faroese and Icelandic ones that the

ballad must have been brought to the Faroes straight from Norway. It is not equally obvious that the Icelandic version was brought straight from Norway, but, as has been pointed out here, there are various features that connect the Norwegian and Icelandic variants in distinction to the Faroese, so that it is more probable that the ballad was also brought to Iceland directly from Norway. The explanation for the close verbal parallels frequently found between the Icelandic and the Faroese versions must then be that the ballad was brought to Iceland and the Faroes at nearly the same time and from approximately the same parts of Norway, and that Norwegian variants have changed considerably in oral transmission since that time and do in fact represent a more heterogeneous tradition than the Icelandic–Faroese variants.

This West-Nordic origin shows that *Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós* was brought to Iceland before the Reformation, but a more accurate dating could only be based on guesswork, as the language and metre of the ballad are of no help in this matter.

ÍF 2 Elenar ljóð

Elen asks her father's permission to go to the dance, but he advises her not to go. She takes no heed of this warning, and at the dance she sings so loud that the merman (*nykur*) hears her. He saddles a horse; immediately, he has Elen in his power and ties her to his saddle. They ride along a lake and she asks him for a rest. He says he is willing to give her a rest if she will have him. She replies: *eg því ekki nenni* (I do not care to), and then he disappears, no doubt because she has said his name (*nennir* is another word for the merman or *nykur*). Elen returns home and praises God.

The C-variant begins in the same way, but when the maiden, Kristín, leaves for the dance, her splendid costume and numerous attendants are carefully listed. She then sets off riding so hard that the *Nennir* hears her. After this there is a gap, for there is only one more stanza which describes how he vanishes when she mentions his name.^{13b}

This ballad is obviously a variant of TSB A 48, although the verbal relationship to variants from other parts of the Nordic area is not very close. Versions of the ballad have been recorded in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and the Faroes. It makes comparison of individual variants difficult that the extant Nordic versions seem to be impregnated with

^{13b} Texts: A = III, p. 249, B = IV, p. 120 (one stanza), C = VII, p. 121.

material from other *nykur*-ballads, esp. TSB A 50, as Sverker Ek has pointed out.¹⁴ However, Ek feels that the Icelandic A-text is a comparatively good representative of the oldest form of the ballad, except that it has a happy ending as do other West-Nordic versions: the girl escapes from the *nykur*. This shared ending was Liestøl's main argument against Finnur Jónsson's conclusion that the Icelandic A-text had come straight from Denmark. Finnur thought that the Icelandic version had been created by a fusion of two Danish ballads, *Nøkkens sving* (DGF 39, TSB A 38) and *Mø fra Dandsen* (DGF 232, TSB D 151), the latter of which has a beginning similar to that of *Elenar ljóð*.¹⁵ Ólafur Marteinsson agreed with Liestøl on the origin of the A-text, but thought that the C-text had come straight from Denmark. His conclusion is:

Liestøl is right in that Elenar ljóð is a survival of a *nykur*-ballad which came from Norway a long time ago. F.J. is right in that every single stanza of the ballad is either Icelandic or Danish, or could be so.¹⁶

When we look at the two Icelandic texts, it is immediately obvious that they have nothing in common but the beginning and the end. Two stanzas from the beginning of C and a stanza and a half from the ending have parallels in A. The main content of C, the description of the maiden's horse, the number of her attendants and the splendour of her ride, can hardly have been part of this ballad from the beginning. Most probably, as Ólafur Marteinsson thought, this is a variant evincing a great deal of influence from younger *nykur*-ballads. When it was brought to Iceland, its thematic kinship with *Elenar ljóð* was recognized, so that the old beginning and ending were used, while the new content was inserted.¹⁷

The first stanza of the A-text is also frequently found at the beginning of Scandinavian variants. It is, however, repeated as stanza 6, where in fact it fits into the narrative. The B-text has started with A 2.

¹⁴ See Ek 1935.

¹⁵ See Liestøl 1915a, pp. 5–11 and Finnur Jónsson 1914, pp. 44–7.

¹⁶ Ólafur Marteinsson, p. 178.

¹⁷ There is nothing in the plot which conflicts with the possibility that the A and C texts might be parts of the same ballad version, as the extra material in the C-text comes in where there is a gap in the narrative; but the differences in names and style indicate that these are not fragments of a single whole.

There are no parallels for A 2–5 in Scandinavian variants of this ballad, which was the reason why Finnur Jónsson thought it had been borrowed from DGF 232. It is worth considering here that a related beginning is also found in DGF 189 and 282. The relationship to 232 is, however, closest, and this is a ballad that shows every sign of being quite young.¹⁸ The initial incident, where the daughter asks permission from father/mother, is obviously a commonplace motif which can easily be assimilated into a ballad without direct influence from any other specific ballad. It should be pointed out, however, that there exist European ballads on the same theme which begin in exactly the same way as i-A; so it is by no means unlikely that the beginning of the Icelandic variant was a part of the ballad in its original form.¹⁹

A few verbal parallels can be pointed out:

i-A 1(6) Elen litla kvað so hátt,
heyrði nykur í vatni lá.

d-A 4 Stallt war denn iumfrw, hun kuai saa:
det hørrde hand nøkenn, vnder isenn laa.

n-A 1 Heiemór kva, dæ saang í lí,
dæ hörde nykkjen, paa have skrí.²⁰

i-A 7 Nykurinn tók sinn gangvara grá,
setti gylltan söðulinn á.

d-A 7 Hand skabber sin hest buod suortt och huid,
i forgyldene saadell saa rider hand did.

n-B 3 Han skapte sæg sadel, han skapte sæg hest,
bissel av sylv aa gríme av gull.²¹

n-E skjønt hesten han va sala aa beisla med Guld.²²

In the Icelandic version, the resolution comes quite suddenly and practically by coincidence, when Elen uses the verb *nenna*. In effect, this

¹⁸ See DGF, II, pp. 50–51, and Ek 1935, p. 70.

¹⁹ See especially DGF, II, pp. 50–51, which recounts the contents of a Slovenic ballad which must be related to German ballads that are the most probable sources for DGF 39.

²⁰ Bugge 1858, p. 68.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

²² Text in NFS from Eksingedalen.

is similar to the Norwegian and Faroese versions, except that in those she is perceptive enough to recognize the *nykur* for what he is. At the beginning of the scene, there is a stanza which has its closest parallel in the Danish A variant:

i-A 9 Riðu þau so með vatni fram.
Elen beiddi hvíldar hann.

d-A 21 Thj redd igenem stuoff och stauffn,
hans hest stander wed saa wilt ett wand.

At this point the Faroese version has some stanzas in Danish, and one of them is also a parallel to i-A 9:

f 8 Der de kom i roenslund,
da lyster Else lille at hvile en stund.

The rest of the scene, with the abrupt ending, distinguishes the West-Nordic tradition:

i-A 11 “Eg því ekki nenni.”
So hvarf hann frá henni.

12 Elen snerist heim í leið,
hún lofaði guð það varð ei meir.

n-B 11 Der hó kom í rósenslund,
hó nemde nykkjen, han sokk í grunn.

12 Upp kom nykkjen vesul aa vaat,
helvten va’ mann aa helvten va’ baat.

f-11 Elsa lítla lítur seg upp í fjøll:
“Eg meini, tú ert eitt nykartrøll.”

13 Nykurinn leyp á vatnið kátur,
hálvur maður og hálvur bátur.

14 Skundaði hon so snarliga heim,
hon takkaði Gud, hon fekk ikki mein.

The rhyme-words in i-A 11 show that this stanza must have been composed in Iceland. Probably, the temptation to use the pun was too great to be resisted, though this could of course be a question of influence from folktales with the same ending, providing their source is not the

ballad.²³ The scholars who have written about this ballad agree that the West-Nordic happy end is secondary.²⁴ This means that the ballad must have been brought to Iceland from Norway in a form close to that of the Icelandic A-text.²⁵ Features common to this variant and Danish ones must therefore be old.

The diction and metre of the ballad do not warrant any conclusion regarding its age. Rhyming feet are all in agreement with Old Icelandic quantity rules, but other feet are sometimes short where they should be long according to those rules. Still, it is hardly possible to draw any conclusions from this. The lines are fairly short and the metre is regular.

The language of the A-text is pure Icelandic. Ballad words like *gá* and *gangvari* occur, but this is to be expected in any ballad. There is a much greater admixture of foreign influences in C, where we find adjectives without endings, incorrect noun declensions, an incorrect verbal form, and unusual words. The non-declined adjectives may be regarded as normal ballad language, but the number of these linguistic peculiarities is too great for the version to have enjoyed a long life in oral tradition. It is therefore most probable that the material distinctive for the C-text was brought to Iceland from Denmark rather late, probably c. 1600, while the older version may be at least a century older.

ÍF 3 Gauta kvæði

Gauti and Magnhild are talking in a loft (this is missing in many variants), and he asks her what is the cause of her sorrow. She says that she will drown in the Skotberg river; he offers to build an iron bridge across the river; she says that will be of no avail. When Magnhild reaches the middle of the bridge, it breaks into three parts. Many people fall into the river, but no one takes any notice of Magnhild. Gauti hears of this, calls for his harp, and, with his playing, he draws a star into the sea, a bolt from a lock, a cow from its stall, hind from the hillside and, finally, Magnhild from the deep. But he has to endure the pain of kissing her dead lips. Thus ends B; DE add that his

²³ Cf. JÁ₂, I, pp. 131–2.

²⁴ See Bugge in DGF, III, pp. 819–20, Liestøl 1915a, pp. 6–8.

²⁵ Liestøl 1915a points out that the Icelandic and Faroese versions are, in some respects, more related to variants from West Norway than are the Telemark variants. This is interesting, but one must bear in mind that the Norwegian tradition as a whole shows every sign of decay and, in any case, is collected some four centuries after the Icelandic branch was split from it.

heart broke and describe the funeral. In A, it is said that he buried her in consecrated ground, and wove strings from her hair; in G she gains the power of speech in death and rebukes him for not leaving her in peace, but adds that he will join her in the grave.²⁶

This ballad is preserved in recordings from the 17th into the 19th centuries, but most of them are from the late 17th and early 18th centuries. There are some slight differences between the texts in that stanzas are missing in some places; also, influences from *Hörpu kvæði* (13) can be detected at least in the A-text. A version of TSB A 50, this ballad is found in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. There, the narrative shows some points of difference. Everywhere it is stated that Magnhild's horse stumbled on the bridge, and therefore she alone falls into the river. In some variants it appears that her fear is caused by her sister having previously been killed in the same way, and in most cases it is mentioned that it is the merman or some other monster that causes the accident. The important difference, however, is that the playing of the harp brings Magnhild back to her bridegroom alive.

Knut Liestøl investigated the origins of the Icelandic version and came to the conclusion that it had come from Norway, more specifically the Southwest or West of Norway. His main evidence is the use of the names Gauti and Magnhild, which are also found in some of the Norwegian variants, and close parallels in wording between Norwegian and Icelandic variants.²⁷ There is not much to add to Liestøl's observations.

The initial stanza found in some variants, which states that Gauti and Magnhild are sitting together in a loft, is formulaic and serves as an introduction to their conversation. It has probably replaced an older one which has given the information that their wedding is soon to take place. The two conversations that follow this beginning in the Icelandic version have close parallels in Norwegian texts while the wording is much less closely related in Danish and Swedish texts.

i-A 2 Gauti spurði Magnhild sín:

“Hvað syrgir þig, sætan mín?”

3 “Mig syrgir það þú mátt ei sjá,
eg mun drukkna í Skotbergs á.”

²⁶ Texts: A = I, p. 239, B = III, p. 222, C = IV, p. 116 (one stanza), D = IV, p. 159, E = IV, p. 237, F = V, p. 206 (one line), G = VI, p. 213.

²⁷ See Liestøl 1915a, pp. 18–22.

n-R 4 Aa Goute han tala te bruri si:

“Kvi renn dei strie taarinn paa kinn?”

5 “Aa væl dei taarinn renne maa,

d’æ spaatt eg sko drukne i Vændels aa.”²⁸

i-A 4 “Þú skalt ei drukkna í Skotbergs á,
járnbrú skal eg um miðja slá.”

n-A 11 Aa me skal byggje den brú sá hág,
og sterke jönnstolpanne under slá.”²⁹

This close similarity between Icelandic and Norwegian variants continues until it comes to the description of the effects of the playing of the harp. Then, the Icelandic version goes its own way while other Scandinavian versions are fairly closely related to each other. It is usual that enumerations of this kind invite all sorts of variations and emendations, which can easily lead to a complete change in content; but, as will be mentioned later, at least one stanza in the Icelandic version seems to belong to a very old layer of the tradition in Scandinavia.

Of course, it is common to all the variants that the last thing Gauti effects with his playing is retrieving Magnhild from the river. The rhyming word *grunni*, which occurs here in the Icelandic variants, is probably an old feature of the ballad, as it occurs in a Norwegian variant from Skafsaa (Cf. DGF, III, p. 821) and in d-A 26–7.

As stated above, the ending has changed in the Icelandic version, and therefore it cannot be compared with foreign versions. Liestøl explains these changes as the influence of *Hörpu kvæði*, but this can hardly be considered certain, as direct influence from this ballad is only seen in the A-text. In all the Icelandic variants, however, the attempts at the end to restore the bride to life are a total failure.

Sophus Bugge has made the most thorough investigation of this ballad and brings forward arguments to the effect that it is put together from two distinct parts.³⁰ He thinks that the first part of the ballad is based on a German ballad which he calls *Wassermanns Braut*.³¹ It begins in a manner similar to our poem, the bride foresees her fate, and

²⁸ R is a text rec. by Hans Ross and pr. in *Syn og Segn* 1903, pp. 166–70.

²⁹ A is Landstad’s text, pp. 469–76.

³⁰ See Bugge 1891.

³¹ DV, no. 47, there called *Die Rheinbraut*.

it ends with a bridge breaking underneath the bride and her death by drowning. Most scholars have accepted Bugge's idea about the connection between these ballads.³² But earlier, Grundtvig had assumed the German ballad to be younger, which is not an unnatural assumption since it is not preserved in manuscripts older than the 19th century.³³

The latter part of the ballad, the playing of the harp and the recovery of the bride, Bugge traced to England, to English variants of the well known legend of Orpheus and Euridyce. He thinks that the main source is a Middle English lay, *Sir Orfeo*, which probably dates from the early 14th century or possibly earlier, and is presumably based on an older French lay. *Sir Orfeo* is 600 lines and has little material in common with *Gauta kvæði*. On the other hand, it is indisputable that ballads were composed using *Sir Orfeo* as a model. In the 19th century in the Shetland Islands, *King Orfeo*, a fragment of a ballad with a Nordic refrain showing clear signs of being based on *Sir Orfeo*, was written down.³⁴ However, Bugge does not think of this ballad as an intermediary link, but rather that these are two independent ballad versions based on the old poem. It is impossible to find conclusive evidence that the Scandinavian ballad is derived directly from *Sir Orfeo*, but other details indicate that this ballad has its roots in the British Isles. The stanzas about the magic power of the music have parallels in a few Anglo-Scottish ballads, particularly in Child 67, *Glasgerion*, and in Child 49, *The Twa Brothers*. It is noteworthy that the latter ballad contains a stanza parallel to one in *Gauta kvæði*, though it has no parallels in Scandinavia:

i-A 14 Gauti sló það fyrsta slag,
stjarnan fauk í myrkva haf.

Child 49 C 18 She ran distraught, she wept, she sight,
She wept the sma brids frae the tree,
She wept the starns adoun frae the lift,
She wept the fish out o the sea.

³² See, e. g., Norlind 1911, Ek 1935, and Meier in DV, II, pp. 182ff.

³³ Cf. DGF, IV, pp. 811–12; he makes a reservation, though: "I sin Helhed maa denne Vandringshistorie staa hen som en ubevislig Formodning."

³⁴ Another romance or lay about Orpheus is described by Stewart 1973, and later recordings of the King Orfeo ballad are printed by Shuldham-Shaw 1976. This recently discovered material strengthens the assumption that the Orpheus theme was dealt with in Scottish oral poetry in the Middle Ages.

It is interesting that not only does the stanza mention the weeping of the “starns adoun frae the lift” but also the weeping of the fish out of the sea, while in the Icelandic variants of *Gauta kvæði* various animals are drawn from their natural habitat. The weeping of the girl is only a distortion, as can be seen from this stanza from another variant:

Child 49 B 10 She put the small pipes to her mouth,
 And she harped both far and near,
 Till she harped the small birds off the briers,
 And her true love out of the grave.

In this ballad, as in *Gauta kvæði*, the music fails to restore the loved one to life, and the ghost only speaks a few words to the girl.

Bugge thought that, from the material described above, a ballad was composed in Denmark around 1400, and then spread throughout the Nordic countries. Sverker Ek agrees with him as regards the material, but thinks that the ballad was composed in Norway, probably in or near Bergen.³⁵ It is difficult to make a decision here, but the Icelandic version seems to support Ek’s theory. It has the breaking of the bridge in common with the German ballad, whereas the bride’s horse stumbles in other Nordic versions, and, furthermore, the bride is not restored to life. A feature in common with related English material is the star that falls into the sea. If Bugge’s theory regarding the origin of the Nordic ballad is sound, the Icelandic version must contain more original traits than other Nordic versions (this does not hold for the ending itself, as the “happy end” could have come from the English version of the Orpheus legend). *Gauta kvæði* has undoubtedly come to Iceland straight from Norway, probably from Bergen or its surroundings. If the ballad was of Danish origin, it seems highly unlikely that the Icelandic version should preserve features more original than those found in other Nordic versions.

Bugge thinks that the original version of the Nordic ballad was composed around 1400, but his evidence for such an exact dating is weak. Nothing can be said with certainty about the ballad’s age in Iceland, except that it must have been brought there before the Reformation. Close verbal parallels with Norwegian variants would seem to speak against great age, but this cannot be used to state categorically whether the ballad was brought to Iceland before or soon after 1500.

³⁵ See Ek 1935, pp. 3–14.

The length of rhyming feet in *Gauta kvæði* is always in agreement with the old rules of quantity. Other feet are not always of full length. This kind of irregularity is common, but also speaks against great age. The metre is regular and almost all lines have either a full rhyme or assonance rhyme. The language of the ballad is pure and devoid of Scandinavian traces other than features that may be regarded as common ballad diction. These characteristics are in good agreement with the assumption that the ballad was brought to Iceland no later than around 1500, but how much earlier this happened is impossible to say.

ÍF 4 Ríka álfs kvæði

King Eiríkur has a daughter called Engilsól. She refuses to give her love to any man. She is addressed by someone who asks her to go to the loft and make love to him. She refuses, but is then led away to a house where a powerful fairy sits and everything seems prepared for a wedding. The fairy asks her not to cry and offers her all his love, but she says it is to no avail, for she is in hard labour. He then foretells that they will have a son and asks that he should be given the name Jálkus.³⁶

It is clear that something is missing from the 17th century text which is the only recording of this ballad, but obviously it tells the story of a girl who is enchanted by fairies. The editors of *Íslensk fornkvæði* pointed out the thematic relationship between this ballad and DGF 37 (TSB A 54), which also deals with a girl enchanted by fairies. Still, it is quite clear that these are two different ballads. The Danish ballad and its parallels are in couplet metre; there are no verbal parallels, and the story itself is different, even though the main motif is the same.

Ríka álfs kvæði is in a quatrain metre and has no refrain. In this respect, it is in a category with a few other ballads that have no foreign parallels and contain various specifically Icelandic linguistic details. Moreover, these ballads are generally very regular in metre, and the rhyming feet in lines 2 and 4 are by an overwhelming majority feminine.^{37a} There are no exceptions to this in *Ríka álfs kvæði*. It must be

³⁶ Text: III, p. 173.

^{37a} The other poems are ÍF 50, 56, 58, 78, 81, 82. The use of feminine vs. masculine rhymes in the Nordic ballad quatrain is studied by Widmark 1959 and 1970. She is also inclined to explain the dominance of feminine rhymes in many West-Nordic ballads as influence from *rímur*.

considered probable that all these ballads were composed in Iceland and influenced by the four line *rímur* metres. In addition to this, both the lack of refrain and various other stylistic features tie them more closely to *rímur*. In the language and style of *Ríka álfs kvæði*, there are, however, few specially Icelandic characteristics or other details giving indication of its origin. The formula *gá með mér í hægaloft* is so common and must have been so ready to hand for the ballad singer that no conclusion can be drawn from its presence in the ballad. The style can be called genuine ballad style, though there is one feature that indicates the influence of *rímur* style: a narrator makes his appearance in the first line: *Eirík nefni eg kónginn þann*.

In Icelandic folk poetry and legends, we can find parallels to *Ríka álfs kvæði*. In the poem *Kötludraumur*^{37b} there are descriptions of the dwellings of the fairies reminiscent of this ballad, and in particular there is a resemblance in the words of farewell spoken by the fairies:

10–11 — — —

Við munum eiga ungan son
undir silkitjaldi.

Ef þú átt einn ungan son
láttu hann Jálkus heita.

— — —

Kötludraumur II, 27 Við munum eiga
einn son í vonum,
þann skaltu, kvendið frítt,
Kára nefna.³⁸

An example of a legend showing similarities to *Ríka álfs kvæði* is the story of the *Daughter of the Bishop at Hólar* in Jón Árnason's collection.³⁹ The beginning of that story, the kidnapping of the girl and

^{37b} This poem, which narrates a fairy legend in an eddic metre and is found in a great number of mss. from the 17th to the 19th centuries, is edited in ÍGSVÞ, IV, pp. 4–29.

³⁸ ÍGSVÞ, IV, p. 21. *Kötludraumur* was written down from oral tradition in several variants in the 17th century but can have been composed no later than the 16th century.

³⁹ JÁ₂, III, p. 101.

the description of her experiences in the fairy world, is similar to the ballad, both in content and sometimes in wording.

The conclusion of this study is that there are various indications that *Ríka álfs kvæði* was composed in Iceland, whereas there is no evidence to the contrary. It is difficult to offer a guess as to its age. Still the old rules for syllable quantity seem to be followed meticulously, not only in rhyming feet but in all feet with one exception. This indicates that the ballad can hardly have been composed later than mid-sixteenth century.

ÍF 5 Sætrölls kvæði

A king and a queen sail their ships out to sea; the wind dies down completely; hairy paws and claws reach out of the sea. (The queen asks) how much gold has to be given in order that the sea monster will let the ship move again. The monster only wants the boy who sits on her lap. The mother combs the boy's hair with a golden comb and sheds a tear, but then gives up the boy. Then the ship starts moving fast under them.⁴⁰

There is no difference in content between the variants of this ballad, which were collected in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, and the stanzas are always the same with only slight verbal variation. A very different version of this type (TSB A 74) appears in Denmark as *Germand gladensvend*, and there is also thematic kinship with the Faroese *Trøllið í Áradal* (CCF 101, TSB A 75). The Danish ballad begins in the same manner as *Sætrölls kvæði*, but the queen is pregnant. The monster (here usually appearing as a bird) demands what the queen is carrying under her belt. She agrees and throws her keys into the sea. The ships begin to move, but when they reach the shore the keys are lying on the sand. Five months later, the queen gives birth to a son. He grows up, a fine man, and finds a sweetheart. One day he borrows his mother's feather cloak (*fieder-ham*) and flies away to his sweetheart. On the way he meets the bird-monster, which allows him to pass but puts its mark on him and drinks half of his heart-blood. Germand then finds his betrothed and tells her what has happened. She then takes a feather cloak and flies after him. With her scissors, she cuts all birds that she

⁴⁰ Texts: A = II, p. 72, B = IV, p. 124 (one stanza), C = IV, p. 235, D = V, p. 19, E = VII, p. 31, F = VII, p. 112 (one stanza), G = VII, p. 191.

meets into small pieces, but she fails to catch the bird-monster, and of her lover she finds only the right hand.

Germand gladensvend is composed around the central motif of a mother who unwittingly loses her child to a monster. This has been simplified in the Icelandic ballad—the mother knows what she is doing—and therefore it becomes a mere fragment compared with the Danish one. In the Faroese ballad, this motif is better preserved than in the Icelandic, while in other respects it is less closely related to the Danish ballad. The lady Margrét comes to a river in Áradal, washes and combs her hair, but is stuck to the ground. Then, the ugly monster in the water makes her promise to give to him “tað fyrsta kind” which she is going to have (a pun seems to be involved). Unsuspecting, she gives this promise, but it turns out that she is carrying a son and a daughter. The queen takes good care of her children. One day the troll comes to fetch them, but gives her leave to keep them for fifteen winters. Then one day there is a snowstorm and the children disappear. In the last stanza of A they are with the troll, and the ballad seems to end in the middle of the story. This is probably a late addition under the influence of fairy tales.⁴¹

The similarities between the narratives of these three ballads are so slight that they could, on that basis alone, be considered totally unrelated. But verbal similarities show that they all preserve remnants of one and the same ballad. This was pointed out by Svend Grundtvig and has not been questioned until recently when Iørn Piø objected to the view that the Icelandic and the Danish ballads belong to the same type.⁴² He says about *Sætrölls kvæði*: “Dette visefragment . . . kan ikke henregnes til DGFT 33.”⁴³ For one thing, *Sætrölls kvæði* is not a fragment but a rounded story, albeit a short one. However, Piø’s view can be accepted if he means that the differences in the plot are so great that two types have to be postulated when the matter is regarded from a synchronic point of view. On the other hand, there is undoubtedly a generic connection between the two. Here, the crucial factor is that, apart from a certain similarity of content, there is also a considerable verbal relationship. These verbal parallels are found not only in identical parts of the story but also in other places.

⁴¹ See, e.g., *Færøske folkesagn og æventyr*, no. 10.

⁴² See DGF, II, p. 1, and IV, p. 784, further Piø 1969.

⁴³ Piø 1969, p. 70.

The beginning of the oldest Icelandic and Danish variants is almost identical:

i-A 1 Kongurinn og drottningin
 á þann sunnudag
 héldu sínum skipunum
 á það myrkva haf.

2 Þegar að þau komu
 á það myrkva haf
 þá tók allan byrinn af
 svo hvörggi gaf.

d-A 1 Konngen och danske droning
 dy segller att haffuen fram:
 thy kunde ycke børenn faa,
 saa thi kunde segle fram.

In i-A 3 one can see that the monster is in the water, and this is also the case in both Faroese variants and Danish C and D, whereas the monster is a bird (eagle or raven) in other Danish variants.

The offers made by the queen are similar in Icelandic and Danish variants while the roles are reversed in Faroese:

i-A 4 Hvörsu mikið rauðagull
 skal eg gefa þér
 ef þú lætur skipið
 skriða undir mér?

d-B 4 “Hør thu thett, du vilde ørn,
 nedsennck nu icki migh:
 thett røde guldt, dett huide sølff
 saa ville ieg giffue digh.”

f-A 5 Hvussu mikið reyðargull
 vilt tú mær til veita?
 Eg loysi teg frá jørðini
 gullkamb úr hári at greiða.”

The answer to this question, contained in i-A 5, is verbally similar to the first part of the answer in the Danish variant, as was to be expected.

The most memorable stanza of *Sætrölls kvæði*, the one that makes the ballad come alive, is the 6th stanza describing the mother's grief. Here, the Icelandic version stands apart, because it is the only one where the mother has to part with her child immediately, and one could hardly expect to find any parallels in the other versions. Still, the same stanza is found in the Danish ballad, only in a different place, where Germand's betrothed is taking leave of him:

i-A 6 Móðir tók sér gullkamb
og kembdi sveinsins hár,
en með hvörjum lokkinum
þá felldi frúin tár.

d-B 24 Saa thog hunn enn sølffslagenn kam,
och saa kiemde hunn hans fouere haardt:
for huer enn lock, och der hunn redde,
hun felde saa modige thaare.

In the Danish D and E variants we find a "kam aff guld" in this position. It should also be kept in mind that the Faroese ballad mentions a golden comb, as pointed out above, although in a different context. It looks as if we have here one of the examples where fragments of a disintegrated tradition have been gathered to form a new whole.

The final stanza in the Icelandic variants has no direct parallel in other versions, though there is a resemblance to Danish variants:

i-A 7 Þegar þau höfðu af hendi selt
þann unga svein
bruna tóku skipin
undir báðum þeim.

d-C 5 Saa tug hund dy nogle smaa,
hund kaste thennum udy strand:
dy fyck bør hynd blyde,
dy seyled saa glad tyll land.

The comparison has shown that most of the lines of *Sætrölls kvæði* have parallels in *Germand gladensvend*. The relationship with the Faro-

ese ballad is much weaker, but still these three ballads seem to be so closely related that they must have had a common source. The most obvious assumption then is that *Sætrölls kvæði* and *Trøllið í Áradal* are direct descendants of *Germand gladensvend*, although each one has been transformed in its own way. Still, there is a striking contrast between the simplicity of the younger ballads and the complex, almost novelistic, structure of *Germand gladensvend*, and it is tempting to assume that all three are based upon an older Danish ballad with a somewhat simpler story, e.g., the fiancée might not have played any role in it. The story gets more complicated and sympathies are scattered when the woman who grieves is split into two women. Of course, there is no evidence for an older Danish ballad, and speculations on its existence are therefore futile.

In the above-mentioned study, Iørn Piø has maintained that the evil bird or monster that stops the ships and ends up drinking the blood of the protagonist was originally a raven, who in fact was a man under a spell (*valravn*). In this he opposes the views of Axel Olrik, who maintained that this creature was actually a sea-monster (*havuhyre*).⁴⁴ If we think that we have decisive proof that *Sætrölls kvæði* is of the same type as, or even a direct descendant of, *Germand gladensvend*, Piø's argument is undermined. If Piø is right, however, regarding the nature of the monster and about the relationship between the Danish variants, then *Sætrölls kvæði* must have been brought from Denmark to Iceland at a very late date, which is highly unlikely. Also, the earliest Danish recording and another one, slightly later, both have a sea-monster in the first part of the ballad, and though the monster later appears as a bird, a raven, eagle or vulture, it is always on or above the sea. The fact that the monster can turn into a bird if necessary leads to its turning into a *valravn* in some variants, which Piø considers to be the most original. The monster's craving for Germand's blood is the point most heavily stressed by Piø in his argument that it is really a *valravn*, but it is undeniably a weak spot in his theory that there is nowhere any indication that the monster is freed from a spell by drinking the heart-blood, and thus the most important characteristic of this creature is missing. The craving for heart-blood which appears in all Danish variants is undoubtedly introduced through influence from ballads about a *valravn*, but here it is used for poetic effect: there is no better

⁴⁴ See Olrik 1934, pp. 27ff.

way of expressing the cruelty of the monster and its thirst for the victim's life. The reason why the betrothed does not find the bird-monster is that it has returned to its natural habitat in the depths of the sea.

The central motif in *Germand gladensvend*, a woman promises unwittingly to give her unborn child to an evil creature, is widely known. It appears in Old Icelandic literature and in many legends and fairy tales of other nations.⁴⁵ In the Icelandic tradition of the ballad, this motif has undergone simplification and distortion so that all the fateful events occur in the same place at the same time, and it actually only describes one character, the mother, instead of three as in the Danish ballad.

There is nothing in the metre or language of *Sætrölls kvæði* to indicate that it is a recent composition. The language is pure and beautiful. The only linguistic pointers to Scandinavia are three places where a demonstrative pronoun is used as an article, but no dating can be based on that evidence alone. As the ballad is not found in Norway, a reconstruction of its history becomes difficult, but it can be regarded as probable that it was brought to Iceland from Denmark in the 16th century or earlier, possibly through Norway.

ÍF 6 Kaupmanna kvæði

Traders are becalmed at sea and are suffering from starvation. They eat gloves and many other things of value, cut down masts and beams for firewood. They are all cousins, except for the young helmsman. When they are going to draw lots to decide who is going to be cut up for food, the helmsman offers to sacrifice himself (BC, in A his lot is drawn) and tells them how to go about killing him. In variants B and C, he is then killed and his liver and lungs are brought before the young king, but as he is about to start on his meal, he chances to look up. In A the helmsman is not killed; it is he who chances to look up. He then sees a dove sitting on the mast. He asks for a bow and arrow, but the dove asks him to show mercy and gives them a favourable wind to reach shore. C finally adds that the dove carried a tankard of wine under its wing and gave them to drink. They then sailed to shore, God and Mary with them.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ See Thompson, *Motif-Index*, S240, Olrik 1934, pp. 32–3. The oldest example is in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, pp. 169–70.

⁴⁶ Texts: A = II, p. 32, B = III, p. 187, C = V, p. 1.

This ballad is found in Norway, Denmark and Sweden (TSB B 26). Another version has been popular among the French, the Spanish and the Portuguese.⁴⁷ This Romance version is probably the primary one, even though the recordings are younger. Although the only evidence he offers is the antique appearance of the ballad, George Doncieux maintains that the French prototype could not be younger than the 16th century.⁴⁸ This does not conflict with the age of the Nordic recordings. The Icelandic variants are oldest; in Denmark and Sweden the ballad appears in the early 18th century, while the Norwegian variants date from the 19th century.⁴⁹

There are numerous verbal parallels in all the Nordic texts, but in content they differ on many points. In neither the French ballad nor the Icelandic variants are there any signs that the vicissitudes of the traders are a punishment for any wrong they have done, but in Scandinavia they are being punished for setting sail on Christmas Eve or for some other misdemeanour. This is probably a feature that was added in Scandinavia after the version that was brought to Iceland took shape, although it is possible that it has been omitted in the Icelandic tradition.⁵⁰ The Icelandic version seems to have altered, becoming increasingly realistic, as the ship is at sea for only 40 days, while in other versions the voyage takes many years. In the description of the effects of starvation on the traders, related stanzas appear in the Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish variants:

i-A 3 Hjuggu þeir tré og hjuggu þeir rá,
allt var eytt á skipinu lá.
Átu þeir sína glófa
og marga gripina góða.

n-A 3 Dei laag der saa lengje,
dei aat upp baade segl aa strengjir.

⁴⁷ See Doncieux 1904, pp. 243–51.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

⁴⁹ See DGF, IX, pp. 199–205, and Liestøl 1950, pp. 36ff.

⁵⁰ Religious teachings were frequently added to ballads or omitted from them, esp. when they were being transmitted from one country to another, cf. e.g., ÍF 15, where this kind of a teaching is omitted, and on the other hand ÍF 1, where the religious material is added.

4 Dei aat upp balgjen av sítt svær,
dæ va' saa líti matevær.

5 Dei aat upp skóen av sín fót,
dæ va' saa líti matevón.⁵¹

In the Swedish variant, there are stanzas very close to the Norwegian ones; but there are no parallels in the Danish variants.

It is interesting to note that in the oldest Icelandic variant the helmsman is not killed, because this unnecessary killing has been added to the story in Scandinavia. However, this is probably an example of how a story can be 'corrected' during transmission rather than an original feature; the helmsman describes his own killing in advance, and the repetition of this description has been omitted.

The special relationship between the Nordic versions appears where the cannibalism is about to commence. The same stanza is used in Danish, Norwegian and Icelandic variants. It is true that this is a formulaic stanza, but it cannot be a coincidence that all these variants use it in this place:

i-B 7 Tóku þeir lifur og lungu,
þeir báru fyrir konginn unga.

n-A 9 Dei auste upp livr aa lungur,
dei bar for kungssonen den unge.

d-A 12 De skaare da ud hans Lever og Lunge,
De bare det frem for den unge Konge.

The conclusion of the ballad has, for the most part, disappeared from the Norwegian tradition, but still, one stanza says that the Virgin Mary appeared and offered to steer the ship for them; one informant remembered that a dove had sat down on their mast, while another one thinks it was an angel. In n-A and the Swedish variant, a favourable wind springs up without any visible helping agent, while the Danish and Icelandic variants tell the story in much the same way although they are not very close verbally, e.g.:

i-A 8 "Fáið mér ör og boga," hann tér,
"að skjóta fugl til matar mér."

⁵¹ Bugge 1858, p. 86.

d-A 15 Kongen hand taler til liden Smaa Dreng:
 “Du skyd mig den Due og kaage mig den.”

In the Danish variants, however, the dove is more talkative and not only directs them to shore but explains that it is an angel.

The prelude of *Kaupmanna kvæði* is singular and beautiful. As the editors of *Íslenzk fornkvæði*¹ pointed out, there exists a German poem which seems to be related to it. It is printed in Uhland's collection of folk poetry and is the initial stanza of a poem called *Nordfahrt*. The poem deals with the voyages of Hanseatic traders to Bergen and neighbouring places in Norway, more specifically with one particular voyage.

Dat vögelken singet sinen sank,
 de sommernacht de is nicht lank,
 dat is des koepmans beste;
 got vorlehn uns ein guden wint
 van norden und van westen!⁵²

As can be seen, a direct relationship with the Icelandic prelude is only found in the 3rd line, *dat is des koepmans beste*, which is a direct parallel to *það er kaupmanna prýði*. This stanza is rather different in tone from the other stanzas of the German poem, and it is tempting to speculate that it was originally independent of the poem. Still, it is, of course, perfectly possible that it was sung by Hanseatic traders in Bergen within the hearing of Icelanders and that this stimulated one of the latter to sing about *kaupmanna prýði*. This does not necessarily indicate that *Kaupmanna kvæði*, as a whole, was brought to Iceland from Bergen, as the verse was hardly composed to be used specifically as a prelude for *Kaupmanna kvæði*; at least, the refrains from the other Nordic countries are not related. It is most probable that this was a single lyrical stanza which got connected with *Kaupmanna kvæði* in Iceland because of the reference to *kaupmenn*.⁵³

⁵² Uhland 1844–5, (no. 172), p. 452.

⁵³ Uhland says that his source is a printed Low German collection of poetry without date or place of printing, but probably dating from the beginning of the 17th century. In Deutsches Liedarchiv in Freiburg, there is a copy of a broadside (*Flugblatt*) of the poem, with the first stanza identical to that in Uhland's edition. This broadside is probably also from the 17th century. Otherwise, the stanza is not to be found in DL. Dr. Otto Holzapfel at the DL, who has been kind enough to investigate this for me, says in a letter dated 20.2.1972: “In der ersten Strophe

The two oldest texts of *Kaupmanna kvæði* are recorded in such a way that two couplets are joined by a refrain which is split and comes after the first, the second and the fourth lines of the two couplets. This is probably to be regarded as a singing rhythm rather than a special metre. The arrangement presumably has some connection with this lyrical refrain.

The language of *Kaupmanna kvæði* is comparatively pure, and it is noteworthy that the rhyming feet do not contradict the old quantity rules. Internal feet in the lines are, on the other hand, often irregular, but variants are not in good agreement, so it is difficult to say when this is caused by faulty transmission. The rhymes are fairly irregular, many of them assonance rhymes, but in general there is a good ballad tone.

The preservation of this ballad in the Nordic countries is so poor that no definite conclusions can be drawn from comparison of the versions. Some features in the Icelandic version seem to be more original than comparable features in Scandinavian versions, and this indicates that the ballad was brought to Iceland fairly soon after it became known in Scandinavia. It can have reached Iceland from either Denmark or Norway. This can hardly have happened later than the 16th century, but there is no reason to believe in a greater age.

ÍF 7 Hildibrands kvæði

Hildibrand gives away his sister Hljóðbjörg (or other names) into the power of a mighty lord of a heathen (remote) country. Shortly afterwards the lord, Porkell, throws her into a dungeon and claims she was not a virgin when she came to him. Hljóðbjörg swears her innocence. She sits at the window in her prison and sees a raven fly by. She offers to give him a blue coat and other treasures if he carries news of her to Hildibrand. He wants nothing but the liver and lungs (of young Porkell). She agrees and the raven flies across the sea and tells the news to Hildebrand. He walks to the stable (here the tradition must be divided in Type I and Type II). Type I (AEFGI):

dieses Liedes würde ich als Lied keinerlei Beziehung zum isländischen Zitat sehen. Die Zeilen 1 und 2 (Vogel und Sommernacht) würde ich als Wanderzeilen aus der Liebesliedrepertoire bezeichnen. Zeilen 3 bis 5 gehören zusammen, und hierin kommt vielleicht eine geläufige Redensart der Hanseleute zum Ausdruck. Nord- und Westwind brauchte der Seemann, um seine niederdeutsche Heimat wieder zu erreichen."

Hildibrand takes a horse, rides to the lands of the lord and asks for his sister. The lord says that she is bearing a child, but Hildibrand is not deterred by this and knocks at her door. She says she is in chains, whereupon he breaks down the door and turns her loose; he fights the lord, the lord is hanged, and the raven comes to receive his liver and lungs. Type II (D): Hildibrand goes to the stable, where he speaks to the horse and asks him to carry him. The horse agrees to this but warns him not to speak a word. On the way Hildibrand lets slip a word of praise for the horse and falls into the water, while the horse wades ashore, comes to the assembly and kicks a hundred men to death. Hljóðbjörg asks the horse to carry her and he agrees on the same condition as before. In the final stanza, she kisses the horse and he is transformed into a prince.

In H, a late 19th century recording from Eastern Iceland, these two types are mixed, but this variant has several other special characteristics: the brother is called *herra Karl*, he speaks to the horse, whom he calls *blakkurinn*, and is warned not to speak on the way. In the middle of the strait, he inadvertently does so, but then it is the horse that sinks while Karl and his men get to the shore. After that, everything happens as in Type I and ends with the raven asking for Þorkell's lungs.⁵⁴

Type I is also found in Norway, where there are 21 variants, 19 from Telemark and 2 from Aust-Agdir, all of them recorded in the middle or late 19th century. Most of these variants are quite similar to the Icelandic ones, though in some of them the horse plays a greater role in saving the sister than in the Icelandic version. This is undoubtedly more original, and in fact it brings the two types closer to each other. The spell motif has completely disappeared from the majority of these variants; they end with the killing of Þorkell and the raven obtaining the lungs and liver as had been promised. In Sweden, there is also one variant of this type which is in content closely related to the Norwegian ones.

Type II is found throughout the whole Nordic area but is divided into two sub-groups. Most closely related to the Icelandic version are d-A and f-ABC (these are the only Faroese recordings). The other group only exists in 19th century recordings, 3 Norwegian, one Swedish and one Danish. There the hero is called Valdemon, Vallemo, Wollemor, and the girl is his daughter. The king does fall into the water but

⁵⁴ Texts: A = II, p. 12, B = IV, p. 119 (one stanza), C = IV, p. 180 (one stanza from the same informant as D), D = IV, p. 181, E = V, p. 132, F = VI, p. 58, G = VI, p. 152, H = VI, p. 161, I = VII, p. 123, J = VII, p. 171 (a fragment).

the horse picks him up on the way home and then falls dead from exhaustion when he reaches home, and the king's sole regret is not to be able to bury him in consecrated ground.

A few features in the H-text, which are not found in other Icelandic variants, have foreign parallels. In the Faroese texts, the horse is called *hin blanki* or *Blanki*; in Norway, he is called *den blakke* or *blakkin*, both in Type I and II; the same is true of Swedish and Danish variants. The name *herra Karl* occurs in f-BC, though in a peculiar way, for in both these recordings the brother is first called Hildibrand, but later *herra/harri Karl*. However, the feature that the horse is drowned while the brother is saved has no parallel, and has undoubtedly come about when the types coalesced.

Long before other scholars began to consider the origins of *Hildibrands kvæði*, Árni Magnússon expressed his view on its sources: "Það fornkvæði: Hildibrand á sér systur í borg, er transfererað úr dönsku máli, so sem af þess orðum auðséð er."⁵⁵ (The ballad: Hildibrand has a sister in a castle, is translated from the Danish language, as may easily be seen from its words.) If he means by this that a written translation was made, he is obviously wrong, but it is also doubtful that the ballad can have been orally translated from Danish.

Svend Grundtvig's investigation of this ballad is focused on the story itself, which he considers to be very old. He thought that d-A gave the most accurate picture of the story in its original form, but he gives no account of how he thinks the ballad has been transmitted through the Nordic area.⁵⁶ Axel Olrik dealt fairly thoroughly with this ballad in a lecture in 1894, where he brings forward evidence of the Norwegian origin of the ballad.⁵⁷ The same view is expressed by Ernst von der Recke, who feels he can detect West-Nordic linguistic traces in d-A, and Sverker Ek, who thinks that a whole group of ballads in which horses play a great role is Norwegian.⁵⁸

Finnur Jónsson and Knut Liestøl were for once in agreement on the Icelandic tradition of this ballad. Finnur thinks it likely that Type I and II were brought to Iceland separately, probably at different times and

⁵⁵ ÍF, IV, p. xxxvi.

⁵⁶ See DGF, II, pp. 190–199.

⁵⁷ See Olrik 1934, pp. 170–80.

⁵⁸ See *Danmarks Fornviser*, I, pp. 280–81, and Ek 1921, p. 90.

even from two countries.⁵⁹ Liestøl supported this view and found examples to demonstrate the close relation between the Icelandic and Norwegian variants of Type I.⁶⁰

The i-H-text was known neither to Finnur Jónsson nor Liestøl, but it was known to Ólafur Marteinsson who was the first to investigate it. He thought that this text showed a direct connection with the Faroese tradition and drew the conclusion that Type II must have been brought to Iceland from the Faroes.⁶¹

The opening of the ballad is very similar in Icelandic, Faroese, Norwegian and Danish variants, and thus gives no indication of their relationship, though it is noteworthy that in both the Icelandic and Faroese variants, and nowhere else, Hildibrand is said to have sent his sister to a *heathen* people. After the bride has been put in chains, there follows, in many variants, a conversation where she demands an explanation of this treatment. This conversation is missing in i-D and the Faroese variants, and also in Type I in Norway. On the other hand, it is present in Icelandic variants of Type I, and in d-A and young texts of Type II it is very long. It is not conclusive in itself that the conversation should be missing in some cases and not others, but this does show that the dividing line between the types is blurred in the first part of the ballad. The beginning of this conversation is most closely related in i-A and d-A:

i-A 4 Hljóðbjörg spurði greifa sinn:
“Fyrir hvað lætur þú binda mig?”

5 “Fyrir það læt eg binda þig
að þú komst ekki mey til mín.”

d-A 19 “Mynn herre, huad laader y wydde meg?
huor-for laader y saa bynnde meg?”

20 “Dett haffuer ieg att wydde theeeg:
thu kaamst icke møø y bwrre till meeg.”

In d-A and in young texts of Type II, both Danish, Norwegian and

⁵⁹ See Finnur Jónsson 1914, p. 57.

⁶⁰ See Liestøl 1915a, pp. 13–17.

⁶¹ See Ólafur Marteinsson, p. 186.

Swedish, there is a lengthy addition to this conversation, the core of which appears in i-H.

The next part, the conversation between the woman and the raven, is very similar in Icelandic and Faroese variants:

i-A 8 Hún leit upp og hún leit fram,
hún sá sér öngvan hjálparamann.

9 Hún leit upp til skýja,
hún leit hrafninn fljúga.

f-C 6 Hon leit seg upp, hon leit seg fram,
hon visti sær ongan hjálparamann.

7 Hon leit seg upp til skýggja,
har sá hon fuglar tríggjar.

f-A 5 Hon sá seg upp til himmal,
har sá hon fuglar flúgva.

i-E 11 “Heyrðu það, hrafninn brúni!
Kanntu veg til Túna?”

f-B 7 “Hoyr tað, fuglurin brúni,
kanst tú bera boð til Túna?”

d-A 25 “Hør du nu, raffuenn hynn brune:
kaandtt thu thend *weegtter thuonne*.”⁶²

i-E 12 “Já góð, já góð, eg kann þann,
eg kann fljúga í hvörn einn rann.”

f-A 7 “Eg kann bera boð í hvørt eitt land,
eg kenni tín bróður Hildibrand.”

She then offers the raven a red band of gold and a blue coat as a reward. Of course, these are formulas which are inserted here and are both unnecessary and unsuitable. In the Faroese variants they do not

⁶² Svend Grundtvig considered these last words to be a distortion of *weeg teell Thuonne*, which is probably correct.

occur, while the golden band occurs in Danish A 29–30, and both the golden band and the blue coat in Norwegian variants (e.g. XXII (Landst.), 3–7). The relationship is closest between Norwegian and Icelandic texts, but these formulas are so common that their occurrence does not count for much. The last offer, the one which the raven accepts, is related in all versions and almost identical in the West-Nordic versions:

i-A 12 “Gefðu mér lifur og lungu
úr honum Þorkeli unga.”

n-XXIb 5 “Du gjeve meg Livr aa Longur
Alt af en Tarkjel den onge.⁶³”

i-D 13 “Gefðu mér lifur og lungu
að fæða með mína unga.”

f-C 10 “Gev mær livur og lungu
at bera for mínar ungar!

11 Gev mær livur og lungu fyrst,
hjartað út av Torkils bryst!”

The old Danish text is further removed from these, but still has connections with the Faroese version when the heart is added to the list:

d-A 32 “Raffuen-lild, wildtt thu flyffue for meg,
mynn harris hiartte saa gyffuer ieg thieeg.”

33 “Neye saa mend, ieg icke weell,
for-vddenn ieg faar hans øggenn tieell.”

In the next section of the ballad, the description of the raven’s journey and his conversation with Hildebrand, practically every stanza in the Icelandic variants has a close parallel in the Faroese texts and Norwegian texts of Type I. There are few close verbal similarities in other texts.

As soon as Hildibrand’s journey commences, the two sub-types

⁶³ The Norwegian variants of this ballad are quoted in accordance with the plan for the forthcoming Norwegian ballad edition, to be published by the Institutt for folkeminnevitenskap, Oslo.

diverge as described above, but in the first part of the ballad the West-Nordic variants show the closest interrelationship. This is interesting because all the Faroese variants belong to Type II, but they are, at the same time, most closely related to Icelandic and Norwegian variants, Type I no less than Type II.

There is no reason for quoting examples of the close relationship between the conclusions of Type I in Iceland and Norway; the story is the same and many stanzas are almost identical, but a closer look must be taken at the ending of Type II; here i-D and H have the same content:

i-D 20 Hildibrand gengur í hestahús,
sinn brúna gangvara leiddi hann út.

21 Hildibrand talar hestinn við:
“Viltu voga að bera mig?”

22 “Ég skal gjarnan bera þig,
tala þú aldrei orð við mig.”

d-A 40 Hylldebraand gaar y stalde,
hand skuodde thy fuollerr allee.

41 Hand skuodde denn brune, hand skuodde denn
graa,
men Black lagde hand gyltte saaddell paa.

42 “Black-lyllde, willdt dw beerre meeg?
thaarskenn hueedde saa gyffuer ieg dieeg.”

43 “Saa giernne daa wylde ieg beerre deeg,
om dw wilde icke nøffne meg.”

There are no parallels to this in the Faroese variants. But in those texts in which the hero is called Valdeemon, these stanzas occur with very slight variation in Denmark and Norway. It is interesting that these stanzas should occur in both i-D and i-H but not at all in the Faroese variants. On the other hand, the accident that occurs on the way is found in the Faroese texts as might be expected, but the wording is not quite the same as in Icelandic texts:

i-D 23 Hildibrand talar hestinn við:
 “Séð hef eg aldrei líkann þinn.”

24 Hesturinn óð með slóðum,
 kongurinn flaut í flóði.

The last stanza is almost certainly distorted. The wording of the H-text is more natural, and it is very close to Faroese and Danish texts, except that it is the horse that is drowned:

i-H 24 Þegar hann kom á mitt sund
 mælti hann orð á óstund.

d-A 45 Denn thyd hand kaam der meette paa sund,
 daa neffnid hand Black y kranckenn stunde.

f-A 14 Tá ið hann kom har mitt á fjørð,
 tá brast Blankans saðilgjørð.

Here we can leave i-H out of consideration as that text follows Type I from here on, but i-D is fairly close to Faroese texts and to d-A:

i-D 25 Hesturinn kom á þingið fram,
 þess galt margur velborinn mann.

Hesturinn barði og hesturinn sló,
 hundrað manns fyrir fótum dó.

d-A 49 Black-lyld leebb att tyngenn frem:
 haand suo synn søster bonndenn stand.

50 Black-lyld ind paa tynngenn sprang:
 thy rømett for hanom buode quinde och mand.

51 Black-lyld sluo, och raffnenn hog:
 thy stuod y hunddertt maannde bluod.

It is worth noting that, in the Faroese texts, this feature is closest to Norwegian variants of Type II:

f-A 18 Blanki bæði beit og sló,
 tretivu menn undir hóvum tróð.

n-XII 30 Aa Blakkjen han blei baade gram aa mo
de 30 Mænd slo han onde sin Fot.

After this, there are no parallels to be found except the conclusion where the horse is released from his spell, which occurs both in Denmark and the Faroes. A spell motif also occurs in the endings of a few Norwegian variants of Type I, but here it is the raven that is delivered from a spell.

i-D 29 Hún minntist við hans fagra munn,
svo er hann sannur kongsson.

f-B 40 Hon myntist við hans munn so góð,
hann varð ein kongason, sum hann stóð.

n-XXII 27 Og raven han skreik, så høgt han gol,
så vart han til ein kongsmanns son.

The relationship between Icelandic and Norwegian variants of Type I is so close that there can be no doubt that this version of *Hildibrands kvæði* was brought to Iceland from Norway. Problems arise when it comes to explaining how Type II was brought to Iceland. The extant variants are so few and scattered that it is impossible to make any definite statements about the history of this sub-type before the date of the earliest recordings. It would make the investigation easier if we knew whether the ideas about the Norwegian origin of the ballad are correct. The arguments leading to this conclusion are indeed convincing, not least the fact that in the East-Nordic tradition, where ballads of the supernatural usually enjoy great popularity, there are very few recordings and only one (d-A) before the 19th century. The spread of the ballad and its sub-types is best explained by assuming that it was composed in Norway and that the splitting into sub-types was begun before it left this area. The version where the hero is named Valdeemon and is the girl's father seems to be the latest development, and before it started, Type II was brought to Denmark, as witnessed by d-A, and to the Faroes and Iceland. The question that then remains to be answered is how Type II was distributed over this area: did the Faroese and Icelanders get it from its place of origin in Norway, or from Denmark?

Finnur Jónsson thought that the Faroese variants had been brought there from Iceland, but various points, both in content and rhyme, indicate that this could hardly have been the case. The relationship between the Norwegian and the Faroese variants is so close that there is no reason to assume Icelandic tradition as an intermediary link. (Both Norwegian and Faroese variants list horses of various colours which Hildibrand has in his stable before the right horse is reached. There is no sign of this in the Icelandic variants. In the Faroese variants and in n-Type II, 30 men are waiting for the horse on the beach when he reaches the shore. In d-A and i-D, he comes to the assembly and fights a hundred men. There are also certain parallels in rhyme words of Faroese and Norwegian variants which are not found in Icelandic.)

The name *herra Karl* in the H-text indicates a special connection with the Faroes, but it has to be considered that neither the Faroese nor the Icelanders seem very likely to have introduced this name, which was practically unknown in these places in former times.⁶⁴ On the other hand, Denmark has quite a few ballads where the name *herr Karl* occurs; and three of those also exist in Norway (DGF 182, cf. Utsyn 188, DGF 87, 389, cf. Utsyn 109, DGF 409, cf. Utsyn 127, and DGF 432). It is therefore likely that the name was introduced into the ballad in Denmark. If this is a sound conclusion, a Danish variant of the ballad must have been brought to the Faroes and Iceland. This could have happened at a comparatively late date, perhaps not until the 17th or 18th century. Nevertheless, Type II is likely to be older than this, both in the Faroes and in Iceland, and the fact that the brother is called Hildibrand both in i-A and in parts of the Faroese variants is evidence for this conclusion. Both i-A and the Faroese variants are so closely related to Norwegian variants of the ballad that it seems impossible to postulate a Danish intermediary link. Instead, one must assume that Type II was originally brought from Norway directly to Iceland and the Faroes, but that this branch of the tradition later was influenced by a Danish variant.

The language and style of the Icelandic variants, except for H,

⁶⁴ Occurrences of the name *Karl* in Iceland in earlier times are few and dubious in origin, and in the 1703 census, there is no one with this name (cf. Ólafur Lárusson 1960). In CCF there is no *Karl* apart from this one, and in 1801 it is not found in the Faroes as the only Christian name, but three persons bear it as one of two names (cf. Jákup í Jákupsstovu 1973).

support the conclusion that the ballad belongs to the mainstream of West-Nordic ballads brought to Iceland before the Reformation. The language of the H-text, on the other hand, shows various signs of being younger, and st. 8 conflicts with the old quantity rules using *föður:söðul* as rhyme words in extended feet.

ÍF 8 Kvæði af Stíg og Regisu

The knight Stígur carves runes which he intends to throw at Kristín, but they end up with the king's daughter, Regisa; Regisa blushes while Stígur pales. He goes to his mother for advice, but she tells him that there will be no escaping Regisa. Regisa comes to Stígur's bed and tries to seduce him, but he resists all temptations. The king hears of Regisa's behaviour, calls her before him and asks what passed between them. She says it is true she went to Stígur but he did not cause her any disgrace. The king says he is to be thanked for this, summons him to his presence and gives him his daughter and twelve marks of gold. Stígur and Regisa are married.⁶⁵

This ballad (TSB A 4) is found only in the collection of Gissur Sveinsson. It is undoubtedly Danish, and in Denmark there exists one recording from the end of the 16th century and three from the first half of the 17th century. An account of Stígur's wedding has been added to two of these variants, but it must be considered a separate ballad.⁶⁶ In addition to these Danish recordings, there is one Swedish recording from the latter half of the 17th century, and Norwegian recordings from the 19th century.⁶⁷

All these recordings, except one of the Norwegian variants and a Danish one, have the same refrain. This indicates that the ballad was transmitted throughout the Scandinavian countries at a rather late date.

The Swedish recording shows considerable distortion and has been influenced by another ballad; it is very closely related to the Danish recordings, not surprisingly, as it comes from South-Sweden. It is thus out of the question as an intermediary link between Denmark and Iceland. Therefore, this investigation will concentrate on whether the ballad came to Iceland directly from Denmark or through Norway.

⁶⁵ Text: I, p. 74.

⁶⁶ Cf. DGF, II, pp. 301–5, *Danmarks Fornviser*, II, p. 10, Ek 1945, pp. 115–16, and Jonsson 1967, p. 727.

⁶⁷ See *Visböcker*, I, p. 378, and Bugge 1858, p. 76.

The initial stanza in the Icelandic version has no parallel, but bears some resemblance to n-B 1.⁶⁸ The following stanzas are practically identical in the Danish and Icelandic traditions:

i 2 Með hægri skenkir hann mjöð og vín,
með vinstri ristir hann rúnirnar sín.

3 Allar koma þær undir Regisu skinn,
sem hann ætlaði frú Kristín.

4 Roðna tók hún Regisa rauð sem blóð,
blikna tók hann riddari Stígur þar eð hann stóð.

d-A 6 Med hiøgre hand skiencker hand miød och win:
med wenster hand kaster hand rounner sin.

7 Hand hagde agt att kaste rounner paa hin lidenn
Kierstin:
och di dreff under iomfru Rigesse hindis skiend.

d-D 10 Iunfrw Rygys hun rødemer som en blod:
men rider Styd suorttener som en iord.

It is characteristic for the narrative method of the Icelandic variant that all connective material is omitted. In the next stanza, Stígur is with his mother asking for her advice. In the Danish variants, the scenes are connected and the narrative is fuller and runs more smoothly. In the Danish version, Stígur goes to his stepmother for advice and there Regisa is the king's sister while everywhere else we find a mother and a daughter. Here, the Danish variants have probably preserved the original text; but it is very common in balladry that family relations become simpler the farther one gets from the place and time of origin, so that this does not necessarily show any particular connection between the Swedish–Norwegian–Icelandic versions.⁶⁹

The dialogue between (step)mother and son is very closely related in the Danish and Icelandic variants, while the relationship with the Norwegian texts is weaker. After this dialogue, the Icelandic text im-

⁶⁸ The Norwegian variants are quoted from Bugge 1858.

⁶⁹ See Ek 1931, pp. 80–81.

mediately begins to describe how the king's daughter comes to Stígur's bed. At the beginning of this description, Norwegian and Icelandic recordings have one stanza in common which is not found in the Danish tradition:

i 8 Regisa lagðist í sængina niður,
riddari Stígur sneri sér til veggjar viður.

n-B 12 Ridderlíti la' seg í sengji ne,
Ridderstíg han snúdde veggjen te.

In other respects their meeting is for the most part described in such closely similar terms in the Icelandic and the Danish variants that it can almost be regarded as a literal translation, as can be seen from the following stanzas:

i 10 Minntist hún við hans munn so reyð,
kyrr lá hann riddari Stígur sem hann væri deyð.

d-A 32 Hun minder hanom for sinn mund saa rød:
alt laae Riiderstii, som hand war død.

In the Icelandic text and in d-BCD, the king hears about Regisa's behaviour and summons her and then Stígur to his presence, while in d-A and the Norwegian recordings the knight Stígur in the most un-chivalric fashion goes to the king himself and complains of Regisa's pursuit of him. This feature must derive from another, later ballad where it fits better. As it appears in one of the Danish variants, we may assume that it came to Norway when the ballad was originally brought there. The fact that the Icelandic variant preserves the older type of the story here indicates that it cannot have come to Iceland from Norway.

In the final section of the ballad, there is no close similarity between the texts. Still, it is interesting to note Regisa's response when the king asks her what she has been doing:

i 18 "Satt var það eg til hans gekk
en öngva skömm eg af hönum fékk."

d-A 42 "Alt war dett Gudtz sande, ieg till hanom gieck:
dog ingenn u-ere ieg aff hanom fieck.

In d-CD, we find 'godvilje' instead of 'u-ere', while B has 'skade'. The 'good will' seems to be a later change; but it also occurs in n-B (n-A has 'kjærlegheit'), and this is a further indication that the Icelandic text has come directly from Denmark.

In three stanzas, i 23–25, the king thanks Stígur for his constancy and offers him his daughter as a reward. Judging from the story, this expression of gratitude is likely to be original to the ballad. Two stanzas with similar content and wording are found in the Norwegian variants, but are missing from the Danish variants. The last stanza is the same in all variants with minor verbal variations.

When we look at the comparison as a whole, it appears that the Icelandic and Norwegian texts are on two points in agreement on material not found in the Danish variants; but this only proves that these stanzas have been omitted from the Danish version. Against this, we have the close verbal relation between the Icelandic and the Danish texts throughout most of the ballad, and, furthermore, secondary features which Norwegian texts have in common with some of the Danish texts, where the Icelandic recordings seem to preserve a more original text. There is, thus, no doubt that the Icelandic tradition is derived directly from Denmark.

The Icelandic version of this ballad is recorded in a repetitive metre, i.e., one and a half lines from the previous stanza are repeated at the beginning of a new one.⁷⁰ As will appear here, this metre seems particularly to characterize ballads which contain other features that indicate that they have been transmitted directly from Denmark at a fairly late date. Other metrical characteristics point in the same direction: the lines are very long; there are usually two unstressed syllables between the stressed ones, sometimes three. The old rules on syllable length seem to be adhered to, however, if we assume that the words *riddari Stígur*, always written thus, were sung *riddar Stíg*, i.e., with three syllables, which is demanded by the rhythm. If this was not so, we can hardly assume that the ballad was ever sung in Iceland, as can be seen by lines such as *blikna tók hann riddari Stígur þar eð hann stóð*, or *riddari Stígur sneri sér til veggjar viður* or *kyrr lá hann riddari Stígur sem hann væri barn*. Lines of such length are unparalleled in Icelandic ballads collected from oral tradition. These examples also show that the

⁷⁰ For discussion of this stanza form, see Dal 1956, pp. 282–6, and the literature he refers to, esp. Schiøler Mileck 1955.

ballad's Icelandic leaves much to be desired; even the word order, usually natural in ballads, is all jumbled, e.g., *mitt líf stár so í hræðilegum voða*. The fact is that many parts of the ballad are in no better Icelandic than the written translations from Vedel made in the 17th century, and apart from the adherence to old quantity rules there are no linguistic grounds for supposing that the ballad is older than the time it was recorded. An examination of the rhymes leads to the same conclusion.

The language of the ballad thus indicates that it came to Iceland at a late date and arouses the suspicion that it may have been translated in writing in the 17th century, never having existed in oral tradition in Iceland; this assumption is in accordance with the fact that there is only this single recording. However, there does not exist in Denmark a written, not to mention a printed text, which could have been the basis for the Icelandic translation. The points on which the Icelandic version differs from the extant Danish texts are best explained as the result of oral transmission. It must therefore be considered most likely that *Kvæði af Stíg og Regisu* was transmitted orally from Denmark to Iceland; but, as stilted as it is, the ballad can hardly have enjoyed a long life in Icelandic oral tradition. It could hardly have been brought to Iceland earlier than around 1600, and it might have been known to a very limited number of people before Gissur Sveinsson wrote it down.

This conclusion differs very much from the views held by Sverker Ek, who says: "Nästan genomgående visar sig den isländska versionen stå på det ålderdomligaste stadiet."⁷¹ It is interesting from a methodological point of view to try to find out how such differences of opinion can arise.

It appears that Ek bases his conclusion almost exclusively on aesthetic criteria and, moreover, on a preconceived idea of the medieval ballad. The most important criteria in this case seem to be simplicity of plot construction and an advancing of the story by scenes which are not or only loosely connected. When we look at the Danish recordings, we see that judged by these criteria the 17th century C-text shows every sign of being older or more original than the 16th century D-text.

It is interesting to note that the changes that were made in this ballad when it was transmitted from Denmark to Iceland consist mostly in the elimination of connective material: the story is abridged and simplified.

⁷¹ Ek 1945, p. 132.

This is something that occurs naturally in oral tradition, particularly through transmission between countries. At the same time, what has been accepted as ballad tone and ballad style becomes clearer through these changes. Of course, it is only what was to be expected that characteristics acquired through oral transmission have become typical of an oral genre, but it is a methodological fallacy to believe that such characteristics have belonged to a particular ballad from the time of its composition. The views of many scholars of an earlier generation, such as, e.g., Steenstrup, Olrik and Ek, on what the ballads looked like originally and what is original to them, are perhaps mainly determined by what was ultimately latent in them, given the conditions of their transmission.

ÍF 9 Stafrós kvæði

Salomon and Kári were brothers (refrain: they know the runes well). Kári rides to a forest; the mighty Stafró comes and carries him deep into the mountain. She forces him to make love to her, and he forgets his runes. He gets her permission to ride away, comes to Salomon and asks him to teach him the runes again. Salomon demurs, but still they step upon a stone and Kári learns his runes again. He rides back to the mountain with a sword. Stafró asks him why he is armed, and Kári replies that the king is angry with him. She offers him gold to reconcile the king and then asks him to buy a horse for her, but he says she can run. She runs ahead of him. When they reach the white sand, he drops his sword and asks her to pick it up, but when she bends down he says some runes and tells her to turn to stone, cause trouble to no one and stand there as a landmark.⁷²

The only text of this ballad (TSB A 66) was recorded by Gissur Sveinsson in 1665, and it has not been found outside Iceland. The essence of the story is a legend about a man who is taken into a rock by a giantess and saves himself through rune magic. Seduction and escape from giantesses is a common motif in Icelandic folktales, but none of their heroes uses a similar method to get away.

Formulaic phrases known from other ballads are few in number (stanzas 8 and 15), but the spell in st. 23 is a variation on a stanza in ÍF 83, *Kára kvæði*, where a human being also succeeds in turning an erotically minded giant into stone, although rune magic is not made use of.

⁷² Text: I, p. 50.

Although this ballad is not found anywhere outside Iceland, it is obvious from its metre and diction that it is not Icelandic. The name *Stafró* is peculiar, and Grundtvig has pointed out that its second syllable is probably the same word as Swedish *rå*, e.g. in *skogsrå*.⁷³ The rhyming is extremely slipshod and would be improved in several places if translated back into Scandinavian. Some of the lines are without rhyme. However, the old quantity rules are followed in the rhyming feet.

The ballad is undoubtedly non-Icelandic, and the language indicates that it is rather young. It could hardly be older than the 16th century.

ÍF 10 Kvæði af Sigmundi

Sigmundur knows no greater man on earth than himself. He asks his mother where he is to find a bride, and she says that Valgarð has three daughters. He rides away from home with twelve knights, goes to see Valgarð and asks to be allowed to marry one of his daughters. He answers that he has three daughters and cannot stand to see any one of them grieving. Sigmundur then asks for Ingiríður who he says is neither beautiful nor pretty. He now carves runes on a stick and throws it into her lap, and when she asks for something to drink he throws another stick into the drink. But she goes to the pigsty and gives the drink to a sow. The sow runs to the ships and to Sigmundur's bed. He kills the sow but it turns into a ghost and prevents them all from sleeping. The maiden boasts that she outwitted him at his rune magic.⁷⁴

This ballad is only found in Gissur Sveinsson's collection. It is not found outside Iceland, but it is undoubtedly based on an anecdote from the German collection of *exempla*, *Schimpf und Ernst*, originally published in 1522 and in a Danish translation 1625.⁷⁵ Eight other poems in ballad metre were composed on the basis of this collection, and all have been edited in ÍF. However, most of them seem never to have been transmitted orally and are therefore not dealt with in this work. *Kvæði af Sigmundi* has a special position.

Comparison of the *exemplum* and the ballad shows that the poet did not stick closely to the story; he has given it a shape and form well fitting for a chivalrous ballad, but at the same time he has turned it

⁷³ See *Íslenzk fornkvæði*, I, p. 59.

⁷⁴ Text: I, p. 34.

⁷⁵ See Vésteinn Ólason 1975.

into a parody of such poetry. He uses the story to ridicule a conceited young man and adapts it to the pattern of *Kvæði af riddara Stíg*: love runes are diverted from their intended destination with unexpected consequences. But, while the older ballad deals with the loves of noble people and ends with the marriage of the hero to a princess, the story is debased and the knight ridiculed when an enamoured sow appears on the scene.

There are indications that the ballad was recorded from oral tradition, e.g., two lines are inverted in the 7th and 8th stanzas, though this kind of error could have been made by a scribe. What is more important is that the general appearance and rhythm of the ballad places it in a category with poems from oral rather than written tradition. It is in a repetitive metre, but the metre and the length of the lines is more regular than in most ballads of the same metre. The diction is mostly ordinary ballad diction, but it sounds more like an originally Icelandic composition than a translation. There occur in rhyming feet words like *fús*, *þykkur* (noun), *flæðar rein*, in addition to phrases like *banna svefn*, *sjá við*, *auka aldur*. None of these can be raw translations. There also occurs the narrator's interjection *frá ég* (I was told) as in many other ballads that seem to have been composed in Iceland.

All this supports the conclusion that the story was turned into a ballad in Iceland, as were the other poems based on the same collection of stories; but whoever did this worked differently from the composer(s) of the ballad imitations from the same source. The treatment of the material is noticeably more independent, and a poetic effort is more in evidence than in the other poems.

As described elsewhere, there are strong indications that the other Icelandic poems based on *Schimpf und Ernst* were composed from the Danish translation rather than from the German original.⁷⁶ There are no special indications to this effect in *Kvæði af Sigmundi*, although it is most likely that it was also based on the Danish text, since there is no evidence that the German text was brought to Iceland. This means that the ballad was composed between 1625 and 1665, although the possibility cannot be excluded that it was based on the German text and was composed somewhat earlier.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

ÍF 11 Stjúpmóður kvæði

A king proposes to a woman and she accepts. They live together for 7 (5) years and have 2 (5) children. The woman dies and the king remarries. The children weep so much that the mother hears them in the other world. She gets permission to go and visit them, meets the stepmother, reminds her of several things she had left for her children, exhorts her to take good care of them and makes it clear to her what reward she can expect in the other world if she does not. Then she leaves; the stepmother starts comforting the children and sewing clothes for them, although the king objects.⁷⁷

This ballad (TSB A 68), which was recorded in Iceland in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, has been popular all over the Nordic area. Moreover, a ballad on a related subject is known in many other places in Europe.

Grüner-Nielsen divides the Danish texts into Groups I, II, and III.⁷⁸ Group I has been collected in different places throughout Denmark and seems to be most archaic, whereas Group II is the one most frequently found outside Denmark. Although the Icelandic texts clearly belong to Group II, they seem to be of mixed origin, as is best revealed by the fact that there is a variation in the names parallel to variations found outside Iceland. The stepmother's name is in Icelandic either Svanborg or Elín; in Norwegian variants, it is Ljósborg, Vendelin, or Elin; in Danish variants, Blide, liden Kerstin, Guldborg, Ellensborg.

The easiest way to account for the relationship between the various groupings of this ballad would be to assume that Group II acquired its characteristics outside Denmark. In those cases where the Icelandic variants have closer verbal parallels in Danish tradition than in West-Nordic tradition, those parallels are found in texts belonging to Group I. These features probably belong to an old layer of the tradition and have been lost in the West-Nordic area except in Iceland. On the whole, there is a close interrelationship between texts from the West-Nordic area, as can be shown with two examples. Danish Group I tells about the death of the mother in this stanza:

d-A 4 Saa kaam der døddenn paa thett laand
och tuog bortt Sølfuerlad, denn lilli-wand.

⁷⁷ Texts: A = II, p. 70 (st. 51ff, this ballad has here been added to a variant of ÍF 52), B = IV, p. 80, C = IV, p. 117 (one stanza), D = V, p. 149, E = VI, p. 196, F = VII, p. 82.

⁷⁸ See DGF, X, pp. 151–2.

This is found also in Norway and Iceland with almost the same rhyme words:

n-F 1 Der kom sjúkjen på de land,
døe burt Sylveli, de liljevand.⁷⁹

i-B 4 Þá kom sótt í ríkið hans,
Sigurlöð dó fyrir utan stans.

But both in Norway and Iceland there is another stanza with new rhyme words, which is probably a Norwegian addition, although this can not be proved:

n-F 2 Der kom sjúkjen í den bý,
døe burt Sylveli, de véne vív.

i-D 4 Þar kom sótt í þeirra bý,
kongurinn missti sitt ektavíf.

In many of the younger Danish, Norwegian and Swedish variants, the children go to their mother's grave and awaken her from death with their crying. But Danish Group I, the older Norwegian group, Faroese and Icelandic variants know nothing of this. They only say that the mother heard the children crying. The verbal parallels in the West-Nordic variants are significant:

d-B 11 Om aftenen silde, der børnene græd,
Det hørde deris moder under mulden ned.

n-X 17 Han grét så sárt den líten svein,
hånoms móer hørde det i andre heim.⁸⁰

f 2 Á foldini gráta börnini smá,
tað hoyrði móðir, undir moldini lá.

3 Sá sára græt tann yngsti svein,
at tað hoyrði móðir í annan heim.

⁷⁹ DGF, III, p. 866.

⁸⁰ Text in NFS: Bugge, V, p. 173.

i-D 8 Heyrði móðir í moldu lá
sáran gráta börnin smá.

9 Heyrði móðir í annan heim
sáran grát af yngsta svein.

i-B 7 Þá grét oft hinn yngri sveinn,
heyrði það móðir í annan heim.

These examples and others show that there is a special connection among the Icelandic, Norwegian and Faroese versions, and it seems obvious that this ballad should be grouped with those already discussed that have come to Iceland from the West-Nordic area, probably Norway, during the late Middle Ages. But, this need not be the whole story, as both the Norwegian and the Faroese tradition have obviously been influenced later by East-Nordic tradition, and we cannot rule out the possibility that the same is true to a lesser degree of the Icelandic tradition.

ÍF 12 Kvæði af Rögnvaldi og Gunnhildi

One day, Gunnhildur is giving presents and she gives a red shield to Rögnvaldur. He proposes that she should become his wife, but she claims that this is absolutely out of the question as she is married to King Þiðrik. He then threatens to spread lies about her, and she says she will not mind that. Rögnvaldur stands on the beach when Þiðrik sails ashore. To his question on how the people of his kingdom are doing, Rögnvaldur answers by saying that people are well in Spira, but that Gunnhildur is doing badly. 'I saw with my own eyes, an archbishop with her lay.' He adds that, on another occasion, five knights lay with her. Þiðrik gallops home, grabs Gunnhildur by the hair, drags her to the edge of the bed, starts beating her and continues this for three days. Nobody dares to ask about the cause of these beatings, except for the youngest children who ask what Gunnhildur has done to him. He says that she has been unfaithful to him; they then ask him to make her carry iron and walk on steel. Nine times she carried iron and ten times she walked on steel, but the iron chains broke off her. Rögnvaldur turned into a dog and descended to Hell, but Gunnhildur turned back into a maiden and ascended to Heaven.⁸¹

⁸¹ Texts: A = I, p. 79, B = IV, p. 120 (one stanza).

This ballad was recorded by Gissur Sveinsson, and the first stanza was written down in the early 18th century, but otherwise nothing is known of its existence in Iceland. The same ballad (TSB D 231) is found in Denmark and the Faroes, and a summary of the story from the 18th century has been found in Norway, although no recording of it now exists there. This ballad type is also found in England and Scotland where it is called *Sir Aldingar* (Child no. 59). The *Gunnhildur* of the title retains her name, or names derived from it, in all Nordic texts. On the other hand, the king is called *Henrik* in the Danish variants and *Harry* in Child A. It is only in the Faroese variants that he has the same name as in Icelandic, i.e., *Tíðrik*. In the Faroes, *Rögnvaldur* is called *Roysningur*; in Danish variants, he is called *Raffuengard*, *Ravnliil*, *Rundkrud Hagensgaard*, *Røngår*, *Ravnhild*. In the Norwegian prose summary, his name is *Ronnegaar*. It should be mentioned that a character called *Raffuengard* appears in other Danish ballads; but there exists a variant of the name, *Raadengard*, which is considered to be older. In the English variants, he is called *Sir Aldingar* or *Rodingham*.

Of greater importance, however, than these names, is the method that *Gunnhildur* uses to prove her innocence. In the Faroese/Icelandic version, she carries iron, but in the Danish/Norwegian/English version she gets a man to fight a duel for her, and God's judgement manifests itself in the outcome of the duel. Here, a new character makes his appearance, a youth of unusually small stature called *Mimmer-Tand*, *Memering*, etc., who is the one to save the queen's honour. In fact, he also makes his appearance in the Faroese variants, but obviously through late Danish influence.

The content of this ballad is related to stories of abused queens found in many medieval European sources. Moreover, it is mentioned in a 12th century source (William of Malmesbury) that a poem about a certain *Gunhilda*, who had to suffer the fate described in our ballad, is popular among the common people. Therefore, the thought naturally occurs, especially if one believes in early dates for ballads in general, that this ballad, i.e., some version of it, was known in England at the time of William of Malmesbury. As might be expected, this has been a bone of contention among scholars. Long and learned papers assuming an early dating have been written on the history of the ballad. The bulk of the material is presented by Grundtvig as early as the first volume of the DGF. Later, it has been treated by Child in his edition, and further-

more by W. Entwistle and, most thoroughly, by P. Christophersen. The English scholar E. K. Chambers has been almost alone in demurring against the widely held view that the ballad goes back to the twelfth century or even further.⁸²

We are fortunate enough here to be able to ignore, for the most part, controversies concerning the ultimate origin and age of this ballad. On the other hand, we have to choose between different theories about its later development, but first of all it is necessary to consider the verbal parallels between the Icelandic/Faroese version and the Danish one.

The Icelandic variant is the only one that begins with the queen's presents, but these stanzas have parallels both in the Faroese variants and the old Danish A-text. They are everywhere closely related verbally, even though the context is different. In the Danish text, it is Mimering who is reminiscing about old times in the house of Gunnhildur's father, and it is the father who gives the presents:

d-A 22 Some daa gaff hand giøbbind guld,
och suome daa gaff hand skoller fuld.
Raffuenn-gaard gaff hand allder-mieest,
men hand haffuer sueegenn edder alder-først.

Here, there are parallels with the Icelandic version, both in wording and in Rögnvaldur's getting the last and most valuable present:

i 1 Það var einn so blíðan dag,
hún Gunnhildur gjafir gaf.
Sumum gaf hún malið gull,
sumum gaf hún kerin full.

2 Rögnvaldi [gaf hún] rauðan skjöld,
hann var ofinn gulli.

The Faroese text is closely related to the Icelandic one, but it has one word in common with the Danish text, *skálar*, which has changed in the Icelandic variant:

f-B 30 Tað var um ein jóladag,
Gunnhild góðar gávur gav.

⁸² See Entwistle 1939, pp. 66–7, Christophersen 1952, and Chambers 1945, pp. 153–56.

31 Summum gav hon spunið gull,
summum gav hon skálar full.

32 Roysningi gav hon reyðan ring,
han var allur við gulli kring.

Here, the Icelandic and Danish variants are in agreement against the Faroese one in making the presents precede the calamities emphasising Rögnvaldur's wickedness. In the Icelandic variant, the bestowing of gifts also serves the purpose of showing what it is that starts Rögnvaldur's train of thought: he is a villain and interprets Gunnhildur's actions in accord with his own lecherous turn of mind. If we assume that the story of the ballad was from its inception similar to what it is in the old Danish variant and in William of Malmesbury's account, i.e., it started with Gunnhildur's marriage to the king, it is not unlikely that this was followed by a description of the presents that Gunnhildur gave to her in-laws and household upon arrival in her new home.⁸³ The position of this part is rather more peculiar in the Faroese version. Would not Gunnhildur be showing rather excessive kindness by giving presents to Rögnvaldur after what had gone before? It is, therefore, most probable that the order has been confused.⁸⁴

⁸³ Such a scene is found in DGF 62 A 9–14, and in ÍF 7 H 8–10.

⁸⁴ Sophus Bugge offers as an explanation of this incident in the Faroese version that it is symbolic and that the red ring actually stands for a noose that is to be put around his neck (see DGF, IV, p. 729). By chance, I have found similar symbolism in a Spanish ballad, where the explanation is in fact better than Bugge's. The ballad is called in an English translation, *The Mistress of Bernal Francés*, and there the husband who has discovered his wife's infidelity says:

As a present upon my homecoming
I shall dress you in rich apparel:
I shall dress you in fine scarlet
With a red lining,
And such a crimson necklace
As I never saw on a lady;
I shall give you my sword for a necklace
To go around your neck.

(*Spanish Ballads*. Translated with an Introduction by W. S. Merwin. New York 1961. P. 75.)

In spite of the poetic quality of this metaphor—or perhaps for that very reason—I am reluctant to believe that this is a correct interpretation of the Faroese text and find it safer to assume that it has suffered distortion.

In the subsequent dialogue between Rögnvaldur and Gunnhildur, the Icelandic and the Faroese version are practically identical verbally, except that the Faroese text has fewer stanzas. Even places that are obviously distorted are the same:

i 8 “Hirði eg ei þótt þú ljúgir
so þín augun fljúgi.”

f-B 8 “Gud gevi teg so lúgva,
til tíni eygun flúgva.”⁸⁵

The king’s homecoming is described in similar terms in all three countries with the use of formulas. The dialogue between the king and Rögnvaldur is closely related in all three countries:

i 10 “Heyrðu það, Rögnvaldur bróðir minn,
hvörsu má fólk í ríkjum mín?”

11 “Vel má fólk í Spíru,
illa má Gunnhildur dýra.

12 Hún hefur látið lokka sig,
haldið illa trú við þig.

13 Ég með mínum augum sá
erkibiskup hjá henni lá.”

f-A 12 “Hoyr tú, Roysningur undir oy,
og hvussu livir fólkíð undir oy?”

16 “Væl livir fólk á Spírum,
illa stolts Gunnhild dýra.

17 Eg tað við mínum eygum sá,
at erkibispur hjá henni lá.”

d-A 10 “Huor staar thett y Spyrre?
huor lydder frw Guneld hynn dyre?”
“Edders landde staar som dy stuode,
frw Gunild haffuer saa ilde giortt.”

⁸⁵ The verb *fljúga* (fly) seems very inappropriate here; could this possibly be a misinterpretation of Danish *flyde* (float), which would have formed an assonance rhyme with *lyve* (lie)?

11 – – –

“Teg thett med myn øggen suo,
att erricke-bieespenn huoss hynd luo.”

The description of the torture of the queen is also verbally related everywhere, but here the Danish version starts to diverge in content:

i 18 Hann barði hana daginn og barði hana tvo,
þriðja fram til miðja.

19 Enginn þorði að spyrja
Þiðrik konginn dýra.

20 Utan hans yngstu börnin tvö,
Þiðrik föður sinn spurðu þau.

f-B 20 Hann slær hana í dagar og dagar tvá,
eingin ið stolt Gunnhild hjálpa má.

21 Eingin tordi tala uttan börnini tvey,
og Tíðrikur kongur átti tey.

d-A 15 – – –

Saa sluo hand hynndder saa saarre,
slett ingenn hynder hieelpe thuordde.

16 Tther waar heelder ingenn indde,
for-vden thuo høffske quinde.
For-vddenn thuo høffske wyffue,
dy bad thend frw y lyffue.

i 23 “Láttu hana bera járn,
láttu hana troða stál.”

f-B 22 “Mín keri faðir, slá ikki so,
tú lat hana Gunnhild bera stál!

23 Tú lat hana Gunnhild bera stál,
tí henni bitur eingin eldur á!”

There are no more parallels in the Danish version because of differences in content. At this point, a few Danish stanzas have been inserted

in the Faroese version, but after them we still find a parallel with the Icelandic text:

i 25 Þegar hún kom á önnur lönd
so stukku af henni járnbönd.

f-A 30 Gunnhild gongur í önnur lönd,
tá sprungu av henni sterku járnbönd.

The Icelandic ending is probably a late addition to the ballad. It has parallels in ÍF 34, 80, and in DGF 109 and 110, although not exact.

As mentioned above, legends closely related to this ballad are found in several medieval sources. These sources contain numerous variants of the story, and we find the queen clearing herself of libel both by carrying iron and by getting a warrior to fight on her behalf. Therefore, this feature cannot be decisive in determining which is older, the Faroese/Icelandic version or the Danish/English one. Grundtvig thought that the Faroese/Icelandic version contained older features, and Christophersen reaches the same conclusion in his extensive investigation. He says:

The Gunhild ballad is a relatively late development; it can scarcely go farther back than the end of the eleventh century, when the Gunhild legend as we know it seems to have been formed in Flanders and brought over to England. The legend had very likely from the beginning the form of a ballad: at any rate, we know that early in the twelfth century there existed in England a ballad about Gunhild. At a later date, some time between c. 1300 and 1650 and probably nearer to the latter date, the Gunhild ballad was entirely revised and modelled on some version of the Earl of Toulouse story, from which several details were taken. Scandinavia received the Gunhild story in a different form from that in the English ballad, with an ordeal instead of a single combat. We do not know when the story first reached Scandinavia, but it must have been before c. 1250. Presumably it had from the first the form of a ballad, though we have no certain evidence of that. In the thirteenth century the English Gunhild ballad became known in Norway, where it influenced the local ballad, and the revised form then

spread to Denmark. The Faroes were only partially and Iceland not at all influenced by the English tradition.⁸⁶

In his book, Christophersen had already shown that the English and Danish ballads are related in many details and argued that the influence went from Britain to Scandinavia, i.e., Norway and Denmark. On the other hand, he feels that the Faroese/Icelandic version has such a special position that the only connection lies in the name of the queen, and he asks whether this could be a completely separate ballad. The name Spira (Speyer) connects the Nordic versions, but there are no traces of it in English sources, neither legends nor ballads. He therefore thinks it more likely that the ballad version with this name came from Germany. Also, the Icelandic/Faroese version is so closely related to the Danish one that this similarity cannot be explained by superficial influences. From all this, Christophersen draws the conclusion that the material must have been brought in three separate waves to the Nordic countries:

It thus looks as if we have to reckon with three different variants which have coalesced to form the Scandinavian versions of the Gunhild story as we know them: (1) some tradition associated with the name Theodoric and perhaps with Rögvald or Roysning(ur); (2) the German Gunhild story, containing the name Spire; (3) the English version of that story, containing the names Rodingar (Raadengard) and Mimecan (Memering).⁸⁷

He then sums up the history of this material in the Nordic countries as follows:

The English version of the Gunhild story reached Norway in the thirteenth century. The German form of that story containing the names Henrik, Gunhild, and Spire, was already known in Scandinavia, and in the Faroes and Iceland that form had blended with a story about King Theodoric. Both the German story and the Theodoric legend ended with an ordeal.⁸⁸

It appears from this quotation that in fact it is only the name Þiðrik (Theoderic) that remains from the oldest version, which is not known with certainty to have been a ballad.

⁸⁶ Christophersen 1952, p. 164.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

Christophersen deserves admiration for his courage in attacking the legendary material which is the basis for or is, in some way, connected with the Gunhild ballad, not least if one looks at the warning given by Child after he has discussed this subject:

Putting history out of the question, there is no footing firmer than air for him who would essay to trace the order of the development. Even if we exaggerate the poverty of human invention so far as to assume that there must have been a single source for stories so numerous and so diversified in the details, a simple exposition of the subject-matter, with subordinate connections, seems all that it is safe, at present, to attempt.⁸⁹

The safest approach to the problems we are confronted with in this study seems to be to take the ballad texts themselves as a point of departure. It has already appeared that the Icelandic, Faroese and Danish texts must be seen as versions of the same ballad type. This is shown by the name of the protagonist, a common central motif, and by close verbal parallels in all places where the ballads are similar in content. The most important differences are, on the one hand, found in the names of the male characters, and, on the other hand, in whether the queen's innocence is proved by ordeal or single combat. Since the Danish ballad is in both these cases supported by *Sir Aldingar*, it must be given the priority. The place-name Spire and the name Gunhild are both likely to be original to the ballad, but they were both forgotten in Britain before the ballad was written down. The names of characters are not a very stable feature in ballads, and they frequently change when ballads are brought from one country to another; it is especially common that standard ballad names replace names that are unfamiliar to the ballad audience. The name Hinrik is never found in ballads in the West-Nordic area, while Þiðrik is one of the best known king's names in ballad and legend in this area. The two names have the same last syllable, and it is only natural that Hinrik was replaced by Þiðrik. Rodingar/Raadengard is an even more impossible name in a West-Nordic ballad. Such an exotic name must be adapted to names or words already present in the language. Of course, Rögnvaldur and Roysningur are not the same name, but they begin and end with the same sounds

⁸⁹ Child, II, pp. 43–4.

and have the same number of syllables. Rögnvaldur is a common name in West-Nordic sources and is a natural choice to replace Raadengaard. On the other hand, it is not easy to explain how it would occur to a singer to call a man a *roysningur* (walrus), but it is certainly not inconsistent with the description of this uncouth character in the ballad.

There seem to be two possible explanations of the replacement of single combat with an ordeal. Either the single combat was forgotten and replaced by the kind of God's judgement most usual in West-Nordic literature, or another version of the Gunhild legend (or a related one), not necessarily in ballad form, was known to the composer of the prototype of the Icelandic/Faroese version.⁹⁰

Finally, we come to the problem of dating the West-Nordic version and finding out from which direction it reached Iceland. It is undeniably most likely that this version took its shape in the West-Nordic area: there Þiðrik was one of the most popular legendary heroes, and there the *iudicium ferri* ordeal was a common motif. The language and style of the Icelandic version reveals that it must have been rather slavishly transferred from another language, and it seems much more likely that this was Norwegian than Faroese. Admittedly, we only have remnants of the other version in Norway, but this means that the ballad was known there and consequently could have been transformed there too, although this must remain hypothetical.

Gunnhildar kvæði is recorded in the repetitive metre, but it is not as tainted by Danish, nor does it seem as recent as most ballads in this metre. Thus, there is nothing in the language of the ballad to oppose the idea that it was transmitted through the West-Nordic area. However, the ballad's diction is without distinction and of rather low quality, and thus it is difficult to believe that it is very old. At any rate, early 16th century seems more plausible than the datings suggested by Christophersen, although the West-Nordic version need not to have been brand-new when it reached Iceland.

⁹⁰ Entwistle 1946–53, pp. 108–9, offers an outline of the ballad's history very similar to the one suggested here, except that he unequivocally assumes a legendary influence on the Icelandic/Faroese version.

ÍF 13 Hörpu kvæði

There were two sisters; the older one was ugly while the younger one was beautiful. Suitors came and proposed to the younger one. The older sister asks the younger one to walk with her down to the sea, pushes her off a rock and refuses to help her ashore unless she relinquishes the suitor to her. The younger one refuses, saying that he is free to choose himself. She drowns; the body floats out to the sea, then back again. The suitor finds it, makes harp strings from her hair. During the wedding, the strings gain power of speech and reveal the crime; the bride bursts with sorrow.⁹¹

This ballad has been recorded in all the Nordic countries and in English speaking countries in numerous variants (TSB A 38, Child no. 10). Its dissemination outside Iceland has been thoroughly treated by Liestøl 1909 and Brewster 1953. They do indeed reach diametrically opposed conclusions concerning the origin of the ballad, but this is not relevant to the Icelandic tradition.

As Liestøl clearly shows, there is no doubt about the relationship between the West-Nordic texts, so the ballad must have been brought to Iceland either from Norway or the Faroes. Long passages are nearly identical in the Faroese and Icelandic texts, and there are also close verbal parallels with Norwegian texts. In his thesis, Ólafur Marteinsson made a detailed comparison and seems to assume that the ballad came to Iceland from the Faroes and that the Faroese ballad was later influenced by Norwegian tradition and perhaps also Danish tradition.⁹²

Here, only a few examples will be given to illustrate the close relationship between the West-Nordic texts, though many more can easily be found.

i-A 3 is identical with the opening stanza of B and C:

Systir talar við systur góða:
“Göngum við okkur til sjávarflóða.”

f-C 9 Systir talar til systur góð:
“Vit skulum okkum í sævarflóð.”

The same stanza is found in more than one Norwegian variant, e.g., n-Y, recorded by R. Berge:

⁹¹ Texts: A = II, p. 25, B = V, p. 97, C = VI, p. 7, D = VI, p. 51.

⁹² See Ólafur Marteinsson, pp. 219–30.

Syster talar til syster go,
 “No sko me te sjouar-flo.”⁹³

Another example shows the same rhyme words and otherwise similar wording, even with variations that are found both in Iceland and Norway:

i-A 4 Sú yngri settist upp á stein,
 hin eldri hratt henni ofan í straum.

D 3 Sú yngri gekk þá fram á stein,
 sú eldri hratt henni út af stein.

f-C 16 Tann yngra setir seg upp á stein,
 tann eldra fórði hana út á streym.

n-Þ Dan yngsta sette sæg på kvitan stein,
 dan eldsta spente henne på strian straum.⁹⁴

n-Æ Den yngsta hun jekk upp paa en staen,
 den ælsta hu skud ’ænn i striane strøm.⁹⁵

This is less closely related in Danish and Swedish recordings. The Icelandic version is obviously distorted in having the suitor find the body and make the harp; elsewhere, it is pilgrims (Faroese), fishermen (Norwegian), “spillemand” (Danish), etc.

The ballad is thus undoubtedly part of the West-Nordic tradition. It is not possible to reach any definite conclusion on whether it came to Iceland from the Faroes or Norway, but the latter possibility is generally more probable. This means that it can hardly be younger than from the beginning of the 16th century. Diction and metre are similar to what is found in other ballads of this type. Occasional inaccuracy in the rhymes shows that the ballad was transferred word for word from one language to another, and this harmonizes well with the assumption that this happened while there was no great difference among the West-Nordic languages or dialects.

⁹³ Berge: *Norsk Visefugg*, p. 25.

⁹⁴ Variant in NFS, rec. by Veseth.

⁹⁵ Variant in NFS from Finland.

ÍF 14 Margrétar kvæði

Margrét and Elífur are the king's children. She is sent to a nunnery, but once when she is on her way to visit her father, she meets a young man in the forest who rapes her. After the deed, he asks her about her family and it then turns out that he is her brother. He tells her to turn back and hide her grief. Margrét does not come to her father's feast with the other nuns from the convent. When he asks for the reason, the abbess says that she is with child. The king hurries to the convent and meets Margrét outside. When she refuses to name the child's father, he puts fire to the convent while she is inside. Eilífur comes from the forest and puts out the fire with his heart-blood and dies while Margrét gives birth to three boys in the flames. Briet, Barbara and Mary sit with her and take the children (and Margrét herself B) with them up to heaven.^{96a}

This ballad (TSB D 94) is only preserved in Iceland and the Faroes. There are three Icelandic variants, one from the 17th century, another from the latter half of the 18th century and the third from the 19th century. The last one is only a fragment and part of the story is told in prose. A poem in a different metre but based on the ballad is also found in Icelandic. There is a Faroese text from the middle of the 19th century, and another one collected in 1904; but beside these texts, which are printed in CCF, and a third recording from c. 1900, the ballad has been tape-recorded in recent years.^{96b} The story told in the different variants is almost exactly the same in the Faroes and in Iceland, and, in addition to that, just over half of the stanzas in the Icelandic version have a Faroese counterpart with only slight verbal variation.

The question is now whether the ballad is more likely to have been brought from Iceland to the Faroes, or *vice versa*, or whether there is any evidence that it might have been brought to either country from a third.

The Faroese variants show clear signs of the ballad's having been preserved there for a much longer time in oral tradition than the Icelandic A-text. Connective stanzas have been dropped in many places and there are many repetitions of stanzas with only slight changes. But this kind of variation does not occur with any unusual frequency in this ballad, and from the Icelandic variants it can be seen that they have contained many of the same repetitions ever since the versions parted.

⁹⁶ Texts: A = I, p. 98, B = V, p. 63, C = VII, p. 94 (a fragment). Moreover, the refrain is found IV, p. 6, and two lines from st. A 3 in VII, p. 113.

^{96b} Three texts from this century are printed by Nolsøe 1981.

It is noteworthy how full the story is in the Icelandic variants. The context is everywhere clear; incidents and conversations are connected by means of special stanzas or lines. This is unusual in Icelandic ballads.

In the Icelandic tradition, as distinct from the Faroese, the ballad starts with an introductory stanza in the 1st person:

i-A 1 Viljið þér nokkuð hlýða mér
á meðan eg segi frá.
Kongurinn í Danmörk
son og dóttur á.

Although this stanza is only found in the Icelandic A-text, it nevertheless connects the ballad with the Faroese tradition; for, in the Faroes, this stanza and similar ones are much more common than in other Nordic countries.⁹⁷

This one feature would, of course, be of little importance if there were not many others that unequivocally indicate that the ballad was brought to Iceland from the Faroes. It is particularly significant that the Icelandic variants contain several stanzas that are commonplace stanzas in Faroese ballads, or at the very least are found outside this ballad, while they are not found elsewhere in Icelandic ballads.

There exists in the Faroes another *Margrétar kvæði*, which has definite points of contact with this one, i.e., CCF 77 *Margretu kvæði*, which tells of Margrét, the daughter of a Norwegian king, who was burned at Norðnes.⁹⁸ The story told in this ballad is partly built on historical facts. It is clearly based on a tradition from Bergen, whether its composition took place there or in the Faroes. In this ballad, Margrét's father is called Eiríkur (as in the Icelandic *Margrétar kvæði*, while he is called Magnús in the Faroese variants). Stanza 5 in our ballad is, in fact, identical with stanza 5 in CCF 77 A:

i-A 5 Þegar hún hafði í klaustri verið
fulla mánuði þrjá
langaði frúna Margrétu
föður sinn að sjá.

⁹⁷ See e.g., CCF 1 A I, st. 1, B I, st. 1, etc.; CCF 16 C I, st. 1; CCF 24 A, st. 1; CCF 26 C, st. 1; CCF 37 A, st. 1, etc.

⁹⁸ About this ballad, see Solheim 1973.

CCF 77 A I 5 Tá ið hon hevði í kloystri verið
fullar mánaðar trýggjar,
lystir frúnni Margretu
síni faðirs skip at síggja.

This stanza is unnecessary and out of context in the Faroese ballad and, therefore, probably introduced to it from our ballad, CCF 31. However, it demonstrates the kinship of the two ballads. Both the Margréts are burned to death, though in rather different circumstances. It is probable that this historical ballad about Margrét from Norðnes had some influence on the shaping of *Margrétar kvæði* in the Faroes, though this cannot be stated with certainty.

The two stanzas that deal with the upbringing of the brother and sister, i-A 2–3 and f-B 1–2, are also found in other Faroese ballads, cf. CCF 57 *Grips kvæði*, A 1–2 (not in BCD). The same is true of CCF 83 *Rings kvæði* where these stanzas are A 3–4, B 3–4, C 5–6, E 2–3.

The seventh stanza of i-A is a recurrent stanza in Faroese ballads, cf. e.g., CCF 173 *Sveinur í Vallalið* A 58, D 15, 48:

Út varð loystur gangarin
undir hallarvegg,
hann var stroyddur við skarlak
niður á hóvarskegg.

The dialogue between brother and sister, in which they discover their relationship, i-A 16–18, B 13–15, shows some points of difference between the Icelandic and Faroese texts; but the stanzas, as they are preserved in the Icelandic tradition, have many parallels in Faroese ballads, e.g., in CCF 2 *Ragnars kvæði* G 91, where Kráka says:

Sjúrdur frægi var faðir at mær,
hann stóð í ormsins blóði,
Ásla eri eg kallað sjálv,
frú Brinhild var mín móðir.

There are also examples of parallels to these stanzas in CCF 29 *Göngu Rólvs kvæði*, A 53, B 48, C 66, D 47, E 51, F 67, G 55:

Er hann so sannur faðir at tær,
sum tú hevur fyri mær svorið,

samborin eru vit systkin tvey,
bæði til kalls og konu.

Stanza 21 in i-A is also found, with some variation, in both f-A and B; but it is also found in CCF 139 *Ívar Vís*, 3:

Kongurin letur veitslur gera,
tríggjar á hvørjum heysti,
býður hann til allar nunnurnar
út av Mariu kloystri.

i-A 25, B-21 has a close parallel in the Faroese version, but this is also a commonplace stanza in Faroese ballads, occurring in various places in CCF 83, which has already been referred to, with variations fitting the circumstances, e.g., as A 11. It also appears in CCF 174 *Tíðriks kappar* A 2, B 2, C 3:

Allir droyptu høvdið niður,
eingin tordi svara,
uttan Brandur hin víðferi,
ið betur hevði tagað.

No more examples shall be given, but at least a dozen stanzas found in the Icelandic variants of *Margréttar kvæði* are found in other ballad types in the Faroes. Of course, it is possible, and even likely, that in some of these instances a direct loan from *Margréttar kvæði* has taken place. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the singer who formed this poem as it is found in Iceland was familiar with Faroese ballads.

The ending of this ballad is closely related in content to TSB B 20, one variant of which is found in the Faroes, and others in Denmark, Sweden and Norway, apart from the ending of one variant of ÍF 34 *Ólöfar kvæði*, which in ÍF is classified as no. 80.⁹⁹ It should be noted that the brother and sister in that ballad are called Ólav and Margjít in the Norwegian version, the same names as the ones carried by the main characters of *Margréttar kvæði* in the Faroese tradition.

Another ballad which seems to have a special relationship to *Margréttar kvæði* is CCF 123 *Ebbinkarl*, which also tells of a rape in the forest. It is clear that the Faroese variants of *Margréttar kvæði* and

⁹⁹ ÍF, VII, p. 164.

Ebbinkarl have mutually influenced each other, but it is impossible to see any connection between Danish variants of *Ebbinkarl* (*Ebbe Galt* DGF 314) and the Icelandic *Margrétar kvæði*.

The chief motif of this ballad, a brother rapes his sister without knowing who she is, is of course known in all the Nordic countries and much farther afield. It is found in the East-Nordic version of ÍF 15 (TSB B 21), the ballad about the daughters of Þorkell. Still closer to the present ballad, however, is the treatment of this motif in DGF 434 *Liden Kirstins Harm*, a ballad only found in one 16th century recording. There, *herre Peder* says on rising from the bed:

9 “Hør y, liden Kierstyn,
huad ieg spør eder ad:
huem daa vor eders fader,
och huad daa heder eders moder?”

10 “Brøsting saa heder min moder,
ditt siger ieg eder [for] sand;
Baffuen hede min fader,
en saa rask en mand.”

11 “Heder Baffuen fader din,
och ditt sig du mig forsandt,
full ussell bleff ieg broder din,
mig skull hende den vande.”

In this ballad, however, a simpler solution to the problem is found than elsewhere in similar cases: he takes her home with him and gives her to “den gieffuiste ridder/ som paa ditt land mone boe.” The same motif also occurs in Child no. 50, *The Bonny Hind*, and in Child no. 52, *The King's Daughter Lady Jean*. In the Kalevala, the same motif is found in one of the songs about *Kullervo*. Here an influence from TSB B 21 has been assumed, but the treatment of the motif is much closer to *Margrétar kvæði*.¹⁰⁰

The use made in this ballad of widely known motifs raises the question whether it was originally composed outside the Faroes, e.g., in Denmark. The ballad is, however, so firmly rooted in typically Faroese ballad language that the most natural conclusion is that it

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Asplund 1974, pp. 71–2.

was composed in the Faroes and carried from there to Iceland. The subject matter was not new, and since there is an unmistakable Roman Catholic atmosphere, the ballad must be medieval. It is likely that the subject matter was brought to the Faroes from Norway.

This ballad is one of the best examples we have of the extraordinary stability of both the Faroese and the Icelandic ballad traditions. When the Faroese B-text was recorded in 1904, one must assume that c. 400 years had passed since the Icelandic tradition was separated from the Faroese one, and yet the close parallels in the Icelandic A-text from 1665 are astonishing. Even with the utmost scepticism, we cannot reduce the difference in time between the two variants to less than 300 years, which still is a fairly long period.

ÍF 15 Kvæði af vallara systrabana

Porkell has two/three daughters (all variants actually have three daughters, for two go to church and one catches the murderer); they sleep late, then dress and set out for church. On the way, they meet a robber who asks them whether they would rather lose their lives or become his wives. They prefer death, and he kills them with his knife, strips them of everything and then buries them. In the evening, he comes to Porkell's home, breaks into the room of the youngest sister, Ása, and offers her a silk gown if she will let him sleep with her. He shows her the sisters' clothing; she recognizes the sewing, asks him to wait for her, and tells her father that his daughters' killer has arrived. Porkell fights the robber and hangs him up, and a light is seen to shine over the sisters' grave.¹⁰¹

This ballad has been well known in Iceland ever since the 17th century up to recent years. It is also found in all the Nordic countries (TSB B 21); a related ballad has been found in Southern Europe (France, Provence, Northern Italy), and in Scotland there is also a ballad related to some of its variants.¹⁰²

The Nordic tradition can be divided in two branches, one which Axel Olrik has called "den familietragiske form", in which it is re-

¹⁰¹ Texts: A = I, p. 106, B = III, p. 224, C = IV, p. 117 (one stanza), D = IV, p. 180 (one stanza), E = V, p. 37, F = V, p. 85, G = VI, p. 38, H = VI, p. 80, I = VI, p. 113, J = VI, p. 122, K = VII, p. 1, L = VII, p. 33, M = VII, p. 102 (one line), N = VII, p. 160, O = VII, p. 196. Furthermore some tape-recordings from the 1960's and 70's. One of them (P) is printed in VIII, p. 12.

¹⁰² See Olrik's essay in DGF, VI, pp. 114 ff.

vealed when the father of the girl(s) is about to kill the robbers that they are his sons who were sent away in their childhood, and a second which may be called the legendary version. It ends with a miracle and the punishment of the murderers but knows nothing of a kinship between the murdered and the murderer(s). The tragic version is found in all the Swedish variants, seven Danish and one Norwegian, which shows signs of having been brought to Norway from the east at a late date. The legendary version appears in all Icelandic, all Faroese, five Norwegian, and five Danish variants.

Although the Swedish variants are not characterized as 'legendary' according to this classification, many of them have a miracle at the end. Here, as well as in the Danish variants, a spring bursts out of the earth where the maiden is buried. Moreover, it is often mentioned in Swedish variants that the father built a church in memory of his daughters, and the church and the spring are often pointed out in local legends.

The only Norwegian variant which has the whole story is in agreement with the Icelandic version in that the miracle appears as a light shining at the place of the crime:

n-B 16 Så vitt som bloi rann
høie voksljosi ette brann.¹⁰³

i-A 16 Það sást upp í einum heim,
ljós brann yfir báðum þeim.

The Faroese version does better, because it has the light, the spring and the church:

f-A 25 Har sum hennara blóðið dreiv,
tendraðist ljós á hvørji leið.

26 Har sum hennara hævdið lá,
sprakk ein kelda við heilivág.

27 Har sum hennara bulurin lá,
reistist ein kirkja og krossur á.

It is most likely that the light is a West-Nordic innovation which in

¹⁰³ Blom 1971, p. 182.

Iceland and Norway has entirely taken over the function of the spring in the East-Nordic variants. This kind of miracle, a light burning on a grave, is attested in the saga of King Sverrir, *Sverris saga*, from the early 13th century.¹⁰⁴

When the West-Nordic versions have a special form of miracle, this indicates that the ballad was brought to the Faroes and Iceland from Norway. This conclusion is supported by a number of verbal parallels in the West-Nordic texts. The similarities between the Icelandic and the Faroese variants are striking, but it is not as easy to find examples of a special relationship in the Norwegian texts, because the Norwegian tradition was already in a state of disintegration when collection was started. The conclusion is lost in all variants, except in one where there is a prose summary of the ending which shows that the plot was of the same kind as in the Faroese/Icelandic variants.

In all the East-Nordic variants, it is the mother of the girls who reveals the murder, whereas it is a sister in the Icelandic and Faroese variants. There is reason to believe that a sister also played this role in the Norwegian version; in the opening stanza of the best Norwegian variants, the *two* daughters of *Torgjus* are introduced, but then only one goes to church and is murdered. The second sister has then been the one who discovered the crime, just as in the Faroese version, and in the Icelandic, except here the sisters are three.

The number of sisters and robbers is different in different countries. In the East-Nordic area there are usually three sisters and three robbers; in Norway there are two sisters, of whom one is killed, and two robbers; in the Faroes there are also two sisters of whom one is killed, but three robbers appear on the scene, although their number is reduced in repetitive stanzas until only one is left to do the deed; in Iceland there are three sisters, though only two are mentioned in the beginning of some variants, but only one robber.

Although the Icelandic and Faroese versions are close to one another, each of them seems to preserve some traits that are more original than what is found in the other one. Thus, the Faroese version knows of the spring and three robbers, while neither the Norwegian nor the Icelandic variants have the spring whereas they do have, respectively, two and one robbers. The Icelandic version, on the other hand, agrees with the East-Nordic variants in the fact that more than

¹⁰⁴ See *Sverris saga* 1920, p. 122.

one sister faces the robbers and they discuss the choice they have got amongst themselves (cf. i-B 11–12 and s-D 10–12 in *Visb.* III, p. 434). The most natural explanation is that the Faroese and the Icelandic version each derives from an older layer of the West-Nordic tradition which must have developed its characteristics in Norway. This means that the ballad must have been brought to Iceland no later than c. 1500, and there is no linguistic or stylistic evidence to contradict this conclusion.

ÍF 16 Kvæði af Ribbaldi og Gullbrúnu

Ribbald asks Gullbrún to ride with him and puts her on the back of his horse. When they have ridden a short way or are on the heath, they meet a man (robber A, count BD) who accuses Ribbald of having stolen the maiden; but Ribbald answers that she is his sister who has just come from a convent. The other then says he recognizes Gullbrún. They ask him to keep this hidden, but he rides to the king and tells him that Ribbald has ridden away with his daughter. The king rides (sails BCD) after them. Gullbrún sees her father, brothers and brothers-in-law approaching. Ribbald asks her not to say his name while he is fighting. He fights and kills her brothers, her father and brothers-in-law. She asks him to restrain himself and allow her youngest brother to live, saying his name at the same time. Immediately he receives fifteen/forty/sixty wounds. Ribbald wipes the blood of his sword and says that love shields her. They ride over the heath and he is silent. Then they come to his brother and Ribbald asks him to marry his betrothed. She says she will never have two brothers. The brother says he will gladly accept her if he can feel sure that she is a virgin. Ribbald says he has only kissed her once. Ribbald gives up the ghost and the lady is tied by bands of grief (BC). Ribbald, Gullbrún and his mother all die and are buried together (A).¹⁰⁵

This ballad was recorded in the 17th and 18th centuries, but not later. It is one of the best known Scandinavian ballads (TSB A 41) with a great number of recordings from all the Nordic countries except the Faroes where it has not been found. The same ballad or a closely related one is found in English (Child no. 7, *Earl Brand*).

Sophus Bugge has maintained that this ballad is at least partly composed under the influence of the eddic lays about Helgi Hundingsbani and Helgi Hjörvarðsson and that the author has also been influenced by the legends about Walter and Hildegund.¹⁰⁶ These poems are cer-

¹⁰⁵ Texts: A = I, p. 223, B = II, p. 59, C = IV, p. 103, D = V, p. 59.

¹⁰⁶ Bugge 1896, pp. 283–95.

tainly thematically related, though it is difficult to define what their relationship might be. Bugge points out some verbal similarities, but these are more uncertain and could be the result of sheer coincidence.

Whatever connections this ballad may have with old heroic poetry, other ballad types are certainly related to it. Most closely related is *Hildebrand og Hilde*, TSB A 42, which is found both in Denmark and Sweden. There the story is presented as the first person narrative of the heroine, who recollects her sorrows before she bursts with grief. This ballad is probably based on *Kvæði af Ribald og Gullbrúnu*. There is also related subject matter in TSB D 69 and 78, where the central conflict is a fight between a knight and his loved one's relatives.

The most thorough investigation of this ballad is a study by Axel Olrik, "Riboldsvisen", from 1906. There, Olrik tries, among other things, to identify the Danish version on which the Icelandic variants are based and goes on to try to establish a genealogy of that form of the ballad which appears in Danish ballad collections from the 16th and 17th centuries, the oldest written forms of the ballad. He thinks that they represent a relatively late stage in the ballad's development. This is how he presents the part of his conclusions which concerns the Icelandic version:

- 1) *Udgangspunktet* er en form af visen, hvor helten bærer navnet Hildebrand og hvor han sparer den listige gamlings liv og dernæst røbes af ham. Denne form har vi nu nærmest i Nordengland ("Earl Brand"), og vi sporer den også på norsk grund, dels i Telemarken som islæt i den ene af de derværende former ("A-type"), dels ved at den har tjænt som forbillede for den opr. norske Benediktvisen.
- 2) *Den egentlige Riboldvisen* (i sin ældste skikkelse) opstår på dansk grund o. 1300 eller lidt før, dog nærmest kun som en formel overarbejdelse af den oprindelige Hildebrandvisen; dens kendetegn er de fremmedartede navne, en "greve" som den der røber dem, og det mildere præg ved at man ikke tænker på at slå ham ihjel. Fra Danmark (sceneriet viser til Jylland) er den vandret over Norge (hvor den udgør hovedstoffet i den telemarkske A-type) til Island. Hos den danske adel i senere middelalder (14de–15de årh.) bliver fremstillingen noget fyldigere og yderligere lidt forfinet ("Ribold var en grevesön").¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Olrik 1906a, p. 211.

The only thing that really concerns us here is that branch of the tradition which Olrik calls "den egentlige Riboldvise". First it is necessary to look briefly at Olrik's dating and the consequences it has for our ideas about the age of the Icelandic version if we accept his genealogy. When Olrik assumes that "den egentlige Riboldvise" came into being in Denmark around 1300, there is no obvious basis for this conclusion other than his view that this version precedes the aristocratic tradition, which he believes to have taken shape during the 14th and 15th centuries. The oldest manuscript of the ballad is Karen Brahe's folio, probably written in 1583, and then there are a few recordings from the early 17th century. Now, there is no reason to think that the special characteristics of this version, i.e., a few additions and a more polished texture than is met in other versions, are much older than the oldest manuscript. These are characteristics of the period of writing, the latter half of the 16th century. They are not the result of a sudden mutation but of a development of ballad style connected to the times and the environment. Axel Olrik himself often demonstrated the different styles of the aristocratic versus the peasant ballad tradition. Even though we may have reasons to believe that the Danish form of the ballad, which was the basis for the Icelandic tradition, was somewhat shorter and rougher than the form found in ballad collections of the Danish aristocrats, it does not therefore follow that it must have been older. How insignificant the differences between the versions really are can be seen from Olrik's comment on them, "noget fyldigere og yderligere lidt forfinet."¹⁰⁸

As appears from the quotation, Olrik assumes that the Icelandic version came from Denmark through Norway. The only way to find out whether he was right is to compare Danish, Norwegian and Icelandic recordings of the ballad. Numerous recordings exist in Norway, so that the comparison should give a fairly clear indication, even though the Norwegian recordings are much younger than the Danish and Icelandic ones.

It is certainly possible to criticize Olrik's genealogy. One of the disputed points is whether what he calls "den egentlige Riboldvise" could be of Norwegian origin rather than Danish. As Sverker Ek has pointed out, some of Olrik's arguments can just as well support the conclusion

¹⁰⁸ For comment on the development of ballad style in this period, see Frandsen 1969, pp. 16–26.

that this version of the ballad is originally Norwegian, as it is exactly the Norwegian A-version that has the greatest number of archaic features reminiscent for *Earl Brand* and the *Hildebrand* version.¹⁰⁹ The matter cannot be settled with any certainty, but these considerations increase the number of possibilities that have to be taken into account when we try to decide how this ballad was brought to Iceland.

The routes that the ballad might have taken to Iceland are these: 1) The Ribbald ballad originated in Norway and was brought from there directly to Iceland; there is no direct connection between the Danish and Icelandic variants; 2) it originated in Norway and was carried to Iceland via Denmark; 3) it originated in Denmark and was carried from there directly to Iceland; 4) it originated in Denmark and was brought to Iceland through Norway, as Olrik thinks.

The main reason why Olrik believed the Ribbald ballad to be originally Danish is presumably the close relationship between the Icelandic texts and the Danish tradition. As will appear below, this relationship is so close that 1) is necessarily excluded. A reappraisal of the question whether this version of the ballad was Norwegian or Danish would fall outside the scope of this study, and all that can be done here is to try to choose between possibilities 2 and 3 on the one hand, and 4 on the other: was the ballad brought to Iceland from Denmark or Norway?¹¹⁰

The beginning of the ballad is much shorter and more abrupt in Iceland than in most Danish and Norwegian variants. Still, Olrik believes that the beginning most commonly found in Danish recordings is not original and prefers the shorter Icelandic one.¹¹¹ At the start of the description of the lovers' journey, we find in i-BD (these are their opening stanzas, A starts earlier, C later in the story) a stanza with the rhyme words *heiði:greifi*. This stanza, with slight variations and the same rhyme words, is found in both Danish and Norwegian variants of the ballad. On the other hand, the subsequent dialogue with the 'count' has closer parallels in the Danish than in the Norwegian variants. It is particularly noteworthy that i-A 4, an unrhymed stanza,

¹⁰⁹ Ek 1921, pp. 94–5.

¹¹⁰ It has occurred to Ólafur Marteinsson (pp. 250–51) that the ballad was brought to Iceland twice. However, the variations within the Icelandic tradition do not reflect variation between foreign versions, but seem rather to have come about through influence from formulaic material already known in Iceland.

¹¹¹ A counter-argument is found in Recke 1907b, p. 170.

has a close parallel in the oldest Danish text with the same lack of rhyme:

Velkominn, ríki Ribbald,
með þína stolna jómfú.¹¹²

d-A 10 “Wellmøtt, wellmøtt, Ribold!
men stallen haffuer du den stalte iumfrw.”

Another stanza in this dialogue shows closer relationship with Danish than Norwegian variants:

i-A 6 “Ekki þarftu að dylja mig,
gjörla kenni eg, Gullbrún, þig.”

d-F 20 “Du tørst dett icke dølgje for mig:
Guldborg, Guldborg! well kiender ieg dig.”

n-D 14 “Du tar kji Gullbor skygje onde skout
eg kjænner so væl dine ougur tvou.

15 Du tar æ kje Gullborg dylje så
eg tente din fader i femten år.”¹¹³

In fact, the two Norwegian stanzas have all the details that the Icelandic and Danish variants share, so this is of little weight.

In this dialogue there is one stanza which the Icelandic and Norwegian versions have in common which is not found in Danish tradition, but it is a commonplace stanza and its occurrence does not prove anything:

i-A 7 “Ég skal gefa þér kápu blá
ef þú segir ei mínum föður í frá.”

n-D 17 “Eg ska gjeva deg mi kápe så blá
vi du kji bær bud til min faers gård.”

¹¹² Olrik makes the mistake of taking an emendation in the V manuscript, *Ribbald* + *nú*, for the genuine article, while this is just one of the many instances where the V scribe tries to emend poor rhymes or supply rhymes where they are missing.

¹¹³ NB, p. 33, here quoted as D, cf. DGF, III, pp. 853–4.

The Danish variants have a different formula, i.e., she offers him a ring of gold for keeping silent, but it also occurs here that Ribbold has dressed her in a blue cloak.

In the Icelandic variants, the arrival of the count at the palace and the king's reactions are described in formulaic stanzas that have no comparative value. The next part where comparison is possible is the conversation between Ribbold and Gullbrún before the fight. There, we find features that have obviously been distorted in the Icelandic version but that nevertheless echo the rhyme words of old Danish texts:

i-A 19 “Ég bind minn hest við tauma,
taktu upp þína sauma.”

i-C 4 “Heyrðu það, Gullbrún nauma,
þú skalt halda í tauma.”

It seems equally misplaced to call the young lady *naum* (mean) as to ask her to start sewing, but when we look at one of the old Danish texts we realize that the sewing is caused by a misunderstanding of a Danish verb:

d-B 33 “Guldborge, du lader dig der-thill sømme:
du holde min hest y tømme!”

The spirit of chivalry is so strong here that it is not appropriate for a young lady to hold the horses, but people sometimes have to make a virtue of necessity and this is at least better than sitting down to sew at such a moment. In a Norwegian text from Kviteseid, which is linguistically a little tainted by Danish, we find the same stanza but not containing the verb *sømme*:

Aa Gullbór, Gullbór mi brúr saa ómme,
Aa háalt naa begge eders heste i tómme.¹¹⁴

It seems very improbable that such a misunderstanding of the verb *sømme* (*søma*) could have arisen in the transmission of a stanza from Norway to Iceland during the period when these countries had almost a common language, while it fits in very well with the idea that the ballad was translated (orally) from Danish into Icelandic relatively late.

¹¹⁴ Text in NFS, possibly influenced by Syv, cf. Landstad, p. 319.

The words spoken by Ribbald when he asks Gullbrún not to say his name are practically identical in Icelandic, Danish and Norwegian variants and provide no clue, which is not surprising as this is a core feature of the ballad. When we come to the description of Ribbald's killings, we still find numerous verbal parallels, but it is noteworthy that the brothers-in-law, who get a stanza to themselves in all Icelandic variants, are not even mentioned in Norwegian variants; and in fact it looks as if they were added for the sake of the rhyme to the Danish variants. Here, we seem to have a good example of a secondary feature that connects Icelandic and Danish tradition and indicates direct influence:

i-A 23 Hann sló hennar föður í hel,
það gjörði hann illa en ekki vel.

Hann sló þá í annan flokk,
ellefu (40 B) bræður með gulan lokk.

Það angrar hana so sáran,
hann felldi hennar sjö mága.

d-B 35 Hannd wou y thenn første flock
hinder siu brøder med gule lock.

36 Hannd wou y thenn anden skare
hindis fader och hindis elffue suaffuer.

When we come to Gullborg's speech, Icelandic and Danish recordings generally agree that she asks Ribbald to spare her youngest brother, but this is also found in Norwegian texts. However, there is especially close verbal relationship between i-A and d-B:

i-A 17 "Heyrðu það, Ribbald, hvörs eg bið,
gefðu mínum yngsta bróður líf.

18 Gef mínum yngsta bróður líf
so hann megí sinni móður tíðindin bera.

These stanzas have been displaced in i-A, where these words are spoken before the fight commences, but in old Danish recordings there are almost identical verbal parallels where she addresses him during the fight itself:

d-A 26 “Hør y thett, Ribold, myn hiarttens-kierre:
y lader myn yngeste broder werre!”

d-B 39 “Y lader min øngiste broder leffue:
hannd maa min moder thisse thidind hiem føre!”

Here, we not only get the lack of rhyme in the same stanza again but also a very long and clumsy line in Icelandic which is almost a direct translation of a Danish line. It is very hard to believe that the line *so hann megí sinni móður tíðindin bera* has survived centuries of oral tradition and been transmitted through many countries, but it is even harder to believe that its similarity to the Danish line could be accidental.

When we come to the consequences of Gullborg’s speech, we find a close parallel to a Norwegian text:

i-C 9 Á því sama máli
fékk hann fimmtán sárin (sextíu A, 40 B)

n-C 28 Men då di hørte dæ kvindemål,
då fekk den herre femten dödellig sår.

Not only is the number of wounds the same but also the rhyme words. None of the old Danish variants mentions the number of wounds. It only appears in d-D*, a recording from Ty dated 1878, where the main characters are called Ilderbrand and Fredensborg:

25 Hr. Ilderbrand sig over Akselen saa,
da havde han vel atten dødelige Saar.

Here, we have a feature which points clearly to a connection with Norway. If one wants to assume that the ballad nevertheless reached Iceland from Denmark, this would have to belong to a very old layer of the tradition.

The next part of the ballad, particularly the stanzas i-B 24–5 and i-A 29, has parallels both in Danish, e.g., d-P 24, d-Æ 22, d-A 30–31, and Norwegian, n-C and n-D; but the relationship is equally close on all sides.

The description of the journey after the fight is pieced together from

formulaic stanzas differing from one recording to another. It is interesting to note that in the Icelandic variants there is no mention of a conversation with Ribbald's father, mother or sister when they reach his home. Rather, they go straight to the heart of the matter: the conversation with his brother. This conversation is found in both Norwegian and Danish variants, but the verbal relationship is closer in the Danish recordings:

- i-A 33 "Heyrðu það, Rigarð bróðir minn,
konarefnið gef eg þér."
- 34 "Það skal aldrei á meðan eg lifi
að eg sé tveimur bræðrum gefin."
- B 31 "Gjarnan eg hana þægi
ef vissi eg hún jómfri væri."
- 32 "Þann skal eg eiðinn sanna nú,
eg flutti hana mey yfir Rínarbrú.
- 33 Einu sinni kyssti
sem mitt hjartað lysti."
- d-B 51 "Min kiere broder, du stannder mig ner:
du tager denn iomfru, som ieg haffuer kier."
- 52 "Saa gierne ieg thett giorde:
wiste ieg, hun iomfru ware."
- 53 "Saa santt hielp mig Gud for ouen:
som hun er enn iomfru finn!
- 54 For-udenn en gang mig lyste
hindis rosenns-mund att kysse."
- 55 "Thett sker aldrig, men ieg er y liffue:
ieg skall II brøder min tro giffue!"
- n-C 42 "Min yngste broer honom unner eg best,
honom gev eg Gullbör som eg heve fest.
- 44 Bare ei gång eg meg forlyste,
eg Gullbör på kinne kyste."

45 “Á dæ æ no dæ fyste,
tvo bröar kann ikkje ægte ei syster.”

The concluding part of the ballad consists of formulaic stanzas in all the Icelandic recordings, but an ending containing the same material as i-A is common in Danish and Norwegian variants, so it probably accompanied the ballad to Iceland.

As the comparison has shown, there are more numerous and clearer features connecting the Icelandic version with Danish variants than with the Norwegian ones. It is significant that some of the features that most closely connect Icelandic and Danish variants seem to be secondary and by no means such as one could assume to have lived long in oral tradition. This is true of stanzas without rhyme and those with long and clumsy lines.

It should be noted that even though the relationship with the Danish variants appears in all Icelandic recordings, it is clearly closest in i-A, the oldest of them all. Here we find the clumsiest lines with the most obvious signs of not being composed in Icelandic. The question naturally presents itself whether this variant might not show a particular late Danish influence. It should be considered, however, that the B-text is not wholly devoid of clumsy stanzas with a similar appearance: *en annar reið með dóttur þín um landið frí, hann sló í þann fyrsta flokk*. On the other hand, such lines cannot be found in C and D. The most natural explanation of this is that the ballad was brought to Iceland from Denmark and that the clumsiest translations were gradually polished as time went by. The variations among the four texts are so great that some time must have passed before the writing was started. Most of the stanzas in the ballad are in a good enough ballad style and the old rules of quantity are not broken, so it must be assumed that the ballad was not brought to Iceland after 1600; but there is no reason to believe in a much greater age.

ÍF 17 Sonarharmur

A father (king) asks his son what is the cause of his sorrow. The son asks the father to sit down and tells him his story. “You sent me to a foreign land to a count who had three daughters (four B, seven D); one of them loved me. When I was about to leave she came and wanted to go with me. I put her on

my horse. When we came to a glade in the forest, she asked for rest (in B and D a boat episode is inserted, but this makes no difference to the story), asked a golden tent to be raised for her and sent me into the forest to fetch water. When I came back, she was dead and so was my son (B and D do not mention his going to the forest but say that she bore him three sons and then died). Then I buried her. Therefore, I am sad and seldom glad." B adds in third person narrative that he died.¹¹⁵

The Icelandic recordings of this ballad date from the 17th and early 18th centuries. Outside Iceland, the ballad (TSB D 289) is found in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and related ballads are found outside the Nordic area. A first person narrative, with or without a frame story, is also characteristic of this ballad in Scandinavia. In content, however, it is closely related to another ballad which tells the story in the traditional third person and is found in Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and, in Danish, in the Faroes (TSB D 288). On the basis of his views on genuine ballad style, Grundtvig thinks that our rather lyrical version, which manifests a more conscious artistry, must be a younger derivation of the other ballad.¹¹⁶ But, it is interesting to note that *Sonarharmur* exists in a Danish variant from the 16th century and in Swedish and Icelandic variants from the 17th century. The other ballad, *Redselille og Medelvold*, is, on the other hand, first found as a broadside in the 1770's and may well be an 18th century fabrication based on *Sonarharmur*.

A comparison of *Sonarharmur* with foreign variants yields only limited information because of its poor preservation. There are three variants in Sweden and only two in Denmark. The younger Danish variant, from the mid-19th century, is closely related to the Swedish ones. There, the couple travel across a lake and she is drowned. The ballad is best preserved in Norway where there are six recordings, though there it may have been fused with *Redselille og Medelvold* to some degree. Two of the Norwegian variants are monologues throughout, but the other four have an introduction where the father asks for the cause of his son's sorrow, while in the last stanza of three of them his death is described in the third person. Here, d-A is the most consistent, because there the last stanza is:

¹¹⁵ Texts: A = III, p. 254, B = IV, p. 78, C = IV, p. 123 (one stanza), D = IV, p. 259.

¹¹⁶ See DGF, V, pp. 289-90.

Ieg satte min suerd imod thenn steenn:
odenn hun giorde minn hierte stor mienn.

The Icelandic and Norwegian variants agree that it is the father who, in the beginning, asks the son what is the cause of his sorrow, while in d-B and the Swedish variants it is the mother who asks (d-A is in the first person throughout with no frame story, as mentioned above).

Another feature which characterizes the Icelandic and Norwegian versions is that she asks him to fetch water for her (in order to get rid of him while she bears the child?), but here the Norwegian variants are so closely connected to variants of *Redselille og Medelvold* that it is doubtful whether this has any significance.

The Icelandic and the Norwegian texts are also closest in the way they describe the son's leavetaking of the dead body. In d-A, which is the only comparable text, we find only:

d-A 18 Ieg lagde min aller-kierist y graffuen først,
ieg lagde min sønn paa hindis brøst.

In the Norwegian and Icelandic variants we find:

i-B 18 Gröfina tók eg með sverði mín
en moldina jós eg með skildi fín.

19 Eg lagði hana so í moldina fyrst
og hvörn minn son á hennar bryst.

n-A 22 So tók eg upp min blanke skjoll,
å gróv upp den heie-moll.¹¹⁷

n-C 17 Eg gjåre meg so har'e úti den fær:
eg gróv upp greftæ alt mæ mitt svær.

18 Men de æ' adde mi stöste kvíe:
eg la' eitt bån mæ kvor hennes síe.

There is also a clear verbal relation between these two stanzas:

i-B 20 Einn lagði eg utan hjá
og so gekk eg í burtu frá.

¹¹⁷ The Norwegian variants are printed in DGF, V, pp. 297–301.

n-C 19 Men eg gjékk alli so langt ífrá,
eg höyrde so sterk'e den bane-grát.

It is generally true of the passages where the Icelandic variants are most closely related to other Scandinavian versions, particularly the beginning of the son's speech and the account of his relations with the count's daughters, that all these are so closely related everywhere that there is no indication of a definite connection one way or the other. However, the evidence for a particular relationship between the Icelandic and Norwegian versions, which has been put forward here, supports the conclusion that the ballad was brought to Iceland through Norway. There is really nothing that goes contrary to this conclusion.

Ólafur Marteinsson thought that the ballad had been brought to Iceland twice and based this theory mainly on the fact that one variant is in the metre also found in *Kaupmanna kvæði*, in which two couplet stanzas are connected by a tripartite refrain.¹¹⁸ Since the way a ballad was sung was decided by the refrain rather than the ballad itself, this cannot be used as evidence for different origin of the variants. Traveling in a boat is commonplace matter and does not have to be in any way connected with the Swedish and Danish variants where the beloved is drowned.

This ballad has generally been believed to be of a fairly late date because of the form, but it is hard to prove that a ballad of this kind could not have existed in, say, the 15th century. Such evidence as we have for the origin of the Icelandic version indicates that it was brought to Iceland no later than the early 16th century.

ÍF 18 Kristínar kvæði

The ballad begins in the first person. The narrator says she was dressed in fine clothes and laid in a boat, but God and the waves carried her to the shore. A knight arrived, took her to his home where she stayed until she became his wife. The first night they lay together he was killed. This is followed by two lyrical stanzas where the woman laments her dead husband. The remainder of the poem is a dialogue with no discernible connections with the first part. The lady Kristín is asked how she likes her betrothed. She praises him but says she would give all her red gold to be allowed to take

¹¹⁸ See Ólafur Marteinsson, pp. 138–9.

good leave of this world. She is then told to keep her gold and enjoy the mighty man who has betrothed her.¹¹⁹

The first half of this ballad is obviously derived from DGF 285, *Grevens datter af Vendel* (TSB D 374). This ballad was printed in Vedel's ballad book 1591, and a written translation of this printed version is found in Gissur Sveinsson's collection.¹²⁰ There are a few Danish recordings of the ballad from the 16th and 17th centuries, and there are also some Swedish recordings from the 19th and 20th centuries, but here material from another ballad has been included.¹²¹

Svend Grundtvig had rather extravagant ideas about the age of this ballad, believing it to have come to Iceland from Denmark as early as the beginning of the 13th century, but this is, of course, out of the question. Ernst v. d. Recke was moderate in his views; "paa stor Ælde tyder i øvrigt Intet," is his verdict.¹²²

The content of the Danish ballad is very similar to that of the Icelandic version, though various features have been dropped from the latter, e.g., that before she gets to the knight after the sea voyage she was fostered in the forest by a wolf and a deer. In one variant, B, the ballad ends with lamentations after the killing of her husband, and its plot is therefore very similar to that of the Icelandic version; but in other Danish variants, various other misfortunes befall her before the end.

The ballad is of a type where it may be said that the narrative is being broken up by sentimentality. This tendency is unmistakable, both in the Icelandic version and in d-B, but it is carried further in the other variants. This tendency has no doubt been inherent in the ballad from the beginning.

Comparison of individual stanzas shows clearly that the Icelandic variant is a direct descendant of the Danish ballad:

i 1 Ég var skorin í silki
og í skarlats trey,

¹¹⁹ Text: I, p. 183.

¹²⁰ ÍF, I, p. 170.

¹²¹ See Säve: *Gotländska visor*, p. 195, Jonsson 1967, p. 749, and DGF, X, p. 700.

¹²² *Danmarks Fornviser*, III, p. 215; Grundtvig's comments are in DGF, V, p. 375.

síðan borin til strandanna,
lögð í sjávarfley.

d-A 1 Ieg bløff føð y bure
blannt fruer och guode møer:
suøbtte di mig y selcke
och saa y skarlagen rødt.

2 Saa thiellige tha fich ieg steffmoder
hunn war mig aldrig guodt:
hunn baar mig till stranden,
hunn kaste mig ud y floed.

d-B 2 Tyllig fick ieg stimoder,
hun vor mig icke god:
hun lade mig i en gylte skryn,
hun skød mig ud i floed.

i 2 Ég mátti ekki drukkna
því guð var mér so góður,
báran bar mig upp á land.
þar fagri hjörturinn grór.

The last line is probably a reminiscence of that part of the poem where she is taken care of by animals:

d-B 3 En bølge baar mig til landet,
den anden baar mig fraa:
end giorde herre Gud min lycke saa god,
ieg icke søncke maatte.

d-A 4 Thennd enne bølge slouff mig til landt,
thennd andenn bar mig paa grundt:
och ther komm løbind saa vildt enn hinndt,
hunn tog mig i sinn mundt.

i 3 Þar kom riddarinn ríðandi
með sína sveina þrjá,
hann tók mig upp so litla
í fjörusandi eg lá.

4 Hann tók mig upp og bar mig heim
 á sitt eigið bú,
 þar var eg so lengi
 eg varð hans eigin frú.

d-B 9 Der kam riddindis en rider,
 en rider alt saa boldt:
 hand skød ihjel min foster-moder
 aff den grønne voldt.

10 Den samme rigen riider
 suøbte mig i kaaben blaa:
 hand førde mig til sin egen gaardt,
 der mone ieg foster-moder faa.

11 Den same rigen rider
 loed foster mig y sit bur:
 der bleff ieg saa lenge,
 ieg bleff hans egen brudt.

Here, one can see how the Icelandic ‘translator’ makes his story cohere, though he has omitted an episode, and how he uses the same sounds in the rhyming feet and words with approximately the same meaning, *bú:frú* vs. *bur:brudt*.

i 5 Fyrstu nótt við saman lágum
 þá fékk eg þann harm,
 komu kongsins sakamenn,
 þeir vógu hann á minn arm.

d-D 16 Den første Nat, wi sammen laa,
 bleff mig til angist oc harm:
 Hans Fiender brøde den Brudehuss Dør,
 de sloge hannem i min Arm.

The sixth stanza in the Icelandic text, which is the last one with a narrative content, also shows verbal parallels with stanzas from the latter half of the Danish ballad, containing the killing of a second husband, see, e.g., d-D 22–23. In stanzas 7 and 8 of the Icelandic version,

we can also discern the tone typical to the Danish version of the ballad and certain verbal similarities, though the seventh stanza has definite marks of Icelandic refrain style.

The last four stanzas obviously come from another ballad, and there is no way of connecting them to the content of this one.

There are hardly any parallels in wording between the Icelandic and Swedish versions of this ballad, and it seems that there is every indication that it was brought directly from Denmark to Iceland in the 16th or 17th century. It is not very likely that Vedel's printed text was the direct source of the Icelandic version. If this had been the case, one could expect a more complete version of the story and more verbal parallels with Vedel's text. But, as the comparison has shown, the plot of the ballad has its closest parallel in d-B, and in most cases there are closer verbal parallels with variants other than the one printed by Vedel.

ÍF 19 Kvæði af herra Birni og Kristínu

Björn is greeted and invited to drink because the speaker (the king) says he has learned that he has become his brother-in-law. Björn asks that his life be spared and offers his services and 15 barrels of gold. The king refuses to accept his offer and says that he is going to lose his life today. Björn asks Kristín to stand up and pour him out a drink; he then drinks a toast to the Danish queen, to all her ladies and to little Kristín. Kristín stands up and pours the horn full and says she has never seen a nobler man than he. He asks her to unfasten his braces and her tears fall on the knight's hand. He asks her not to grieve over his death, as her brother will marry her to a rich man. South of the palace wall he loses his life, while the fair woman's heart bursts in the bower.¹²³

Apart from one initial line in a Faroese list of ballad beginnings, this ballad is only found in this version and in Denmark (DGF 473, TSB D 431), where there are several recordings dating from the 16th to the 19th centuries. In Denmark the ballad is connected with Sønderborg (on Als), and there exists a legend with the same content, which was recorded for the first time c. 1500. Axel Olrik argues in his monograph on the ballad that it is derived from this legend and thus connected

¹²³ Text: I, p. 250.

with Sønnerborg from the beginning.¹²⁴ Ernst von der Recke has seconded this opinion, while Sverker Ek opposes it and believes the ballad to be Norwegian:

... de danska texterna knyta visan om Björn stallare till Sønnerborgs slott (i Jylland), vilket Olrik vill fasthålla som ett ursprungligt drag. Visans förhållande till Bendiksvisan antyder, att den bör tillhöra Norge, och att den skrivits tidigast under 1300-talet. Därmed överensstämmer, att "stallari" är en gängse titel så länge det norska konungadömet varar, medan titeln i Danmark bortlägges redan under Valdemar Seier. För västnordiskt ursprung talar ytterligare, att dansk F och G uttryckligen kalla Björn för norrman, och att visans inledningsstrof är känd från Färöarna.¹²⁵

The story told in this ballad is related to that of the ballad *Hagbard og Signe*. A debate on whether it is West- or East-Nordic in origin will inevitably lead into the old controversy concerning the origin of *Hagbard og Signe*. It is impossible to take up that issue as a whole for discussion here, and all conclusions about this ballad will be put forward with certain reservations.¹²⁶

The preservation of the ballad gives no particular indication of an independent West-Nordic version. The initial line preserved in the Faroes is not found in the Icelandic variant, while, on the other hand, it echoes the wording of the initial lines of Danish broadside versions of this ballad from the 18th century. Most of the stanzas in the Icelandic variant could be taken directly from the Danish version.

The initial stanza of the Icelandic variant is peculiar as regards both form and content. It does not seem to be a burden because it starts the telling of a story. On the other hand, it names a herra Pétur who has no business in the ballad. In addition, the metre is abnormal, three lines rhyming aaa. It is clear that this beginning has come about through recall of half-forgotten stanzas, though at least one of its

¹²⁴ See DGF, VIII, pp. 54–61.

¹²⁵ Ek 1921, p. 14; Recke's comments are in *Danmarks Fornviser*, IV, p. 26; he does not think that the ballad shows any signs of being old, but thinks that some Norwegian influence can be detected in the younger of the Danish variants.

¹²⁶ See Dal 1956, pp. 237–40, for a summary of the discussion about the origin of *Hagbard og Signe*.

sentences is reminiscent of a sentence in the opening of the Danish version:

i 1 Herra Pétur talar við skenkisveina sín:
 “Vær skulum ganga fyrir sunnan Rín,
 þar blandast bjór og vín.”

d-B 1 Det var unge her Biørn,
 hand beder sadle heste:
 “Wii wille riide thill Sønder-borrigh,
 liden Kierstin wille wy gieste.

2 Wy wille ride thill Synder-borrigh,
 der blendis baade miød och win;”

— — —

It seems as if Pétur has taken the place of Björn through a slip of the tongue; the lyrical formula “fyrir sunnan Rín” has replaced the unknown Sønderborg, the first half of which has called forth the formula (*Sønder: sunnan*), which happened to rhyme with the only line the singer remembered well.

The following stanzas are practically identical word for word in the Icelandic and Danish recordings:

i 2 “Vel þú kominn, herra Björn,
 drekk hjá oss í dag,
 það hefi eg so sannlega spurt
 þú sért vor orðinn mágur.”

3 “Ef hafi þér það sannlega spurt
 að eg sé yðar mágur,
 það skal allt til góða verða
 ef eg lifa má.”

d-A 8 “I were well-komen, ungen herre Biørn,
 i eder mett mig i-dag;
 dit haffuer ieg for sanden sportd,
 at y er wordenn minn suaffuer.”

9 “Haffuer i det for sanden sport,
 at ieg er wordenn eders suaffuer,

dit skall lidenn Kierstinn till glede worde
di dage hun leffue maa.”

All the Danish recordings have *svoger* instead of *måg*, which would fit better. The latter word was most probably replaced when it had become obsolete.¹²⁷ *Það skal allt til góða verða* sounds like a distortion of the Danish text and fits better with the idea that the ballad is late and transferred directly from Danish into Icelandic than with Ek's theory about its West-Nordic origin.

The offering of gold and refusal to accept it found in the next two stanzas is formulaic in Nordic ballads, but the combination with *fótafall* is peculiar. Parallel stanzas are not found in the Danish version of this ballad, but in a 17th century Norwegian variant (in Danish) of TSB D 432, *Ismar og Benedikt* or *Bendik og Árolilja*, they appear with almost identical wording:

- i 4 “Fimmtán tunnur rauðagulls
býð eg yður til bóta.
Viljið þér mína þjónustu þiggja
þá fell eg yður til fóta.”
- 5 “Ei vil eg þitt rauðagull
og ei þitt fótafall.
Þú skalt láta þitt líf í dag
fyrir veröldinni all.”
- n-A 18 “Tolf tønnder af det røde guld
bøder ieg for mig udi bood;
wilst du mer for mig hafve,
saa falder ieg selv til food.”
- 19 “Tolf tønnder af det røde guld
skal ey være din bood;
du skal lade dit lif i-dag,
det ald werden stod imod.”¹²⁸

¹²⁷ See DGF, VIII, p. 58.

¹²⁸ DGF, VIII, p. 108. St. 4 and 5 of the Icelandic version also occur with slight verbal variation (30 barrels instead of 15) in ÍF 26, *Kvæði af herra kong Símon*, but there they look like outsiders, and it is more probable that they borrowed from *Kvæði af herra Birni og Kristínu* than the other way round, unless we are to regard them as vagrant stanzas of no fixed abode.

Now, it seems fairly clear that *Ismar og Benedikt* is of Norwegian origin so that these stanzas are an indication of direct or indirect West-Nordic influence.¹²⁹

Throughout the rest of the ballad, practically every line of the Icelandic version has a parallel in Danish variants, but the Danish variants contain much material not found in the Icelandic. The final stanza has a parallel in the Danish version, but it is still more closely related to a stanza in *Bendik og Árorlilja* recorded in Telemark in the 19th century:

i 11 Sunnan undir hallarvegg
þar lét hann sitt líf,
en í hæga loftinu
sprakk hið væna víf.

d-A 22 Foer offuen wid de borige
der lod denn herre sit liff;
for nedenn wid denn skorstienn
der swalt saa wen en wiff.

TSB D 432 n-B 44 Mitt út fyr garo dei
der laut Bendik döy;
högast upp í loftssvalinn
der sprakk hass véne möy.¹³⁰

When explaining the origin of the Icelandic version of *Kvæði af herra Birni og Kristínu*, we are faced with two possibilities. One of them is that the ballad was brought to Iceland straight from Denmark at a comparatively late date; the two stanzas it has in common with the old Norwegian variant of the *Benedikt* ballad would then have to be accounted for as commonplace stanzas added to the ballad in Iceland or during its transmission. The other alternative is that the ballad was brought to Iceland from Norway. This would explain the relationship to the Norwegian variants of the *Benedikt* ballad. It is not possible at the present stage of research to choose with certainty between these alternatives. Each one presents some problems.

The language of the ballad shows obvious signs of being rather clumsy translation from Danish: *það skal allt til góða verða, fyrir*

¹²⁹ See DGF, VIII, pp. 79–87.

¹³⁰ DGF, III, p. 794.

veröldinni all (rhyming with *fótafall*), *syrgr ei deyð fyrir mig, so eru nógir til*. These examples make it impossible to accept Ek's theory about its West-Nordic origin, i.e., if we assume that it was brought directly from Norway to Iceland. Is it not more likely that this ballad is a Danish treatment of this theme well known in East-Nordic as well as West-Nordic, which has found its most famous form in the legend about Hagbard and Signe? It is not unlikely that either an Icelandic or a Danish ballad-singer would have known other Danish or Norwegian ballads on the same theme which could have contained the stanzas which *Kvæði af herra Birni og Kristínu* has in common with the Norwegian Benedikt ballad. This seems to be the simplest explanation of the fact, but one cannot exclude the possibility that the Danish ballad was brought to Iceland through Norway, where it was influenced by the Benedikt ballad, near the end of the period when Iceland had close cultural contacts with Norway, i.e., in the early 16th century.

ÍF 20 Kvæði af herra Pétri og Ásbirni

Sir Pétur and Ásbjörn snari sail together. Ásbjörn steps up to the loft to Sir Pétur, bribes the doorman with furs; and, before Sir Pétur is aware of it, his daughter has got married (i.e., has been seduced). Ásbjörn snari is pointed out as the one who caused this. Ásbjörn puts on armour; Sir Pétur looks in at the door and Ásbjörn cuts off his head, then slays fifty armoured men. Such a man should fight battles and enjoy the maidens.¹³¹

The preservation of this ballad in Iceland is poor. The beginning seems to have strayed into it from ÍF 55, cf. the beginning of Danish variants of that ballad. Apart from this, the context is fairly clear. This is one of those ballads that describe a breaking and entering of a maiden's chamber, this time leading up to the killing of her father by the intruder. The girl in this case does not enter the story except indirectly.

One variant of this ballad (TSB D 67) is found in Denmark, written down in the latter half of the 19th century; and there is one Swedish recording from the 17th century.

The conclusion of the Danish text is very different from the Icelandic one and has been influenced by *Ribbaldskvæði*. On the other

¹³¹ Text: I, p. 59.

hand, the Swedish text is the most complete of the three. There, Ásbjörn's horse has a role to play in enabling the hero to force his way into the girl's chamber, but the main content of the ballad and its ending are similar to the Icelandic variant. The Swedish and Icelandic versions describe killings with a gusto, which is completely devoid of the tragic tone usually employed in such descriptions in the ballads of chivalry. This might indicate a West-Nordic origin, even a Norwegian one, although the ballad has not been preserved in Norway. Very similar plots are found in some Norwegian ballads, cf. Utsyn, no. 114–19. Sverker Ek has tried to show that this ballad and others related to it are Norwegian.¹³²

The material for comparison is so meagre that there is no way to decide with any certainty whether the ballad is East- or West-Nordic and still less whether it was brought from Denmark or Norway to Iceland. The language and metre indicate that the ballad is fairly young in Icelandic tradition. It is in a repetitive metre; the lines are sometimes rather long and cumbersome; and the rhymes are incomplete: *spurt:gjört, frúr:brún, sín:inn, hafa:bera, so:gá, fimm:menn*. These linguistic features, along with the confusion with the ballad about Ásbjörn snari as it is preserved in Denmark, are indications that the ballad was brought from Denmark at a late date. The 'heroic' style of the ballad seems to contradict this conclusion, but it should be remembered that in the 16th century, when the ballad is most likely to have been transferred, the Danes certainly knew many heroic ballads and were familiar with the kind of style that we meet in *Kvæði af herra Pétri og Ásbirni*.

ÍF 21 Bjarnarsona kvæði

Sir Jón and Ragnfríður talk together in the sleeping loft. Ragnfríður falls asleep and is restless in her sleep; Jón asks why she weeps. She has been dreaming of a red sun, a red fire, black pigs and two brooches that cracked on her breast. She asks him to arise and dress, for the sons of Björn will come riding. He demurs and says that his bow and spear are not near at hand, but she says they are. Jón stands up, feels that he is fey, lies down in front of the altar (walks out of the church door B, rides to the churchyard and the church door C). Prándur and Styrr, sons of Björn, come. He asks

¹³² See Ek 1921, pp. 90–91.

them for mercy and says that he has asked this of no farmer's son before. They say that they will give him as much mercy as he gave honour to Ragnfríður. He asks how she could receive a greater honour than to have him and all his possessions. They disregard the right of the powerful man and cut him down. Ragnfríður did not believe this until she saw his bloodied shirt and red-gold locks. She grieves for three months (weeps for three/five days C), and finally her heart bursts from sorrow. They are buried together.¹³³

Bjarnarsona kvæði has only been found in Iceland, though the pattern of events has many parallels. Knut Liestøl made the earliest study of this ballad and reached the conclusion that it was composed about events that took place in Norway in 1206.¹³⁴ These events are described thus in *Böglunga sögur*, a saga or chronicle relating events in Norway in the first half a dozen years after the death of King Sverrir in 1202:

Þat var þá er Baglar gerðu skúturnar, þá hafði Jón dróttning sýslu austr við Elfi. Fór hann við sveit mikla at veizlum. Hann kom til þess bónda, er Þrándr hét. Hann átti konu fríða. Jón kallaði þau á tal í loft eitt. Gekk húsfreyja fyrri, ok er hon kom í loftit, þá snerist hann við bónda ok hratt honum út, en lét aftr loftit. En er bóndi taldi at þessu, þá hætti Jón honum sökum ok lét taka hann ok binda við hrosshala, fluttu hann svá til skips. Hann leysti sik hálfri mörk gulls ok varð því feginn. Sjau nóttum síðar þá Jón veizlu, þar sem heitir at Forsælu. Gekk hann upp til kirkju snemma einn myrgin ok annar maðr með honum, en Þrándr ok þeir átta saman lágu þar skammt frá ok sá til ferða hans. Þá hljópu þeir til kirkjunnar. Jón hljóp innar í sönghúsit. Þrándr skaut spjóti at Jóni. Hljóp Jón þá út um sönghúsit, en Þrándr eftir honum, ok felldu hann á akrinum. Hjó Þrándr þá höfuð af honum.¹³⁵

Liestøl thinks that the A-text is closest to the original form of *Bjarnarsona kvæði* and he therefore uses it as the basis of his study. He points out that the names Jón and Þrándur are preserved in the ballad, as is the opposition between nobleman and farmer. He also thinks it noteworthy that Jón locks himself with the farmer's wife in a

¹³³ Texts: A = I, p. 148, B = III, p. 227, C = VI, p. 177, D = VII, p. 18. In ÍF₁ the name is *Bjarnasona kvæði*; here, it has been changed to *Bjarnarsona kvæði* in accordance with the spelling of the A-text.

¹³⁴ See Liestøl 1914.

¹³⁵ *Konunga sögur* 1957, II, p. 359.

loft and runs to the church when Þrándur attacks him. In spite of these common features, there are great differences between the narratives of the saga and ballad, and Liestøl comes to the conclusion that it is “uraad aa finna ut noko visst um det nærare samhøvet millom dei.”¹³⁶ His conclusion regarding the dating of the ballad is this:

Bjarnasona kvæði maa vera dikta fyrr minnet um draapet paa Jon drottning hadde bleikna noko vidare, og det kann ikkje liggja noko stort sprang millom hendingane og den tid visa vart dikta.¹³⁷

Norwegian scholars were not satisfied with such uncertain conclusions about the oldest Norwegian ‘historical’ ballad, and in the following years they wrote several papers on the ballad where they tried to determine its origin and history with greater certainty. Magnus Olsen pointed out that the name Styrr was common in Norway around 1200, particularly in the area east of Oslo Fiord where these events took place. The name Ragnfríður was also very common in Norway at this time. Furthermore, he calls attention to the fact that Icelanders at the time had connections with the place where Jón drottning lived, Tjörn in Bohuslän. He assumes that the ballad was composed in these parts, did not spread around Norway, but was carried to Iceland where it was preserved, while it was forgotten in its place of origin.¹³⁸

Shortly after this, Edvard Bull dealt with the ballad. It seemed to him that in the ballad the sympathy was with Jón and, therefore, it must have been composed by his friends or relatives.¹³⁹

Finally, Alexander Bugge wrote a paper on *Bjarnarsona kvæði*. He argues that in the first half of the 13th century there was considerable trade going on between Iceland and Tjörn, which was then a centre for herring trade. On the other hand, the community at Tjörn started to decline after 1225, and the same is true of ownership and use of oceanworthy sailing vessels in Iceland, which he thinks had practically disappeared around the middle of the century. Bugge therefore concludes that the ballad was composed a few years after the event and brought to Iceland while there were still connections with Tjörn.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Liestøl 1914, p. 198.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

¹³⁸ Olsen 1914.

¹³⁹ Bull 1915.

¹⁴⁰ See A. Bugge 1916; further additional comments in Olsen 1916.

Ólafur Marteinsson does not dispute the conclusions of these Norwegian scholars. He thinks there are other indications that the ballad was composed in Norway, as it contains many vagrant stanzas also found in Danish and Swedish ballads. He thinks these stanzas originally belong to *Bjarnarsona kvæði* and feels it is more probable that they spread out from Bohuslän than from Iceland.¹⁴¹

When we consider the fact that *Bjarnarsona kvæði* was not written down until the latter half of the 17th century, more than four and a half centuries after the killing of Jón drottning, we realize how difficult it must be to reach any conclusion about the connection between the events and the ballad. Still, the evidence on which the Norwegian scholars base their conclusions must be scrutinized.

The features that connect the story of Jón drottning with *Bjarnarsona kvæði* are so many that it is impossible to reject the theory that they deal with the same events. But stories of such events can live for a long time in peoples' memories without ballads being composed about them. It is also possible that they were shaped into verse form and preserved for a time, though not in the form of a ballad. Therefore, the date 1206 cannot be regarded as anything but a *terminus post quem* for the ballad.

It is interesting that other 'historical' Norwegian ballads do not deal with events before 1250, and that attempts to date Danish and Swedish historical ballads as early as the first half of the 13th century have met with much criticism.¹⁴² One must therefore say that it is, in itself, unlikely that *Bjarnarsona kvæði* is that old.

In spite of the connection already described, there is a great deal of difference between the plot of the saga-anecdote and the ballad. This becomes clear if we summarize both plots. Then, the narrative of the saga is as follows: A rich chieftain seduces or rapes a farmer's wife and maltreats her husband. Shortly afterwards he is ambushed and killed by the husband. — There is no reason to doubt that these events are accurately described, and the saga gives no occasion to infer any active participation nor even consent of the farmer's wife. On the other hand, the plot of the ballad is: Lovers are sleeping together in a loft. The woman dreams that the man is to die and asks him to rise up and

¹⁴¹ See Ólafur Marteinsson, pp. 256–8.

¹⁴² See the commentary to the historical ballads in DGF, X, and Dal 1956, pp. 257–74.

take to his weapons. He rises up, goes to church where the woman's relatives come and kill him. The woman sees the body and dies of grief.

It is obvious that the plot of the ballad is composed of various common ballad motifs. The whole conforms to a well known ballad pattern, and many of the individual stanzas and groups of stanzas are in fact found in other ballads, both in Iceland and elsewhere. It seems unnecessary to enumerate parallels for particular stanzas, as these are generally found in many places and cannot be given a fixed point of origin. However, a few of the ballads closely related to this one should be mentioned.

Before Liestøl published his study of *Bjarnarsona kvæði*, Axel Olrik had unhesitatingly assumed that ÍF 22, *Kvæði af herra Pána*, was a direct model for it.¹⁴³ It is uncertain that this is the case, but there is a close relationship in subject matter and treatment. There, symbolic dreams also occur as portents of the killing. Brothers arrive to kill the lover. The reactions of Páni and Jón are not dissimilar. Jón lies down before the altar while Páni makes his escape. The poet is not describing a champion but an ordinary knight who has sense enough not to fight against impossible odds. It is interesting that in another group of ballads, which have a typically West-Nordic appearance, the knight turns against his attackers and cuts down the woman's relatives.¹⁴⁴

In the conclusion of *Bjarnarsona kvæði*, there is added to the narrative another well known motif, the reaction of a woman who sees the body of a husband or lover. DGF 144, *Hr. Jon og fru Bodil*, is related to *Bjarnarsona kvæði* in that it starts with dreams portending death and ends with a similar description of the woman's reaction. And, in fact, Grundtvig thought that *Bjarnarsona kvæði* was merely a variant of that ballad.¹⁴⁵

Thus, all the chief motifs of *Bjarnarsona kvæði* are widely known from ballads about knights, and the beginning and end of the ballad remove its narrative far from the historical description of the events

¹⁴³ See DGF, VI, p. 29.

¹⁴⁴ ÍF 56 and 57 belong to this group, but apart from that, it mainly consists of Norwegian ballads, although in these the life of the girl's father is usually spared. See *Utsyn*, nos. 114–121.

¹⁴⁵ See DGF, III, pp. 325–6. The same motif is found in ÍF 23, *Tristrams kvæði*, and in various non-Icelandic variants of ÍF 1, *Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós*.

of 1206. It should be pointed out that the conventions of the ballad of chivalry would, in themselves, have permitted a much more closely related narration. Rape and subsequent vengeance is also a common ballad plot. Is this the result of a shift in sympathies, as Edvard Bull maintained, or does it indicate that the ballad is not at all based on accurate knowledge of the events but rather on a brief account, perhaps in verse, which named the chief characters and the circumstances of the killing?¹⁴⁶ The loft and the church might have been mentioned in this source, but as the former is the traditional refuge for lovers in the ballads and the latter one of the most common places for killing a villain, as people tried to save their lives by seeking the sanctuary of the church, this has to be regarded as totally uncertain. Another feature which could possibly have been found in such a source is the different social status of Jón and his killers. The stanzas emphasizing this difference also occur elsewhere, but, as Liestøl has argued, they seem to be more original to *Bjarnarsona kvæði*.¹⁴⁷

A lost source is, of course, always a convenient way of explaining problems away, but the story told in *Bjarnarsona kvæði* is so different from the anecdote in *Böglunga sögur*, which we assume is historically accurate, that it is extremely unlikely that the ballad in the form we now have it could have been composed and put into circulation at Tjörn in the early decades of the 13th century. It is much more likely that such a treatment of the story could appear when the events were half-forgotten or far from the scene. On the other hand, the events must not be quite forgotten, needless to say, and this leads us to ask how long people would remember the core of such events combined with the names of the main actors. Such a question cannot be answered accurately, of course, but most people would be inclined to operate with some time limit; some would probably say less than one century, others maybe three hundred years. It cannot be denied that an anecdote supported by a skaldic stanza has better conditions for survival than a mere prose account, and such a stanza may seem a less remote possibility from what we know of the literature of Norway in the 13th century than a chivalric ballad with historical content.

Now, the question might be raised whether it is not possible that the ballad in an earlier version was much closer to the historical events

¹⁴⁶ See Bull 1915.

¹⁴⁷ See Liestøl 1914, pp. 195–6.

and later was changed through the influence of other ballads. There is no doubt that it has undergone some changes in oral tradition. The trouble here is that little would remain of the ballad if we were to remove all the material that shows relationship with other ballads of chivalry. The theme of the ballad, its emotional core, is expressed through the dream portents and Ragnfríður's grief, both of which emphasize her tragic situation when she sees her lover killed by her relatives. Concentration on the revenge theme, which would be the natural treatment of the anecdote from *Böglunga sögur*, would by necessity result in an altogether different ballad, which is just as hypothetical as the skaldic stanza mentioned above.

How old is *Bjarnarsona kvæði* then? Its material is moulded in accordance with a certain story pattern and certain conventions of the ballad genre. It cannot be older than this pattern and these conventions. It is impossible to state with certainty whether the ballad was composed by a Norwegian or an Icelander. There is nothing in the language that points outside Iceland, but if the ballad was composed in Norway and brought to Iceland at a comparatively early date, this should not be expected. It must be considered more likely that a reminiscence, in one form or another, of the event was preserved in Norway. The conventions of this genre certainly must have been stronger in Norway than in Iceland, and consequently it is likely to be of Norwegian origin and have been brought to Iceland before 1500.

ÍF 22 Kvæði af herra Pána

Eiríkur wakes up his brothers and asks them to ride with him to Breiðdalur to avenge their sorrows, which has long been desired by the lady Lucia. On Monday morning, they hone their spears, and on Tuesday morning they ride out. Herra Páni talks to a lady and tells her his dreams: polar bears were playing with him; one took him in his embrace; another struck him on the back a heavy blow. She tells him to rise up for his life is in danger; he praises the strength of his house and claims he is not afraid although he is alone there. Then he is travelling, for he looks back and hears the sounds of hooves. He rides over sticks and stones, but he never reaches his house. He is lamented by the ladies of Denmark.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Texts: A = I, p. 41, B = III, p. 208, C = IV, p. 119 (one stanza), D = IV, p. 240, E = V, p. 100.

The first three stanzas of the A-text, telling about the avengers, are not found in D, but otherwise there is little variation between the texts. The ballad (TSB D 334) is also found in the Faroes, Denmark and Sweden, but the recordings are few and rather old. The two Danish variants are from the 16th and 17th centuries; there is one Swedish variant from the 17th century and, finally, one Faroese variant from around or before the middle of the 19th century. All these variants, with the exception of the Swedish, have the common metrical peculiarity that, at the end of each stanza, the first line of the following stanza is inserted before the refrain; then it is repeated in its proper place. This is a unique stanza form in ballads. Ernst von der Recke thinks that the stanzas were originally couplets which were transformed into quatrains before the ballad left Denmark.¹⁴⁹ Erik Dal supports Reckes view and adds: “. . . strofeformen turde være et experiment med pen i hånd snarere end en syngemåde; den overføres til islandsk og færøsk, ikke til den svenske form.”¹⁵⁰ It is not fully clear whether Dal thinks that this metre was then brought to Iceland and the Faroes in written form, but it is hardly possible to find any indications that this could have happened. On the contrary, the variations in the Faroese and Icelandic texts seem to point to an independent West-Nordic version, which must have taken shape in oral tradition. In addition to the stanza form, the refrain of the ballad is everywhere the same, though it is distorted in the Faroes:

i-ABCDE Í þyrn og í blóma
 d-A Y torn och y blom
 s J thörn och i blomma
 f Tárin hevði blóma.

The form *þyrn*, found in ACE (BD have *þyrni*), is peculiar and speaks against great age. The opening stanzas of the A-text (A 1–2, B 1, C 1, E 1–2) have no parallels in variants outside Iceland, while i-A 3–4 correspond to f 5–6. However, their position in the ballad is not the same, because in the Faroese version they follow upon the dialogue about the dream, which opens the ballad everywhere outside Iceland. The question then is whether these stanzas are original to the ballad. Olrik considered them to be a later addition “der synes at være bleven

¹⁴⁹ See *Danmarks Fornviser*, II, p. 272.

¹⁵⁰ DGF, X, p. 778.

til i norrøn sprogform".¹⁵¹ That one of these stanzas seems to be a West-Nordic commonplace stanza supports this hypothesis; at least, it does appear in Norwegian variants of TSB C 15, *Falkvor Lommansson*, in this form among others:

Å sundagjen å måndagjen
 då kvesste no dei si' spjut
 å tilegt um tysdags morgonen
 då rei dei herekjempur ut.¹⁵²

The stanza is not found in Danish and Swedish variants of the ballad. The dream symbols are identical in the Faroese and Icelandic variants; d-B mentions both falcons and "di vilde bjørne", while in d-A and the Swedish version, the symbols are two lions.

Those who have written on this ballad agree that it is Danish, and this is undoubtedly the case, not the least on account of the name. The old Danish variant is the most coherent; it starts with the dreams, and as the lady discusses them, she reminds her lover of the wrong he has done to her relatives; it then goes on to his speech about his strong house and his flight in an attempt to reach them. The polar bears in the Icelandic and Faroese versions must be secondary, and this definitively shows that these two versions form a separate branch of the tradition. This is supported by the fact that the introduction found in the Icelandic variants, which partly appears as an interpolation in the Faroese variant, is most likely to be a West-Nordic addition.

The Faroese refrain, *Tárin hevði blóma*, is far more likely to be a distortion of a Scandinavian form of the refrain than an Icelandic form and thus excludes the possibility that the ballad has been brought to the Faroes from Iceland. On the other hand, it can not be excluded that it came to Iceland from the Faroes, although it is more likely that it came to both Iceland and the Faroes from Norway where the introductory stanzas had been added.

The last stanza in AB and the remnants of the same in DE are in a peculiar metre. It looks like some kind of *stafhent* or two couplet stanzas. It is difficult to say whether this is an Icelandic addition or if it has been brought to Iceland with the ballad. One line has a parallel in the Faroese variant, and the language indicates Scandinavian origin.

¹⁵¹ DGF, VI, p. 29.

¹⁵² NB, p. 122.

Metrically, it is in such a contrast to the rest of the ballad that it can hardly be said to support Recke's idea that it was originally in couplets.

It is not often that a ballad has the same refrain in Iceland as in Denmark, and this definitely indicates that the ballad is not old; and this is supported by the language which shows several signs of the Scandinavian substratum. However, if it came from Norway, this must have happened in the first half of the 16th century.

ÍF 23 Tristrams kvæði

Tristram (or Tristran) fights the heathens (at London Bridge A) and is wounded. Many want to heal his wounds, but he says he wants no doctor except Ísodd the Fair. He sends his men to get her and tells them that they should hoist blue sails if she comes with them, but not black ones. Envoys carry the message. Ísodd goes to the king and asks whether he wants to have the wounds of his kinsman Tristram healed. He says that Tristram needs no healing as he is dying. She puts her arms around his neck, upon which he relents but says he is afraid she will not return in good health. She says she will not forget her duties during this journey. She sets off and orders blue sails to be hoisted on the ships. Ísodd the Dark walks in and says that the ships have black sails. Tristram turns to the wall and dies. Ísodd the Fair walks ashore and hears singing and bells tolling. She walks to the church, bends over the body and dies. Ísodd the Dark declares that they shall not be allowed to enjoy each other in death. They are buried on either side of the church. Trees grow on their graves and meet over the church.¹⁵³

Tristrams kvæði is very well preserved; there are no great divergences between the extant variants, though they differ somewhat in length. Still, the ballad seems to have been totally lost before the end of the 18th century. This ballad is not found outside Iceland, and Danish and Faroese ballads about Tristram are not related to this one, even though some of them tell the same part of the story (CCF 110 and DGF 470, 471).

There is no doubt that *Tristrams kvæði* is based on *Tristrams saga*, a Norse translation by Brother Robert of the French *roman* by Thomas. The translation was made in the early 13th century at the court of King Hákon of Norway, but it is only preserved in Icelandic copies. There exists also a later and shorter version of this saga, *Saga af Tristram ok*

¹⁵³ Texts: A = I, p. 137, B = III, p. 198, C = IV, p. 121 (one stanza), D = IV, p. 221, E = V, p. 22.

Ísodd, preserved in a manuscript from around 1450 and thought to have been written around 1400.¹⁵⁴ It is an Icelandic, quite independent, retelling of the older saga.

Because *Tristrams saga* exists in two versions, scholars have considered the possibility that the poet who composed *Tristrams kvæði* might have made use of the later version of the saga. If this were so, it would be indisputable evidence that the ballad was composed in Iceland after 1400. On the face of it, one feature seems immediately to point in that direction: in the translation, Tristram's beloved is called Ísönd, but his wife's name is Ísodd, while in the later version they are both called Ísodd with the respective epithets, the Beautiful and the Dark. This is closer to the ballad where they are called Ísodd the Fair and Ísodd the Dark. It is these epithets in particular that show that there must be some connection between the ballad and the younger version. It should be pointed out, however, that, in foreign versions of the *roman*, these rivals are namesakes, and, in the text of Brother Robert's translation, they sometimes appear to be so, cf. ch. 69, while Ísönd's mother is variously called the Fair Ísodd (ch. 9 and 30) and Ísönd (ch. 39). It is, therefore, only natural that a poet who composed a ballad on the basis of the saga, or someone who retold it freely, chose to distinguish them only by the epithet, which undeniably is more poetic.

These names are almost the only feature that shows a particular connection between the ballad and the later version of the saga. In opposition to this, we have clear verbal correspondences between the ballad and the older version in various places where no textual connection can be found with the younger version, e.g., in the stanzas D 20 and A 23–24. In the description of the sails, the saga versions diverge; the ballad follows the older version, where we find:

Enn hón laug at hánum; því Kardín sigldi með hvítum ok *blám*
blankandi seglum, stöfuðum; því Tristram hafði svá beðit hann,
til merkis, ef Ísönd kvæmi með hánum. Enn ef Ísönd kvæmi ekki
með hánum, þá skyldi hann sigla með svörtu segli.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ The older version, which I call *Tristrams saga*, is edited by Gísli Brynjúlfsson 1878, and this edition is quoted here. The younger version, *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, was edited by Gísli Brynjúlfsson in 1851; about its age see Schach 1957–59, and 1964.

¹⁵⁵ *Tristrams saga*, p. 197.

In the later version, on the other hand, we find:

þá skal þat mark um yðra ferð, at þér skulut tjalda svörtu yfir skipunum, ef hon er ekki í ferð, en ellegar skulu þér hvítu tjalda.¹⁵⁶

All variants of the ballad mention black and blue sails.

From these connections between the ballad and the saga versions, Paul Schach drew the conclusion that the author of the ballad made use of both versions of the saga. He says:

From the longer one he drew the inspiration and the material for his poem; from the shorter one, he got the suggestion for the names of the two women characters.¹⁵⁷

A few years later, however, another explanation occurred to him:

A similar emphasis in the *Saga af Tristram*, several verbal correspondences, and the similarity of names—*Ísodd fagra* and *Ísodd svarta* in the saga, *Ísodd bjarta* and *Ísodd svarta* in the ballad—suggest that the author of the saga may have known the ballad. Golther's supposition that the ballad writer could have used both sagas is also plausible, but the whole spirit of the poem together with certain details (the blue sail, for example . . .) point unmistakably to the final chapters of *Tristrams saga* as the major source.¹⁵⁸

It is difficult to exclude the possibility, suggested here, that the author of the later saga version knew the ballad and was influenced by it. One place in the text, not discussed by Schach, seems to lend support to this conclusion. Both versions end with the image of the two trees that grew on the lovers' graves and met above the church. The older version puts it in these words:

Enn svá bar til, at sín eik eða lundr vóx upp af hvárs þeirra leiði, svá hátt, at limit kvíslaðist saman fyrir ofan kirkjubustina.¹⁵⁹

The words used in A 30 are very similar:

¹⁵⁶ *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, p. 76.

¹⁵⁷ Schach 1957–61, p. 123.

¹⁵⁸ Schach 1964, p. 286.

¹⁵⁹ *Tristrams saga*, p. 199.

Uxu upp þeirra af leiðunum
lundar tveir,
fyrir ofan miðja kirkju
mættust þeir.

The younger version has an unusually similar wording to the older one here, though there are some differences:

Þá rann sinn lundr upp af leiði hvors þeirra með hinum fegrsta ávexti, ok þar til óxu viðirnir, at þeir mættust yfir kirkjubust.¹⁶⁰

The verb *renna*, an unusual one in this context but quite poetic, occurs in two variants of the ballad:

D 32, E 22 Runnu upp af leiðum þeirra
lundar tveir,
upp af (rétt yfir E) miðri kirkjunni
mætast (mættust E) þeir.

The wording of the A-text must be more original to the ballad, as it is known that it uses the text of the older version of the saga, but there must be some connection between the variant in DE and the younger version of the saga. It seems more likely that these verbal variations appeared early in the ballad's oral transmission and that the younger saga version was influenced by the ballad than that the changes in the ballad occurred through influence from the younger saga. Variation lies in the nature of ballads, and the secondary stanza is a stylistic improvement of the older one.

We do not possess the evidence to prove this, but if the theory that the ballad influenced the saga is accepted as the best explanation of the facts, then it follows that the ballad must have existed in Iceland before 1400. In no other instance have we got any evidence for such great age of an Icelandic ballad, whatever we may want to believe.

The beginning of the A-text of *Tristrams kvæði* states that he fought his last battle at London Bridge, and then that he fought the heathen dog. This latter detail is found in the beginning of all variants. In the dictionary *Specimen Lexici Runici*, written by Magnús Ólafsson in 1650, the verb *heyja* is explained by this example: "Rolland háði bar-

¹⁶⁰ *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, pp. 76–78.

dagann: Rolandus prælium excercuit. In metro antiqvo.”¹⁶¹ Apart from the name of the hero, this looks like the beginning of *Tristrams kvæði* in B: *Tristram háði bardagann*. Jón Helgason has pointed out the connection of Magnús Ólafsson’s example with *Tristrams kvæði*. It is tempting to assume that this is, in fact, the beginning of a lost *Rollands kvæði*. *Tristrams saga* does not mention that he was killed by heathens, but it is well known that the battle of Roncevaux was fought between Christians and heathens, according to the *Chanson de Roland*.¹⁶² Heathens are often mentioned in Norwegian and Faroese ballads about Roland. In *Roland og Magnus kongjen*, for example, we find in st. 8:

Dei sloges ut på Rusarvodden
i virkedagine två
så falt hedningjen fe Rolands sværi
som storren fe goan já.¹⁶³

A corresponding stanza is found in the Faroese *Runsivals stríð* (CCF 106), which, in other respects, is rather remote from the Norwegian ballad. It seems most probable that the formula *x háði bardagann* automatically drew material from **Rollands kvæði* into *Tristrams kvæði*; and, in fact, the words *heiðinn hund* are full of sound and fury and thus a fitting description of Tristram’s killer.

It is more probable that *við Lundúnabré* was a part of the ballad from the beginning. In the saga, this battle is supposed to have taken place “í landamæri á Bretlandi”, and even though this is more likely to refer to Bretagne than Britain, the poet may nevertheless have associated it with London Bridge, which in any case is within the setting for *Tristrams saga*.

In Scandinavia, there exist several ballads derived from the legend of *Hagbard* and *Signe*. A few of these ballads seem to show influence from *Tristrams saga* and, in one case, perhaps from the ballad. In the Norwegian *Bendik og Árolilja*, we find these stanzas:

43 Dei la en Bendik sunnaføre
å Árolilja norra

¹⁶¹ ÍF, V, p. 205.

¹⁶² The *Chanson de Roland* was translated into Norse in the 13th century and incorporated into *Karlamagnúss saga*.

¹⁶³ NB, p. 214.

der vox upp þá deris græftir
tvá fagre liljublommar.

44 Der vux up þá deris græftir
to fagre liljegreinir
dei krøktes ivi kjørkjætárne
der sto dei kongjen te mein.

45 De vox up þá deris græfter
tvá fagre liljeblomar
dei krøktes ivi kyrketárne
dei sto der kongjen te domar.¹⁶⁴

There is, in fact, no reason to assume direct connection between the ballads; this poetic image can have entered *Bendik og Árolilja* directly from *Tristrams saga* or through indirect paths. The trees or plants on the graves are, in fact, widely known motifs in folktales (Thompson E 631.0.1), although they may have their original source in the Tristan legend. In Denmark, this motif is found in some variants of DGF 445, 446 and 448, but these ballads are in other respects not related to *Tristrams kvæði*.

A description of a spouse or lover on his/her way to the deathbed of the loved one and becoming aware of his/her death on hearing the death knell is found elsewhere than in *Tristrams kvæði*. This motif is found in various non-Icelandic versions of *Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós*, cf. e.g., d-A 26–8 and 52–3. W. P. Ker mentions an Italian ballad, recorded in the 19th century, containing the same motif and, what is more remarkable, having the same metre as *Tristrams kvæði*.¹⁶⁵ The correspondence in metres must be a coincidence, but the poet of *Tristrams kvæði* must have known poetry containing this knell motif and felt how suitable it was for his material. Furthermore, the saga text gives a direct occasion for adopting it:

Sem Ísönd var nú af skipi gengin, þá heyrði hún fólkit allt gráta með miklum harmi, öllum klukkum hringjandi. Hón spurði þá, því menn léti svá illa, eðr hvat tíðenda þeir hefði fengit.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ NB, pp. 198–9.

¹⁶⁵ See Ker 1925, II, pp. 87–8.

¹⁶⁶ *Tristrams saga*, p. 198.

This may have found its way from *Tristrams saga* (i.e., the *roman*) into the poetry of various nations, but of course a knell is an obvious poetic image to carry the tidings that someone is dead.

A Faroese ballad, *Pætur Knútssons ríma* (CCF 160), contains the only example found outside Iceland of a verbal parallel with *Tristrams kvæði* so close that there must be a direct connection. Four variants of the ballad are printed in CCF, all recorded in the 19th century. The stanza in question is found in all of these, but with some variations. The relationship with *Tristrams kvæði* is closest in the A-text:

i-D 20 Tristran snerist til veggjar
so hart hann stakk,
heyra mátti mílur þrjár
hans hjartað sprakk.

f-A 20 Kristina lítla vendi sær
til vegginn fast,
hoyrast mátti langan veg
hennar hjarta brast.

The ballad is also found in Denmark and is probably Danish, but this stanza is not found in the Danish variants. The most natural assumption is, therefore, that it was added to the ballad in the Faroes and that this is evidence that *Tristrams kvæði* was known there, which could of course have been the case even though it was composed in Iceland. There is reason to believe that this stanza is original to *Tristrams kvæði* as the saga has this description of Tristram's death:

Enn sem Tristram heyrði þat, þá var hann svá mjök syrgjandi, at aldri beið hann slíkan harm. Ok *snérist hann þegar upp til veggjar ok mælti þá með harmsfullri röddu* 'nú ertú Ísönd mik hatandi . . .' Þrýsvar kallaði hann Ísönd unnostu sína ok nefndi á nafn, enn hit fjórða sinn gaf hann upp önd sína með lífi sínu.¹⁶⁷

Tristrams kvæði is only found in Iceland and is well preserved. It forms a coherent and impressive artistic whole. The metre is the variant of the quatrain where there are only two stresses in the second and fourth lines, but this metre appears in a number of ballads which seem to be of Icelandic origin. There is nothing that excludes the possibility

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

that the ballad is Norwegian, as Liestøl has suggested,¹⁶⁸ but there are no positive indications that this is the case, and the burden of proof must rest on those who want to maintain that it is not Icelandic. The ballad is undoubtedly fairly old; the language is pure Icelandic, and the style and treatment of the subject matter indicate that the ballad tradition was at its most fertile in Iceland when the ballad was composed. It has been pointed out above that it is probable that the ballad influenced a text that was written not later than the beginning of the 15th century, and it seems that we cannot show any evidence that any other ballad is so old; but this may be mere coincidence. On the other hand, it is possible that the ballad has been influenced by the younger version of *Tristrams saga*, and then it is not older than the 15th century and undoubtedly Icelandic.

ÍF 24 Málfríðar kvæði

Málfríður is given to Ásbjörn in marriage. When they have lived together for seven weeks in Sæland, he wants to go on an expedition (Thus ABE). They live for eleven years in Salland and have eleven children. She is carrying the twelfth child when he wants to set off on an expedition (D). She asks him to stay at home, as it has been foretold her that she will die when she has her first/twelfth child. He asks her not to believe in fortune tellers and sets off. On the first night, he has a dream about her and sails back home. When he arrives, a body is being carried to church. He asks whose it is and is told that it is his wife's. He asks leave to kiss her and the kiss is so hard that his heart breaks into nine parts.¹⁶⁹

Málfríðar kvæði is also found in Denmark, Norway and Sweden (TSB D 291), and is furthermore closely related to a German ballad (DV no. 53, see also Child no. 91). The Scandinavian recordings, almost without exception, agree with i-D in that she was carrying her twelfth child when he set off on his expedition. In the German ballad, on the other hand, the point is that the girl is too young to have a child when she is married, and therefore she dies on her first delivery. In most Danish recordings, in the Norwegian and Swedish ones, and

¹⁶⁸ Liestøl 1931, p. 86.

¹⁶⁹ Texts: A = I, p. 133, B = IV, p. 82, C = IV, p. 122 (one stanza), D = IV, p. 145, E = IV, p. 231, F = VII, p. 54.

in the German ballad, the knight kills himself by falling on his sword, but in some Danish variants he dies of grief as in the Icelandic version.

The ballad has the same refrain in Norway, Denmark and Sweden, with variations, but it is unrelated to the Icelandic refrain, though of similar length and rhythm, and could have been sung to the same tune. Sophus Bugge says about the Norwegian tradition: "At Visen ikke er oprindelig norsk, er tydeligt. Sprogformen viser helt igjennem et dansk Grundlag."¹⁷⁰

The Icelandic version is obviously most closely related to the old Danish recordings, though it does not follow any of them very closely. Nevertheless, many lines, not least those that are clumsy in the Icelandic version, correspond to Danish ones:

i-A 2 Hún á ekki barnið nema hana Málfríði ein,
henni gengur daglega sorg fyrir mein.

d-A 1 Der buor en fru vdy Selland,
hun haffuer icke datter for-vdenn ienn.

C 2 — — —
hendis lycke oc skeben bleff hende saa tung.

i-D 5 Ellefu ár í Sallandi var,
ellefu börn í heiminn bar.

d-B 2 XI aar di sammen war,
XI børn hun til verden bar.

i-D 6 So leið á það tólfta ár,
hún Málfríður með sínu sveinbarni stár.

7 Ásbjörn vill í leiðangur fara,
Málfríður biður hann heima vera.

d-B 3 Der hun var med sin XII barn,
da wille rider Oloff aff lanndett fare.

¹⁷⁰ Bugge 1858, p. 123.

i-D 8 “Því var mér spáð þá eg var mey
eg skyldi að mínu tólfta barni dey.”

d-B 5 “Dett wortte mig spoett, der ieg waar møø,
ieg skulle udaff min tolfte barn døø.”

i-D 9 Ásbjörn svarar og varð við reiður:
“Trú þú aldrei spákonu meðan þú lifir.”

d-B 6 “Du thi quer, liden Malfred, du sige icke saa!
di spaa-quinnder liffuer saa mannge paa.”

One suspects that *lifir* (lives) in the Icelandic text is a reflection of *liffue* (lie) in the Danish text.

Many other examples of close verbal correspondences might be enumerated, but only one shall be added:

i-D 13 — — —
“Guð ráði nú hvörninn mín Málfríður má.”

d-A 26 — — —
“Saa rade Gud, huor staltt Mall-fred hun maa!”

Two of the old recordings are in a repetition metre, and the same is true of two Danish recordings from the first half of the 17th century. The language of the Icelandic variants is poor and stilted; the rhymes are often incomplete and demand wrong inflectional endings. All this indicates that the ballad was fairly recent in Iceland when it was first written down in 1665. There can be no doubt that it was brought to Iceland directly from Denmark. It is probably coincidental that three Icelandic variants are in agreement with the German ballad, *Die Elf-jährige Markgräfin*, mentioned above, that the misfortune befell the couple in their first year of marriage. This has probably just been changed by a ballad singer who found it more tragic this way. If this was not the case, one would have to assume that the ballad was brought to Iceland two times, and rather early the first time, which is very unlikely.

ÍF 25 Kvæði af Ingu lífstuttu

Little Inga is reluctant to marry in spite of many suitors; she finally consents to marry a knight but falls ill after having been married for a few days. Before she dies, she summons her husband and tells him about a good girl who will be able to give him comfort. Then the knight is tied with bonds of grief. In some variants he dies, but in others he follows her advice.¹⁷¹

In Denmark and Sweden, there are variants of the same ballad (TSB D 283), all of them old: four Danish variants are from the early 17th century, and the single Swedish recording is from around 1600. Also, in the Norwegian version of *Stjúpmóður kvæði* (ÍF 11, cf. Landstad no. LXII) there are six stanzas in the beginning which are probably taken from this ballad, though they are not related to the Icelandic version.

There is some disagreement between the variants as to the duration of the marriage. In the Icelandic variants, she falls ill on the seventh or the tenth night, but the Swedish variant says that the fatal illness struck her on the third night. One Danish variant uses the Sunday . . . Monday formula here, which means that there was only one night, but in the others she lives for some years, and, accordingly, she has the children in mind when she asks him to take another wife. It is clear that the Danish (and Norwegian) tradition of this ballad has become confused with *Stjúpmóður kvæði*, so that we should perhaps assume that the original duration of the marriage was a few days.

There are a few verbal correspondences with the non-Icelandic texts, closest in one stanza:

i-A 9 “Ríddu þig í Húnavík,
þar er sú frú að mér er lík.”

d-A 11 “Der er enn frue i Slesuig,
hun haffuer enn datter, er mig saa lig.”

The ballad is everywhere very short, and though the Danish variants are slightly longer than the Icelandic ones, there does not have to be anything missing from the latter. Comparison of texts gives no certain indication of the source of the Icelandic version. There is nothing in

¹⁷¹ Texts: A = I, p. 46, B = II, p. 1, C = VI, p. 43, D = VI, p. 143, E = VI, p. 207.

the language or metre to indicate it is very recent, so there is nothing that excludes the possibility that it may have come to Iceland through Norway before the Reformation.

Sverker Ek has proposed that this ballad is from the 13th century. The only evidence he quotes for this is the shortness and conciseness of the ballad.¹⁷² This is hardly a valid argument. With at least equal certainty, one could say that a ballad with such a domestic setting is more likely to date from the end of the Middle Ages or even the 16th century.

ÍF 26 Kvæði af herra kong Símoni

King Simon rides to the assembly. He says that if Lady Ingigerður were present she would defend him, but then she appears and describes how she waited upon King Simon while he rewarded her by breaking into her loft and having his men hold her legs while he had his way with her. She says she was carrying her husband's child, but it did not get into the world alive because of his wicked deed. He offers gold as compensation, but she wants nothing but his life. Then they took King Simon and cut off his head, and Lady Ingigerður took hold of his hair and threw his head into a pile of dung saying that this is how he treated her.¹⁷³

The only Icelandic variant is in Gissur Sveinsson's collection, and outside Iceland, there is only one variant of the same ballad (TSB D 179), a Danish 17th century recording. The Danish variant has a more coherent story. It starts by recounting that the king rode to the assembly, then Sir Peder brings the accusation that his wife has been raped. Now Sir Tidemand, the accused, declares that he wishes that Lady Mettelille was there, because she would not accuse him. Then, Lady Mettelille comes forward, and things happen as in the Icelandic version, though the happenings are more briefly accounted for in the Danish version.

The initial stanza of the Icelandic recording is actually a kind of mixture of a burden and an ordinary stanza. The content is partly an address to the audience and partly narration. Metrically, it can be accounted for as a quatrain with the addition of a refrain that rhymes with the last line of the stanza, which is unique in a Scandinavian

¹⁷² See Ek 1931, pp. 198–202.

¹⁷³ Text: I, p. 43.

ballad. The last line of the stanza then becomes part of the refrain which is a couplet rhymed *aa*. Such a refrain is not found with any other Icelandic quatrain ballad, but there are parallels in the Faroes. The Danish variant has a one line refrain, which is not related to the Icelandic one.

Even though the variants are not identical word for word, the phrasing is often very similar, e.g.:

i-3 Það er hann herra kong Símon,
hann talar í brysti sér:
“Væri hér frúin Ingigerður
hún bæri sætur af mér.”

d 4 Op stod herre Thidemand,
hand tog den thalle thil sig:
“Och worre hun skiønne fru Mettelil herre,
hun kierde icke wold paa mig.”

i-5 “Ég gaf þér minn öl og mat
á míns herrans traust.
Heyrðu það, herra kong Símon,
þú þást það þakkarlaust.”

d 9 “Ieg gaff ether bode møid och vin,
bode ether och ethers suenne;
det giorde ieg paa min hoss-bundis trøst,
och selffuer var hand icke hiemme.”

The brutal content of this ballad is made one degree more brutal in the Icelandic version. This happens through the detailed description of the rape itself in stanzas 8 and 9, the mention of the miscarriage which does not appear in the Danish text, and finally the fact that the lady herself assists at the execution. All the involved seem to be aristocrats in the Danish variants, while the conflict is between king and farmers in the Icelandic version. This class nature of the confrontation is particularly emphasized by the refrain: *Hvað vilja bændur kæra? Nú mega hofmenn læra*, which sounds triumphantly at the end of each stanza, though, of course, particularly after the last ones (i.e., 13 and 14, as 15 is obviously a late addition in a different style). As a matter

of fact, this difference in tone is perfectly natural when we consider that, in Denmark, the ballad is preserved in song collections of the aristocracy. The scribes would no doubt have considered it in bad taste to describe how the men held the lady's legs or how she herself took part in the execution. On the other hand, the ballad is most likely to have reached Iceland through people of a lower class.

Símon is not an unnatural replacement of *Tidemand*, which would have been impossible in Icelandic, and his title of king is no doubt a secondary feature in this ballad. It should be pointed out, however, that in *Marsk Stig* a king is killed for the same reason, but this does not happen at an assembly as an official execution. It is tempting to think that this ballad was composed under influence from *Marsk Stig*. The artistically effective feature of the Icelandic version, that it is the lady herself who revenges her injuries, is probably secondary and could be under influence from *Ebbadætra kvæði*.

Many features of the language of the ballad show Danish influence: *eðla hofmenn*, *Danakóns bý*, *talár í brysti sér*, *bæri sætur (?) af mér*, *á míns herrans traust*, *hélt úti hans lokk*. On the basis of these linguistic characteristics, it is most natural to assume that the ballad was brought to Iceland late and probably directly from Denmark. Obviously, the comparison of texts cannot yield much evidence, since there are only two texts to be compared.

ÍF 27 Kvæði af Magnúsi Jónssyni

Magnús Jónsson seduces Elín, Sir David's widow, promises her his faith, but then rides away to propose to another. He then asks his new fiancée to give her bridal costume to Elín, but she would sooner be burnt than that his paramour should have it. Elín's sons take their leave from the king and hurry to the castle. Their mother complains of her lot to them. The two ladies start quarreling in church. Magnús Jónsson does not know the brothers, but they capture him and ask for compensation for the harm he has done their mother. He offers a fleet and a fine garden; Elín urges her sons to accept his terms, but they kill him east of the church and take his lady in their arms.¹⁷⁴

Apart from Gissur Sveinsson's recording, there is only one 19th century Faroese variant of this ballad (CCF 148, TSB D 212).

¹⁷⁴ Text: I, p. 1.

The Icelandic version has an initial stanza with an address to the audience which is not found in the Faroese variant, although such stanzas are much more common in the Faroese than in the Icelandic ballads.¹⁷⁵ The versions are not closely related, and it is impossible to tell whether they belong to a West-Nordic tradition or have been brought to Iceland and the Faroes directly from Denmark.

Ólafur Marteinsson has argued that the ballad was brought to Iceland from the Faroes, but his arguments carry little weight.¹⁷⁶ The style of the poem is rather clumsy, and yet it has many lines which cannot be translated word for word into Danish or Norwegian. This is often characteristic of ballads which have come late to Iceland. One should expect a closer correspondence in wording if the ballad had been brought from the Faroes to Iceland or *vice versa*, cf. *Margrétar kvæði*. It is certainly true that what we have got of this ballad is a West-Nordic tradition, but it could just as well be of East-Nordic origin, having been brought to Iceland and the Faroes from Denmark in the 16th century and subsequently lost there.

ÍF 28 Kvæði af Loga í Vallarhlíð

Vilhjálmur and Logi propose to a beautiful lady, and she chooses Vilhjálmur. The wedding is celebrated while Logi rides to his home in Vallarhlíð. His mother tries to console him and urges him to go abroad to look for a wife, but Logi answers that nowhere will he find a more splendid maiden. After a month of marriage, Vilhjálmur dreams that a polar bear runs towards him and lays a heavy paw on his breast. Logi then lies in ambush when the count rides to church and kills him. He offers himself to Aðallist as a replacement, but she rejects him and says that Vilhjálmur's avenger is not far away. Logi rides happily to his home, but his sister foresees revenge. Vilhjálmur is given a funeral and Aðallist waits for nine months and then bears a son who is given the name Vilhjálmur. He is brought up by his mother. When he is playing, he treats his mates so roughly that they are hurt and tell him that it would be more fitting for him to avenge his father than beat them up so badly. The boy learns from his mother that his father was killed by Logi in Vallarhlíð. Vilhjálmur goes to his uncle and gets the advice to summon men to the assembly. Logi wonders at the strongly worded letters summoning him to the assembly, but his sister feels she knows what is behind this. Logi rides to the assembly; Vilhjálmur asks his uncle

¹⁷⁵ See, e.g., CCF 1 A, I 1, II 1, CCF 6, A 1, CCF 10, A 1, etc.

¹⁷⁶ See Ólafur Marteinsson, pp. 157–60.

who this tall man is, and when he has been told, he asks him for compensation for his father's death. Logi says that he is kinsman to the king and will pay no compensation. Vilhjálmur then draws his sword and cuts off Logi's head. Thereupon, he rides home and tells his mother the news which makes her rejoice.¹⁷⁷

This ballad (TSB E 96) is found in the Faroes, in Denmark and Sweden, and parts of it have close parallels in other ballads on related subjects. The most distinctive feature here is the incident on the playground that leads up to the revenge, which is not only found in four Norwegian and six Faroese ballads apart from this one, but also in a medieval Icelandic prose narrative.¹⁷⁸

In the Faroese and Danish variants, this story is still more complicated than in the Icelandic version, as most of the variants have some additional material not found there; in particular, young Vilhjálmur's story is told at greater length. In the Faroese variants, he takes the widow or sister of Sveinn in Vallalíð for his mistress, thus arousing the anger of the king of England. Viljormur then wins a famous victory and celebrates his wedding. Moreover, the narrative is extended in several places in the Faroese variants, but to varying degrees (the texts vary from 80 stanzas up to 186). There is also a great deal of difference in the amount of material in the Danish variants. The A-text practically corresponds in content to the Icelandic version, though it has considerably fewer stanzas. This text is written in the first half of the 17th century. Other texts, among them B-F and Q (Vedel), dating from the 16th century, contain more material in varying amounts. In all cases, the additional material deals with the adventures of Vilhjálmur after he has avenged his father and is related to Faroese material. It is noteworthy, however, that the conclusion of all the Danish variants is the same as that of the Icelandic ones, i.e., he returns home and tells his mother that he has now avenged his father. The Swedish variant is shortest, as it lacks the beginning, i.e., what precedes the playground episode, and it contains no material not found in the Icelandic variants.

Child and Olrik point out this ballad's relation to a Scottish ballad,

¹⁷⁷ Texts: A = III, p. 153, B = IV, p. 114 (one stanza), C = IV, p. 213, D = V, p. 209.

¹⁷⁸ See Olrik 1906b; Olrik points out a parallel in the Icelandic *Hrafns þáttur Guðrúnarsonar*; it should be kept in mind that this *þáttur* (short saga) is probably composed in the 14th century rather than about 1200, as Olrik believes, cf. *Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, pp. cxvii–cxx.

Child no. 89, *Fause Foodrage*, but it is badly preserved; its points of relation with the Scandinavian tradition are of a very general nature and by far the fewest are with the Icelandic variants, so it is not necessary to consider it here.¹⁷⁹

In his study of the ballad's tradition, Axel Olrik reached the conclusion that d-A, the Swedish variant, and the Icelandic ones were the best representatives of the ballad's oldest form.¹⁸⁰ He does not positively state that the ballad is Danish by origin, though this seems to be his opinion. He thinks that the ballad has undergone a gradual lengthening process in Denmark and that the effects of this lengthening were carried to the Faroes, though it seems that the ballad was found there previously.

This is undeniably the simplest solution, if we look only at the narrative material and its treatment. But Olrik later rejected it because of Ernst von der Recke's study of the ballad.

Recke's starting point is the fact that ballads on revenge for a father's death are much more common in the West-Nordic tradition than in the Danish one and that when we consider the quantity of the preserved ballads, the Faroes are obviously the centre of the West-Nordic tradition. Recke then discusses various features of the ballad, stanzas and lines, which he thinks are indicative of a Faroese origin. He has this to say about the Icelandic variants:

Om Visen kan jeg sluttelig ikke afholde mig fra nogle Bemærkninger. At dens Grundlinier reneest forefindes i Islandsk, er uimodsigeligt; men at Island desuagtet har faaet den fra Færøerne og ikke omvendt, er ligesaa umiskjendeligt. Det sees ikke blot af forskjellige, karakteristiske Stropher, som paa Island kun forefindes i denne Vise, men som paa Færøerne have en vid Udbredelse, og om hvilke det vilde være fornuftstridigt at troe, at de gennem en fra Island indført Vise skulde have udbredt sig saaledes.

— — —
Jeg betænker mig, som sagt, ikke paa at fastslaae, at en færøisk Vise er udvandret saavel til Danmark som til Island; lad mig herved dog ikke lægge Skjul paa, at den islandske Vise indeholder

¹⁷⁹ See DGF, V:2, p. 117.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

enkelte, paafaldende Træk, idet den paa sine Steder fremviser Stropher af ublandet dansk Afstamning, der ligesaa lidt findes i den færøiske Vise som i nogen anden til nu kjendt islandsk.¹⁸¹

As Recke points out here, some features of the Icelandic ballad indicate Faroese origin, while others show close connections with Danish tradition. We will first give a few examples showing how closely the Faroese and Icelandic texts are related.

The initial stanza is almost identical in both countries:

i-A 1 Frúin situr í ríkinu,
sú kann margt að vinna,
að lesa á bækur rúnamál
og sauma silkitvinna.

f-B 1 Adalus situr í Breiðabý,
væl kann hon tað vinna,
hon kann bók og rúnarmál
og reyðargull at spinna.

The stanza is not found in Danish variants, but it has occurred in other ballads of West-Nordic origin. In DGF 474, *Ismar og Benedikt*, which is, in its oldest recordings, as Olrik has shown, a direct adaptation of a Norwegian version, we find

d-A 28 Hun kand alt med hender giøre,
som lere bør en quinde;
hun kand bog och runne-maall,
och røde guld kand hun spinde.¹⁸²

Another example where the relationship is closer between Icelandic and Faroese variants than between Icelandic and Danish is this:

i-A 9 Til orða tók hún móðir hans:
“Hví ert þú ókátur,
hvort hefur þú í sóttum legið
eða ríka frændur látið?”

¹⁸¹ Recke 1907a, p. 104.

¹⁸² Ólafur Marteinsson points out a *stev* from Sættesdal which has a very similar wording, cf. *Norske folkeviser*₁, III, p. 149.

- 10 “Fyrr vilda eg missa
mína gjörvallar frændur
heldur en honum Vilhjálmi
vífið gæfist í hendur.”
- f-B 22 “Hoyr tú tað, mín sæli son,
hví heldur tú teg ikki kátan,
hvat heldur ert tú av sóttum sjúkur
ella hava teg frændur forlátið?”
- 23 “Ei eri eg av sóttum sjúkur,
ei mist hvørki vinir ella frændur,
fest er frúgvín Adalus
Viljormi í hendi.”
- d-B 4 “Hør thu thett, mynn keerre sønn!
och huy sørger du saa saare?
huad heelder fattis theeg guld eller sølleff,
och heelder wyynn hynd kllarre?”
- 5 “Icke da faattis meg guld elle sølleff,
ycke heelder wyn hyn klaare:
iumfru Ellese-lill hun er maande gyffuet,
fordy sørrger ieg saa saare!”

An example of a peculiar stanza that is only found in Icelandic and Faroese tradition is

- i-A 37 Ólst hann upp í ríkinu
hjá kæru móður sín,
meyjar héldu honum á loft
sem væri hann heilagt skrín.
- f-A 31 Hann varð aftur frá kirkju borin,
sett for móður sín
meiri legði hon røkt á hann
enn alt sítt gull í skrín.

It is characteristic that the rhyme word, ‘shrine’, has been preserved but forms a part of two very different similes.

It would be possible to go on enumerating examples showing close verbal parallels between the Faroese and Icelandic texts, but only one more example will be given, in which the wording makes it impossible that an East-Nordic variant could have been an intermediary link:

i-A 39 Töluðu þeir enir elstu sveinar
er fram í leikinn fóru:
“Nær væri þér þíns föðurs hefna
en berja oss svo stórum.”

f-B 47 Niður settust sveinarnir,
reiðir ið teir vóru:
“Líkari var tín faðir at hevna,
enn berja os so stórum.”

It is particularly the phrase, *berja oss svo stórum*, which is clearly West-Nordic, and in fact this is expressed in various ways in the Danish variants, most of them rather clumsy and stilted. A variant of this stanza is found in Norwegian ballads which have the playground episode, and the same variant is, as a matter of fact, found in another Faroese variant of *Sveinur í Vallalíð*:

f-A 35 Niður settust sveinarnir,
reiðir vóru báðir:
“Líkari var tær faðir at hevna,
enn berja oss so sára.”

This is also found in the Norwegian *Sigurd svein* in a slightly different context:

1 Sigur leikar på leikarvøllunn
så vreie som di vore
d'æ bere du spør ette faersnamne
hell du gjeve kon høggi såre.¹⁸³

The stanza is better preserved in Landstad's version of *Ivar Erlingen og Riddarsonen* (TSB E 102):

24 Neð sá settist dei kniktanne
sá tröytte som dei vóre:

¹⁸³ NB, p. 220.

beðre er deð du heimatt' geng
hell du gjeve kon hoggi sáre.¹⁸⁴

No more examples will be given here of this kind of relationship. In his study, Recke discusses, among other things, three stanzas from Icelandic variants, i.e., i-A 4 (and 5), 41 and 57 (the same stanzas are found with different numbers in C). All these are Danish formulaic stanzas that rarely occur outside Denmark and could be interpreted as evidence that the Icelandic version is under direct influence from Danish texts. But precisely the formulaic nature of these stanzas invites another interpretation, namely, that they were adopted by a ballad singer in the Faroes (or possibly in Norway) before the ballad was brought to Iceland.

The simplest explanation of the relationship between the various versions of this ballad is the one put forward by Recke: The ballad was composed in the Faroes and brought from there to Iceland and Denmark respectively. There are, however, some problems connected with this solution. Although the ballad deals with revenge and has a rather long and complicated plot, it is in many respects more of a chivalric than a heroic ballad. Physical strength is not dwelt upon or exaggerated, whereas the feelings of the involved persons, especially the women, are dwelt upon in a way that comes close to sentimentality. The language of the ballad shows many signs of Danish or at least Scandinavian influence, and on the whole the ballad appears to be rather young. It would, of course, complicate matters to suggest that *Kvæði af Loga í Vallarhlíð* is late and Norwegian, but this would make it easier to account for many of its characteristics. To go farther into this matter would demand more space than we have at our disposal here.

ÍF 29 Kvæði af herra Jóni og Ásbirni

Jón and Ásbjörn are brothers; Jón sets off for Jerusalem. The same day Sigurljóttur is married to the lady Sesselja, but Ásbjörn kills the bridegroom. He is then stripped, tied up and thrown into a dungeon. On his voyage, Jón is troubled by bad dreams and turns back. When he has heard of his brother's misfortune, he goes and releases him from prison; then, he enters

¹⁸⁴ Landstad, p. 161.

the palace and kills the king's candle-boy in front of the king's table. The king offers to give him Sesselja and the kingdom of Greece, but good offers are of no avail. Jón first cuts down the king's standard bearer and then the king himself.¹⁸⁵

The plot of this ballad is related to DGF 393, *Broderlig troskab*, but the relationship between the texts is very slight and they have no stanzas in common. The story is fuller and more complicated in the Danish ballad. Fighting is not described in detail and there is no emphasis on the protagonist's great deeds or his heroism. On the other hand, a great deal of trouble is taken to describe the loyalty and emotions of the girl.

Probably, both Danish and Icelandic versions are fairly removed from the original ballad. The second wedding planned in the Danish version and the heavy emphasis on the emotions of the heroine are probably additions dating from the time the ballad was recorded (16th and 17th centuries).¹⁸⁶

Both Olrik and Recke assume that the ending of the Icelandic ballad is a West-Nordic addition, and this may well be so, but the ballad might also have been West-Nordic from the outset and have been transformed in the Danish version.¹⁸⁷ A final decision is impossible here, but it is obvious that Jón's heroism is of the West-Nordic type. In ÍF 33, *Magna dans*, A 42, 45–7, we find the same stanzas as 14, 15, 18, and 21 in this ballad. The two ballads are found in the same manuscript, and the informant could be the same. Therefore, these stanzas may be Icelandic formulaic stanzas, and the ballad could be based on the Danish version, but transformed in Iceland. Still, it seems more likely that the ballad was brought to Iceland with all its present general characteristics from the West-Nordic area. The language does not show any signs that the ballad is a late one.

¹⁸⁵ Texts: A = I, p. 18, B = IV, p. 115 (one stanza).

¹⁸⁶ The taste of that period was, in many ways, different from that of our time as is amusingly pointed out by Recke in *Danmarks fornviser*, IV, p. 192: "Den Yndest, som Visen, hvori ikke et Stænk af Poesi forefindes, har nydt i Adelskredse, er betegnende og dømmende for Optegnelsestidens Smag."

¹⁸⁷ See DGF, VII, p. 83, and *Danmarks Fornviser*, IV, p. 192.

ÍF 30 Ebbadætra kvæði

Ebbi sails away and leaves his daughters at home. The young sons of Ívar break into their house at night and rape them. One of the sisters wants to bury herself before this terrible shame is known to all, while the other one says they should take up arms. Ebbi comes home and asks them where their head ornaments are and why they are hemming linen. They say that the sons of Ívar are to blame and they themselves will take revenge. In seven weeks, all the people go to church. Hólmfríður smiles and asks people to receive the wives of her sons graciously. The sisters answer that she will soon dress her sons' corpses. The younger one then kills Þrándi Ívarsson. His brother, Pétur, is called outside and they stand on either side of the door, seize him by the hair and say they will now remember the outrage. He pleads for mercy but they humble the power of the mighty and decapitate him. Ívar carries his sons to the church while Ebbi sends his daughters to a convent.¹⁸⁸

There are four complete recordings of this ballad, from the 17th and 18th centuries, and, moreover, there is an incomplete variant filled out by a prose account from the 1860's. Outside Iceland, it has only been found in Denmark in the 16th and 17th centuries (DGF 194).

It would be simplest to assume that this is a Danish ballad brought from there to Iceland, particularly as the name most firmly established in the ballad is *Ebbe*, a purely Danish name. This was Grundtvig's view in his introduction to the ballad in DGF, but Ernst von der Recke has his doubts about this:

Den i sit Grundlag fortrinlige og sikkert gamle Vise har til nu vistnok ubestridt været antagen for at være af ublandet dansk Støbning; en skarpere Betragtning reiser alligevel Betænkeligheder ved dette, der lader den henstaae som et uløst Problem.¹⁸⁹

He then discusses various features in the Danish variants which he feels show a connection with Norway, and then sums up:

Som Visens faste Punkt staaer Fadernavnet *Ebbe* urokkeligt; med dette er Danmark givet som dens Udgangspunkt. Men derhos taler alt for, at den herfra er vandret til Norge for sluttelig, efter helt

¹⁸⁸ Texts: A = III, p. 245, B = IV, p. 115 (one stanza), C = IV, p. 138, D = V, p. 29, E = V, p. 115, F = V, p. 212 (half a stanza), G = VII, p. 92 (fragmentary).

¹⁸⁹ *Danmarks Fornviser*, II, p. 230.

eller delviis at være glempt i sin Hjemstavn, at være hentet tilbage til den.¹⁹⁰

Even though Recke does not directly say so, he undoubtedly assumes that the Icelandic version has come from Norway.

Recke's arguments for these peregrinations made by the ballad are mainly based on the names in the Danish variants, and, in fact, on names that do not occur in the Icelandic variants. The question is then whether the Icelandic variants have any special characteristics which can be regarded as unmistakable indications that this version remained for some time in the West-Nordic area before being brought to Iceland. The main points of the story in the Danish variants are practically the same as in the Icelandic version, but they are not, however, closely related verbally. The Icelandic texts contain considerably more material and they are wordier.

Although Ebbi is the only character who has the same name in the Danish and the Icelandic versions, there is one other name they may have in common. i-D 26 has the name *Þrándi Ívarsson*, while in Syv's text one of the sisters is called *Jomfru Trunde*. Now, it must be considered that *Ebbadætra kvæði* seems to have been influenced by *Bjarnarsona kvæði*, and the name *Þrándur* is found in that ballad. It is only found in one variant of *Ebbadætra kvæði* and thus has no strong claim to belong to it, but the strange thing is that it has got a weak form *Þrándi*, which is unusual and reminds one of *Trunde* in the Danish variant.

The following stanzas contain the closest verbal parallels between the Icelandic and Danish variants:

i-A 1 Ebbi sigldi í leiðangur
konunginn að finna,
eftir skildi hann sínar dætur,
þær skyldi engi ginna.

d-B 1 Dett wor Ebbe aff Quesso,
hand skulle thil Romme ride:
hiemme bleff hans døtter tho,
dem thil megenn guide.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

i-A 2 Ungir voru þeir Ívarssynir,
lögðu saman ráð:
“Við skulum ríða í Ebba garð
og veita meyjum háð.”

d-B 3 Her Bonell och her Skannel
dy gaar dennum y raadt:
“Vy ville farre thil Quesso
och loffue di iomfruer for hadt.”

There are some differences in the description of the housebreaking and the rape. The Icelandic variants here make use of common West-Nordic formulas, but of course they could have been introduced into the ballad by Icelandic singers.

The sisters' conversation after the rape is related in both versions:

i-E 14 Enn því svarar sú eldri,
hún bar meira mein:
“Sökkum við oss í sjávardjúp
áður Ebba kemur heim!”

C 15 “Gröfu við okkur í æginn
og gröfu við okkur í sand
áður en þessi ótíðindi
fréttast upp á land.”

C 16 “Gref eg mig ekki í æginn,
og ekki heldur í sand,
eg hirði ei þó þau ótíðindi
spurjist upp á land.”

d-B 8 Det melthe denn elste søster,
for hinde vord først till meen:
“Wy gaar oss thil mølle-dam,
vy siuncker oss ner med steen!”

9 Suarit det denn anden,
for hun viste bedre raadt:
“Lade vy det stande,
thil Gud det heffne maa!”

In both versions, it is the mother of the sons of Ívar who mocks the daughters of Ebbi in the church:

i-A 11 Og því svarar hún Hólmfríður,
hún brosti undir sín skinn:
“Nú eru þær til kirkju komnar
sona konur mín.”

d-C 20 Fru Mettelild rødmed i sine kinder
Og smiled under skind:
“Staar I op, dannekvinder,
Og lader mine sønne-koner ind!”

The place where Hólmfríður talks about pointing candlelights at Ebbi's daughters is obviously a misunderstanding of the Danish text:

i-D 22 “So virðulega skulum við
um hásetin búa,
við skulum öllum ljósunum
að Ebbadætrum snúa.”

d-A 24 Dy luod wogseett wrie
oc dy luod lysenn snoo;
imod Ebbis döttter thuo,
dy skuldde till kierckenn gaa.

The description of the slaying of the brothers is different in the Icelandic and Danish texts, and in fact *Bjarnarsona kvæði* or some other related ballad seems to have been the model for this part of the Icelandic version.

As shown by the comparison, there are certain verbal parallels between the Danish and Icelandic versions, though they can hardly be called very close. The Icelandic version is interspersed with formulaic stanzas known from other ballads, and there is also a striking number of repetitions, both of whole stanzas with changed rhyme words and of stanzas where the second half is used as the first half of the following stanza.

The language and style of this ballad indicate that it should be classified among ballads that have been brought to Iceland from Nor-

way or the Faroes. The relationship with the Danish version is so loose that this could well be the case, but there is no positive evidence to confirm this conclusion.

ÍF 31 Kvæði af Knúti í Borg

King Sveinn sails from one country to another while Knútur marries a lady (thus ABCG, the beginning is missing in F. E begins by describing how Kristín loses her father, mother and brother, after which Núpur of Borg proposes to her). Knútur suggests to Kristín that they should invite King Sveinn to the wedding, but she thinks he will gain little honour by doing so. He is not convinced and rides to see Sveinn and invites him to a feast. King Sveinn asks how many men he is allowed to bring with him and Knútur tells him he can bring as many as he likes. The king's men express their fear that Sveinn is planning some evil. They ride to Borg and are welcomed. Sveinn offers Kristín a fortune if she will give in to him. She declines his offer. She bursts out crying, and when Knútur asks her what is the cause, she says that King Sveinn plans to deceive him. He is undaunted. Sveinn stands up and kills Knútur, who asks Kristín to remember him for three nights while lying on the king's arm. Sveinn orders his men to watch over the body, but says he will take care of the bride himself. Kristín asks him to allow her to sleep as a virgin three nights on his arm. He agrees, but during the third night, she stabs him. Then she goes to Knútur's grave, mortifies her flesh and dies within seven nights.¹⁹¹

There are three closely related 17th century recordings of this ballad, all originating from Gissur Sveinsson and the family in Vatnsfjörður, but variant E, from Árni Magnússon's collections, begins differently and names the protagonist differently. The same ballad (TSB D 172) is preserved in Denmark, Norway and the Faroes. The Danish variants are found in verse collections from the 16th and 17th century and in Syv's ballad book (Syv's text is constructed of material from three of the preserved manuscripts and one that has been lost). There are three Norwegian variants from the middle and late 19th century. From the Faroes there is only one text, from the first half of the 19th century.

The Icelandic variants contain more material than the others and are also of a much higher artistic quality. Ernst von der Recke says about this ballad:

¹⁹¹ Texts: A = I, p. 62, B = III, p. 210, C = IV, p. 73, D = IV, p. 179 (one stanza, same informant as E), E = IV, p. 191, F = V, p. 55, G = V, p. 121.

. . . den over alle vestnordiske Lande udbredte Vise, der i sin islandske Form, uanseet enkelte Mangler, hører til det mest Storslaaede, som middelalderlig Digtning nogensteds har frembragt . . .¹⁹²

Some people would probably be reluctant to endorse such an extravagant statement, but it is certain that the Icelandic version of the ballad is the best by far. Still, it would be quite exceptional if such a widespread ballad had originally been composed in Iceland, and in fact this is not the case.

Svend Grundtvig thought that this was a historical Danish ballad, possibly even the oldest of them all. Ernst von der Recke took a different view here, as so often. He says, in an almost direct continuation of the passage cited above:

. . . det burde være mere nedsættende for dansk Forstaaelse af Poesi, om man med Grundtvig vil tiltroe den, at den hos os i sit formentlige Hjemland skulde have tilsat Alt, hvad der giver den Værd, end at antage, at den hos os oprindelig er fremmed og indført i en Form, der aldrig har tilladt den at kjendes i sin Storhed.¹⁹³

In fact, Recke has more tangible evidence to offer than mere faith in Danish poetic appreciation, and his conclusion is:

. . . turde dog den Antagelse ligge nærmest, at en oprindelig norsk Vise her haves indført til Island, for maaske først der at udfolde sig helt som et af Fornvisens ypperste Mesterværker.¹⁹⁴

Later, he comes to the conclusion that the Danish version must have been brought there from Norway at a late date. He thinks that the Faroese version has no points of contact with the Danish version.¹⁹⁵

It is interesting that the name *Sveinn*, which is common to all West-Nordic variants, should not occur in the Danish ones, because *Svend* is a royal Danish name, while *Sommer*, *Sannder* or *Soner* sound curious. Recke maintains that, if the name *Sveinn* originally occurred in a Danish ballad, it is hard to see why it should become distorted, but it is not any easier to understand why it was not kept in an imported

¹⁹² *Danmarks Fornviser*, II, p. 236.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 238–9.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

ballad. The logical conclusion is to apply the *lectio difficilior* rule and assume that the Danish forms of the name are closer to the original, and that the unusual name *Sander* (or something close to that) was simply changed to *Sveinn* in the West-Nordic area. On the basis of this feature seen in isolation, the ballad ought to be of Danish origin, with the West-Nordic versions forming a special branch of the tradition.¹⁹⁶

It is, in itself, a plausible hypothesis and one for which many analogous examples can be found, that the tradition of this ballad is divided into two branches, one East-Nordic and the other West-Nordic with its origins in Norway and brought from there to the Faroes and Iceland. The language and style of the Icelandic variants clearly put them in a category with ballads brought to Iceland before the Reformation. The only objection to such a hypothesis is that the Icelandic variants are verbally closest to the Danish ones. A few examples shall be taken to show this relationship, but many more could be given:

i-A 3 En so svaraði hún Kristín
með rauða kinn sem blóma:
“Bjóðir þú Sveini kongi
hann vinnur þér öngvan sóma.”

i-E 5 Og því svaraði hún Kristín,
það eðla lífið fráma:
“Bjóðir þú Sveini konungi
þú vinnur þér lítinn sóma.”

d-A 6 Det suaritt liidenn Kierstinn,
hunn var enn rosenns-blomme:
“Beder y Sommer koninng hiem,
det bliffuer eder liiditt thill fromme.”

This part is different in the Norwegian texts, which say that both of them had proposed to her earlier and the king is assumed to have

¹⁹⁶ It would certainly complicate the issue to suggest that the ballad is originally Swedish and that the villain's name was originally *Sune*, but it is striking that in the ballad *Sune Folkeson*, DGF 138, the name of the protagonist takes the following forms in the different variants recorded in Denmark: *Sone*, *Sonne*, *Suoner*, *Sonner*, *Soone*, *Sommer*, *Soner*, *Sogne*, *Sogner*, *Sønne*, *Søne*, *Synder*, etc., which certainly is similar to the diversity of the names given to the king in our ballad.

arrived at the wedding party uninvited. In the Faroese text, it is not mentioned that Sveinn had proposed to Kristín earlier, but there he hears of her beauty from his men; he rides to Borg and meets Knútur, who thereupon invites him to the wedding. It is only in the Icelandic and Danish variants (d-CDE) that Knútur makes a special journey to invite the king.

The descriptions of the incidents at the wedding party are not very similar in the different countries, but the similarities are greatest between the wording of the Icelandic and the Danish variants:

i-A 20 “Ég vil ei þinn hörpuslátt
og ei þína dönsku pípu,
hitt þyki mér meira vert
að kóngurinn vill þig svíkja.”

d-A 15 “Dett er icki aff harpe-slett,
icki helder aff pibe-leeg:
ieg sørger for eder, minn edelige herre!
Sommer koninng vill eder suige.”

In Kristín's reply, we have, on the other hand, an example where the closest similarity is with a Norwegian variant, which contains a peculiar stanza common to the Icelandic and Norwegian texts:

i-A 21 “Heyrðu það, sæla sætan mín,
jafnan hugurinn lýgur,
sá mun fyrri falla
sem öðrum fangið býður.”

n-B 12 “Høyrrer du fruva liti Kjersti,
du bere fyr meg ingjo sut,
han plaga alstøtt verri fara den
fangtokji bye ut.”¹⁹⁷

The slaying of Knútur is described in different terms in the various countries, though it is possible to discern a connection between the Icelandic and the Norwegian texts:

¹⁹⁷ NB, p. 162.

i-A 22 Sveinn kóngur undan borðum stökk
 í gylltri hringabrynju,
 þar vó hann hann Hnútt í Borg
 það varð ófyrirsynju.

n-B 14 De va kongen here Svein
 han hoggji ivi bor
 han kløyvde skjollen á ringebrynja
 hass hjarta'i i tvo.

Knútur's request that Kristín should remember him for three nights, and her subsequent request to be allowed to remain a virgin for the first three nights (*sjey* in the Faroese text), occur everywhere in some form.

The conclusion of the ballad is longest by far in the Icelandic version, and there are no parallels with foreign versions, except that the same formula is used in the description of the killing of Sveinn in the Faroese and Icelandic texts, even though the killing takes place under different circumstances in the Faroese version, which is obviously corrupt here:

i-A 32 Hún stakk undir hans herðarblað
 so oddurinn stóð í dúni.

— — —

f 28 Kristin stendur á gravarbakka,
 helt um brandin brúna,
 rendi hann so fyri kongsins bróst,
 at oddurin stóð í dúna.

Comparison of the ballad's main material has thus shown that the Icelandic text is most closely related to Danish texts, but the examples are not wholly unequivocal and some of them point towards West-Nordic versions. When the age of the recordings is considered, it becomes clear that late changes and intrusion of formulaic material in the Faroese and Norwegian variants may have caused the disappearance of some verbal parallels with the Icelandic variants.

We have still not considered the beginning of the ballad, which is found in two different versions in the Icelandic texts, as mentioned above: Beginning I in ABCG and beginning II in DE. The beginning

is missing in F, and DE only represent one variant. The same variation in the beginning is also found outside Iceland, but the dividing lines do not follow borders. Beginning I is also found in the Faroese text and in the Danish C-text. The Norwegian version has some special material in the beginning, but the rhyme words in the initial stanzas of n-AB indicate that this is a variation of beginning I:

i-A 1 Sveinn kongur á skeiðunum
siglir á millum landa,
Hnútur er í Borginni,
festir frú til handa.

f 1 Svein kongur liggur við havið út
tjaldrar sær við lín,
eingin fer so suður og norð,
hann býður ei heim til sín.

2 Svein kongur liggur við havið út,
tjaldrar sær við brandar
Knútur er í Botnum norð,
festir sær frú til handa.

n-B 1 De va' fruva liti Kjersti
lást ho hava fengji vande
ho viste 'kje hot ho sille svora
tvo belar fyr bori stande.

Beginning II is found only in Denmark and Iceland, and the verbal parallels are very close:

i-E 1 Vilji nokkur hlýða til
á meðan eg segi fram
hverninn hún unga Kristín
sorgirnar fann. (vann D)

2 Fyrst missti hún sinn föðurinn
og svo sína móður,
þá missti hún sinn
kærasta bróður.

3 Hennar bað einn herlegur mann,
það var hann Núpur í Borg,
stuttur var þeim aldur lagður,
snemma beygði sorg.

d-B 1 Will i lyde oc høre mig,
men ieg queder wisen frem:
alt huor hin lidenn Kirstinn
hun al sin sorrig foruanntt?

2 Først døde iomfruens fader,
oc saa døde henndis moder,
oc saa døde iuncker Waldemaar,
iomfruens ynste broder.

4 Hennde bads thill saa rig en ridder,
oc hand hed Knudt aff Borrig:
hand leffde mett hende saa stackit enn stund,
der-aff øgthis iomfruens sorrig.

It is striking here that the narrator addresses his audience in the first person. Furthermore, the second half of the third stanza shows that this is a lyrical commentary on the story about to be told rather than the beginning of the story proper, in spite of the narrative elements that occur in these stanzas. Introductions like this one are an exception in ballads; they are most commonly found in the Faroes and have, therefore, often been considered West-Nordic. Still, it has to be taken into account that in Norway there is only one example of such an introduction, i.e., *Draumkvedet*, and also that in an area as small as the Faroes the use of an introduction could spread in a relatively short period of time.¹⁹⁸ In *Danmarks gamle folkeviser* there are four examples of ballads beginning with introductory stanzas (DGF 86, 195, 141, 408) where the audience is directly addressed by a poet using the first person pronoun. Such stanzas are, however, generally not found in all variants of a ballad, and they seem to belong especially to the 16th century.¹⁹⁹

When we look at the introduction quoted above, it is immediately

¹⁹⁸ See Hildeman 1958, pp. 232–7.

¹⁹⁹ See Steenstrup 1891, pp. 37–45.

obvious that the two versions must be closely related and that one must derive from the other. The language of the Icelandic variant shows that it is based on the Danish one, e.g., *vann* in D 14 is obviously a phonetic translation of *foruantt*; *fann* in E is the scribe's attempt at bringing meaning to the phrase.

Whatever its origin, it seems quite safe to assume that this ballad was brought to Iceland twice, and this accounts for the variation in the beginning. The main part of the ballad appears to be of such age that it is more likely to have been brought to Iceland through the West-Nordic area. This is further supported by the king's name and some verbal parallels with West-Nordic variants. Later, a variant with a lyrical introduction was brought to Iceland from Denmark. Some of the parallels between the Danish version and the narrative part of the Icelandic version can probably be accounted for by this late influence, but in other instances the reason might be that both versions preserve wording quite close to a prototype common to all extant Nordic variants. The Icelandic tradition is so uniform, apart from the beginning, that it seems most natural to assume that when the later version was brought to Iceland, the older one was commonly known and continued to dominate the tradition.

It is likely that some parts of the ballad, especially its conclusion, owe some of its artistic qualities to Icelandic recreation.

ÍF 32 Skógarmanns kvæði

A knight sleeps with a maiden in a tower. Her father learns of this. They make their escape by sea, but the weather turns bad and the ship goes down. The knight then swims ashore with the maiden. They walk along cliffs and find no water, but from the town they hear the sound of weapons and pipes. Three knights come riding, and, as the hero has lost his weapons and armour in the sea, he rips up an oak tree which he uses to fight against the knights for three days, whereupon he falls dead to the ground. The maiden looks on and plans revenge. She walks up to the loft where the knights and their pages sleep and kills the three knights with her knife. After this, she retires to a convent.²⁰⁰

There is one 17th century recording of this ballad and three from the 19th century. It has not been found in other countries. However,

²⁰⁰ Texts: A = I, p. 229, B = VI, p. 53, C = VI, p. 111, D = VII, p. 127.

all the motifs and many of the stanzas are known from other ballads, both Icelandic and non-Icelandic. The oak that the outlaw rips up belongs to the stock-details of West-Nordic heroic ballads, but in contrast to those, here the hero is killed. On the whole, this is a typical ballad of chivalry, as can be seen, e.g., by its tragic end.

The Icelandic ballads most closely related to *Skógarmanns kvæði* are *Ribbalds kvæði* and *Sonarharmur*. In variants of both, it occurs that lovers make their escape by boat. It is possible that in both cases there is a late influence from this ballad. An old Swedish variant of *Sonarharmur*, which is so set apart in some respects that it could almost be called a separate type, is more closely related to *Skógarmanns kvæði* than other variants in that it includes a shipwreck. Here, it seems that the girl sets off alone on a sea voyage, and the consequences are still more tragic than in *Skógarmanns kvæði*:

4 Alt som mÿn kÿrist kom segland p  sundh,
thet wexer vp weder thet r dhes i grundh.

5 Thet wexte vp weder thet m lnath i skÿ,
Ther l g then b then i stÿcken trÿ.²⁰¹

Ólafur Marteinsson calls particular attention to the relationship between the latter stanza and our ballad A 9:

Þegar þau komu skammt úr bý,
vindurinn jók sín mánaský.

Although *mánaský* (moon-clouds) certainly is a poetic word, its first component may be a misunderstanding of Swedish *moln* (cloud).

There are various indications that this ballad is not a pure type but rather some sort of bastard. First, they suffer a shipwreck from which they escape, then they need water (reminiscent of *Sonarharmur* where it fits in better as she is about to have a child); and yet they have got no farther than they can still hear sounds of weapons and pipes from the town when the knights set off to chase them. Moreover, it can be said to be a stylistic anomaly when the hero rips up an oak tree, as there is otherwise no emphasis on showing him to be a great champion. Those fellows who rip up oak trees are not ordinarily brought down

²⁰¹ Visböcker, II, p. 66.

by only three knights; they are more likely to polish off three hundreds. On the other hand, they usually stay out of problematic love affairs.²⁰²

In spite of this incoherent plot, the younger recordings are, in the main, in agreement with the oldest one, except that the youngest variant has acquired a happy end which sounds rather strange with its accompanying refrain:

D 20 Hann tók frúna á sitt kné,
gaf henni bæði gull og fé.

21 Þau voru ung og afmors gjörn,
á mína trú,
áttu saman átján börn,
og enn er hún jómfrú.

This ballad is filled with formulas, and many stanzas have parallels both in Icelandic and non-Icelandic ballads. The ballad as a whole is furthermore composed of common ballad motifs. The composition may have occurred in Iceland, but there is nothing that particularly indicates that this is the case. This is, therefore, a ballad of absolutely uncertain origin.

ÍF 33 Magna dans

Magni forces his way into Svialín's chambers, goes to her bed and has her brought to him there (In B she asks whether he would rather drink to her or go to bed with her, and he is quick to accept the latter offer). They lie together during the night until she asks him to arise quickly as her father is in the habit of coming every night. He objects, but then the father arrives. He breaks into the house and does not listen to Magni's offers of gold for his daughter, but cuts off his head in front of Svialín. She threatens revenge. Svialín bears a male child (in secret A; her father is told it is a female child B) to whom she gives his father's name. When he is twelve, she shows him his father's bloody shirt. He asks who killed him, and she tells him. He asks permission to leave, and she asks him not to harm any of his relatives. He then goes to his grandfather and asks him what compensation he is ready to

²⁰² "Det ämne, som intresserar kämpavisan, är sällan kärleken, alltid främst vapendåden . . . Hjältarna äger onormala dimensioner . . . fiender fälls 'som gräs för lien', blodet står knähögt, och de kan slita upp hela ekar med roten." Hilde-
man 1955, pp. 238–9.

give him for the loss of his father. The grandfather offers him a lamb with a broken leg. Magni now starts killing the king's men, and finally he kills the king himself. He is then captured and brought to the assembly (thus B; in A he makes his escape and goes to his mother to tell her the news, but is then brought to the assembly). At the assembly, he is sentenced to become the king of Sweden.²⁰³

There is one 17th century variant of this ballad and another one from the late 18th century. The older one is considerably longer, and there are several variations in phrasing and detail. The story consists of two main parts. It starts with a cluster of motifs that often form a whole ballad: forcible entry into a maiden's chamber with subsequent revenge by kindred, but this pattern is expanded by the addition of father revenge. The only special characteristic of this ballad is the peculiar ending where Magni is sentenced to be king; in fact, this ending is only peculiar because it is unique in ballads, but when we consider that he may have been the only male member left of the royal family, this turn of events is not so strange.

Ólafur Marteinsson considered that *Magna dans* was composed in Iceland because of the great number of stanzas from other ballads that it contains.²⁰⁴ This is quite possible but there is scant evidence to this effect.

One stanza certainly indicates acquaintance with written Icelandic literature, namely A 44 (B 37):

“Lambið er í hlöðunni, hefur brotinn fót,
það skaltu hafa í föðurbót.”

This is strongly reminiscent of the answer given by Víga-Styrr in ch. VIII of *Heiðarvíga saga* when he is asked to give compensation to a young boy whose father he has killed: “. . . í sumar sǫgðu griðkonur mínar þar vera hrútlamb eitt, grátt at lit, ullarrýjat, er eigi vildi þrífask; nú sýnisk mér þat rétt á komit, at sveinn þessi hafi lambit í fǫður-gjöldin, en eigi mun hann frekara af mér fá.”²⁰⁵ But, the same contemptuous offer of compensation is also made in *Sveinur í Vallalíð*, the Faroese version of ÍF 28:

²⁰³ Texts: A = I, p. 110, B = IV, p. 115 (one stanza), C = V, p. 49.

²⁰⁴ Ólafur Marteinsson, pp. 109–11.

²⁰⁵ *Borgfirðinga sǫgur* 1938, p. 231.

CCF 173 B 60 Svaraði Sveinur í Vallalíð,
 glettir undir skegg:
 “Tú skalt fáa lambið tað,
 lítið er loðið um legg.”

The connections between the two ballad stanzas, which must be related to each other, and the saga text present us with a puzzle not easily solved. It is more likely that the stanza is Icelandic than Faroese, although by no means certain, as Faroese ballads are frequently based on Icelandic saga texts. But, even if we come to the conclusion that the stanza was wrought by an Icelander, this tells us nothing about *Magna dans* as a whole.

The A-text of *Magna dans* gives several indications that the ballad has not lived long on the lips of the people. The lines differ greatly in length, and some of them would fit better in a quatrain than in a couplet. In the stanzas where we find these long lines, the rhymes are often poor, e.g.:

A 4 Skemmu leit hann standa, gulli var hún byggð,
 þangað réð Magni að ganga fyrst.

A 27 “Værir þú mér svo vandalaus sem þú ert mér skyld,
 þú skyldir smakka þá hvössu egg.”

But, there are also examples of very long lines where the rhyme is correct and others where the length is normal and the rhymes are defective:

A 36 Leiddi hún hann til kirkjunnar, nóg var þar fé,
 blóðugan brandinn skyrtunni vafinn hún lagði honum í hné.

A 56 Þann skal honum Magna dóminn dæma,
 hann skal kongur yfir Svíaríki vera.

It is hard to believe that a stanza like A 36 was sung to the same tune as A 51:

Heyrði eg fugla syngja,
 eldri suma en yngri.

These metrical characteristics are only found in A, for in the other recording, the lines are not unnaturally long. From this, we can see

that 18th century ballad singers had no difficulty in making the verse lines conform to a more regular rhythm, and it is only natural to assume that this transformation would have happened earlier if the ballad had been, say, more than a century old when Gissur Sveinsson wrote it down.²⁰⁶

Although nothing can be said with certainty about the origin of this ballad, the most likely conclusion is that it was composed in Iceland c. 1600 or even later from vagrant motifs and stanzas borrowed from ballads both in quatrain and couplet metres. Since there are no traces of it anywhere outside Iceland, it is not likely that it was imported at such a late date.

ÍF 34 and 80 Ólöfar kvæði

ACFGIKLMT start by describing how the king rides past a rock, comes upon a small child that he says he recognizes. He takes the child to the chamber of his daughter Ólöf (breaks into the chamber/sends for his daughter) and shows her the child, but she refuses to admit to knowing it.

BDHJNOP start with the king asking his daughter whether she wants to get married this year, but she says she is not ready to give an answer.

These introductions are followed by a part common to most variants that have no lacunae at this place: The king starts asking her questions, but there is a considerable variation in the content of these questions. He asks who is the owner of the grey steed that stands in front of her door, who has kissed her, etc. She answers shrewdly, saying that everything was actually different from what it appeared to him; the horse was a deer, the knight a servant girl, etc.; he then asks her more closely about attire: since when did servant-girls wear swords at their sides; she answers that it was not a sword but a key-chain; since when did they wear spurs: it was a gold-laced shoe, etc. Variations on these questions and answers are found in ABDGH IJLMNOPQRS. This question part is thus only missing in CKT, all of which have Beginning I.

The next part also consists of questions, and it sometimes precedes the question passage described above though this is not the normal order (LMQ RS start with this second question passage). Here, the king asks why the boy has her eyes, and she answers that one person resembles another. He asks

²⁰⁶ There is no doubt that Gissur Sveinsson wrote *Magna dans* from an oral performance, for there exists in his handwriting a copy of the first line of each stanza of the ballad, which seems to have been used as notes for the final recording, cf. *Kvæðabók B*, pp. 51–2.

why milk flows from her breasts, and she answers that it is neither milk nor wine but blood from her heart. Now, there follows a passage, found in ABD GHIJLMNOPQRS, i.e., all the variants that had the first series of questions, where he reveals the severed limbs of a knight that he has brought with him. He asks whose are the head, the hand, the foot hanging at his saddle, while she answers that she knows him and that he has often lain on her arm. This group of variants continues with the girl cursing her father. The palace catches fire straight away, and the father is burned to death. DINO add that Ólöf entered a convent, JMQR that she burst from sorrow.

CKT each have a different ending, though at least C and T are variants of the same version. In C, the king orders his men to light a fire out in the woods and throw the boy on the flames while the lady looks on. She then lays the boy upon her right breast. He asks whom she loves most dearly, and she answers that his name is Vilhjálmur. This ballad ends here, and optimists are at least offered the hope that the poor girl will be allowed to live and even marry her lover.

K is a defective text, though no stanzas seem to be missing from the end. There, the king says after his daughter has denied having milk in her breasts: "Then take the boy, my daughter true,/treat him as if he belonged to you." In T the king, Logi, calls for his slaves and orders them to light fire in the forest. Ólöf puts on fine clothes and rides with him on a white horse to the forest. When they come there, they see the blazing fire. She asks why a fire is lit in the forest. He says it is her bridal bed. He pushes her into the flames with a spear. She asks, in the Lord's name, for something to drink. Her mother, brother and sister try in vain to help her, but two doves come from the east and meet in the middle of the blaze. They fly upwards with Ólöf's soul between them. Ólöf ascended to Heaven while Logi descended to Hell.²⁰⁷

As can be seen from this long report, there are three main versions of the ballad. Version I starts with a child being found in the open and ends with the king being burned to death. AFGILM belong to this version. A study of this version reveals that it is in fact composed of parts from two foreign ballad types. The beginning is derived from TSB D 434, a type from which ÍF 35, *Tófu kvæði*, is also derived. On the other hand, the main core of the ballad, the questions and answers and the death of the king, come from TSB D 324.

The divergence between Version II and Version I is, in fact, only in

²⁰⁷ Texts: A = I, p. 176, B = II, p. 8, C = III, p. 235, D = IV, p. 90, E = IV, p. 123 (one stanza), F = IV, p. 180 (one stanza), G = IV, p. 263, H = IV, p. 268, I = V, p. 16, J = V, p. 91 (the beginning, c. 10 stanzas, is lost), K = V, p. 93, L = V, p. 105, M = V, p. 143, N = VI, p. 45, O = VI, p. 88, P = VI, p. 141, Q = VII, p. 6, R = VII, p. 56, S = VII, p. 138, T = VII, p. 164, U = VIII, p. 1.

the beginning. Type II starts with the king asking his daughter whether she wants to marry this year, and then he starts questioning her about the knight who has been visiting her. BDHJNOP belong to this version, which is a variant of TSB D 324.

The three remaining variants, especially CT, then constitute Version III. It starts in the same way as Version I, but lacks the questions about the knight's visit and the incident where he shows her the lover's severed limbs; but this version ends with a fire being lit in the forest and the consequences of this. Here we have in fact material belonging to at least two ballad types. The beginning is from TSB D 434; the middle section with questions about the child's eyes and milk in the mother's breasts connects this version with several variants of Version I and II, but has no direct parallels in non-Icelandic variants of TSB D 324. Finally, the last section, at least as it appears in T, is undoubtedly derived from TSB B 20, *Møen på bålet*.

Of these three ballad types, D 324 is known in all the Nordic countries, D 434 in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and B 20 in the same countries and also in a semi-Danish form in the Faroes. This is an unusually complicated mixture for one Icelandic ballad, and in fact Jón Helgason has chosen in his edition to divide this into two types and call the ending of the T-text, a variant of TSB B 20, ÍF 80. But, since this type is not preserved as an independent ballad, it is most natural to study it in the same context as the other half of the variant which contains it.

In this instance, comparison with foreign ballads is more complicated than usual, as at least three foreign ballads have contributed material as described above. It seems practical to begin the comparison with the type that has made the greatest contribution, D 324.

There can be no doubt that this ballad was brought to Iceland through the West-Nordic area. Icelandic, Norwegian and Faroese recordings agree that the ballad is about a father and a daughter, while both Swedish and Danish variants tell the story of a brother and sister. In addition, there are verbal parallels. In the Faroese recordings and the Icelandic recordings of Version II long passages are almost identical word for word. The Norwegian texts are not as closely related; they are much younger and not well preserved, and there are clear signs of later East-Nordic influence in some variants.

Nevertheless, some Norwegian variants contain lines which corre-

spond word for word with Icelandic and Faroese stanzas but have no parallels elsewhere:

i-B 13 “Plagar það Kristín þerna þín
kringskorið hár sem riddarar mín?”

14 “Það var ekki skorið í kring,
heldur lokkar er lágu í hring.”

f-A 16 “Plagdi so Kristin, terna tín,
skera av hári um íkring?”

17 “Tað var ikki skorið í kring,
men frúnnar flættur lógu í ring.”

n X 3 “Gjeng so Kristi terna di
me krusa hári skori umkring?”

4 “D’er kje krusa hári skori umkring,
d’er Kristis flettur, ligg i ring.”²⁰⁸

Still clearer evidence of the special connection between the Norwegian, Faroese and Icelandic variants is the ending where the girl wishes her father to be burned to death in the palace. This is only found in the West-Nordic area, and there are close verbal parallels between the variants.

We do not need any further testimony to show that TSB D 324 was brought to Iceland through the West-Nordic area and that the best representative of the type in Iceland is Version II of *Ólöfar kvæði*. There are also sections directly derived from this type in Version I, indeed its greatest part. Type III, on the other hand, is totally unrelated.

Ernst von der Recke maintains in *Danmarks Fornviser* that this ballad was originally brought from the south of Europe to the Faroes where it was transformed and then spread out from there to the other Nordic countries. He classifies the Norwegian tradition with Danish and Swedish variants and has overlooked those features which connect it particularly closely with Faroese and Icelandic recordings.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ NFS, Bugge, IV, p. 202, from Lárdal.

²⁰⁹ See *Danmarks Fornviser*, III, pp. 227–9.

Here, as so often, we must regard it as more probable that the real origin of the West-Nordic tradition is to be found in Norway, and, in fact, this type is more likely to have been brought to Norway than to the Faroes from the south of Europe and to have taken on its chivalrous appearance there. From the late Middle Ages and up to the 19th century, when it was recorded in Norway, the Norwegian tradition of this ballad has deteriorated considerably and we have to go to the Faroes or Iceland to get a fairly clear picture of the West-Nordic version of the ballad.

What distinguishes Version I from Version II is its beginning, which derives from TSB D 434. There is considerable variation in the extent of this material, because the king's journey to meet his daughter has accumulated formulaic stanzas in some variants. The A-text has little material which is obviously alien and formulaic. The initial stanza has parallels both in Danish and Norwegian variants of D 434:

i-A 1 Kongurinn reið með steini fram,
fann hann fyrir sér lítið barn.

d-B 13 Konngenn hanndt gannger udt mett thenndt
stranndt,
hanndt fanndt thett skrinn, war dreffuedt till
lanndt.

n A 11 Kungen gjekk seg ne ve strand,
saa kom dæ skríne skríands ti land.²¹⁰

Other stanzas have no direct parallels in foreign variants of this type, but, in the Icelandic *Tófu kvæði* (TSB D 433), there are parallels both in wording and content. *Tófu kvæði* has been classified as a separate type in TSB, but there are good grounds for looking upon it as a variant of D 434 as Olrik does.²¹¹ The simplest explanation of Version I of *Ólöfar kvæði* is that it has been influenced by *Tófu kvæði* at an earlier stage while *Tófu kvæði* was closer to other variants of D 434. Further investigations of the origin of this material therefore fall under the heading of that ballad. There is no reason to believe that the coalescence of these ballads did not take place in Iceland.

²¹⁰ Bugge 1858, p. 93.

²¹¹ DGF V:2, p. 69.

As stated above, Version III contains none of the material derived from D 324, but begins with material from D 433/434, like Version I. The treatment of this material is the same as in other versions of *Ólöfar kvæði* but different from that of *Tófu kvæði*. Here, as in many other variants, there is added to the stanzas we suppose were derived from *Tófu kvæði* the question on why milk flows from the breasts. This is a formulaic stanza found also in ÍF 52 and certain variants of 61, and therefore does not connect this version with the questions and answers derived from D 324. The K-text follows C and, in fact, some other variants up to this point, but then finishes the story in one stanza. The reason for classifying it with Type III are purely negative, i.e., it contains no material from D 324, but it is possible to interpret both this final stanza and the ending of the C-text as variants created to avoid the cruel ending of T. It might be objected that the fire in C has a different function from the one in T. There, the boy is to be thrown on the flames in order to frighten the heroine into revealing the name of her lover. This might have brought about a connection with B 20, but the feature of using the fire to induce fear in this manner, with a subsequent happy end, does not appear in foreign variants.

The stanzas in which the name of her lover is asked and she answers and tells what he has paid for her favours have a parallel in ÍF 68 (TSB D 182), which is also found in foreign variants of the ballad. It is, therefore, the most natural assumption that this material is derived from that ballad.

TSB B 20, *Møen på bålet* or *Olav lyg på stolt Margjitt*, is found in all the Nordic countries. In Denmark, there are nine recordings from the 19th century and also fragments from this century; the recordings from Sweden and Finland are still more numerous, nearly thirty; and the oldest Swedish recording is from around 1600. In Norway there are eight variants, and in the Faroes there is one recording in a mixture of Danish and Faroese.²¹² In all these variants, the ballad opens with a brother who wants to make love to his sister. When she refuses, he threatens her with false accusations. He then goes to his father and slanders her, saying she is guilty of both adultery and murder. The father decides, at the son's urging, to burn her at the stake. After this, the foreign variants are mostly in agreement with this Icelandic variant, except that the brother is usually active at the

²¹² The Faroese text is printed in DGF, II, p. 588.

burning, pushes her into the fire and does other nasty things. Also, it is he who deservedly goes to hell in the end.

A comparison shows that the closest relationship to the Icelandic text is found in the Faroese text (DGF 109 C):

i-T 16 Logi kallar á þræla sín:
“Kyndið þið bál á skógi mín.”

f 14 Ívar talar til sveina tvá:
“Tit gangið á skógva og kyndið bál.”

A parallel to this stanza is also found in the earliest Swedish text, s-A 7, and the earliest Danish text, d-D 11. The verb *kynda* is only found in the Icelandic and Faroese texts. Her question on the bonfire and the answer in which it is compared to a bridal bed must be original to the ballad, as this is found everywhere in one form or another. The same is true of all the main features of the rest of the ballad except for one stanza found only in the Faroes and in Iceland. It relates how the mother tries to give the girl something to drink, and it fits so badly into the context that this is very likely to be an addition to the ballad and should therefore be reliable evidence of a special relation:

i-T 25 Móðir reið um torgir,
keypti vín með sorgir.

f 26 Hennar móðir gár til borga,
hentaði vín með sorga.

The conclusion is closely related in most variants. It is noteworthy that the stanzas in the Faroese text that most closely resemble Icelandic stanzas are in Faroese, although most of the text is in Danish. This strongly indicates that the Faroese text represents a mixed tradition, an old Faroese basis and a later Danish influence. Furthermore, the connection with the Faroes indicates that this is an old West-Nordic tradition. The same is true of the language of the Icelandic variant which shows no signs of late translation and is rather smooth and of good quality.

When one starts to speculate on the possible origin of the strange mixture the various versions of *Ólöfar kvæði* consist of, one is naturally led to think of ballads like *Magna dans* and *Ásu dans*, which also

contain a great deal of formulaic material. All these ballads show signs of having, at some stage, gone through the hands of ballad singers who were in possession of quite a large stock of formulas and formulaic sequences and were more interested in telling a good story than in the verbatim repetition of what they had heard. On the other hand, they show no interest in the innovation of themes or in phrasing. A ballad singer of this type concentrates on the core of the story, and he will be aware that a feature like the opening of this ballad, where the father asks his daughter whether she would like to marry this year, is an unimportant detail. He includes, without scruple, material from another ballad, in which the daughter has exposed her child. Another singer connects this opening (of course it is impossible to determine the order or precise nature of these events) with a ballad about a father who burns his daughter to death on a pyre. In addition, commonplace material and formulaic stanzas enter and are used to change the story in various ways. It is noteworthy that many of the formulas used for this variation are specifically Icelandic, and there is, therefore, no reason to believe that these connections were made outside Iceland.

Most of the components of the ballad that can be identified as belonging to foreign tradition seem to have come to Iceland from the West-Nordic area, Norway or the Faroes, and this confirms the impression one gets from the language and manner of composition, that the ballad is fairly old in Iceland.

ÍF 35 Tófu kvæði

Tófa has a child with Björn and exposes it; a raven finds the child, carries it to the top of a ship's mast and drops it into the lap of a count who is the girl's father. He recognizes the look of both parents in the child's features and takes it to his daughter and asks why the boy has her eyes. She replies that all men are more or less alike. He then hits her so that tears and blood fall on the sable furs. (Thus AB) In other variants, the man who finds the child is its father. He sees from its features who the mother is, that the child will later rule over countries and that the mother is filled with sorrow. This marks the end of CEIJK. FGH add that the count sailed home to his country and (FH) married Tófa.²¹³

²¹³ Texts: A = I, p. 233, B = I, p. 236 (this text is probably a combination of A and C), C = III, p. 177, D = IV, p. 117 (one stanza), E = IV, p. 252, F = V, p. 7, G = V, p. 80, H = V, p. 157, I = VI, p. 118, J = VI, p. 187, K = VII, p. 60.

Tófu kvæði has not enjoyed quite the same popularity as *Ólöfar kvæði*, but it is still preserved in 11 variants stretching from the 17th century up to the late 19th century. Furthermore, it was tape-recorded in the 1960's and early 70's. As stated above, it is closely related to or possibly a version of TSB D 434, *Karl Hittebarn*.²¹⁴ If we compare *Tófu kvæði* to Scandinavian variants of this ballad, we see that the end of the poem and much other material has been lost from the Icelandic version. According to these versions, it is the king, the girl's father, who finds the boy, brings him up and then plans to have him marry his daughter. She is then forced to tell the truth and suffers various punishments. In the Norwegian version, he plans to burn her at the stake, but because of her son's pleading she is merely sent into exile. In Danish versions she is either cruelly punished or allowed to marry the father of the child, although the conclusion is often obscure. The Swedish variant, in Geijer & Afzelius, stands apart in that there the king who finds the child is himself its father, and when the son discovers all this, he forces the king, his father, to marry the mother.

In that part of the ballad which is common to Icelandic and foreign versions, there are a few parallel stanzas which may indicate the nature of the relationship, but the material is too scant for any definitive conclusions to be reached.

The names, *Tófa* and *Björn*, are peculiar to the Icelandic version. In some Icelandic texts, there are two children, but the latter child has obviously come into being through incremental repetition. In foreign variants the child is laid in a casket like Moses, but the raven who carries *Tófa's* child is Icelandic, probably introduced through influence from *Hildibrands kvæði*. The only comparable stanzas are the king's speech when he finds the child:

i-B 11 “Það sé eg á þínum reifum
þinn er faðirinn greifi.

Það sé eg á þínum lófa
að þín er móðirin Tófa.

Það sé eg á þínum linda
sú kann barn að binda.”

²¹⁴ p. 255 The Swedish variant ref. to is pr. in Geijer & Afzelius, I., p. 269.

n-A 13 “Dæ sér eg paa dí lúve,
dí móer æ’ ei frúve.

14 Dæ sér eg paa dín reivi,
dín faer æ’ ein greivi.

15 Dæ sér eg paa dín lindi,
dí móer heve deg bundi.”²¹⁵

A few stanzas, related in content, are found in Danish variants, and one of them has the rhyme *Hue:Frue*, but the rhymes *reifar:greifi* and *lindi:binda* are not found there.

Bugge assumes that the ballad has come to Norway from Swedish or Danish tradition.²¹⁵ It seems quite possible that an old Norwegian version was carried to Iceland but later came under either Danish or Swedish influence. The three stanzas common to the Icelandic *Tófu kvæði* support such an idea. The ballad must be rather old in Iceland if it has carried material from D 434 to the Icelandic version of *Ólöfar kvæði*. Its language and style agree well with the hypothesis that it was brought to Iceland from Norway before the Reformation.

ÍF 36 Kvæði af Hringi kongi og Alexander

Alexander kidnaps the daughter of King Hringur. He has bad dreams. His mother interprets them as though they bode well, but King Hringur soon comes from the sea with a large army. Alexander defends himself heroically against impossible odds, is wounded, refuses to accept the king’s reprieve and is killed. The king goes home with his daughter. Thus ends A, but in B the daughter threatens her father, and we are told that the tears did not dry on her cheeks for months.²¹⁶

The two recordings of this ballad are made by the same person and are textually related, though there seems to have been an independent oral source for the B-text or parts of it. The ballad is composed of motifs well known from ballads of chivalry. However, no stanzas have been borrowed from existing ballads, and this ballad is not found in other countries.

The metre is the same as that of *Tristrams kvæði*, fairly regular but

²¹⁵ See Bugge 1858, p. 93–4.

²¹⁶ Texts: A = I, p. 255, B = III, p. 193, C = IV, p. 121 (one stanza).

without any resemblance to *rímur*. The rhymes are not strict, but in most cases they are full rhymes and all are perfectly proper ballad rhymes. There are hardly any signs of a foreign origin in the ballad's vocabulary. In A 4, we find *vintrarnátt*, and in A 3 *kæru*. These forms could be interpreted as Scandinavian influence, but they are normal ballad language and also familiar from *rímur*. Specially Icelandic expressions abound: there occur the poetic names *róma*, *skeið* (probably a mistake for *fley*) and *brandur*, this being the only appearance of *róma* in ballads. We also find a perfectly correct kenning, *hlunna hestur*, as well as the expressions *unnar band* and *friðar band*, which are genitive periphrases characteristic of *rímur* style. There are other features in this ballad which have a very Icelandic cast.

It seems a natural conclusion that *Kvæði af Hringi kongi og Alexander* was composed in Iceland. The main influences behind it are ballads of chivalry, as can be seen from its methods of presentation and the tragic end. The description of the battle, however, is in a heroic style and may be directly influenced by *rímur*. As has been mentioned elsewhere, there are a few more examples of ballads in the Tristram metre that have every appearance of being Icelandic. Nothing can be stated about the age of this ballad, except that it seems unlikely that it is young.

ÍF 37 Bóthildar kvæði

The king is enchanted by the singing of young Bóthildur and has her summoned to his presence. She takes her brother along and goes to the king who asks her to play chess with him. Bóthildur wins, and now the king offers her brother Philpo masses of gold for her. He refuses and is killed. Bóthildur gets her maid (or nurse) to mix 'treacherous wine', which she gives to the king. He dies at once and Bóthildur enters a nunnery.²¹⁷

In the introduction to DGF 237, it is maintained that *Bóthildar kvæði* is at least parallel to that ballad, although there are differences in the stories. Both Recke and Dal have rejected this, and in TSB this ballad is, correctly, registered as a separate type.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Texts: A = III, p. 232, B = IV, p. 97, C = IV, p. 121 (one stanza), D = IV, p. 179 (one stanza), E = V, p. 44, F = V, p. 151, G = VI, p. 107, H = VII, p. 68.

²¹⁸ See *Danmarks Fornviser*, III, p. 122, and DGF, X, p. 572.

Bóthildar kvæði is a conglomeration of various ballad motifs and contains a great quantity of formulaic material. Parallel stanzas can be found in variants of ÍF 2, 32, 38, 43, 44, 52, 53, 54, and 61.

The diction and rhythm of the ballad are comparatively pure and show no particular indications of the ballad's having been brought to Iceland from Denmark at a late date. There seem to be two alternatives: either the ballad is an Icelandic hodgepodge of familiar motifs and formulas or it contains an old West-Nordic core. There are considerable differences in detail in the variants of this ballad. For example, the chess scene is completely missing in A. There is no doubt that the G-text has borrowed from *Taflkvæði* (ÍF 38), but there is more doubt about other variants. The question whether the chess scene is original to this ballad or whether it is derived from *Taflkvæði* has to be left unanswered here. The same is true of the poisoning scene. Some of the variants have obviously borrowed from *Eiturbyrlunar kvæði* (ÍF 43), but there is more doubt about others.

This ballad could very well have been composed in Iceland by combination of scenes and stanzas borrowed from various other ballads, but this cannot be proved.

ÍF 38 *Taflkvæði*

A maiden sits in her loft and plays chess with the knights, bringing shame on all of them. Finally, no one dares to play chess with her except young Limiki. They play for various things, and he loses a saddle and horse (thus A; property and estate B, gold and shoes C, a horse EF, golden shoes G, six castles, hawk and horse H, etc.). Limiki then walks out and prays to saints Paul and Canute, or to God Almighty and the Holy Cross to help him at chess. He then walks in again and wagers his head and neck while the maiden puts herself at stake. (In most variants, she begins by offering her servant maid, but the maid tells her to wager her own self.) This time Limiki wins. The maiden offers him ten marks of gold in a casket as ransom, but he wants nothing except herself. Some variants end by telling how they were joined together in a single bed with great pomp and ceremony. (In C, there has been a confusion with ÍF 37, and she poisons him and goes to a nunnery; in F and K, the chess match is prolonged by first having them, after he has walked out, play for a maid and a page; he loses and walks out again to pray and then wins the maiden.)²¹⁹

²¹⁹ Texts: A = I, p. 70, B = II, p. 5, C = III, p. 229, D = IV, p. 119 (one

The recordings of this ballad date from the 17th to the 19th centuries. Four variants (ADEG) begin with a lyrical introduction which will be discussed below. The ballad (TSB D 399) is found in all Nordic countries. In the Faroes it does not, however, exist independently but has been inserted into a variant of the ballad of *Queen Dagmar and Junker Strange* (TSB C 3), which has been recorded there both in Faroese and in Danish (DGF 132 D = f-D).

This ballad is found both in couplet and quatrain metres. The Icelandic and Faroese variants, Danish FGHU, Norwegian variants and some of the Swedish ones are in couplets. Erik Dal divides the variants into three versions: I: boatswain and maiden play chess on her challenge for three stakes; II: boatswain and maiden play chess on her challenge for one stake; III: knight and maiden play chess on her challenge for three stakes and—after the knight has sought assistance from powers on high—for one more.²²⁰ The Icelandic version belongs to Version III along with the Faroese variants and d-FGHU. The ballad is almost solely known in 19th century recordings in Denmark. An exception is d-A, printed in Syv. This text is in quatrains and belongs to Version I. Another exception is d-U, stemming from a verse collection from Als probably written around 1700. It belongs, as mentioned above, to Version III and is useful for comparison with the Icelandic variants.

The wording of individual stanzas gives support to Dal's classification as regards a special connection between the Icelandic variants and the Faroese and the old Danish text from Als. The beginning is not comparable in the Faroese texts, as it is inserted into another ballad, but as soon as the narrative gets off the ground, d-U agrees with the Icelandic variants:

i-A 11 “Viljið þér, jómfúin, tefla við mig,
minn söðul og gangvera set eg út við þig.”

d-U 5 “Skøn iomfru, skøn iomfru, spiel tielling med mä,
min sadel oc min hest setter ieg mod dig.”

stanza), E = IV, p. 200, F = V, p. 25, G = V, p. 73, H = V, p. 139, I = VI, p. 30, J = VII, p. 8, K = VII, p. 43, L = VII, p. 130.

²²⁰ See DGF, X, p. 573.

A horse and a saddle also appear in their wagers in d-FG, in the Faroese version and in some Swedish texts.

The feature that particularly sets the Danish couplet texts, the Faroese version and the Icelandic one apart from other variants of the ballad is the break that occurs in the chess match while the knight is praying to the powers on high. In the Faroese text, they first put their lives and honours at stake, and then he prays before they play the game, but the course of events is the same in the Icelandic and Danish variants. The Icelandic and the Faroese texts are more closely related verbally, and in the Faroes there are also prayers to Saint Canute and Saint Paul, while in the Danish texts it is the Lord that he appeals to. After the Faroese variant ends, there comes one stanza which particularly connects the Icelandic variants and d-U:

i-A 27 “Ég held þann öngvan karlmanns maka
sem rauðagull vill fyrir jómfrú taka.”

d-U 18 Det bør ingen unge suend at giør
oc sa tage guld for skøn iomfruenis er.

In the K-text, which is actually based on two recordings from the same family, the variant ends, as it does in several other cases, with the stanza:

17 “Standið upp, sveinar, og hendið að gaman,
Lemiki og jómfrú stár vel saman.”

To this, there are added six quatrain stanzas. These stanzas obviously come from Syv's printed collection and are almost identical to stanzas 14, 15, 10, 11, 16, 17 in Syv's text in that order. The translation is practically word for word but still fairly fluent—*sølvbunden* becomes *silfurskeftur*, which cannot be said to be inaccurate; rather more free is the translation of *mit slot og mit fæste*, which becomes *fullan kastala af gulli*. The confused order of the stanzas indicates that this had existed for some time in oral tradition, as does the fact that the ending is missing. This influence from Syv does not, in itself, affect any conclusions concerning the path of this ballad to Iceland, as this is obviously an intrusive element in the variant, but it is interesting to see here one example of the influence of Syv's verse collection in Iceland.

It is, however, noteworthy how much smaller this influence is in Iceland than comparable influences in the Faroes and in Norway, and the reason for this must be that the Icelandic people did little or no singing of ballads in Danish, contrary to what was the case in Norway and the Faroes.

The relationship between the Icelandic and Faroese texts is very close, as a few examples will show:

i-A 14 Upp stóð hún jómfrúin hægt hún hló:
“Nú er vel teflt á mína trú.

15 Standið upp, meyjar, og hendið það gaman,
söðull og gangveri stár vel saman.”

f-D 32 Op stod Dagmar, saa højt hun lo:
“Nu haver jeg tevlet paa min Tro!”

33 Op stod Dagmar, hun holdt det for Gammen:
“En Sadel og Hest de passe vel sammen.”

i-B 11 Limiki gekk í garðinn út,
hann heitir á Guð og hinn helga Knút.

12 Hann heitir á Guð og hinn helga Pál
að hann skuli sigur á tafli fá.

f-A 29 Strangir út av vindeyganum sá,
hann heitir á Gud og sankta Pál.

30 Hann heitir á Gud og sankta Knút,
at hann mátti vinna tað talvið út.

In d-U, we can see that the rhyme word *Knud* has been lost in a comparable stanza, probably because of influence from Lutheran theology:

d-U 11 Den rider gangis ad garden vd,
ham falder de modige tare paa.

12 Den rider falt paa sin bare knee:
“O herre, o herre spel telling med mä.”

One more pair of stanzas that clearly shows the relationship among these versions is this one:

i-B 14 “Viljir þú, jómfúin, tefla við mig,
höfuð og hálsbein set eg út við þig.”

17 “Þar set eg mig sjálfa í gen,
eg má vel svara þér, velborginn sveinn.”

f-A 27 “Set teg niður, Strangir, og telv við meg,
mína góðu æru sætter jeg i ved.”

28 “Sætter du i ved æren din,
så sætter jeg i ved hálsbein mítt.”

d-U 14 “Skøn iomfru, skøn iomfru spil telling med mä,
min videne hals setter ieg imod dig.”

15 “Din hvidene hals trenner ieg vnder fod,
min ere oc tro setter ieg der imod.”

There should be no need to give any further examples to indicate the relationship among these texts. The ballad must have come to Iceland either from the Faroes or from Denmark. Still, it is problematic to imagine that it can have come from the Faroes, because of the prominence of Danish in the Faroese texts and because only a part of it has been preserved in the Faroes. Of course, it is possible that *Taflkvæði* existed separately in the Faroes before it was inserted in the ballad about Queen Dagmar, but it is also possible that the mixing of the ballads occurred before it reached the Faroes. In that case, the most likely explanation of the close relationship between the Faroese and Icelandic variants is that people of both nations learned the ballad at more or less the same time and place. This is by no means unlikely. Icelanders and Faroese have always had their business at more or less the same places in Denmark, i.e., in the towns and cities, where the ballads later were forgotten, while they were preserved in the rural areas. It is also unlikely that Icelanders and Faroese moved much in the company of those aristocrats who were the first to record the ballads in Denmark, but they were familiar with people of the middle and lower classes.

The verse collection from Als is conclusive evidence that Version III was alive in oral tradition in Denmark in the 17th century. There are, in fact, many indications other than the relationship with this recording from Als that this ballad was brought to Iceland from Denmark relatively late.

Mention has already been made of the lyrical introductory stanzas that open *Taflkvæði* in some of its Icelandic variants. Although this introduction is missing from the majority of the recordings, among them some early ones, this does not necessarily mean that it cannot have accompanied the ballad to Iceland. It was so loosely connected, or rather it was so unconnected, to the main body of the ballad that it was very easily dropped from it; and anyway it is a fact that it is nowhere found in an independent state or in connection with other ballads. Lyrical introductory stanzas of this kind are by no means unknown in Denmark, though Danish scholars in earlier times were rather antagonistic towards them because they did not conform to their ideas of a proper ballad style. Such introductory stanzas are also similar to these in being rather loosely tied to the narrative part of the ballads. It is particularly in aristocratic manuscripts from the 16th and 17th centuries that such lyrical stanzas form introductions to ballads. They often depict aristocratic maidens in an idealised natural setting.

The lyrical introduction in A is this (with only slight variations in other texts):

- 1 Það er so fagurt um sumartíð,
frúrnar gjöra sig so blíð.
Frúrnar klæða sig so vel.
Um sumurin,
þar allir fuglar syngja vel.
- 2 Sig so vel,
sumar með silki og sumar með pell.
Silkinu sveipa þær um sín bein.
Um sumurin.
- 3 Um sín bein,
þær hvíla sig undir lindinni hrein.
Þær hvíla sig undir lindinni rót.
Um sumurin,
þar allir fuglar etc.

4 Lindinni rót,
 hjörturinn breiðir sín horn á mót.
 Hjörturinn breiðir sín horn í tré.
 Um sumurin,
 þar.

5 Horn í tré,
 fiskurinn rennur sig hægt með hlé.

— — —

It is obvious that this lyrical introduction fits well both with the refrain and the continuation of the ballad, and it evidently helps to emphasize the chivalric tone of the ballad. Various examples can be found to show that these introductory stanzas are put together from lyrical formulas that have several parallels in lyrical introductions and asides in Danish ballads. Of particular interest is a Swedish ballad, a version of TSB D 140, found in three variants from around 1600. It contains more lyrical formulas than the Danish variants, where they are really only found in the initial stanza of the earliest recording. (The other recordings are classified as TSB D 141 and 142, though all of them are considered one type in DGF.) It is particularly interesting to find these formulas here, as chess is mentioned in the initial line, and verbal parallels are also found with the refrain of *Taflkvæði*.

1 Wnger suenn spelte skacthaffela af guld,
 then longa sommar dagh,
 han lechte alltt medh thenn skiöna Jungfru,
 som honom bäst behagar.
 Nu lengesth migh thill min Jungfru:

Later in the poem there are two stanzas particularly reminiscent of *Taflkvæði*:

7 Hiörthen löper J hagan,
 han kröker sin halz,
 acthar thu thigh en Jungfru tro loffua,
 thu snaka eý falsktt,
 Nu lengest m ti

8 Hiorthen löper J lunden,
 han kastar sin Ben,
 förnimmer thu goth aff thin goda wen,
 gör honom thet Jgen,
 N.l.mi.t. m J

Variants of these stanzas are found in a Danish ballad too (DGF 306 F and G), in recordings from c. 1650 and in a sequence of Norwegian 'gamlestev'.²²¹

In this Swedish ballad we find characteristically a combination of natural imagery and a reflective or proverbial statement. The *Taflkvæði* introduction, on the other hand, is notably lacking in all such reflection; it consists exclusively of images.

In some variants of Danish ballads, recorded in the 16th and 17th centuries, we can also find introductory stanzas related to these, but they are unusual and do not seem to be permanently attached to particular ballads but are rather insertions of certain scribes or ballad singers.²²²

It is hardly debatable that Steenstrup and others who have written about this are right in maintaining that this is not in a genuine ballad style. Steenstrup thinks it is a case of influence from German poetry.²²³

Recently, a Danish scholar, Kaare Vinten, has made a special investigation of introductory stanzas in ballads.²²⁴ He shows that these lyrical introductions flourished during the period from the first aristocratic verse collections until about 1650, after which date no new ones were added. He also points out that there is generally some connection between the lyrical introduction and the epic part of the ballad, though there are exceptions to this. He would presumably feel that there is some connection between the introduction to *Taflkvæði* and its narrative, as the introduction can be said to form a kind of background or framework for the story. Furthermore, he points out some parallels in lyrical poems written at the same time, and not only in Danish lyrical

²²¹ The Swedish text is printed in *Visböcker*, II, pp. 218–20; the Norwegian *stev* in Landstad, p. 401.

²²² The examples are DGF 56 C 1–3, DGF 355 B 1, DGF 356 A 1, DGF 407 BDG 1.

²²³ See Steenstrup 1891, pp. 148–54.

²²⁴ See Vinten 1973.

poems but also in German folk poetry of the 16th century. However, it should be stressed that nature imagery of the kind found in *Taflkvæði* is not frequent in Danish lyrical poetry from this period.²²⁵

Vinten concludes his investigation with these remarks:

Selvom visse af de lyriske indledninger må karakteriseres som vandrestrofer med særlig lang levetid, og selvom naturindledningerne helt sikkert kan føres længere tilbage end volksliedtraditionen, — så er det måske det naturligste, når vi finder funktionsmæssigt og indholdsmæssigt ensartede strofer foran viser, optegnet i 1500-tallet både i Tyskland og Danmark, og erindrer den tyske Volkslieds øvrige forbindelse med den danske lyriske vise, — at hævde at folkevisens lyriske indledningsstrofer først og fremmest må betegnes som et tysk-inspireret fænomen, der i tidsmæssig henseende næppe kan rykkes længere tilbage end til sidste halvdel af 1400-tallet!²²⁶

From the above quotations, it can be seen that the lyrical introduction to *Taflkvæði* cannot prove anything about its dating or origin; but, on the other hand, it can be safely stated that it is highly probable in itself that such a ballad, with such an introduction, could have been brought to Iceland from Denmark some time during the late 16th century or the first half of the 17th. It is unlikely that such introductions can have been brought to Iceland in any number before the mid-sixteenth century.

There are various other indications that this ballad was brought to Iceland at a comparatively late date and from Denmark. The two earliest recordings are in a repetitive metre; this seems also to be the case with D although only the initial stanza is preserved, and in fact the first stanza of the C-text is written in such a way that it looks as though there is going to be some kind of repetition, but that the scribe then changed his method and skipped the repetitions, no doubt in order to save ink and paper.²²⁷

The most unequivocal evidence, however, for Danish origin and a fairly short life in oral tradition in Iceland is found in the language of

²²⁵ See Frandsen 1929, pp. 230–31.

²²⁶ Vinten 1973, pp. 53–4.

²²⁷ In this manuscript, Papp. fol no. 57, there are no ballads in a repetitive metre; and in this it contrasts strikingly with other 17th century ballad collections.

the ballad. This is seen in the use of incorrect grammatical forms, words taken raw from the foreign text and various distortions and nonsense which must have had their cause in insufficient ability to understand and translate into Icelandic.

The lyrical introduction is in a language rather worse than the rest, which is probably because the translator did not have familiar phrases handy for that part.

There is no likelihood that grammatical errors and ineptitudes were added to the ballad in Icelandic oral tradition, so that the most significant text in this respect is the A-text, which is both the earliest and linguistically the most deficient. There, we find these examples of incorrect grammatical forms: *frúrnar gjöra sig so blíð, undir lindinni hrein, undir lindinni* (gen. sing.) *rót, frúinnar sveinn*. There are many examples of rhymes that would improve if they were translated into Danish: *vel:pell, fimm:þeim, skó:bú, í gen:sveinn, hló:trú, skrín:minn*. *Hæga loft* and *stár* are ballad words too common to be significant; the same is true about *bein* in the sense 'leg', which is good Icelandic usage known from early *rímur*, but still it is more likely here to be a raw translation of Danish *ben*. There is a distinct Danish flavour of *hægt hún hló*, which has its unique appearance here. *Gangvari* is common ballad language where we find *ganger* in Danish, but here this word takes on the form *gangveri*. *Setja út* in the sense 'wager' sounds un-Icelandic; *á mína trú* is more Danish than Icelandic; the same is true of *sorgfullur*. As is to be expected, these linguistic characteristics are accompanied by uneven rhythm and long lines.

The language improves slightly in younger texts, and in some of them, esp. in the H-text, there seems to be a conscious effort to purify the language.

The conclusion of this investigation is that it is highly probable that this ballad was brought to Iceland at a rather late date, hardly earlier than the late 16th and perhaps not until the 17th century. If this conclusion is accepted, it lends support to the idea that Version III, in which the main character is a knight, is younger than Versions I and II, in which he is a man of the people. Sverker Ek has dealt with this ballad in some of his writings and put forward theories regarding its history. There is no reason to recapitulate these theories here, as they are difficult to test, but one can easily give credence to his proposition that this version came into being through influence of ordinary chivalric

ballads, cf. the fact that in the Icelandic version Limiki keeps some of his original characteristics, i.e., he is an *ungur smásveinn*. On the other hand, it seems simpler to assume that this version is derived directly from the boatswain version, which only needs the addition of some formulaic diction, than to think, with Ek, that a semi-historical Swedish ballad is the common progenitor.²²⁸

The consequence of this reasoning is that we must reverse Erik Dal's conclusion that "Gruppe III må formodentlig repræsentere det ældste lag i visens danske overlevering, siden det er den der genfindes i islandsk."²²⁹ Version III is probably a rather late Danish transformation of the (originally Swedish?) ballad.

ÍF 39 Stjúpmóður kvæði

A girl addresses her stepmother, asks her to interpret her dreams and offers her a golden casket as a reward. She dreamt that the moon shone over Skáney, that a tree hung over her head, that a bird ran across the gold in her room, that two stars sat on her breasts, that the tide flowed across her floor. (Thus in A, the dreams are the same with minor variations in most texts.) The stepmother's interpretation of the dream is that the king of Skáney will propose to her, the whole population bow to her, that she will have a handsome son and two daughters and live a good life. The stepmother then declines the offer of the golden casket.²³⁰

This is one of the most popular and durable of Icelandic ballads. There are recordings from the 17th century up to recent years.

In most of the variants, the whole ballad is in direct speech; first the stepdaughter speaks and then the stepmother for the rest of the ballad. In five 19th century recordings, however, there is, at the beginning, a passage where the stepmother goes to wake up the maiden, after which their conversation begins. This has foreign parallels.

²²⁸ See Ek 1928, esp. p. 67.

²²⁹ DGF, X, p. 573.

²³⁰ Texts: A = I, p. 190, B = III, p. 220, C = IV, p. 255, D = V, p. 12, E = V, p. 78, F = V, p. 141, G = VI, p. 9, H = VI, p. 23, I = VI, p. 85, J = VI, p. 102, K = VI, p. 128, L = VI, p. 131, M = VI, p. 145, N = VI, p. 168, O = VII, p. 10, P = VII, p. 11, Q = VII, p. 36, R = VII, p. 58, S = VII, p. 83, T = VII, p. 96, U = VII, p. 99, V = VII, p. 104, W = VII, p. 107, X = VII, p. 110, Y = VII, p. 133, Z = VII, p. 176, *A = VII, p. 183, *B = VII, p. 187, *C = VII, p. 189, *D = VII, p. 192, *E = VII, p. 198.

The ballad is known in all Nordic countries (TSB D 397). The dream passage, which in Iceland has practically obliterated other parts of the ballad, is only a small part of it in foreign versions, which usually include an extensive introduction and an epilogue. There are Norwegian variants, though, in which the material is practically identical with that of the Icelandic version, if we include the opening of HIKWY, cf. the Norwegian C-text.²³¹ However, this text contains a rebuke for sleeping too late which has vanished from the Icelandic tradition.

In Danish variants, the stepmother is not the kindly person who appears in Icelandic texts, but the ordinary type who treats her stepdaughter unfairly. Justice is carried out here in the description of how the dreams are fulfilled, but they are not interpreted except in variants recorded in the Faroes and those of Swedish origin. In Swedish texts the dreams are interpreted immediately, but the stepmother is not kindly, as she tries to advance her own daughters rather than the stepdaughter. Two Faroese texts are written in Danish and show signs of Danish influence, although they contain much that is related to Icelandic and Norwegian texts, as will be shown below. There are a few variations of the story in the Norwegian texts. n-A follows the story of the Danish variants in its emphasis on the description of the maiden, her finery and beauty, and there the dreams have begun to come true before the end of the ballad. In the B-text, much space is also used to describe the arrival of the suitor, the objections of the stepmother and then the maiden's attire and her beauty. On the other hand, n-CDEFG end with the interpretation of the dream, like the Icelandic version.

The comparison of the form of the story in the different Nordic countries gives a clear indication that the Icelandic version is an extension of a separate West-Nordic branch of this ballad's tradition. Most of the stanzas of the Icelandic variants appear in many countries and have no value for comparison, although their wording is usually closest to Norwegian variants. However, a couple of stanzas are peculiar to the West-Nordic tradition:

i-A 5 Að mér þótti stjörnur tvær,
á mínum brjóstum sátu þær.

6 Að mér þótti sjávarflóð
renna á mitt skemmugólf.

²³¹ Printed in DGF, IV, p. 450.

n-A 15 Eg dröymde um dei stjönnur små
dei mone pá jórði fyrir meg gá.²³²

n-D 6 Ég dröymde um den sjouarfló,
ég tótte, hó rann ivi mitt haddarbór.²³³

The only parallel to this is found in Faroese variants recorded in Danish:

d(f)-L 12 Jeg drømte, at den høje Flod
stod alt under mine Loftter god'.

This may indicate that the Faroese variants contain some remnants of an older layer of tradition related to Icelandic and Norwegian variants.

In Danish variants, the queen asks her stepdaughter to give her her dreams as a gift and makes good offers in return. The stepdaughter's offer of a reward in the Icelandic variants is probably a reverse reflection of this, but there is no sign of it either way in Norwegian texts.

The relationship between the Icelandic variants and the texts of the ballad in other Nordic countries shows that it must have been brought to Iceland from Norway. There is nothing in the language or metre of the ballad that speaks against its being fairly old in Iceland.²³⁴

ÍF 40 Marteins kviða

Young Sir Marteinn wants to abduct his Lucia from a convent and is advised to lie down on a stretcher and feign death. He then lies ill for two days and lies down alive on the stretcher on the third day. His body is carried to the convent, and after the mass has been sung, the maiden Lucia stands alone beside the body and sings from a psalter. The corpse then starts to revive, and asks Lucia not to take fright, says that a horse and armoured men are waiting for them. Thereupon he takes her away, while the cloister maidens pray to God that they too might be carried away by angels.²³⁵

²³² Landstad, p. 580.

²³³ DGF, IV, p. 451.

²³⁴ This is no place to treat theories of an English origin of this ballad, cf. Falbe-Hansen 1922, Kabell 1952b and DGF, X, p. 593; they are not relevant in the determination of the origin of the Icelandic version, but the whole idea seems rather dubious to me.

²³⁵ Text: III, p. 250.

This is a variant of a Danish ballad, *Hr. Mortens klosterrov* (DGF 408). The Danish variants contain the same basic story as that retold above, but the events leading up to the climax are described in more detail, and the whole ballad is richer in material. Almost every stanza of the Icelandic version can be traced to a source in the Danish variants.

The oldest manuscripts of the Danish ballad date from the middle of the 16th century, and none of them seems to be younger than the 17th century. There exists another ballad related to this one, DGF 409, some variants of which have been confused with it. That ballad is found in Norway, among other places. Olrik presents evidence to show that these are actually two distinct ballads, 409 having been influenced by 408 at a relatively late date, and that this version was then brought to Norway. There is, therefore, no reason to assume any direct connection between the Icelandic version of 408 and Norwegian variants of 409, and this is, in fact, not indicated by comparison of the two. On the contrary, the relationship between the Icelandic and Danish variants of 408 is very close, as stated above.

In the Danish variants, the hero is always called Morten, while the name of the maiden is variously Lisebet or Luse lille (stolt Lutze). In the fourth stanza, we read: *Fréttist það um Danaveldi/ og borgina Rem*. This town name has been read *Rein* in *Íslensk fornkvæði*. Jón Helgason seems in doubt, for he says about the reading *Rem*: *nærmest sál*. The other reading is in better agreement with Danish texts, where we find one place-name of which this might be a distortion, i.e., *Rhin*:

A 4 Hans frender sende hannum aff landt
ud offuer then saltidt ryn.

Although this is not found in the same position in the Icelandic variant, it could serve as an example of a rhyme word that wants to get in somewhere in a new version. A similar distortion occurs when *pylegarth* in d-A 31 becomes *Vífilsgarð* in i 8 and *Fífilsgarð* in i 9.

The language of the ballad shows obvious signs of translation and is, in some places, very clumsy and un-Icelandic: *væri sig líf úr heim, óttast ekki stans*. The lines are short, but the same is true of the Danish variants. Thus, everything indicates that this ballad was brought to Iceland directly from Denmark, and the most likely time for its transfer is the late 16th century.

ÍF 41 Gunnbjarnar kvæði

Gunnbjörn of the Upplands longs for his beloved and resorts to the device of dressing up as a woman and sitting at the castle gate where the king, her father, rides past. The king asks where he comes from. He tells him and says he needs to have a word with his daughter. The king sends him to her. They start talking and Snjáfríður asks for news from the Upplands and what Gunnbjörn is having built. He says he is having a ship built and is leaving for Greece to get betrothed to a lady. Snjáfríður wishes God would grant him victory so that he might win her. Gunnbjörn now asks her whether she has set her mind on this particular man, and she answers that she would marry Gunnbjörn if she could. He now takes off his headdress and reveals who he is, and Snjáfríður turns pale and says she has spoken too much, but he says that she will not have to regret these words. Here AEFH end, while B and G say that they went away and no obstacles are mentioned.²³⁶

The majority of the variants have the refrain *kóngabörn hafa sorg fengið*, and if this is original, it might indicate that a continuation of the story, containing material more tragic than what has been preserved, has been lost, though it is doubtful if anything can be based on such slender evidence.

This ballad is not found outside Iceland, but closely related ballads exist in the Nordic countries, especially *Hagbard og Signe* (TSB D 430) and *Kong Görels datter* or *Gjur'e borgegreiven* (TSB D 31). The latter ballad, which has been recorded in Denmark and Norway, is more closely related to *Gunnbjarnar kvæði* than *Hagbard og Signe* in that it not only contains a disguise motif and the conversation where she expresses her love for the disguised suitor, but it also contains the feature that he first meets the girl's father who asks who he is and then allows him to see her. *Gjur'e borgegreiven* also has a happy end, though it is in itself not at all related to the ending of *Gunnbjarnar kvæði*, for there the count comes to his senses and decides that the lovers should be allowed to marry.

The interrelation of these Scandinavian ballads and their connections with German poetry has been widely discussed, and this has been closely tied to a debate on whether *Hagbard og Signe* is Danish or Norwegian. There is an excellent report on this controversy, with a wealth of references and quotations, in DGF, X, pp. 852–5.

²³⁶ Texts: A = II, p. 22, B = IV, p. 85, C = IV, p. 123 (one stanza), D = IV, p. 179 (one stanza), E = IV, p. 188, F = IV, p. 242, G = V, p. 34, H = V, p. 155.

Verbal parallels between *Gunnbjarnar kvæði* and these Scandinavian ballads are so scant that they furnish no grounds for arguments concerning their relationship. It is obvious that these ballads belong to one family. If *Hagbard og Signe* is much older, it is more probable that *Gunnbjarnar kvæði* is its direct descendant, i.e., that no intermediary links have been preserved. However, the opposite view has also been expressed, that the Norwegian *Gjur'e borgegreiven* is older than *Hagbard og Signe*, or at least that it has given more than it has received in their relationship, as it is originally Norwegian and based on a German model.²³⁷ If this is a sound hypothesis, it can well be that *Gunnbjarnar kvæði* is modelled upon *Gjur'e borgegreiven*. The opening of the ballads is similar:

n-A 2 Og deð var ungan Eirik'e
han búdde út með á,
han fekk stóre sorginne
fer han mátte 'ki hennar sjá.²³⁸

i-B 1 Gunnbjörn á Upplöndum
fengið hefur hann pín,
allan aldur þreyir hann
eftir unnustu sín.

In the continuation of the Icelandic variants, one can see that Gunnbjörn and Snjáfríður never have seen one another before, as is the case in the Norwegian ballad.

Comparison between these ballads is rendered still more difficult by the fact that, in some passages, *Hagbard og Signe* and *Gjur'e borgegreiven* have the same stanzas, and this is true of just the passage which would have been most useful for comparison, the dialogue between Gunnbjörn and Snjáfríður.

If we look at the language and diction of *Gunnbjarnar kvæði*, it is immediately obvious that it was either composed in Iceland or has become thoroughly assimilated through a long sojourn in this country. The lines are generally short, and the metre either the same as in *Tristrams kvæði* or the usual ballad quatrain, but the rhymes are always masculine. In spite of the ballad's thoroughly Icelandic appearance,

²³⁷ See Ek 1921, p. 25 and p. 45; further Seemann 1949.

²³⁸ Landstad, p. 521.

there is no tangible linguistic evidence that can prove it to be an Icelandic composition, but it must either have been composed in Iceland or have been brought there from Norway quite early.

ÍF 42 Vilhjálms kvæði

Guttormur (Rögnvaldur A) comes home from the assembly and tells his sister Vindilmóð (Vendilmón D, Endermón A) that her lover, Vilhjálmur, is dead. He then offers her a man, enumerates his merits and finally tells her that his name is Jón; but she firmly refuses. He says that she will no longer be allowed to have her own way and summons Jón to pledge her engagement to him. She wishes that it will not be a lasting engagement. Then a small boy enters the palace and says that he has seen 15 (16) ships owned by Vilhjálmur the German. She says she will reward him with gold (give him 15 farms) if he is telling the truth, and he asks her to have him hanged if he is lying. Here C ends, by saying that Vilhjálmur and his lady gave the boy 15 farms, and one has to guess how things went in other respects; but D, which has a fuller text here as elsewhere, ends by saying that Vilhjálmur killed the suitor.²³⁹

In that section of this ballad where the brother is offering his sister a husband, a few stanzas (C 5–10, D 5–10) have been inserted which do not belong to this ballad but to a jocular ballad on marriage talk, and will be treated below (p. 394).

No direct parallels to this ballad are known outside Iceland, but in Scandinavia there is a group of ballads on related subjects: a girl promises to wait for her lover, but the relatives want to force her to marry. The lover comes at the eleventh hour and claims his bride. The relationship is closest to TSB D 45 and 46, both found in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. In the Norwegian variant of the former, the girl is called Vendelin, while in a variant of 46, where the two ballads have been confused, she is called Venelíta. In the Danish variant of 46, *Rosengård og Hillelille*, we also find the little boy who is first to spot the ships and receives at least pretty promises as a reward.

Although there are similarities in content, this is not the same ballad and no verbal parallels can be found. The Icelandic ballad is in quatrains, but the lines are often very short, so that some of the stanzas

²³⁹ Texts: A = IV, p. 119 (one stanza), B = IV, p. 179 (one stanza, the same informant as C), C = IV, p. 185, D = VI, p. 181.

could be read as couplets. The foreign ballads, on the other hand, are in the ordinary couplet metre. The metre of the Icelandic ballad, which has remained unchanged from the early 18th to the late 19th century, is most closely similar to that of 21 *Bjarnarsona kvæði* and 48 *Kvæði af herra Birni og Ingigerði*.

The language of the ballad is of good quality and shows no signs of translation. The conclusion here is, therefore, about the same as that concerning *Gunnbjarnar kvæði*: the content certainly comes from abroad; the ballad itself could possibly be Icelandic; and, if it is not, it was probably brought to Iceland from Norway sometime before the Reformation.

ÍF 43 Eiturbyrlunar kvæði

Gunnhildur had three sons but could not stand them. She speaks to her maid and asks whether she knows how to brew treacherous wine (tells her she is going to brew treacherous wine D). The maid says she knows and they brew the wine. She brings the wine to her son and asks him to drink (first the oldest, then the youngest C). He asks her to drink of it herself first; she is reluctant but finally gives in and drinks from the horn. She dies. Here C ends, but D and E add the son's comments on his mother's treachery.²⁴⁰

We can see that this ballad existed in two fairly different variants in the first decades of the 18th century, but as a whole it has only been recorded in the 19th century. The name of the mother is variously Kristín, Sesselja or Gunnhildur, but apart from this the extant variants are fairly close to each other.

This ballad (TSB D 274) is found in all the Nordic countries with fairly great variations. There are two Danish variants—as a matter of fact, these have been classified as TSB D 273—one from the 16th century, the other from the latter half of the 19th. They agree on the main points: a mother-in-law is filled with envy towards her daughter-in-law, brews treacherous wine and tries to get her to drink it. The son comes along and forces his mother to drink first. The mother dies from the drink; her name is *stalt Mettelil*.

In Sweden, there is one recording of this ballad where the mother's

²⁴⁰ Texts: A = IV, p. 118 (one stanza), B = IV, p. 125 (one stanza), C = V, p. 142, D = VI, p. 134, E = VI, p. 185.

name is *Gundela* (cf. i-C), and it is her stepsons she is planning to kill. In Norway and the Faroes, on the other hand, it is her own sons as in the Icelandic version, although there we are given an explanation of her behaviour that she originally had them exposed as infants but they came back to her as grown men. The mother is called *Signelill* in the Norwegian variants and *stolt Signild* in the Faroese one. (The ballad is printed as B-text with a totally unrelated ballad, *Brøðurnir* CCF 120.)

In the Swedish variants, it seems that the lady Gundela seeks advice from giants, *går sig till bergrummet fram*; in the Norwegian A-text, she commits the crime single-handed, while in other Norwegian variants and the Faroese one she seeks advice from her neighbour. The interchange between the mother and the neighbour is practically identical to the conversation between the mother and her maid in the Icelandic version.

As is shown by this survey of the material, the West-Nordic texts have common traits in opposition to the others, although the Swedish text is more related to them than the Danish variants, since the change from mother to stepmother could be seen as a natural attempt to find an explanation for the mother's attempted murder. As a matter of fact, the Swedish text was written down in Värmland and therefore not unlikely to be of Norwegian origin. But it is difficult to find any indications as to the nature of the relationship between the West-Nordic and the Danish versions. It is possible that the West-Nordic version is simply derived from the Danish one and that the scene where the son forces the mother to drink the poison herself, which is undeniably the most effective scene in the ballad, has given birth to the preceding scene where the mother tries to get *him* to drink the poison. The explanations of this unnatural behaviour that appear in the stepmother relationship in the Swedish variant and the exposure motif in the Faroese-Norwegian ones could be independent attempts to invent motivation for the poisoning scene after the attempt to murder a daughter-in-law had been forgotten. Accordingly, the Icelandic version should, in content, show the oldest stage of the West-Nordic tradition, and it seems plausible that at that stage the mother's name was Gunnhildur.

Danish scholars have favoured a different explanation. They think that the beginning of the ballad in its Danish form was borrowed from other ballads on related themes, while the scene where the mother

tries to get her sons or stepsons to drink poison is more original.²⁴¹ It seems impossible to find any irrefutable proof either way, but it has to be admitted that the unexplained attempt of a mother to murder her sons and their cruel revenge found in the Icelandic version has the attraction of a horrible enigma which seems to point far back to a forgotten past.

The beginning of the Faroese variant is the same as the one most commonly found in Iceland:

i-A 1 Kristín á sér syni þrjá,
öngvan þeirra mátti hún sjá.

f 1 Stolt Signild eigur synir tvá,
hvøngan vil hon við eygum sjá.

The conversation with the maid is related to the conversation with the neighbour both in Norwegian and especially in Faroese variants. In Danish, Swedish and Norwegian variants the poison is said to have been brewed by digging up snakes, cf. i-D 3.

The conversation over the horn is very closely related in West-Nordic variants:

i-C 4 Hún bar það þeim yngsta,
hann fékk þeim enum elsta.

D 4 “Drekktu af horni, sonur minn,
eg hef bruggað þér heilsuvín.”

i-C 5 “Tak við, móðir, og drekktu fyrst,
þig hefur meira í morgun þyrst.”

D 6 “Ekki má eg drekka það,
föstudagur er í dag.”

n-A 17 Hó sendte dæ ti den yngri,
han tók imót den eldri.²⁴²

²⁴¹ See Olrik in DGF, VI, pp. 159–60, and Recke in *Danmarks Fornviser*, III, p. 288.

²⁴² Bugge 1858, p. 98.

s 4 “Välkomna hem kär söner min,
För er har brygt både mjöd och vin.”²⁴³

n-A 18 “Kjære mí moder drikk no fyrst!
kvendi dei æ’ morgótyst.”

f 11 “Mín kæra móðir, drekk tú fyrst,
tí kvinnfólk er so morguntyrst.”

f 12 “Eg gat ikki drukkið harav,
tað ber upp á mín føstudag.”

n-A 19 “No æ’ Maremess visse,
at kvendi maa ’kji mjöen drikke.”

d-A 17 “Thett er faaste-dag y-dag,
ieg der icke af dreke maa.”

In all countries, this is followed by a description of the effects of the poison on the woman’s insides, her liver, lungs, and heart. The ending of the Icelandic variants has its closest parallel in the Faroese text:

i-D 11 “Guð fyrirgefi þér, móðir mín,
þú hefur bruggað svikavín.”

i-E 10 “Nú fékkstu það, móðir mín,
sem þú hugðir sonum þín.”

f 19 “Gud fyriláti tær, móðir mín,
og hatta ætlaði tú soni tínum.”

As has clearly appeared through the comparison, the Icelandic variants are most closely related to the Faroese one, but there is also a close relationship with the Norwegian variants, some of which have rather an abrupt beginning like the Icelandic version, which might be indicative of a direct connection.

The ballad is in a fairly regular metre, and the language is good Icelandic, which still further strengthens the conclusion that this ballad

²⁴³ Arwidsson 1834–42, II, p. 92. Bugge 1858, p. 56, adds *har jag brygt*.

was brought to Iceland through the West-Nordic area, probably from Norway, at some time before the Reformation.

ÍF 44 Kvæði af Nikulási

Nikulás rises early and dresses in a noble fashion. He rides with his men to his brother Pétur who welcomes him (in B, they ride to King Salomon and there is no mention of any kinship) and gives him mead containing poison. He drinks and first his belt bursts and then his heart. Nikulás rides away with his men; but, when they reach the forest, he falls dead. In B, the men put his body on a shield and bury it in consecrated ground; in A, the men carry him home while a maiden stands in a tower and sees a body being carried home. She is on the point of bursting from sorrow, and they are later buried together.²⁴⁴

No direct parallel to *Nikulásar kvæði* can be found outside Iceland, though it is in all respects in the style of East-Nordic ballads of chivalry. This appears in the descriptions of equipment and clothes and the epithets applied to the characters, but also in the laconic style and tragic mood of the ballad. The conclusion of the ballad in A undeniably arouses suspicion that love is at the root of this fratricide, as it is in the ballad of *Ebbe Skammelssøn*, but about this we can know nothing.

In DGF 331, *Brune-Erik og Nilaus Buggesøn*, there are a few initial stanzas that are very reminiscent of the beginning of *Nikulásar kvæði*, except that they are quatrains. In that ballad, however, there is no poisoning, and the reason for the similarity is undoubtedly the fact that the beginnings of both ballads are made up from formulas. Various stanzas in the ballad have parallels elsewhere (A 8 in CCF 154 A 23, and A 9–10 in ÍF A 17–18).

Both recordings are in repetitive metre, The rhythm is fairly regular and lines never unnaturally long. The rhymes are comparatively regular ballad rhymes.

It is impossible to state anything with certainty about the origin of this ballad. It is probably of foreign origin, most likely Danish, but lack of comparative material prevents us from drawing any conclusion as to whether it came to Iceland directly from Denmark or through the West-Nordic area.

²⁴⁴ Texts: A = I, p. 38, B = III, p. 172.

ÍF 45 Harmabótar kvæði and ÍF 46 Systra kvæði

A girl is in love with a man; her youngest sister is in her confidence but betrays her, and then the story goes from one person to another and ends up with her father (brother AF), who summons her and asks for the facts in the case. According to H (46), she says it was Vilkin who seduced her. The king summons Vilkin to his presence, but then says that young Agnes is his equal, and they prepare a wedding, get twelve children and an even greater number of castles. The other variants (45) state that she was sold out of the country to a wealthy count with whom she lived a miserable life; but then he sold her again and this time to her friend, so the whole thing ends happily.²⁴⁵

Grundtvig separated variant H from the others as a special type and others have followed him, but one can also look at it as a variant which has got the happy end a bit sooner than the other variants. This ballad (TSB D 71) is also found in Denmark, Norway and the Faroes. The Faroese version is quite close to *Systra kvæði*, as there the lover comes walking while her father is scolding her and takes her with him to the loft where she is relieved of all her sorrows. The Danish version is, in parts, very different. There the girl is sent out destitute to beg, but the country is harassed by a plague and all her relatives die, so that she can decide for herself whom she is going to marry. (In d-C, however, she is sold to another country, immediately finds her lover, and then comes the plague.) The Norwegian version is closest to the Icelandic one, though there are some differences. It does not describe how her secret is revealed, but her father wonders whether he should have her burnt or sent into exile. Because of the pleadings of her sister and brother, she is sent away from the country to a wealthy count. She lives a miserable life but sends a message home saying that she is fine. Then she is taken back and sent to a very humble count. There she spins red gold in the daytime and spends her nights sleeping on the young man's arm. Here the ballad ends, but presumably she was allowed to remain in peace there.

From these differences in the plot it follows that a thorough comparison is out of the question. It seems clear that the Faroese text is directly derived from the Danish version, though it goes its own way in the end. In the beginning, there is a fairly close relationship between

²⁴⁵ Texts: 45: A = II, p. 49, B = V, p. 148, C = VI, p. 65, D = VI, p. 100, E = VII, p. 23, F = VII, p. 51, G = VII, p. 116; 46: H = III, p. 259.

the Icelandic and Danish versions (as well as the Faroese), but for that part there are no Norwegian stanzas for comparison. At the beginning of the Norwegian text there are two stanzas that seem to be meant to show her reluctance to go to see her father, and this has a parallel in the Danish version. The same applies to the speculations on her punishment. When it comes to the punitive measures themselves, we get stanzas that are comparable in all three countries, and the verbal parallels here are closest between the Icelandic and the Norwegian versions:

i-A 10 Seldi hann mig á annað land,
einum ríkum greifa í hand.

n 6 Så sendte dei meg så langt av land,
alt undi så rik ei greivars hand.²⁴⁶

d-C 10 Saa solde de mig udi fremmede lannd,
saa wiitt offuer sø och saltte wannd.

The description of her circumstances in exile are also closely related in the Icelandic and Norwegian texts. In the Icelandic C-text she does not finally come to her original friend but to a *ríkur greifi* again. This is in agreement with the Norwegian text where this count, however, is not powerful but *ringur* (humble). Olrik thinks that this is more original, but that is very unlikely.²⁴⁷ All the other Icelandic texts agree that it was her best friend she finally came to stay with, and this is undeniably in better agreement with the sentimental spirit of the ballad.

It seems impossible to form a clear notion about the relationship between the different versions of this ballad. The first section of the Icelandic and Norwegian versions are related to the Danish version, each in its own way, so that there seems to be no direct connection, but this could be partly caused by poor preservation. In the latter part, there is no doubt about the special connection between these two versions, but is it because they both have a common West-Nordic prototype or is it because the Danish version has undergone changes and additions?²⁴⁸ The answer to this question is so uncertain that it is

²⁴⁶ NFS, Bugge a, p. 116–18.

²⁴⁷ See DGF, VII, pp. 565–7.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

not possible to talk about a special West-Nordic branch of the tradition of this ballad except as an uncertain possibility.

The metre of the ballad is fairly regular, and the language shows no obvious signs of translation, so that the ballad could therefore have a fairly long history in Iceland; but the question of age and origin must remain open.

As stated above, the beginning of *Systra kvæði* is identical with that of *Harmabótar kvæði*, and then the end is formed of commonplace stanzas. From a historical point of view, therefore, it is best explained as a variant of *Harmabótar kvæði*. However, the ending has changed the form of the plot to such an extent that the editors are justified in classifying it as a separate type. In the introduction to DGF 426, *Erik og Adelaad*, it is pointed out that the content is related to this ballad, but 426 is in quatrains, and there is indeed nothing that indicates a common origin. There is more reason to emphasize that in the Faroese version of *Harmabótar kvæði* the girl's tribulations are cut short as they are here, which makes the plot almost the same, although this has probably happened independently in the two countries.

ÍF 47 Þernu kvæði

Young Kristín announces to the king that she is carrying his child. He says that her honour depends upon its being a male child and that if it is female it will be sent to a cloister. Kristín gives birth to a boy (a girl C) and sends her maid with message for the king. The maid says that Kristín has given birth to a female child, ugly and resembling the king's slave and finally suggests that she should be burned at the stake. The king says he has to see Kristín first and walks up to her sleeping loft. Kristín lays the child on his arm. He marries the lady and gives her land, but the maid is burned at the stake.²⁴⁹

This ballad is found in all the Nordic countries, except in the Faroes (TSB D 118). There are many Danish recordings from the 16th and 17th centuries. They are long and the maid is even more darkly painted than in the Icelandic version, as the Danish versions contain much more material. In the Norwegian and Swedish variants, there is no indication that the child's sex is of any consequence, while in the Danish variants,

²⁴⁹ Texts: A = IV, p. 116 (one stanza), B = IV, p. 162, C = V, p. 20.

no less than in the Icelandic ones, it seems to be the maid's chief lie that the child is a daughter.

It is only after the child's birth that we can find any direct verbal parallels, and then it so happens that the same stanzas are found in both Denmark and Norway. The relationship to the Danish texts is closer, but the difference is not so great that it can decisively determine the ballad's origin. In content, there is one more feature that forms a special link between the Icelandic and Danish versions: in the Danish variants, the maid is sometimes burned at the stake and sometimes buried alive; the latter is always the case in Norwegian and Swedish variants.

Judging from the preservation of the ballad, it is most likely to be Danish. The Swedish and Norwegian recordings are, in most cases, very close to the Danish ones. Nothing can be found that links the Icelandic variants in any special way to the Norwegian ones. On the contrary, various features of content are common to the Danish and Icelandic versions.

The rhythm and diction of *Þernu kvæði* are rather clumsy, e.g., *klæðist með gull, gár fyrir kónginn, stár með barni, þreytt af móð, fætt eitt meybarn á* (the last word is redundant, inserted because of the rhyme). These examples are from the B-text; in C, we find these solecisms: *beint er ég með barni þín, þar stár öll þín æra uppá*. The rhymes are also often incomplete, e.g., *gull:fulla, sinn:þín, séð:við, lifa:gefa*. Neither the rhyme nor the language as a whole is such that they enforce the conclusion that the ballad is a very late translation, but they certainly strengthen the meagre indications of the comparison that the ballad was brought to Iceland from Denmark, probably in the 16th century.

ÍF 48 Kvæði af herra Birni og Ingigerði

Sir Björn and Ingigerður sit talking, and he asks how she will take it if he goes to other countries to find a bride. She asks whom he desires. He says it is Princess Engilborg. She then asks him when she is supposed to dress in gold-laced furs, and he answers that it is tomorrow. Then she is to walk cheerfully up to the bride and call herself Margrét his sister. Engilborg arrives and is given a royal reception and is led to her seat. She then asks who it is that pours the wine. Sir Björn says that it is his sister Margrét. She then asks why she is in tears, and he answers that she is pining for her

betrotted. Engilborg advises that she should be married to her brother, but he claims that she does not want him. When the married couple go to bed, Ingigerður draws the shoes off their feet, covers them up and asks blessings for them. Engilborg now voices her suspicion that this majestic looking woman was at one time his beloved. He does not deny this and says that she is Ingigerður, his former fiancée. Engilborg then calls for Ingigerður, asks her to lie down with Björn, and says she will give her all the gold she brought with her. Engilborg rushes from the palace before Björn can stop her, asks blessings for everyone, says she has been married to seven (three) men before but has always been deprived of her pleasure by rivals, then enters a nunnery.²⁵⁰

A ballad on the same theme and usually classified as the same type (TSB D 259) is found in the Faroes, Norway and Denmark, but there it is in couplets. The quatrains in the Icelandic version of this ballad are of a similar kind as in *Bjarnarsona kvæði*, i.e., the length of the lines is rather irregular and the half stanza often has only five or six stresses, and, occasionally, only four. It is, of course, tempting to explain this as a case of couplets being expanded into quatrains, but such an explanation is not unproblematic.

There is only one Danish variant of this ballad, and there the main emphasis is on one scene, the wedding feast. There is a detailed description of the mistress's fine clothes, and it is the mother of the bridegroom who tells the truth. But the bride's final words are spoken to her father when she gets home. Erik Dal evaluates the position of this variant as follows:

I den nordiske overlevering af 255 (bruden resignerer til frillens fordel) står den eneste danske optegnelse svagt, og vandringen er formentlig gået fra vest mod øst under reduktion af den oprindelige handling.²⁵¹

In Norway the ballad is uncommon. Only one recording (printed in DGF, V, p. 5) is to be found there in addition to a fragment, but this variant is closer in content to the Icelandic version than to the Danish variant. The dialogue, in the beginning, is parallel to the Icelandic version, but this is followed by a feature which is unique to the Norwegian

²⁵⁰ Texts: A = I, p. 28, B = IV, p. 115 (one stanza), C = IV, p. 156, D = IV, p. 226, E = V, p. 82, F = V, p. 137, G = VI, p. 92, H = VI, p. 199, I = VII, p. 63, J = VII, p. 179.

²⁵¹ DGF, X, p. 633.

version: that the wedding is held far away from the bridegroom's home and that the mistress comes there on her own initiative. Here the bride seems to ask someone else for particulars about this woman, and she learns the truth immediately. She thereupon demands right away to be driven to her father's home, and a marriage between Benedikt and his mistress, Videmöy, takes place instead of the planned one.

In the Faroes, three variants have been collected which, in many respects, stand as intermediaries between the Norwegian and Icelandic versions. The mistress is called either Mjólkhvít or Hvítmoy, and the bridegroom Brúnsvein, so that the name of the mistress connects this version to the Norwegian one, as does the metre, which is the same. On the other hand, the treatment of the story in the Faroese version is closer to the Icelandic ballad than is the Norwegian one. The mistress accepts her lot and asks blessings for them. The bride suspects the truth from the mistress's tears. She demands the truth from her husband after they have gone to bed. At first, he maintains that she is his sister, but she feels certain that she is his mistress (*helja*). In the C-text, she asks the maid; this text also has the bride give her brideclothes to her rival.

It seems a natural assumption that this is a single ballad that has split into two sub-types. One of them is in quatrains with the Icelandic version as its representative, the other is in couplets and shorter with the Norwegian and Danish versions as representatives. In the Faroes, these have been mixed together, and it seems most likely that the couplet version with the name Hvítmoy and some other features was brought there from Norway and absorbed various narrative features from the quatrain version which was already found there. If this explanation is accepted, it follows that the quatrain version must be quite old and probably West-Nordic in origin. If it has ever existed in Norway, it seems to have been totally forgotten there. Obviously, this hypothesis conflicts with the idea that the quatrain-version has evolved out of a version in couplets, and must be considered uncertain.

Comparison shows that certain verbal features are closely related in the Danish and Icelandic versions, although the closest relationship is always between Icelandic and Faroese texts:

i-D 8 Engilborg spurði
hann herra Björn þá:

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“Hver er sú hin volduga
skenkir mjöðinn á?”

d 11 Tthett meelltt bruden paa benncke:
“Huem er denn frue, der skencker?”

n 15 Dær tog bruden at spørja for sig:
“Hvad er det for viv, som sørger for mig?”

f-A 14 “Hoyr tað, Brúnsvein, eg tali til tín:
hvör er tann, í aftan skeinkir mær vín?”
(variant: Hvat er tað fyri væna vív,
í aftan skeinkir mjöð og vín).²⁵²

i-C 17 “Þremur hef eg mönnunum
verið gift,
allar hafa mig eljurnar
yndinu svipt.”

d 14 “Thry gang haffuer mytt brølup weritt giortt,
men alltid er ieg bleffuen møø hieem-førtt.”

f-B 20 “Trí gangir hefur mín faðir meg gift,
alt havi eg fyri heljum skift.”

There are other Danish ballads than DGF 255 that are related in content to *Kvæði af herra Birni og Ingigerði*, though this is particularly true of parts of DGF 209, *Stolt Ellens hævn*. This ballad also tells the story of the wedding of a man who has a mistress, and throughout the first part the stories are fairly parallel; but 209 ends with the mistress killing the bridegroom. In other related ballads she commits suicide. The specially noteworthy feature of 209 is that it is in a quatrain metre, the lines being on the short side, often with only two accented syllables in lines two and four. These parallels in form and content seem rather to strengthen the assumption that *Kvæði af herra Birni og Ingigerði* was brought to Iceland in the quatrain metre form.

The language of this ballad is excellent and shows no signs of a late

²⁵² Only the variant is printed in CCF, but this quotation is from DGF, V:1, p. 6.

translation. Everything indicates that the Icelandic version of the ballad is of West-Nordic origin and rather old.

ÍF 49 Kvæði af Gunnari á Hlíðarenda

Gunnar and Hallgerður live at Hlíðarenda. Gunnar asks Hallgerður where she gets good cheeses from. She evades the question, and he expresses the hope that they have not been taken without permission and slaps her. A long time passes, and Hallgerður keeps this incident in mind. Finally, Gunnar's enemies come to his home and want to take his life. He asks Hallgerður to lend him hair for a bowstring as his life is at stake. She says she remembers the slap he gave her and does not care to stop him from being killed. The enemies kill Gunnar.²⁵³

As is shown by the summary, this ballad gets its material from *Njáls saga*, chs. 48 and 77, which it follows quite faithfully, although everything is greatly simplified.

Nobody has doubted that this ballad is composed in Iceland, both because the source was most readily available to Icelanders and because the language and style of the ballad show that it is Icelandic and can hardly be older than 1600.²⁵⁴ The most peculiar feature of the style is that there are no traces of characteristic ballad formulas or ballad style, and the author obviously has no feeling for the old rules of syllable quantity. Only one part of the ballad has genuine ballad rhythm, the refrain: *Á þingi/ betur unni Brynhildur Hringi*, which fits well to the content though it is hard to believe that it is formulated by the same poet as composed the rest of the ballad. The refrain alludes to the *rímur Geðraunir*.²⁵⁵

In the Faroes, there exists a fragment of a ballad about Gunnar's death (CCF 21), parallel to the latter half of the Icelandic ballad. There is only one recording, from the latter half of the 19th century, and it ends so abruptly, with a comment from Gunnar's mother, that something must be missing from the end. No connection can be seen between these two ballads, other than their common source, and it is of course only natural that a dramatic incident, such as Gunnar's death, should

²⁵³ Texts: A = I, p. 12, B = VII, p. 20 (one stanza).

²⁵⁴ See Finnur Jónsson 1914, p. 23.

²⁵⁵ *Rímnasafn*, II, pp. 170–287.

have tempted more than one ballad singer. The Faroese ballad follows the saga text fairly closely, though it adds something to it:

Móðir fellir møðig tár:
“hjálp tær sonur, við mítt hár.”

“Ei skulu bragdar brigda mær,
eg reiv hár af hövdi á tær.”

It is, therefore, possible that the ballad is based on an oral retelling of the saga or imperfect remembrance of a reading, but it could also be composed freely after the saga itself. Direct verbal influence from the saga text is, for instance, evident in stanzas 5 and 6:

“Verja mann eg meg væl um stund
fái eg notið buganum.

Veit mær hann skjótt, sit so við frið,
lívið mítt har liggur við.”

ÍF 50 Óláfs vísur

May King Ólafur give us courage to make a rhyme about his deeds. King Ólafur rides through a forest and sees a footprint. Finnur Árnason says that this small foot would look pretty in a scarlet stocking, and the king tells him to find the maiden before sunset. They bring a beautiful maiden who says that her name is Álfheiður and that their meeting is going to bring her luck. The king tells her to go and serve the queen and foretells that she shall enjoy ‘victory and flower’. The queen leaves the noble lord and has to sleep alone. Early one morning, the queen sends Álfheiður to search for her scissors. She comes to the king’s chamber and tells him that she is looking for a son. The king asks her to wash her feet and step into his bed, and King Magnús is conceived on a Sunday. It is written in books that the king’s men said that he had atoned for this sin before it was committed. Álfheiður has three dreams: the whole of Norway is covered with water (floating); she steps into a church and sees twelve lights being lit in her hand; she dreams that a beautiful ray is shining from her bosom. After this, Álfheiður realizes that she is pregnant. The queen offers to buy her dreams with twelve good farms and marry her to a gentleman, but she refuses. The king says that she should keep her dreams and enjoy them. Álfheiður bears a child which women consider to be sickly, and the poet Sighvatur asks whether the courtiers want to christen the child or answer to the king. They leave the choice to him.

Sighvatur goes before the king who asks him who has given him leave to christen the king's child. Sighvatur answers that he gave the name Magnús to the child, because this is the noblest name for a king that he knows. The king answers that Sighvatur shall serve Magnús as long as he lives. Jesus Christ has redeemed us; may he help all people, living and dead.²⁵⁶

Óláfs vísur was recorded in the first half of the sixteenth century, but when the ballad collecting was begun in the 1660's and onwards, the poem seems to have been forgotten.²⁵⁷ Undoubtedly, it has its protagonist, the saintly King Olaf of Norway, to thank for its preservation. No traces of this ballad have been found outside Iceland.

Óláfs vísur is in quatrains without refrain, and since this is also the case with a few other Icelandic ballads similar to it in many ways, one must assume that *Óláfs vísur* was sung (?) without a refrain and, indeed, never had one. The language of the poem is pure Icelandic with none of the linguistic peculiarities frequently found in ballads; the only solecism is that *Noreg* is feminine in the line *Noreg öll á floti* (st. 18). The feminine gender is most likely to have been adopted here because the masculine nominative ending *-r* has disappeared from the word, as it also has in Norwegian. This does not necessarily indicate a Norwegian origin of the poem, or even of this line, because the disappearance of a nominative *-r* frequently occurs in Icelandic literature from the late Middle Ages, no doubt under influence from the Norwegian.²⁵⁸ Thus, the nominative *Noreg* could have been a form known to the poet.

The style of *Óláfs vísur* is simple, but occasionally it reveals traits reminiscent of *rímur*. This includes the prominence given to the narrator by his first person addresses and intrusions. Apart from the opening and concluding stanzas, we find: *slík eru minnin stór* (st. 2), *varð henni að því mein* (st. 10), *tel eg af góðs manns æði* (st. 16), *so er á bókum ort* (st. 17), *get eg hún giftu fangi* (st. 20), *so er á bókum ritað* (st. 26). Expressions more in the style of *rímur* than ballads are also *einka fljóð* (st. 12), *vífið teita* (st. 13), *tiggi* (st. 16), *prýddir vel til dáða* (st. 27), *borða ljóma* (st. 31). These traits are not dominant when one looks at the poem as a whole; yet, they are more prominent than is

²⁵⁶ Text: IV, p. 11.

²⁵⁷ See ÍF, IV, pp. xiii–xv.

²⁵⁸ See Björn K. Þórolfsson 1925, pp. 1–2. The instances he discusses are not entirely comparable with *Noreg*. The form *Noreyar*, occurring in an 18th c. prose text must be gen. sg. of *Noreg* f., see *Blanda*, I, p. 107.

usual in ballads, although they also occur in a varying degree in other Icelandic quatrain ballads without refrain.

In spite of these affinities with the style of *rímur*, the general impression of the ballad is that it is not in heroic style; it does not relate any heroic feats, nor does it contain any of the exaggerations or clichés common in heroic ballads. Repetitions are very moderately used, and there is only one example of a repetition of a stanza with new rhyme words but almost the same content (stanzas 23–4), which is so extremely popular in Faroese ballads. No commonplace ballad stanzas or lines are found here; nevertheless, the language is formulaic to some extent, especially in the introductions to direct speech where we have *Svaraði hann . . .*, or *Enn so* (or *enn því*) *svaraði/ svöruðu . . .* in eleven stanzas. *Heyrðu það . . .* occurs once, but this is a common formula in Icelandic ballads. Other expressions in typical ballad style are found in the dialogue, which appears in 50% of the stanzas. Such a high percentage of dialogue is, of course, a typical ballad trait.

The plot-structure of this ballad is peculiar in some ways. It opens in a perfectly normal manner with a king heading for an erotic adventure with a young girl, and since the king has a queen, a triangle is soon established. However, this conflict evaporates in the final part of the ballad. Here the central issue is whether the king is going to recognize his illegitimate son, and since neither the queen nor the concubine is mentioned, one must assume that they no longer are part of the conflict; rather, it is a conflict which the king has within himself. A new figure appears on the scene, namely the poet Sighvatur who acts as the helper of the new born prince. Sighvatur is in the end assigned the role of the prince's servant in the future as well. The important role of this helper is one of the un-balladlike characteristics of *Óláfs vísur*.

The irregularities of structure that characterize this ballad and reveal that it is not truly popular are best explained by considering its sources.

The main source of the ballad is undoubtedly Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*, ch. 122. Here, the birth of Magnús is described, but we get no information on how King Olaf and Álfhildr, Magnús's mother, first met, nor is she mentioned elsewhere in *Heimskringla*.

Álfhildr hét kona, er kolluð var konungs ambótt. Hon var þó af góðum ættum komin. Hon var kvinna fríðust. Hon var með hirð Óláfs konungs. En þat vár varð þat til tíðenda, at Álfhildr var með

barni, en þat vissu trúnaðarmenn konungs, at hann myndi vera faðir barns þess. Svá bar at eina nótt, at Álfhildi stóð sótt. Var þar fátt manna við statt, konur nokkurar ok prestr ok Sigvatr skáld ok fáir aðrir. Álfhildr var þungliga haldin, ok gekk henni nær dauða. Hon fœddi sveinbarn, ok var þat um hríð, er þau vissu ógløgg, hvárt líf var með barninu. En er barnit skaut ʒndu upp ok allómáttuliga, þá bað prestr Sigvat fara at segja konungi. Hann svarar: “Ek þori fyrir engan mun at vekja konunginn, því at hann bannar þat hverjum manni at bregða svefni fyrir honum, fyrr en hann vaknar sjálf.” Prestrinn svarar: “Nauðsyn berr nú til, at barn þetta fái skír. Mér sýnisk þat allólífligt.” Sigvatr mælti: “Heldr þori ek til þess at ráða, at þú skírir barnit, en ek vekja konung, ok mun ek ávítum upp halda ok gefa nafn.” Svá gerðu þeir, at sveinn sá var skírðr ok hét Magnús. Eptir um morgininn, þá er konungr var vaknaðr ok klæddr, var honum sagt allt frá þessum atburðum. Þá lét konungr kalla til sín Sigvat. Konungr mælti: “Hví vartu svá djarfr, at þú lézt skíra barn mitt, fyrr en ek vissa?” Sigvatr svarar: “Því, at ek vilda heldr gefa guði tvá menn, en einn fjándanum.” Konungr mælti: “Fyrir hví mundi þat við liggja?” Sigvatr svarar: “Barnit var at komit dauða, ok mundi þat fjándans maðr, ef þat dœi heiðit, en nú var þat guðs maðr. Hitt er ok annat, at ek vissa, þótt þú værir mér reiðr, at þar myndi eigi meira við liggja en líf mitt, en ef þú vill, at ek týna því fyrir þessa sʒk, þá vænti ek, at ek sjá guðs maðr.” Konungr mælti: “Hví léztu sveininn Magnús heita? Ekki er þat vart ætt nafn.” Sigvatr svarar: “Ek hét hann eptir Karla-Magnúsi konungi. Þann vissa ek mann beztan í heimi.” Þá mælti konungr: “Gæfumaðr ertu mikill, Sigvatr. Er þat eigi undarligt, at gæfa fylgi vizku. Hitt er kynligt, sem stundum kann verða, at sú gæfa fylgir óvizkum mʒnnum, at óvitrlig ráð snúask til hamingju.” Var þá konungr allglaðr. Sveinn sá fœddisk upp ok var brátt efniligr, er aldr fór yfir hann.²⁵⁹

It is obvious that the poet knows more of *Heimskringla* than this one chapter. Thus, the Norwegian chieftain Finnur Árnason, mentioned in st. 3–4, was one of King Olaf’s most loyal followers and was killed with him at Stiklarstaðir. The king’s prediction in the ballad that Sighvatur shall serve Magnús all his life is also in accordance with what

²⁵⁹ *Heimskringla* 1941–51, II, pp. 209–11.

happens in *Heimskringla*, where this extraordinary man is seen to reach his summit as a courtier and politician as King Magnús's adviser. Moreover, the prophecy of royal offspring in a dream also appears in *Heimskringla*, although in a different context, viz. in *Hálfðanar saga svarta*, ch. 6 and 7, where Hálfðan's queen has a dream which is interpreted as predicting that her offspring shall rule Norway, and Hálfðan himself has another dream to the same effect, of which one detail is said to predict the glory of King Olaf.²⁶⁰

Although *Heimskringla* thus forms the basis for the ballad, other literary influences are also at work. As mentioned above, the poet must have been familiar with *rímur*; and the prayer-like addresses to King Olaf and Jesus Christ in the opening and concluding stanzas are in accordance with the conventions of hymns and other religious poetry. Álfheiður's third dream, about the beautiful ray, has parallels in religious poetry, most notably in the name of the poem *Geisli*, composed by Einar Skúlason in the middle of the twelfth century. *Geisli* is a skaldic poem about King Olaf. The same image is found in the 14th century *Lilja*, where the birth of Jesus Christ is described as follows:

Glóar þar sól að glerinu heilu
gleðiligt jóð er skín af móður.²⁶¹

In spite of the sporadic influence from *rímur* and religious poetry, the basic formal influence on *Óláfs vísur* is, of course, from ballads. The style and metre are decisive on this point, but it is also true with regard to thematic structure. The rivalry between a king's concubine and the queen is a theme treated, for example, in ÍF 51 and 54 in a similar way. The dreams of a young woman are a motif found in ballads, especially in ÍF 39 and its parallels, as has already been pointed out. The presence of the detail that the more powerful person offers to buy the dreams of the one who has luck, found here and in non-Icelandic variants of ÍF 39, is a strong indication of a special connection between the two ballads; the simplest explanation is that, when *Stjúpmóður kvæði* was brought to Iceland, it contained this feature which was borrowed by the poet of *Óláfs vísur*.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 90–91.

²⁶¹ *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning 1908–15*, II A, p. 374.

²⁶² The origins of *Stjúpmóður kvæði* or *Møens morgendrdømme* has been treated by Falbe-Hansen 1922 and Kabell 1952b, who both maintain that it is of English

The ballad must be rather well preserved. However, there are some minor inconsistencies and loose ends which are best accounted for as the result of forgetfulness and confusion by the oral transmitters. Stanza 10 seems to be loosely connected to the surrounding stanzas; no reason is given for the fact that the queen leaves the king's bed. As it stands, one must assume that this is caused by jealousy, but there is not really a need for this either, since the queen and her maids are already up and sitting at their embroidery when the conception of King Magnús takes place.²⁶³ It seems most likely that this stanza is either a remnant of a forgotten cluster of stanzas, or that it has been added by a singer but really belongs to another poem. If this is correct, it shows that the poem was recorded from oral tradition, an assumption which seems natural, but is not easy to prove definitively. There are some rather abrupt changes of scene which are in good ballad style and certainly more like oral than written literature. The choice Sighvatur gives the courtiers in stanza 26 is not real, since he takes both things upon himself, but this is best explained by assuming that the saga-text is inaccurately retold rather than this is a question of later confusion. It seems probable, that the conversation between the King and Sighvatur in stanzas 28–9 is somewhat confused and that something is lacking.

A close reading of the ballad shows that its division into two parts, undertaken above, only accounts for superficial features. The latter part of the ballad could not exist independently of the first, and the shift of emphasis is actually prepared from the beginning. In the introductory address to Ólafur, we are given a clear warning that we are not to hear a common love story. This we are reminded of at crucial moments, where the saintliness of the king is mentioned or alluded to. The strange circumstances under which the king discovers Álfheiður, as well as her equally strange words in coming to the king, that she is looking for a son, and the repeated allusions to her 'luck', indicate that she is unimportant as a person, but that her future son gives her importance. Although the poet starts with a familiar theme, the rivalry

origin. Although it can hardly be proved that there is a direct connection between this ballad and William of Malmesbury, it seems very likely that dreams with a similar function as in *Óláfs vísur* and *Stjúpmóður kvæði* have been common motifs in balladry for a long time.

²⁶³ It is, of course, possible that this feature has been added as mitigating circumstances for the king's sin.

between queen and concubine, he is, from the beginning, intent on composing a ballad with religious flavour about the succession of King Olaf by King Magnús. Although Sighvatur plays an important role in the ballad, it can be seen by means of comparison that the emphasis in *Heimskringla* on his wisdom and smooth turn of phrase has been reduced in the ballad, while allusions to King Magnús's future kingdom and Sighvatur's service to him have been added.

Ólafur Marteinsson thought that *Óláfs vísur* had been composed in Norway because the first part of the ballad must be based on oral legends about the events, and such legends were more likely to have been preserved in Norway than Iceland.²⁶⁴ There are, however, no reasons to believe that the ballad was based on any such legends. The laconic statements about King Olaf's beautiful concubine in *Heimskringla* could have been sufficient to kindle the imagination of a ballad poet. According to *Heimskringla*, Olaf was, at this time, married to Ástriður daughter of King Olaf of Sweden; someone who knew a number of ballads would have no difficulty in making up the rest.

The distinct literary flavour of the poem, which appears both in its closeness to its source, as well as in style and manner of presentation, in combination with its linguistic characteristics, makes it overwhelmingly probable that it was composed in Iceland. Its age cannot be decided. It certainly has the appearance of having been composed before the Reformation, but it cannot be older than most ballads because the author must have known a number of chivalric ballads. It is also rather well preserved, and consequently one would hesitate to believe that it is older than from the 15th century.

ÍF 51 Karlamagnúsar kvæði

The queen overhears her husband wishing that she were dead; then he could love another. She asks the girl (her maid) what the king has said to her. She answers that he wished death for the maid and long life for the queen. The queen says she is lying and has her moved to another country. The king immediately sets off after her and stays with her that same night. He says that they will have a son and name him Magnús. The king then returns home and the queen stands outside and greets him, asking for news. He says he is expecting a son who is to be king over the whole people. When

²⁶⁴ See Ólafur Marteinsson, pp. 53–4.

they have talked for a while, Karlamagnús arrives, the king greets him, says he has one sister and that she should be married to the best of his men. He also orders a church to be built. The poet ends by praying that God and Karlamagnús may be with us all.²⁶⁵

This ballad is not found elsewhere. The first five stanzas are taken straight from ÍF 54, *Kvæði af Kristínu drottningarelju*, although the order there is different. After this beginning, the ballad takes its own course and is related in content to *Óláfs vísur*. This relationship is, however, limited to the main lines of the story.

There seems to be some relationship between this ballad and medieval legends about the birth of Charlemagne, although it may be accidental.²⁶⁶ There are some commonplace stanzas in the ballad, yet it is rather independent and not likely to be just a conglomeration of commonplace material. The language is good and shows no signs of translation. No guess will be ventured here as to the age and origin of this ballad.

ÍF 52 Soffíu kvæði

King Valdimar and his cousin Burtleif are planning an expedition. They draw lots to see who is to go, and Burtleif's lot comes up, but then he falls ill. The king goes on the expedition, and Burtleif soon gets well (This opening is only in CDF). Burtleif and Kristín dance together and sleep together in a single bed (F says that she was reluctant). Kristín gives birth to a boy and a girl. (Now A and E begin.) Valdimar comes home from the expedition; Soffía greets him and tells him that Kristín slept on Burtleif's arm (and that she has given birth to children BC). The king refuses to believe this as they are cousins, sends for Kristín and asks her to hurry to his side as he is dangerously wounded. Kristín gives her maids gold and jewels and asks them to take care of the children as they will not see their mother again. She rides to the king who asks her various questions and bids her to perform certain tasks (this is the order in C); asks her to exchange belts with him; asks why milk flows from her breasts—she says it is not milk but sorrow from her heart because of the parting from her maids—; asks her to mix beer and wine or to pour wine, but she says she is too young to pour. He then asks her to dance with him and dances with her all night (in other variants up to five days), and the dance ends with Kristín dying on the king's arm. ABF stop here and add commonplace stanzas saying that Valdimar (and Burtleif) died and three corpses went into the same grave.

²⁶⁵ Text: II, p. 56.

²⁶⁶ See Liestøl 1931, p. 86.

CD add that he says to Soffía that he will reward her by never again coming to her bed.²⁶⁷

This ballad (TSB D 346) has travelled far and wide, for it is found in all the Nordic countries and also in Germany and among the Vends in Poland (a variant of the German version). There is also a related ballad in Scotland. As for the relationship between the Scandinavian and non-Scandinavian versions, scholars have reached the conclusion that the ballad was brought to Germany from Denmark.²⁶⁸ It is not possible to determine the connection with the Scottish ballad with the same degree of certainty, but there are various indications that it came from the Nordic countries as well, probably in a version closer to the Faroese-Icelandic than to the Danish.²⁶⁹ Oldest among the Nordic recordings are the Danish ones, one from the 16th century, several from the 17th and two variants (one of them a prose narrative, the other fragmentary) from the 19th century. Second oldest are the Icelandic recordings, all from the 17th century or the beginning of the 18th. Norwegian, Swedish and Faroese recordings all date from the 19th century.

The variations in content that are significant for the determination of the relationship between the Icelandic version and variants from other Scandinavian countries are these:^{270a} All indications are that the Icelandic version preserves the correct names of the four main characters. The Faroese variant and three of the Danish ones name the king, whose name is then Valdemar or names derived thereof. All except two Danish variants name the queen Soffía (Sophie); the same is true of the Faroese text and all the Icelandic ones except E where she is called Lúsía. The king's sister, whose name is Kristín in all Icelandic texts save one where her name is Katrín, is also called Kristín

²⁶⁷ Texts: A = I, p. 91, B = II, p. 64, C = III, p. 201, D = IV, p. 67, E = IV, p. 120 (one stanza), F = IV, p. 247.

²⁶⁸ "Den nyere tyske Forskning (John Meier, Louise Tuschke) bekræfter ud fra Studium af det samtlige tyske Materiale den af Grundtvig fremførte Antagelse (III S. 79), at den tyske Vise maa forklares som en Udløber af en af de forvanskede efter-middelalderlige nordiske Former . . ." Grøner-Nielsen in DGF, X, p. 261.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

^{270a} The content of the Swedish variants is summarized in DGF, III, pp. 69–70. About the ballad as a whole, see DGF, III, pp. 63–97, X, pp. 265–8, and Dal 1956, pp. 264ff.

everywhere else. Burtleif (or Burtleifur or Burisleif) is called Boris or Børre-lille in Denmark, Börje or Bojarten in Sweden, Brónsvenn in Norway, and all these are presumably variations on the same name. Burtleif does not occur in the Faroese version where Soffía, through magic, plays his actual role in the ballad, whereas a prince from England is named father of the child, which is related to the story as it appears in the Danish F-text and in the German version. The Danish variants can be divided into two groups. Both start with the queen asking the king to give his sister Kristín to her brother Boris as a wife, but he flatly refuses. In one of the versions, A-E, the king then goes on an expedition and the queen manages Kristín's seduction while he is away. She orders Boris to seduce her; he tries but gets nowhere until the queen employs rune magic, and then he gets his way. In the other version, FG, she answers the king's refusal already in the first conversation by saying that Kristín is carrying Boris' child. In this first part, the Icelandic and Faroese variants follow the first version in the main, while the Norwegian variant follows the second one. The part which follows this in the Danish versions, the messenger sent to Kristín and her leavetaking of the maids and children, is largely similar in the other Nordic variants. Kristín's tribulations in the palace, on the other hand, are to some extent different from the Icelandic version, particularly Soffía's role, which is everywhere both larger and much more evil than in Iceland. Thus, it is she herself who milks Kristín's breasts to convince the king when the dancing and exchanging of belts have made him believe that his sister is innocent, both in the Norwegian version and all the Danish variants. It is true that the Faroese variant does not mention the milking of breasts, but there it is Soffía who finally exhausts Kristín in the dance. The final passage in all the Danish variants and some of the Swedish ones, about Kristín's tortures and their culmination, does not exist in the West-Nordic area, though it is the central part of the ballad in Germany. In this part, we are told how the king beat his sister with whips until her lungs were laid bare and she lay dead before his feet. Then he repents and orders the burial of Kristín and the punishment of Boris. In the Danish F-text, Kristín reveals, on the point of death, that the emperor of England is the child's father and not Boris, and this information causes the king's repentance.

In content, the Faroese variant follows the Icelandic version to a

large extent, while the Norwegian ballad, for the most part, goes its own way. There, Kristín dances until her shoes are filled with blood, but nobody seems to notice this, and the king accuses the queen of lying. It is at this point that Soffía milks her. The king then summons Brónsvenn to his presence and offers him the alternative of being burnt at the stake or hanged. Brónsvenn shakes his sword in the face of the king who immediately relents and gives him his sister. The end is obviously influenced by other ballads.

There can be no doubt that all these Nordic variants are derived from Danish tradition, but what was it like when they broke away from it, and what is the nature of their internal relationships? Svend Grundtvig's answer to these questions was that the ballad described true incidents from the 12th century and that the Icelandic version was the one that showed the truest picture of the original form of the legend:

Ikke blot fra Smagens, men ogsaa fra den historiske Kritiks Side tror jeg derfor, at den islandske Fremstilling heraf, som i det hele taget den islandske Form af det her omhandlede Sagn, maa gives Fortrinet, og at den tør gjøre Krav paa at anses for en væsenlig sand Beretning om den tragiske Begivenhed, der alene gjennem denne Vise er kommen til vor Kundskab.^{270b}

It is no longer generally believed that Grundtvig was right concerning the great age of the so-called historical Danish ballads, nor concerning their historical veracity, but his relative chronology might nevertheless be correct. This seems to be the view taken by Grüner-Nielsen in his review of studies of the ballad.²⁷¹ The same view, with reservations, is expressed by Ernst Frandsen. He points out the analogy between the sadism of the Danish version and the sadism of religious art in the late Middle Ages, especially of the 15th century, but does not want to exclude the possibility of an older version, which then would probably have been more like the Icelandic one:

Men denne sene datering gælder ene og alene den foreliggende komposition, bag den kan der for så vidt godt gemme sig et ældre digterværk, ja måske to, en fremmed vise, Tyskland har jo flere

^{270b} DGF, III, p. 86.

²⁷¹ See DGF, X, p. 268.

sidestykker, og en dansk, som *kan* have forbindelse med Valdemartiden.²⁷²

It is impossible to go further into the problems connected with this ballad, but there seems to be no reason to assign to it any historicity nor to try a reconstruction of a form older than the preserved variants represent.

The first part of the ballad in Icelandic variants, describing how the king and Burisleif draw lots about who is to go on the expedition and Burisleif's feigning illness, is only found in Iceland; but some of the stanzas have parallels in Danish variants:

i-C 3 Burtleifur skyldi í leiðangur fara
en kongurinn skyldi heima vera.

d-A 10 Kongen skulle i leding fare:
Boris skulle hieme vere och tage landen warre.

f 2 Kong Valdimann skuldi í leiðinga fara,
drotning Sofía skuldi taka londini vara.

The seduction of Kristín occurs very rapidly in the Icelandic version, though she sometimes demurs. This is described in formulaic stanzas which are followed by a formulaic description of her giving birth, so this is probably an Icelandic change, whether it was caused by forgetfulness or was consciously made. In the Faroese version, the poor girl misses both dancing and other kinds of fun as Soffía gives her fish to eat which makes her pregnant. This is in accordance with the Danish version in so far as it is also Soffía who causes the pregnancy through her magic, though she uses a different method. As stated above, this feature is missing from the Norwegian tradition. Of course, this does not have to mean that there is a direct connection with the Danish variants that do not explain Kristín's pregnancy; it could simply have been omitted from a badly preserved ballad; anyway, the Norwegian version is here much closer to the Danish than the Icelandic version, cf. the accusation that Brónsvenn is a horse thief.

Valdimar's homecoming is described in formulas in Icelandic, Danish and Faroese variants, and the Faroese variant uses practically

²⁷² Frandsen 1969, p. 15.

the same formulas as the Danish ones; but no firm conclusion can be drawn from this link.

Soffía's accusations upon Valdimar's homecoming are verbally closely related both to the Danish texts and the Norwegian one:

i-A 7 "Hefur þú frétt þann undarlega harm,
Kristín liggur á Burtleifs arm."

d-G 4 "Ttha skall ieg ind sigge eder større harum:
liden Kiersten hun gaar med Borriesis baarnn."

n-B 4 "Eg sko' seia deg større harm:
líti Kjersti söve på Brónsvennis arm."²⁷³

i-C 19 "Það skal eg ekki ljúga,
börn eru komin að sjúga."

d-E 47 "Det er Guds sanden og ikke løyet:
Hun haver mig til sit Barsel bødet."

n-A 8 "Eg lýg ikkje anten på frúvur hell vív,
voggunne gjenge sö unde lí."

It is noteworthy that in n-B 4 we have an example where the Norwegian text is closer to the Icelandic than the Danish version.

In the description of the arrival of Valdimar's messenger to Kristín, a few stanzas are closely related in the Danish and Icelandic versions, while there is this difference in content, that he sees her children in the Icelandic version, which he does not do in the Danish version:

i-B 19 Sveinninn leggur sig við hliðglugga þá,
glatt logar ljós í hvörri krá.

20 Glatt logar ljós í hvörri krá,
einkum þar sem hún Kristín lá.

d-A 51 Di reed thill ded windue, och ind di saa:
da brende der lyss i huer en wraa.

²⁷³ The Norwegian variants are quoted from DGF, III, 913–14.

52 Der brennde lyss i huer en wraa:
och vox-kiert, som liden Kiersten laa.

Furthermore, the part where Kristín gives presents to her maids has fairly close verbal parallels both in the Faroese and Danish texts.

The most important scene in the ballad, in which its essential feeling is concentrated, is the testing and punishment of Kristín in the king's palace. Verbal parallels with the Icelandic texts are also most frequently found in this scene in Danish and Faroese variants. But it is remarkable that one part of the testing scene appears in Icelandic, Faroese and Norwegian variants, but not outside the West-Nordic area. The king asks Kristín to pour wine, but she demurs. Of course, this could be an original feature which has been preserved in these countries by coincidence, but a simpler explanation would be that this is a West-Nordic addition.

In this part, there is also one stanza which is verbally closest in the Icelandic and Norwegian versions. This is where Valdimar says to Soffía:

i-A 31 “Skamm bíddu, Soffía, þú skalt þig dey,
þú hefur logið á svein og mey.”

n-A 31 “Nå heve dú logji både på frúvur á möy,
Gud nåde deg, droning, nå lýte dú døy.”

In Danish variants, he also accuses her of having lied about Kristín, but the wording is not so closely related.

The comparison has not led to an unequivocal conclusion. As shown by the summary of the content, the Icelandic version is fairly independent. There can be no doubt that the Icelandic and Faroese versions are partly based on the same foundations, but, as so often occurs, there have been later Danish influences in the Faroes. This Faroese-Icelandic version must have been derived from the Danish one; they have so much in common and have so many verbal parallels. The question is then whether there is any reason to assume a special West-Nordic version, probably Norwegian, as a kind of intermediary, or whether it is more likely that the Icelandic and Faroese versions were brought from Denmark separately and are derived from a Danish version considerably different from the preserved ones. Judging from the great

differences between the Danish variants and from how much they still have in common which is different from or missing from this Faroese-Icelandic version, the last possibility is remote, unless one assumes this version to be derived from the Danish ballad in an earlier form than that shown in the Danish recordings. In the absence of any traces of such an older version, it seems a more natural conclusion that there was a West-Nordic, probably Norwegian, version which has left some traces in the extant variants from Norway, although these, as well as the Faroese variant, have later been influenced by Danish tradition. Admittedly, this is an uncertain conclusion.

In the hypothesis outlined above of the development of the ballad's tradition, it is assumed that the king's thrashing of Kristín is the cause of her death, as the Danish variants state, but not her dancing. There is reason to believe that Norwegian tradition formerly knew of the death caused by dancing, because in one stanza (n-A 30) it is said that her shoes were filled with blood. This fits in better with death caused by dancing than thrashing. It seems no less likely that the ballad's sadism was watered down as it was shortened and simplified on its way northwards, than to assume that all the variants in its country of origin acquired this new addition.

The lines in the Icelandic variants are on the longish side, although there are never more than three unstressed syllables between stressed ones. It is obvious that the old quantity rules are dominant, for only one stanza in all the variants (A 40) goes counter to them, and this could well be a distortion. The rhymes are ordinary ballad rhymes with a comparatively large portion of assonance.

The language of the ballad is by no means poor; endings are occasionally dropped, and possessive pronouns used without inflection, as is the rule in ballads. On the whole, however, the language is of high quality, which rather supports the idea that the ballad was brought to Iceland before the Reformation.

ÍF 53 Kvæði af Tófu og Suffaralín

Valdimann (Valdimar B) has a saddlebow inlaid with gold; little Tófa prepares for a journey, dresses in finery and rides until she comes to the town gate where she meets the priest Gunnar. She asks whether Valdimann has betrothed himself to a girl. He says that Valdimann is betrothed to

Suffaralín in Óðinsey. Valdimann has Tófa summoned to his presence and asks her how well she loves Suffaralín. Tófa says she loves her as well as her son Kristoforus, says she will give her a horse (fine clothes B) and the title of a queen as well. Valdimann then summons Suffaralín and puts the same questions to her; she says she loves Tófa as the snapping wolf that whines in the woods and says she will give her three farms and seven rings and wishes that she may burn alive in return for all her gifts. Tófa goes before the queen, who asks her whether she would rather talk to Valdimann or go with her to the bathhouse. Tófa says she would prefer to talk to the king, but Suffaralín drags her against her will to the bathhouse (and stokes the fire so fiercely that Tófa cannot catch her breath, B). Tófa calls for Kristoforus her son and asks him for help, but he says that he is held by twelve armoured men. Valdimann wonders at Tófa's absence from the evening mass, but Suffaralín says she is out of breath from the bathhouse. Valdimann compares them, thinks that the poor Tófa is much better than the rich Suffaralín. He says he would kill Suffaralín if she were a man and says he will vex her by never letting her into his bed. B says that she died from sorrow, but A says that he threw her out and got himself another wife called Kristín. (Both these are probably late additions.)²⁷⁴

This ballad, which is known in Iceland only from the oldest ballad collections, has been found in all the Nordic countries (TSB D 232). By far the best preservation is in Denmark where there are recordings from the 16th, 17th and 19th centuries. In Norway and the Faroes, there have only been fragments preserved from the 19th century. There are also Swedish recordings from the 19th century, but there the ballad has suffered considerable distortion and admixture of material from other ballads. The ballad's chief motif, a queen is killing her rival or having her killed, is found elsewhere in Europe, but that is not relevant here.²⁷⁵

The Icelandic ballad consists of two scenes, the former is Valdimann's conversation with the rivals, and the latter is the killing of Tófa in the bathhouse followed by a conversation between the king and the queen. The former scene is not found outside Iceland; the latter has its correspondence in four stanzas in the Faroese variant, a prose paraphrase in the Norwegian one, while in the Danish variants this is the main scene of the ballad as it is in the Icelandic version; but all the Danish variants contain a lot of material which is not found in the Icelandic version. It is evident from this that the basis for comparison

²⁷⁴ Texts: A = I, p. 6, B = III, p. 179, C = IV, p. 126 (one stanza).

²⁷⁵ See DGF, X, pp. 254–5.

is not extensive, but still an attempt will be made to use it to reach some knowledge concerning the relative positions of these versions.

In DGF III, Grundtvig presented a fairly thorough exposition of the divergences and similarities of the Danish and Icelandic versions. He emphasizes that the openings of the ballad in Danish and Icelandic variants are not mutually exclusive and wants to join these two versions.²⁷⁶

Axel Olrik has also written about this ballad and believes the Icelandic version to be more original:

Vi har to Toveviser, eller rettere vi har den samme Toveise i en oprindeligere Skikkelse (bevaret paa Island; den som vi her kalder A) og i en yngre Omdannelse (B; som den senere blev sunget i Danmark).²⁷⁷

Grüner-Nielsen on the other hand, does not think that the two main versions of the ballad can be seen as deriving from a common prototype, since the ballad seems to have been through repeated transformations, and he doubts Olrik's conclusion that the Icelandic form is in agreement with an older version of the Danish ballad.²⁷⁸ Further, he refutes the theory, advanced by Henrik Schück, that the ballad is originally Swedish and composed about Swedish royalty:

Hypothesen om en tabt svensk Urform synes derfor at savne Støttepunkter.

Hvor tidligt Sagnet om den skinsyge Dronnings Hævn er knyttet til Valdemar den Stores Dronning Sofie, er umuligt at afgøre, men Visens Tilblivelsestid kan dog neppe være senere end Slutningen af 13. Aarhundrede. Thi Visen maa være blevet til paa et Tidspunkt, da man endnu vidste, at Valdemar den Stores Frille hed Tove.²⁷⁹

Presumably, all the names in the Icelandic version are the original ones, if we assume that the peculiar form *Suffaralín* is some kind of distortion of *Sofie* (*Sofie* has become *Sylverlin* in a Norwegian variant of *Soffiu kvæði*; an intermediary form could have been *Sofielil* (little

²⁷⁶ See DGF, III, pp. 20–34.

²⁷⁷ Olrik 1908, p. 42.

²⁷⁸ See DGF, X, pp. 253–4.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

Sophie, cf. *Tove/Tovelil*). *Tófa* (*Tovelil*) bears the same name in all variants. The king is also called Valdimann in the Faroes, while in the Danish recordings he is called *Valdemar*. On the other hand, he is anonymous both in Norway and Sweden. The queen is anonymous in Danish variants except that she is called *Sofie* in d-B. Syv calls her *Helvig* but this is undoubtedly his own insertion, as this was the name of the queen of King Valdemar Atterdag, about whom he thought the ballad was composed. In the Faroes, on the other hand, she is also called *Soffía*, and, strangely enough, the same name is also used in Norway, although the Norwegian text is largely based on Syv. The son *Kristoforus* also appears in Danish variants while in the Faroes his name has been changed to the more familiar *Kristian*. In both the Danish variants and the Faroese one, there are two sons. Sons or a son do not appear in Norwegian or Swedish variants. If we accept that Suffaralín is derived from Sofie, the names in the Icelandic version are all historical, for King Valdemar the Great (1131–1182) had a queen called Soffía, a mistress called Tófa and a son called Kristoforus with the latter. There is no probability that anything else in the ballad is historical.

The most frequently used refrain in the Danish variants is *Med råde/Kong Valdemar lover dem både* (with some variations). This refrain does not seem to have gained ground outside Denmark, except in Norway, where it has been adopted from Syv. Still, there may be some kind of an echo from this refrain in i-B: *Með mæði/þann herlegi mann/sigla þeir stóran æginn*.

In the Icelandic variants, it is a fact from the beginning that Tófa is Valdimann's mistress and has a grown-up son with him, while the real action starts with the impending marriage of Valdimann and Soffía. On the other hand, one Danish variant begins with describing the first meeting of Valdemar and Tófa, while in another one this scene is interwoven in the scene that usually opens the Danish version: there is a dance in the king's palace and Tófa joins in. Either there is an interchange between her and the queen, where it appears that Tófa is the king's mistress, or between her and the king, who then wishes that the queen were dead (thus also in a Norwegian and a Faroese variant, cf. ÍF 54). It is not until we come to the events leading to the bathhouse scene that we find corresponding stanzas.

There is an obvious connection between the Danish and Icelandic

versions where Soffía asks Tófa to come with her to the bathhouse, though it has been weakened because of the intrusion of formulaic expressions in the Icelandic version. In the Danish variants, Tófa goes willingly and unsuspecting to the bathhouse; and this is probably original. In the Icelandic variants, Soffía drags her forcibly to the bathhouse. The same thing happens in the Faroese variants, except that the roles have been reversed and it is Tófa who drags Soffía:

i-A 26 So var hún Suffaralín í höndunum stinn,
dregið gat hún Tófu litlu í baðstofu inn.

f-B 7 Tá var hon Tóva í hondunum stinn,
og neyðug fekk hon Sofíu í baðstovuna inn.

Here the Faroese variant ends, but its opening is closely related to Danish variants, especially d-A.

Tófa's son, Kristoforus, plays a similar role in the Danish as in the Icelandic versions, especially in d-C. There he forces his way into the bathhouse but too late. The verbal relationship is not very close. In the conclusion of the Icelandic A-text, there is one stanza (also found in ÍF 52) which has a parallel in Syv's text:

i-A 36 "Það skal eg, Suffaralín, skaprauna þér,
þú skalt aldrei koma í sæng hjá mér."

d-D 33 Det fik Dronning Helvig, for Tovelild var brændt:
Ret aldrig kom hun med Dan Kongen til seng.

The comparative material is too meagre and too restricted to Iceland and Denmark for any extensive conclusions to be drawn from it, other than pointing out the great difference between the versions of the ballad in these two countries. The Faroese text is quite remarkable, though it is short and fragmentary. In what seems to be Schröter's original recording, f-B, the ballad's language is a mixture of Danish and Faroese, which rather speaks against an early date for the ballad in the Faroes.²⁸⁰ Still, it should be kept in mind that the stanza quoted above and the following stanza, which is only a variation on the first, seem to be in pure Faroese. Therefore, it is tempting to guess that this

²⁸⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 253.

short Faroese fragment is in fact a mixture of two versions, an older Faroese and a later Danish one.

In several places, the Icelandic variants of this ballad have lines so long that it would seem more natural to sing them with six stresses instead of four. It is interesting that there is a marked difference between the scenes in this respect. The lines of the first main scene, where the king talks to the ladies, are generally shorter and more like normal Icelandic ballad lines. The language of the ballad is fairly good and there are no signs of raw Danish to be seen through the Icelandic surface. Adjectives and possessive pronouns are usually uninflected, as is the main rule in ballad language; the rhymes are sometimes inaccurate, e.g., *fús:ljós*, but no more so than is to be expected. The rhyme *sjau:þau* found in the A-text would probably have sounded better before 1500 than after, but the stanza looks like an addition.²⁸¹ The old rules of quantity seem to be strictly adhered to in rhyming syllables, and even though feet that are too short occur within a couple of lines, this could easily be distortions.

On the whole, *Kvæði af Tófu og Suffaralín* has the appearance of having been brought to Iceland before the Reformation, probably around the same time as *Soffiu kvæði*. It is so clearly distinguished from the Danish tradition of the ballad that it is a natural conclusion that it represents an old West-Nordic tradition, but there is almost no evidence for the existence of such a tradition outside Iceland.

ÍF 54 Kvæði af frúnni Kristínu

A starts with describing what a loss the young Kristín suffered when she lost her father, mother, five brothers and three sisters; but after this A and B are in agreement. The king has Kristín summoned to his presence, says he wished that she were his beloved and that the queen were dead so that he could more easily get her. The queen hears the conversation, has Kristín summoned to her presence and asks her what the king said to her. She answers that knights had asked for her hand and she sought the king's advice. The queen says she lies and repeats the king's words. The queen orders her men to burn Kristín at the stake. They become angry at this, take a boat and carry Kristín to the land of a heathen king. They take Kristín to the king, bringing greetings from the Christian king who has sent him

²⁸¹ See Björn K. Þórólfsson 1925, p. xx.

fine presents and Kristín for a wife. Here, Kristín intervenes and says she will rather die than marry a heathen king. The king gets himself baptized in a hurry, and they are married. Kristín puts a casket on her knees and gives the men presents. She asks them to carry greetings to the king and wishes him all blessings. She also sends regards to the evil queen and asks them to remind her (tell the king, A) how they exchanged caskets. 'Mine was whole, but hers was broken. My services have been badly paid for.'²⁸²

This ballad has been found in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and there is further one recording in the Faroes (TSB D 232).

The initial stanza of the A-text is a quatrain and must have been borrowed from another ballad, e.g., ÍF 18, where a similar beginning could easily fit. The reason why it was possible to join it to a ballad in couplets is that it is in a repetitive metre, and therefore only has a one-line refrain with each stanza. In fact, stanzas 2–4 in A, describing the loss of Kristín's relatives, are not found in any other variant of this ballad and are obviously formulaic material loosely joined to its beginning.

The story in the non-Icelandic versions is very similar to that given in the summary above. There is a particularly close relationship between d-A, found in manuscripts from around 1600, and the Icelandic version. Other Danish variants, among them the one recorded in the Faroes, are not as closely related to the Icelandic ones. A special feature of the Norwegian variants is that it is the king who sends Kristín away from the country to save her from the queen's revenge. Here, too, the queen gets her punishment: she is killed by the king when he gets Kristín's message, which in this case is far clearer than the symbolic language of the Icelandic and Danish versions.

The close relationship between the Danish and Icelandic versions appears in the wording of the stanzas through the whole ballad. A few examples will suffice here:

- i-A 5 Kongurinn talar við sveina sín:
 "Kallið á hana Kristínu hún komi til mín."
- 6 Sveinninn kom fyrir Kristínar borð:
 "Kongurinn sendi yður orð."
- d-B 3 Danner-konning heder at suenen tho:
 "I beder liden Kierstin ind for mig gaa!"

²⁸² Texts: A = I, p. 85, B = III, p. 189.

4 Ind kom di kongens mend, stedis for bord:
 “Liden Kierstin, i skall thalle med wor herre it ord.”

i-A 12 “Vilda eg að mín drottning væri deyð,
 skylda eg fanga þig, rósín reyð.”

B 7 “Hættu þig, kongur, talaðu ei það,
 mann þvingar það ekki má.”

d-A 4 “Giffue ded Gud, min droning ware døed!
 da skulle i werre min fester-møe.

5 “Thier quer, min herre, i sigger icke slig!
 min frue ere dannis och dydelig.

6 Min edelig herre, i sigger icke saa!
 ded ere den thingest, icke werre maa.”

Examples of this kind could be multiplied, but the most closely related stanzas are: i-A 13 and d-A 3, i-B 9 and d-A 8, i-A 25 and d-A 25, i-A 26–7 and d-A 27–8, i-A 28 and d-F 22, i-A 29 and d-A 35, cf. also d-F 21, i-A 30 and d-A 37.

Only in one part of the ballad, the message Kristín sends to the queen, can we find stanzas equally closely related to the Icelandic version in Norwegian and Danish texts, but it has to be taken into account that the message is longer and fuller in the Norwegian texts, while it is quite identical in the Icelandic and Danish versions:

i-A 33 “Segðu mínum herranum í frá
 hvörsu við skiptum þeim skrínunum þá.

i-B 28, A 34 Mitt var heilt en hennar var brotið,
 illa hef eg minnar þjónustu notið.”

i-B 27 “Heilsíð minni ríkri frú
 og spyrjið hana hvörninn vær skulum skipta skríni úr.”

d-A 39 “I beder min frue thencke der-paa:
 der vi skiffte di skrine saa smaa.

40 Medt ware heeldt, och hinded ware brødt:
fuld lided haffuer ieg min thieneste nødt.”

n-B 12 “No helsar du kungen så mange gónatt!
men droningji helsar du stór útaktk!”²⁸³

C 30 “Dú be, hó vi’ minnast, hor me va’ då,
den tí, at me býtte ’kons skríni so små.”²⁸⁴

The B-text has *krónunne små* in the same place, but continues:

n-B 14 “Mí va’ heile, á hennes va’ broti;
sá iddi hev eg mí tenesta noti.

In n-B and C, they are also said to have exchanged dresses, clean and soiled; and this appears in d-F.

The casket, the crown and the dress are obviously symbols of virginity, and the same motif appears in the Tristan legends. In *Tristrams saga*, chapters 47 and 48, it is related how Queen Ísönd tries to ensure the silence of her maid Bringvet, who has helped her to deceive King Mark by sleeping with him on the wedding night, by ordering two slaves to kill her. Bringvet then tells the slaves that she has done nothing to harm the queen except to exchange nightgowns (*náttserkr*) with her before Ísönd had entered the king’s bed; the queen’s nightgown had become soiled because of too careless use, and she had lent her a clean one. She is not killed, however, and the queen repents.²⁸⁵

It seems very likely that the whole incident in the ballad draws directly on *Tristrams saga*, though this is impossible to prove. At any rate, one must assume that of the three kinds of symbols used in the different ballad texts, the dress is the most original one. Consequently, the casket, which is the only symbol used in the Icelandic version as well as most of the Danish ones, is a secondary feature, confirming that the connection between these versions is especially close.

In addition to those features already mentioned which show a special connection between the Icelandic version and the oldest Danish aristo-

²⁸³ DGF, III, p. 151.

²⁸⁴ DGF, III, p. 915.

²⁸⁵ See *Tristrams saga*, pp. 99–103 (chs. 47 and 48).

cratic recordings, especially A, there is the stanza form. The Icelandic variants are both in the same kind of repetitive metre, as are d-A and B. Although the refrains in these recordings are not the same, they are in the same rhythm, so they could easily have been sung to the same tune. There is, in fact, the same rhythm in the refrains of s-A and n-A, and the former is also most closely related to the Icelandic one: *Ty hon var dejeligen vacker*. This connection between the Icelandic and the Swedish variants, whose relationship is otherwise distant, could indicate that the Icelandic refrain is not very different from the refrain originally sung to this ballad.

The Icelandic variants are rather clumsy metrically, and some of the lines are extremely long, e.g., *guð náði hann skaða sem hún fékk um sinn, kóngurinn í kristindóminum sendi yður orð, hann sendi yður orð og góðar gáfur*. The last line is, furthermore, not in agreement with the old quantity rules which do not allow a four-stress line ending \acute{x} . All these examples are from A, but B also contains many similar features.

The language of the ballad is characterized by an extensive use of formulas which often correspond to Danish formulas in the same positions in the Danish variants. One can safely say that the diction of the ballad is fairly poor, though this is hardly conclusive evidence for a late dating. As the wording is often very closely related to the Danish texts, they rhyme generally better, e.g., *gave:have*, which becomes *gáfur:ráðs*.

The conclusion is that the ballad came to Iceland directly from Denmark at a late date, hardly much earlier than 1600, perhaps even somewhat later.

ÍF 55 Kvæði af Kristínu og Ásbirni

Kristín asks her mother's permission to cut clothes for Ásbjörn. Having received permission, she lays the clothes on boards and cuts out various chivalrous motifs to sew into them, roses and lilies, a ship, a deer in the forest, a pretty maiden being kissed by a knight. Then she asks her brother to give the clothes to Ásbjörn. He says he does not know Ásbjörn, but she says he will be sitting in the middle of the circle at the assembly, strumming a harp and wearing a ring of gold. He finds Ásbjörn and gives him the clothes. Ásbjörn inspects the clothes, blesses the one who sewed them and

asks him to carry to her the message that she is to attend his wedding and be the bride.²⁸⁶

The ballad is found all over the Nordic countries (TSB D 16). Elsewhere, it has an introduction which is missing in Icelandic: Hr. Peder (Iver, Espen, Asbjörn) asks Espen (Peder, the king) to give him Kristín for a wife. The other asks why he wants one who neither knows how to cut clothes nor sew. (In the Norwegian and Faroese versions, the roles are reversed, and it is the suitor who doubts Kristín's domestic talents.) The suitor then buys cloth and sends it to her. This is undoubtedly original, for it would hardly have been regarded as good form on Kristín's part to court a man in as open a fashion as she does in the Icelandic version. The Norwegian and Faroese versions also show rather bad form, as there the father makes an offer of his daughter. The continuation is then similar everywhere. Most of the variants end in a similar manner, i.e., with Ásbjörn's words after he has inspected the clothes and declares that he is going to marry Kristín. In Syv, the ballad takes an unexpected turn, for she answers that he will never possess her, and this has seeped into the Faroese version.

The beginning of the Icelandic text is made up of formulaic stanzas with parallels elsewhere. When it comes to the part that deals with the sewing, there is a great deal of material for comparison, as this is the part of the ballad that was most peculiar and memorable, and it is everywhere preserved with closely similar turns of phrase. Thus, the rhymes *liljur:pilju*, *saum:straum*, *brysti:kyssti* and the content of the stanzas where they are found have close parallels in Faroese, Norwegian, Danish, and some of them in Swedish recordings. Thus, no conclusion can be drawn from these stanzas. One Icelandic stanza has a parallel only in the Faroes, and this is one of the features that indicate that there must exist a tradition there that is older than Syv:

i-B 4 Hún skar á hans ermar fram
það fegursta dýr í skógi rann.

f-A 19 Hon skar í hans ermur fram,
hvørt tað djúr, í skógnum rann.

²⁸⁶ Texts: A = I, p. 192, B = III, p. 252, C = IV, p. 124 (one stanza), D = IV, p. 236, E = V, p. 3, F = VI, p. 188.

In the Faroese variant, this stanza is a variation on another one which is found elsewhere, but not in Iceland:

f-A 20 Hon skar í hans ermukrans
fimtan jomfrúur í ein dans.

n-B 11 De sette hó på hass ermekrans:
han slær på gullhorpa, han bere gullband.²⁸⁷

d-C 13 Hun skar i hans ermekrans
femten iomfruer i en dans.

In itself, this variant stanza in the Icelandic and Faroese versions is of small consequence as evidence of a separate West-Nordic branch of the tradition, but there is the additional circumstance that the whole last part of the ballad has some very distinctive characteristics in the West-Nordic variants:

i-A 9 Kristín talar við bróður sinn:
“Færðu hönum Ásbirni klæðin sín.”

f-A 26 Lítin Kristin talar til sín drong:
“Ber mær Ásbjørni klæðini fram!”

i-A 10 “Hvörninn má eg hönum klæðin bera,
eg kenni hann ekki Ásbjörn herra.”

11 “Þegar þú kemur á örva þing
Ásbjörn situr í miðjan hring.

12 Ásbjörn situr í miðjan hring,
stillir hörpu og ber gullhring.”

n-B 16 “Eg si’ bera din saumen frem,
kjente eg herr Asbjønn frá sine hommenn.”

17 “Herr Asbjønn æ’ kjend fra sine hommenn,
han slær på gullhorpa, han bere gullband.

²⁸⁷ DGF, X, p. 277.

18 **Á** når dú kjem í stoga inn,
herr Asbjønn sit fremst í manning.

f-B 15 “Hvøssu skal eg bera tann seyminn fram,
eg kenni ei Ásbjörn for annan mann?”

16 “Ásbjörn han er eyðkend,
hans er kápan gullrend.

17 Ásbjörn er ein eyðkend mann,
hann stýrir gullsnökkju, ber reyðargullband.”

Only one Danish text, A, has anything that is related to this in content. There, we find one stanza with instructions to the messenger:

d-A 14 “I-nar du komer till tinge-stok,
der holder her Ieffuer med gulle lok.”

There is one more stanza that shows the special relationship between the West-Nordic versions:

i-A 13 “Þar eru þér, Ásbjörn, klæðin þín,
saumaði Kristín systir mín.”

n-B 20 “Høy rer dú herr Asbjønn, eg tale ti deg:
her æ' saumen frá líte Kjersti.”

f-B 19 Ternan mælir for munni sín:
“Eg eri send við seymin tín.”

Comparison has shown that it is fully justifiable to talk about a West-Nordic tradition of this ballad, to which the Icelandic version undoubtedly belongs. Although some features are more closely related to the Icelandic version in Faroese than in Norwegian variants, this is not always so, and there is no particular reason to assume that the ballad was brought to Iceland from the Faroes.

The language of the Icelandic variants is of a fairly high quality and its rhythm is supple. The old quantity rules are adhered to with one minor exception, and there is nothing that contradicts the assumption that the ballad was brought to Iceland before the Reformation, which is in accordance with its West-Nordic origin.

ÍF 56 Riddara kvæði

A knight sees a young maiden in a high castle tower, enters and wakes up the maiden. She asks him to go away, but he says he has come to touch her flesh. They lie down and wake up when they hear singing swords. 'He took the woman in his arms and a sword in the right hand and managed to reach his horse unscathed.'²⁸⁸

This ballad is not found elsewhere, although the chief motif, forcible entry into a woman's bedroom, is among the most common in ballads. There is a certain inconsistency in the narrative method, because the ballad starts with the knight's first person narrative, then there is a dialogue between the couple, directly followed by a third person narrative.²⁸⁹ The last stanza in the manuscript is in a different metre from the rest and not in ballad style. It has presumably been added by the scribe.

Riddara kvæði is in a quatrain metre with the same rhythm as in the *rimur* metre *ferskeytt*, so that the rhyming feet are feminine and long according to old quantity rules, $\acute{ } x$. In the 4th stanza, there is an exception to this, where we get the rhymes *saka:vaka* which have a short stressed syllable according to the old quantity and equal masculine rhyme. If we assume that this stanza is original to the ballad, it either indicates that the old rules of quantity had begun to change when the ballad was composed or that this rhyme is to be interpreted as masculine, indicating that the poet wavered between the *ferskeytt* model and the usual ballad quatrain with masculine rhymes.

Riddara kvæði contains more alliteration than most or all other Icelandic ballads, though the traditional rules of alliteration are not followed. On the contrary, one might imagine that the poet tried to avoid it, though haunted by alliterative phrases. The occurring alliteration is of various kinds, sometimes imperfect or faulty according to the rules: *Eg var úti snemma myrgins/ so skal kvæðið inna; hún var so á allan hátt/ sem hvör mann mundi kjósa*. Often, lines are alliterated without respect to whether they are even or odd lines and without an accompanying alliteration (*höfuðstafur*) in the following line:

²⁸⁸ Text: III, p. 185.

²⁸⁹ The same shift from first to third person narrative is found in ÍF 18, 46 and 57, and it also occurs in English and Danish ballads, cf. Gerould 1957, p. 8, and Steenstrup 1891, pp. 48–50.

8 Hann tók frúna sér í fang,
sverð með hægri hendi,
klýfur hann bjarta brynju blá
og rauðan skjöld út renndi.

In another stanza, the poet has reached the last line when he seems to remember that he must not let the traditional rules of alliteration dominate him:

6 Eg vil upp í yðar sæng
mitt eðla vífið bjarta
og minnst við þitt megta hold,
treysta á hug og hjarta.

This widespread but irregular use of alliteration must mean that the poet was an Icelander and brought up on alliterative poetry.

The vocabulary is of a genuine ballad kind: *borg*, *borgarturn*, *lilja*, *eikitré*, *hæga loft*, *ríku frúrnar*, *jómfrú*, etc. In spite of this, the diction is purely Icelandic and shows no sign of being a translation from another language.

Riddarakvæði is thematically related to several West-Nordic heroic ballads in which the champion manages to fight his way through the circle of men that the maiden's relatives have gathered around him. It is, however, very different in style from such ballads, tersely composed in a lyrical mode.

There are few or no indications about the age of this ballad. It seems to have been composed while the old quantity rules were still in force, or at least before they were relaxed to any great extent. It is impossible to detect any omissions from the ballad, and even though its ending is somewhat abrupt, this does not necessarily mean that it was originally longer.

Riddara kvæði is preserved in a rather small ballad collection, AM 153 8vo II, written in the late 17th century by Oddur Jónsson in Vatnsfjörður who also wrote the B-copy of Gissur Sveinsson's collection.²⁹⁰ Next to *Riddara kvæði* in the manuscript are two other ballads, ÍF 57 and 58, which are also found only in this manuscript and which also show clear signs of having been composed in Iceland. ÍF 4, *Ríka álfs kvæði*, another ballad with many characteristics that indicate it to be

²⁹⁰ See ÍF, I, pp. xv–xvi.

Icelandic, is not found in any other manuscript. Apart from this, *Kvæði af Hringi kongi og Alexander*, with its many Icelandic characteristics, is only found in this manuscript and another textually related one, and this is one of the manuscripts which contain *Tristrams kvæði*. It is hard to tell if this concentration of what seem to be indigenous Icelandic ballads in one small collection has any significance, but it seemed worth pointing out.

ÍF 57 Þiðriks kvæði kongs

A knight meets a lady on a castle lawn (probably scribal error for castle tower). They talk and she tells him that her father will kill him if he hears of this. He is still determined to sleep with her. The king asks his daughter a little later why her dress is getting shorter. She answers that her maids have cut it, but he says he sees the handiwork of King Þiðrik. Birgir takes a boat and sails to the lands of King Þiðrik; they fight for three days and King Birgir is killed.²⁹¹

The narrative method is somewhat mixed, as it is in *Riddara kvæði*. The initial stanza is in the first person, but this could be a direct borrowing from *Riddara kvæði*, for there one can find, with slight variation, the line that appears here. Apart from this, the narrative is in the third person. The ending must be missing from the ballad, but its brisk tone indicates that the girl must have got King Þiðrik himself as compensation for the loss of her father.

Þiðriks kvæði kongs is in quatrains of the same type as *Tristrams kvæði*; it has one of the most intricate preludes found in Icelandic ballads and a refrain which is the last line from the prelude. The metre is regular with 4 + 2 stresses in each half stanza and masculine rhymes. Alliteration is relatively frequent, as in most ballads in this metre, but not as heavy as in *Riddara kvæði*.

The language is fluent and idiomatic; there is even a kenning, *falda brik* (woman), and another one not correctly formed, *hlunna mar* (sea; used correctly it would mean a ship). Otherwise, the vocabulary is quite fitting for a ballad of chivalry. *Þiðriks kvæði kongs* is undoubtedly Icelandic and probably of similar age as *Riddara kvæði*.

²⁹¹ Text: III, p. 182.

ÍF 58 Klerks kvæði

In the Pope's city, there is a cleric decked in worldly finery who has travelled widely and accomplished much. In his travels, he finds a princess and talks to her; she invites him to a feast, and soon he wants to take her to bed. She warns him that her father comes every night to check on her. He then says he wishes he were in the country where he was born. The king goes with his men to the house and is going to wake his daughter but is told that she has disappeared. The king then sends strongly worded letters to the land of the Saracens and demands that they should be burnt at the stake.²⁹²

This ballad is in third person narrative with inserted dialogue. It is in the same variant of the quatrain metre as *Riddara kvæði*: the rhyming feet are always feminine with a long accented syllable. There is a great deal of alliteration in individual lines, though not as much as in *Riddara kvæði*. As a whole, the metrical characteristics unequivocally indicate that this is an Icelandic ballad. It has no refrain.

There are certain obscure points in the story: the protagonist acts more like a knight than a cleric most of the time, and if nothing is missing between stanzas 7 and 8, one must assume that he is a magician as well. However, clerics may do the most unexpected things in many medieval exempla or adventure romances, and it seems not unlikely that reminiscences of some such narrative have been the primary material the poet used. The chief motif is certainly common in ballads, but its treatment is peculiar in some ways. The ballad begins with a comparatively thorough presentation of the protagonist, which is rather unusual and quite different from both *Riddara kvæði* and *Þiðriks kvæði kongs*. We are told that the cleric wanted to go to bed with the girl but not whether his wish was realized. Ballads are ordinarily silent about people's wishes and have more to say about their actions. We also learn that the king sent threatening letters to the land of the Saracens but not whether he tried to execute them. These features indicate that although the poet wanted to make a ballad and had a fairly good idea of how he should go about it, he was not really familiar with ballad conventions.

There can hardly be any doubt that this ballad had a previous life in oral tradition, because of the fragmentary nature of the narrative and the abrupt conclusion. In the beginning of one of the stanzas, there is also a phrase that must be a distortion: *það var klerksins óðalag*.

²⁹² Text: III, p. 184.

There is a number of phrases that sound genuinely Icelandic and could not possibly be word for word translations from a Scandinavian language, e.g., *frétti allt hið sanna, fylkisdóttir* for princess, *að hrinda sút og ekka*. The last two lines of the ballad also are of the same kind, besides being very good poetry with the contrast between pale death and bright fire: *Þau skulu dapran dauða fá/ og brenna á björtum eldi*.

All indications are that this ballad was composed in Iceland, and it is not unlikely that it dates from the same period as the two preceding ballads.

ÍF 59 Systkina kvæði

A maiden walks to a well; there comes a knight who promises her gold if she will be betrothed to him. She asks what she is to tell her mother if she sees her carrying gold, and he answers that she shall say that she found it. She then asks him to sit down by her side and says she will tell him of her sorrows. She says her mother died when she was born and the father when the mother was buried. Then the knight answers: "I did not know you were my sister."²⁹³

This ballad (TSB D 90) is also found in Denmark, Sweden and Norway, and the story is in all important respects the same everywhere. It is a fostermother she expects will show surprise at the gold—the mother in the Icelandic version being an obvious anomaly. In most places, there is also a fuller account of her relatives, e.g., we are told that her brother (Svend), the only other family member to survive, found foster parents for her. Outside Scandinavia there are also ballads with related content.²⁹⁴

The Nordic texts are all closely related, but even so comparison yields but little profit. The opening of the Icelandic text has an exact parallel in Swedish variants:

- i 1 Jómfrú gekk til brunna,
hún bleikir sinn hvítan tvinna.
- 2 Bleikti hún sinn hvíta fald,
þar kom riddari ríðandi í garð.

²⁹³ Text: I, p. 174.

²⁹⁴ See DGF, VI, pp. 449–50.

s-C 1 Jungfrun gick sig åt lunden —
Hon skulle tvätta tvinne.

s-D 2 Rätt som hon tvätta' som allra bäst,
Så kom der en riddare ridandes.²⁹⁵

The wording of the seduction scene is very closely related everywhere, but in one place the relationship with the Danish text is closest:

i 5 “Segðu þú hafir fundið
undir einum lundi.”

d-A 9 “Du sige, du haffuer det fundet,
op under en lind oprunden!

The Norwegian variant is obviously based on Syv: the narrative in both these variants is in the first person throughout, the refrain is the same and practically every stanza is identical. Still, there is one exception to this, and just in that place there is complete agreement between the Norwegian text, the Icelandic one and some Swedish variants:

i 7 “Ég var fædd þegar haninn gól,
mín móðir dó þegar upp kom sól.”

n 7 “Å eg va fødd før hanen gol,
å mi moer va dø, før opp rann sol.”²⁹⁶

s-B 8 “Och jag blef född innan hanen gol;
Min moder vardt död innan upprunnen sol.”
(Min moder dog innan upprunnen sol. C)

One more example of a close relationship with Swedish texts can be found, i.e., in i 6 and s-A 6, D 7.

The oldest recording of the ballad in Denmark is from just after the middle of the 17th century; the second oldest is Syv's text; all the other recordings date from the 19th century. The oldest recording is s-A from around 1600, but it is obviously distorted, so the ballad must then have lived for a while in oral tradition.

²⁹⁵ Swedish BCD are printed in Geijer & Afzelius, I, pp. 46–50.

²⁹⁶ Moltke Moe: *Folkeminne frå Bøherad* (Norsk folkeminnelags skrifter, 9), p. 84.

This ballad is probably composed either in Denmark or Sweden. If it is Danish, the Icelandic text must be derived from a Swedish version in which case it would most probably have come to Iceland through Norway. And, in fact, we can see signs of the Swedish version in Norway and Iceland in the stanzas quoted above. If the ballad is Swedish, the parallel features in the Icelandic and Swedish variants are probably original to the ballad. In that case, it is impossible to determine how the ballad was brought to Iceland: directly from Sweden, through Denmark or through Norway. In any case, we cannot speak of any particular West-Nordic version of this ballad, though it is possible that it was brought to Iceland through Norway.

The rhymes in *Systkina kvæði* are poor, cf. *brunna:tvinnna, fald:garð, segja:bera, mér:sorger, hulinn:sálar, vissi:systir*; only three stanzas have full rhymes. On the other hand, the metre is well handled, and there are no particular signs of translation in the diction, so that cannot be used as evidence for a late transmission of *Systkina kvæði* to Iceland. The question of its age and origin must remain open.

ÍF 60 Ásu kvæði

Ása hears a beautiful song and finds a slave tied up who asks her to untie him and promises not to betray her. She says she fears that he will betray her, but he calls the king of the land as witness that neither of them will betray the other. She unties his fetters, and then he says that he has travelled in nine lands and betrayed ten girls, and she will now become the eleventh one. Thus far, complete variants are practically identical, and many of them end here (ACEFOX). But, in a few variants, there is a continuation describing how she got away from him: a) she asks him to wait while she goes to the green glade, and he waits for a long time but she does not return (thus in GMPQSUY; D has only the stanza where she asks him to wait); b) she starts to call out loud and her father comes, K; c) she has him bound again, LV (there is no explanation of how she is able to do this).²⁹⁷

²⁹⁷ Texts: A = I, p. 181, B = IV, p. 126 (one stanza), C = IV, p. 233, D = V, p. 6, E = V, p. 62 (fragm.), F = V, p. 99, G = V, p. 142 (the opening is missing), H = V, p. 213 (half a stanza), I = V, p. 216 (one stanza), J = V, p. 219 (first line only), K = VI, p. 63 (fragm.), L = VI, p. 66, M = VI, p. 99, N = VI, p. 128 (one stanza), O = VI, p. 132, P = VI, p. 166, Q = VII, p. 16, R = VII, p. 20 (one stanza), S = VII, p. 62, T = VII, p. 113 (one stanza), U = VII, p. 151, V = VII, p. 178 (This variant corresponds, apart from a number of linguistic archaisms, to the L-text, and is in fact somehow connected with its scribe, Gísli Konráðsson,

As is shown by the large number of recordings, though in fact many of them are incomplete, this ballad was among the most popular in the 19th century, and it has been tape-recorded in recent years. The type (TSB D 411 and 412) is found in all the Nordic countries except the Faroes, and in fact in most places where European languages are spoken. As is to be expected with such a widespread poem, the literature investigating its origin and dissemination is vast.²⁹⁸

When we state that the same ballad is found in many countries, the reservation must be made that the story has been so radically transformed in Iceland that it would hardly be recognizable if it were not for the fact that many individual stanzas and lines are the same in Icelandic as in other Nordic variants, though they have in fact been totally reordered. This can best be demonstrated by comparison with the story as it is in most foreign versions: A knight seduces a maiden and takes her away from her home. When they come to the green glade, he starts digging a grave and tells her that he has earlier seduced and killed eight maidens and that she is the ninth. The maiden suggests that she should search him for lice before the execution. He agrees and falls asleep; she ties him and then wakes him up, says she does not want to betray him while he is asleep. He tries to get her to untie him but she takes his sword and kills him, then rides back home. This summary is based on the old Danish version, but actually the same story is found in all the Nordic countries. Of course, the variations become greater the farther afield we go, but the actual core of the story is everywhere the same, as Holger Olof Nygard says in his study of the ballad:

In its passage through time and space the ballad narrative has undergone great changes. But the narrative core of the ballad, its narrative "idea", has remained intact: a villain entices a girl away from her home to kill her as he has killed others; she through bravery and presence of mind defeats his designs by a ruse; and he, pleading for his life, is destroyed by her.²⁹⁹

on whose recording this variant is probably based, cf. ÍF VII, p. lvi), W = VII, p. 182 (fragm.), X = VII, p. 185, Y = VII, p. 194, Z = VIII, p. 13.

²⁹⁸ In addition to erudite studies by Grundtvig, Doncieux, Child, and Meier in their respective editions, the fullest treatments are found in Kemppinen 1954, Nygard 1958, and Vargyas 1967, pp. 129-57.

²⁹⁹ Nygard 1958, p. 319.

From this summary, we can see that the Icelandic variant is in fact nothing but a vague memory of the original narrative. Its connection with the Scandinavian versions has been thoroughly traced by Nygard and his conclusion is this:

What is interesting about the Icelandic ballad . . . is that nearly every stanza is reminiscent of a stanza from the Scandinavian sister countries in spite of a great alteration of the narrative. It is as if individual strokes have been remembered from the Scandinavian ballad although the outline of the narrative has been forgotten.³⁰⁰

Later in the same paper Nygard describes the method used by the composer of the Icelandic version in this way:

Ásu kvæði, rather than preserving the narrative, which has clearly undergone a serious twist and turnabout, retains merely a few thematic correspondences, and primarily because in the attempt to reproduce the song, the Icelander, whose memory clearly flagged, could muster only a few verbal echoes of the original Danish. The result is a new narrative with suggestions of relationship that emerge from the phrasing.

In that reconstruction, the fact of the villain being bound was a primary recollection, as well as the concern over deception (whether it be his or hers the singer has forgotten). To make a story the villain must be unbound. The threat follows, a stanza that is remarkably constant in the entire tradition of this ballad. The theme of the ruse is then added to provide the maid with a means of escape.³⁰¹

As Nygard points out, the opening is the most remarkable feature of the Icelandic *Ásu kvæði*. There it does not correspond to other Scandinavian versions, but on the other hand it does correspond to the opening of this ballad as it is sung in the countries south of Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands. Thus, the Dutch variant of *Heer Halewijn*, which is one of the most ancient-looking of all variants of the ballad, begins in this way:

1 Heer Halewijn zong een liedekijn,
al die dat hoorde, wou bij hem zijn.

³⁰⁰ Nygard 1955, p. 143.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

2 En dat vernam een konigskind,
die was zoo schoon en zoo bemind.³⁰²

A German variant begins thus:

1 Gut Reuter der reit durch das ried,
er sang ein schoenes Tagelied,
Er sang von heller stimme,
das in der Burg erklinget.

2 Die Junckfraw an dem Laden lag,
Sie hoert gut Reuter singen:
'ja, wer ist der, der singet?
mit dem wil ich von hinnen.'³⁰³

Nygard points out that this beginning is evidence that the Icelandic version is derived from an older stage of the Nordic tradition than the one that has been preserved in Scandinavia, and as a matter of fact the great instability of the opening in Scandinavian variants indicates that the oldest opening has been lost. Nygard is not as convinced of the importance of another stanza which seems to point in the same direction:

i-K 4 Ása tók að kalla hátt,
þá kom hennar faðirinn brátt.

There are German variants of the ballad in which the villain allows the girl to call out three times, and her brother hears her and comes to her rescue. Nygard points out that this denouement of the ballad is found only in South German variants which are obviously derived from the Low German ones which are most closely related to the Scandinavian versions and where we have a heroine who saves herself. He therefore thinks, no doubt rightly, that this is an independent attempt to provide an ending for a short and fragmentary variant.³⁰⁴

Nygard attempts to determine by comparison from which version of the ballad in Scandinavia the Icelandic version is derived. He says:

³⁰² DV, II, p. 67.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

³⁰⁴ Nygard 1955, p. 145.

From what body of variants was the Icelandic ballad drawn? It has already been suggested that the Norwegian variants form two groups of related texts, the second of which is derived from the first. The first is more closely related to the Danish texts and partakes of those phrasings and motifs that we might consider pan-Scandinavian. The Danish variants divide into three readily recognizable groups: Group I, the A-D texts, drawn from early aristocratic commonplace books; Group II, also old as regards both records and thematic content, and transmitted in great part as broadsides; and Group III, the traditional texts from Vestjylland collected during the last hundred years. From the comments accompanying the stanzas above it is at once seen that the progenitors of the Icelandic ballad are not in Group III of the Danish ballad, nor in Group II of the Norwegian, for in both languages it is the older forms that consistently exhibit the related passages. Ascertaining the precise parent group is made difficult by the circumstance that the passages we have specified as verbal retentions in the Icelandic ballad are prominent phrasings in the continental Scandinavian ballad and so appear in nearly all the groups in question. But stanzas 4, 5, and 6 do strongly suggest that the Danish ballad, and more precisely Group II of the Danish variants, is the progenitor of the Icelandic song. For the phrasing in Group II is in most instances closer to the words of the *Ásu kvæði* than is that of Group I, a fact which only extended and comparative quotation will reveal. That the Icelandic ballad is Danish in origin is in part borne out by the refrain of the oldest texts, *fögrum tjöldum slógu þeir undir Sámsey*, which mentions the Danish island of Samsö, from which derive incidentally three of the texts of Danish Group II.³⁰⁵

As the Icelandic version is derived from an older layer of the Nordic tradition than the one that has been preserved, it is obviously impossible to assume without reservations that the grouping of the material based on preserved versions was valid for the time when the ballad was brought to Iceland. As Nygard points out: "the verbal echoes to the Scandinavian ballad that we find in the Icelandic song all derive from passages that are common and undoubtedly original in the Scan-

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

dinavian song.”³⁰⁶ It follows from this, though Nygard does not seem to realize it fully, that these features have little value as proof that the Icelandic version is related to some particular phase of the Scandinavian tradition. But, how clear then is the relationship between the three stanzas on which Nygard bases his conclusion and Group II of the Danish variants?

According to Nygard’s references, parallels to stanza 4 of the Icelandic A-text can be found both in Groups II and III in Denmark and in Groups I and II in Norway.³⁰⁷ In this connection, it is worth noticing that Nygard thinks “that the Norwegian Group I variants did not emerge from a single Danish form of the song but instead emerged from that form of the ballad which was antecedent to Danish Groups I and II.”³⁰⁸ The parallel to i-A 4 in d-Group II, which he refers to, is this stanza which occurs there with several variations:

d-F 11 “Ja, gjerne saa maa du løske mig,
om du agter ej i Søvn en at svige mig.”

i-A 4 “Ég þori ekki að leysa þig,
ég veit ei nema þú svíkir mig.”

And furthermore, the reaction of the girl earlier in the ballad when he entices her to come with him:

d-H 2 “Ja, gjerne vil jeg følge af landet med dig,
når du så ej i fremmed land vil svige mig.”

Both stanzas have parallels in Swedish texts:

s-B 4 “När som J kommen på fremmande land,
Så sviken J mig och tagen er en ann!”

13 “Väl kan J få löska mitt fagergula hår,
Om J intet i sömnen förråden mig då.”³⁰⁹

In Norway there are also variants of both these stanzas:

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

³⁰⁷ See Nygard 1958, p. 196.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

³⁰⁹ Arwidsson 1834–42, I, pp. 302–3.

n-F 4 “Jou eg sille av lande med deg,
Dersom eg visste at du inkje ville svíke meg.”³¹⁰

This stanza is only found in one recording, the other one in many, e.g.:

n-B 13 Aa gjönne sá má du luske meg
berre du inki i svemnen vil svíke meg.³¹¹

Here it seems that the phrasing of the Norwegian variants is at least as close to the Icelandic stanza as what is found in d-Group II. The same is true of the following stanza:

i-A 5 “Viti það kongur í ríki,
hvorki annað svíki.

As is to be expected, this is found in the same position in foreign variants as an answer to the first question:

d-H 3 “Svig mig den Kristus af Himmerig,
om jeg agter nogen tid at svige dig.”

d-E 20 “O svige den Gud udi Himmerig,
der har i Sinde i Søvn at dræbe jer!”

d-F 12 “Bevare mig Gud i Himmerig,
om jeg agter i Søvn at svige dig!”

The same stanza with very similar wording is found in the Swedish variant quoted above. In Norway, the answer to F 4 has been lost; but there is no reason to doubt that it was there originally just as it is in the Danish, Swedish and Icelandic variants. An echo of the same stanza is easily heard in a variant L 11, quoted by Nygard:

“Eg svíke deg Gud á eg svíke deg kann,
Eg svíke no allí min Festarmann.”³¹²

This answer is obviously distorted or misplaced because he has just declared that he is going to kill her.

³¹⁰ Rec. in NFS by Bugge 1864, from Fyrresdal.

³¹¹ Landstad, p. 569.

³¹² Nygard 1958, p. 166. The rec. in NFS coll. by Bugge in 1857.

Thus, the conclusion about this stanza becomes the same as that about stanza 4: The verbal parallels with d-Group II do not indicate any special relationship between the two versions. These stanzas are obviously old material which is found in Sweden and Norway as well as Denmark and could as well have come from either of those countries to Iceland.

The last of the stanzas referred to by Nygard as particularly related to d-Group II is

i-A 6 Leysti hún bönd af hans hönd
og so fjötur af hans fót.

As Nygard himself points out, parallels to this stanza occur in all groups of the Danish tradition (though in the form of tying rather than untying him), so there is no question of this stanza showing a special relationship with one of them. Because of the changes that have occurred in the phrasing along with the change in content, it is difficult to compare this line for line, but the main point is which of the nouns *bönd*, *hönd*, *fjötur*, *fótur*, occur in different places in this context. We soon find out that three of them, *bönd*, *hönd*, *fótur* occur in Danish, Swedish and Norwegian variants, while *fjötur* is only found in one variant, the Danish A-text from the 1580's:

d-A 28 Hun thog aff hans hals thett rødde guld-boen,
ther-med bandt hun Vlffuers huden haand.

29 Saa løste hun hest af *fieeder*,
hun spentte denom om Vlffuers feeder.

It is of course natural that this archaic word should not survive into the 19th century when the Norwegian variants were recorded. The conclusion is then that this stanza, as well as all other stanzas in the Icelandic variants, echoes a very old stanza that has been spread all over the Nordic countries.

Nygard's belief that the Icelandic version of *Ásu kvæði* is "drawn from" Group II of the Danish ballad is inconsistent with his own observation that the Icelandic version must be

... derived from the Danish or Norwegian ballad at an early date, a conclusion entirely credible, for the verbal echoes to the Scan-

dinavian ballad that we find in the Icelandic song all derive from passages that are common and undoubtedly original in the Scandinavian song.³¹³

The relationship with d-Group II that he finds in three stanzas is hardly closer than the relationship with Norwegian variants or the relationship with d-Group I and does not at all constitute a reason to assume a special connection between the two, as this is an earlier stage of the tradition than the formation of this particular group.

Nygaard has the additional argument for the Danish origin of the Icelandic ballad that the refrain in the oldest texts is *fögrum tjöldum slógu þeir undir Sámsey*. It is certainly likely that this refrain is of Danish origin, but it could easily have come to Iceland from Norway, and it must be considered doubtful that it accompanied the ballad to Iceland. It is not found with this ballad anywhere else.

The conclusion is then that it is impossible to discern from the Icelandic variants that they are more closely related to one group of Nordic variants than any other, and therefore there is no knowing how this ballad was carried to Iceland. This must have happened before 1500, as *Ásu kvæði* contains such archaic features, and then it is more likely that the ballad came through Norway, as there is nothing in the ballad's diction to indicate that it might be a late translation from Danish.

ÍF 61 Ásu dans

Gunnar has two daughters, Ása and Signý. Signý is married, while Ása wears gold on her head. Sir Pétur breaks into Ása's chamber, has his men carry her to his bed, lies with her during the night and asks her, when he leaves, to keep silent about the father's name if she has a child. He gives her a red ring as a parting present and sails away. Gunnar hears that Ása has suffered woes, summons her to him and asks why she is pale and like a pregnant woman. She feels that this is none of his business, and he hits her and orders her to leave and never darken his door again. Her mother brings her a horse for the journey and a blind page to accompany her. They leave and come to her sister who invites them inside to drink wine. Ása declines the offer but asks to borrow her secret chamber. She says she will not do this unless she is given the golden ring. When Ása refuses, her sister drives

³¹³ Nygaard 1955, p. 144.

her away. Ása and the page continue their journey and come to her nurse. Ása asks to borrow her secret chamber, and this is readily granted. Ása gives birth to a son. Gyða asks her what name he is to be given, and Ása wants to call him Magnús. When the boy is twelve years old, Sir Pétur comes to the farm and asks the boy who his parents are. He says his mother is Ása, daughter of Gunnar. He then says he is his father and takes him inside. He kisses Ása and asks her why she is away from home and whether Gunnar made her suffer on his account. The nurse then tells him that no one has managed to get her to tell who is the father of the child. Pétur asks his men to summon Gunnar. Gunnar comes to see him and he rebukes him for having rejected Ása, hits him so that blood splashes on his furs. He orders Gunnar away and never to come before his eyes again. In some variants, Gunnar escapes at this, while in others they fight and Gunnar is killed or hanged. Pétur is betrothed to Ása, gives her gold; and they are married.³¹⁴

Although the recordings of this ballad are numerous and it is one of the longest, the differences among them are surprisingly slight, except in cases of obvious distortions and omissions. As is shown by the number of texts, this was one of the most popular ballads. The reasons for this cannot be its artistic merits, according to modern taste, but presumably the fact that it has a happy end after severe tribulations of the heroine accounts for its popularity.

This ballad is not found outside Iceland, but it has been pointed out that it is related to a Danish ballad, *Liden Gjertrud og hr. Børge* (DGF 269). Ernst von der Recke doubted that these ballads were directly related but suggested that they had a common ancestor in a Norwegian ballad.³¹⁵ The common features of these ballads are that a father who discovers that his daughter has had a son in secret rejects her forcibly, while a stepmother in the Danish ballad provides her with means of transport. There, the girl has gone no farther than to the green meadow when she meets her lover who takes her with him and marries her. The father does not come to the wedding, but the stepmother comes and is received with loving words by her stepdaughter, who at the same time castigates her father.

There are an unusual number of formulaic stanzas in this ballad. At

³¹⁴ Texts: A = I, p. 119, B = III, p. 236, C = IV, p. 6 (half a stanza rec. in the late 16th century), D = IV, p. 114 (one stanza), E = IV, p. 204, F = V, p. 87, G = V, p. 110, H = V, p. 208 (one line), I = V, p. 214 (one stanza), J = V, p. 219 (one line), K = VI, p. 73, L = VI, p. 217, M = VII, p. 74, N = VII, p. 85, O = VII, p. 106 (one stanza), P = VII, p. 114 (a copy of K).

³¹⁵ *Danmarks Fornviser*, III, p. 183.

least 32 of the 88 stanzas in the A-text occur elsewhere, 16 of them in more than one place. This does not have to mean that the ballad is only a rehash of material from other ballads, as it has to be considered that the number of stanzas not occurring elsewhere is greater than in a ballad of medium length.

The whole appearance of this ballad puts it in a category with the earlier ballads of West-Nordic origin, although its narrative structure, which has a novelistic tendency, does not indicate great age. Recke's notion of a common Norwegian ancestor for the Danish and Icelandic ballads could therefore be sound, but it seems obvious that if *Ásu dans* was not composed in Iceland, it must have been extensively lengthened and transformed there. It is, for example, interesting to note the typically Icelandic tone of some of the stanzas that describe Ása's visit to her sister and nurse:

A 36 Sveinninn svaraði henni bert:
“Þar eru öll ráðin sem þú ert.”

37 “Við skulum ríða suður á hól,
þar býr fyrir mín systirin góð.”

38 Riðu þau holt og riðu þau hraun,
fagar lágú leiðir um.

39 Þegar þau komu suður á hól,
Signý úti í dyrum stóð.

One of the stanzas contains a proverb which must be old and Icelandic since it also occurs in a skaldic stanza in *Grettis saga*:

A 33 Móðir góð er barni best,
hún gaf henni bæði söðul og hest.

Gr. st. 12 — — —
enn réð orðskvið sanna
auðnorn við mik fornan
ern, at *bezt es barni*,
benskóðs fyr gjof, *móðir*.³¹⁶

³¹⁶ *Grettis saga* 1936, p. 50.

The stanzas describing the upbringing of the boy are related to ballads on father revenge and are identical to those in *Magna dans*. This indicates that, at an earlier stage, *Ásu dans* may have been closer to the Danish ballad in that Ása found her lover soon after being rejected by her father.

The diction and metre of *Ásu dans* are generally of good quality and often very Icelandic in tone, as stated above. The ballad is definitely not among those that have come late from Denmark, but apart from that nothing can be said about its age and origin.

ÍF 62 Þorkels kvæði Þrándarsonar

Porkell Þrándarson seduces the lady Aðallist, daughter of Sir Logi, and lies on her arm for seven weeks. His father asks where he has been and he answers, metaphorically hiding the truth. His father understands and thinks this is a dangerous game, says he will send him to Friesland with Ásbjörn snari bearing a letter saying that the king will have to come to him if he wants to gain control of the land. Aðallist goes to church with her mother and asks who the messengers are who are being sent to Friesland, and Gunnhildur answers smiling that it is her best friend Porkell Þrándarson. After the mass, Porkell walks around saying goodbye to his friends and finally to Aðallist. Porkell goes to Friesland, goes before the king who receives him badly and brings forth accusations against his father which he says Porkell will pay for. Now there is a battle in the palace; Porkell kills many a man but is taken prisoner. (In A it seems that they did not manage to subdue him but this must be a distortion.) At home, Stígur Jónsson asks for Aðallist's hand; she hedges and says she wants Porkell, but there is no escape; she has to obey. She gets one Kristín Jónsdóttir to lie for her as a virgin during the wedding night. Then, Aðallist goes to church; Porkell Þrándarson comes there and asks who has felled her golden headdress. He is told who it is, becomes angry and threatens to kill her husband. Aðallist says that then he would never get her; he should rather ask a woman to marry him and directs him to a suitable candidate. She is married to him and gives birth to three sons, whereupon she dies. As luck would have it, only three months pass until Stígur goes on an expedition and dies. Porkell and Aðallist are married and give presents to Kristín.³¹⁷

This ballad (TSB D 201) is found in Denmark and Sweden, and in

³¹⁷ Texts: A = III, p. 106, B = IV, p. 114 (one stanza) and 127 (the opening stanza on p. 114 belongs to the variant on 127), C = V, p. 125.

Norway there exists a recording in Danish from around 1580.³¹⁸ The earliest Danish variant is a recording from Skåne dating from just after the middle of the 16th century where the ballad has been changed considerably to improve its morality. Practically by accident, there are preserved fragments of two broadsides dating from around 1580, and the Norwegian recording seems to be based on one of these.³¹⁹

The Icelandic version of *Þorkels kvæði Þrándarsonar* is an indubitable offspring of the two or three times longer Danish version. Little can be added to Olrik's presentation of the relationship between these versions:

En vis Grad af Særpræg har ogsaa den *islandske* Overlevering, for saa vidt den er en mere *kortfattet* Fremstilling af den samme Handling, som findes i de danske Opskrifter. Flere Optrin, der ikke fører Handlingen frem, mangler her; saaledes hele det Motiv, at Adelus skal være Brudeførerske, og den dertil svarende fyldigere Udmaling af Torkels Bryllup. Alt dette beror dog sikkert paa, at den islandske Overlevering har afkortet sit Grundlag; se saaledes isl. A 32, hvor en nylavet Overgangsstrofe skal dække over Springet i Handling. Virkelig selvstændige Optrin findes derimod ikke udover saadanne Smaatræk, der kan give Visen det i islandsk Digtning yndede krigerske Præg: Torkel dræber Kongens Svende, inden han overmandes og sættes i Fængsel, og han slaar til et Sendebud saa Hjærnen stænker mod Taget; Stig Jonsøn dør ikke af Alderdom, men falder i Leding. Grundlaget for den har sikkert udgjort en dansk Overlevering af lignende Art som den nu foreliggende, vel nærmest i Slægt med vore østdanske DE.³²⁰

Olrik estimates that the ballad was composed around 1500, and has no doubt assumed that it was brought to Iceland in the 16th century.³²¹

³¹⁸ See Kolsrud 1919. The Swedish variants, which were recorded in the 17th century, show clear signs of having been translated from Danish, cf. Jonsson 1967, p. 765.

³¹⁹ This broadside, Ci, is printed in DGF, X, p. 873. The Norwegian recording printed in 1919 is not mentioned there; but it follows the broadside so closely, as far as it goes, that it is evidently a direct copy; and Kolsrud did in fact point out in his notes the possibility that the ballad was brought to Norway by a printed broadside.

³²⁰ DGF, VIII, p. 237.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

As there are broadsides where this ballad is printed which are almost a hundred years older than its earliest recording in Iceland, the question presents itself whether the ballad was brought to Iceland on a printed sheet and translated from this. This must, however, be considered rather unlikely because of the extensive cuts in the ballad and because it is obviously recorded from oral tradition. If it had been translated from print, one would expect written translation and preservation, which would have resulted in a better rendering of the original story and an altogether different style.

Although one must agree with Olrik that the Icelandic version is derived from the Danish ones, there are several details in the Icelandic texts for which the simplest explanation is that the ballad came to Iceland through the West-Nordic area, Norway or, even more likely, the Faroes. These details must be considered before a conclusion is reached about the path the ballad has taken to Iceland.

Porkell's journey to the foreign kingdom (which in the Danish version is Iceland!) is described in many stanzas in the Danish variants. The Icelandic variants make do with a single stanza. It is strange that no two of these three variants have the same stanza. The most peculiar one is found in A:

21 Lágu þeir í höfnum
sem hvör mann mátti sjá,
lægðist segl á bunka niður
Fríslands drengjum hjá.

The stanza is rather vague and badly constructed, but the 3rd line contains a formulaic expression found nowhere else in Icelandic ballads, while it is among the most common ones in descriptions of sea travels in Faroese ballads, as for instance:

CCF 11 A 21 Vindur upp síni silkisegl,
gull við ráum brann,
strykar ei á bunkan niður
fyrr enn við Noregis land.

Other examples are CCF 12 A 12, 16 A 21, 20 A 6, 23 A 13, 24 A 16, 26 A 15, 27 A 17, 29 A 23, 30 A 9, etc.

Because of the position of the word *bunki* in the stanza, this is much

more likely to be a Faroese formula than an Icelandic usage, although the word *bunki* appears in fairly early *rímur*.³²²

It goes without saying that one Faroese formula does not make this a Faroese ballad. It could have been transmitted through other ballads and later dropped from these, or they could have been totally lost. The passage describing Þorkell's capture in the Frisian king's palace, which is an addition in the Icelandic version, does not seem to be composed of Faroese formulas. Nevertheless, its whole appearance seems very much in the same vein as the West-Nordic heroic ballads:

- i-B 27 Kongurinn kallar
 á hermennina þrjá:
 "Takið hann Þorkel Þrándarson
 og leggið fjöturinn á."
- 28 Það er hann Þorkell Þrándarson,
 rykkti búnum hníf,
 hann stakk so fyrir þeirra brjóst
 að allir misstu líf.
- 29 Mikið var að heyra
 til Jórsala fram,
 þeir tóku hann Þorkel Þrándarson
 við átjándá mann.
- 30 Þeir tóku hann Þorkel Þrándarson
 við nítjándá svein.
 Fyrr en hann kom í myrkvastofu
 vann hann þeim öllum mein.
- 31 Af sumum hjó hann höndina,
 af sumum hjó hann fót.
 Allir þeir á mót honum voru
 biðu þess aldrei bót.

As an example of a similar passage in a Faroese ballad, we might take these stanzas from CCF 62, *Haraldskjöldur á Miklagarði*:

- 75 Tí svaraði keisarin
 við sítt valda meingi:

³²² See *Rimnasafn*, I, p. 133.

“Sláið ein garð um reystu kempu,
her hefur staðið leingi!”

76 Haraldskjöld á Miklagarði
ruddi fyrri sær gongd,
átjan vá hann her Kempur,
áðrenn hann tókst í band.

77 Átjan vóru her Kempur,
sár bar undir skinn,
áðrenn teir hǫvdu Haraldskjöld
í myrkastovu inn.

78 Settu Harald í myrkastovu,
mangir at honum vóru,
tá vóru færri vinir hans,
enn hann frá alvi bóru.

One more example of the West-Nordic type of exaggeration is the description of Þorkell's reaction when he hears that Aðallist is married:

A 50 Það er hann Þorkell Þrándarson,
hann var sig maðurinn bráður,
hann sló frúinnar þjónustusvein
svo heilinn f auk um rjáfur.

It is true of this as of other particularly West-Nordic features that it is more likely to be Faroese or Norwegian than Icelandic, because of the paucity of heroic ballads in Iceland; but no positive statements can be made on this issue.

Now, Olrik assumes that this ballad is hardly older than around 1500, which in itself is a very credible age. Sigurd Kolsrud points out that the names in the ballad were known amongst Norwegian aristocracy of this period, and other so-called *romanviser* or novelistic ballads have been linked with this same milieu.³²³

If the ballad about Þorkell Þrándarson was composed amongst Danish-speaking gentry in Norway around 1500, it is not unlikely to have gained fairly strong foothold among ballad singers in Bergen in

³²³ See, e.g., Dal 1956, p. 223.

the first decades of the 16th century while there was still lively communication between Iceland and Bergen. In that case, the singer who moulded the West-Nordic prototype of the Icelandic version could well have been familiar with the style of Norwegian and Faroese heroic ballads. But this must remain hypothetical.

There are a few grammatical errors and solecisms in the Icelandic variants, some of which can be explained as distortions of the Danish texts: Þorkell's suspicious practice of *blanda bjór* (mixing beer) in the meadow is undoubtedly some kind of misunderstanding of Danish *bede djur*, cf. d-A 18. (Here it is tempting to imagine that the Faroese form of the word, *djór*, was an intermediary.) There is quite a lot of padding found in various stanzas, not the least in the second lines, as is to be expected. A few examples from A: *það er hans virðing full, með sárum sútar karmi* (which is not very suitable in the context because he is said to be lying on his lady's arm), *viðá er manna getið*, *Guð gefi oss góðan tíma*; these phrases become more rare as the ballad progresses.

The rhymes are fairly good; there is a considerable number of assonances and other incomplete rhymes, however. In several cases, individual lines have alliteration, though the traditional rules of alliteration are nowhere adhered to. These characteristics are partly the same as those found in ballads which seem to be Icelandic, e.g., *Klerks kvæði*.

The diction and metre of *Þorkels kvæði Þrándarsonar* do not give the impression of an automatic word-for-word translation, rather of a consciously and fairly well done translation by someone who was familiar with ballad traditions. It is quite possible that it was translated directly from Danish in Iceland or by an Icelander, but such an assumption makes it difficult to account for the influence from the West-Nordic, particularly Faroese, heroic style.

ÍF 63 Gunnlaugs kvæði

A mother urges her son to propose to a woman; he asks where he should look for her; she tells him about King Eiríkur who has five daughters. Gunnlaugur sails and steps ashore where the court sits drinking. Eiríkur at once offers him a choice of one of his daughters, and Gunnlaugur gets a fair bride and sails home with her. He comes home to his lands and makes the bride mix mead and wine, puts her on a golden chair and shows her his

property. The ballad ends on a stanza which either contains nonsense or obscure erotic allusions.³²⁴

This ballad, or ballad fragment, is only found in a single 17th century manuscript. There must be some distortions in the ballad: *Ölvers sker* is a place-name which fits badly into a ballad of chivalry but reminiscent of *rímur* and *fornaldarsögur*, where vikings customarily keep their ships near skerries. Eiríkur is said to have started *málin grimm*, 'cruel language', but the cruelty is not apparent as he offers Gunnlaugur the best choice imaginable. Either the poet could not think of any other word than *grimm* to rhyme with *fimm*, or something has been lost from the ballad, e.g., the description of some tests he had to pass to earn the right to choose a bride. On the other hand, it is just possible that the poet had this pattern or a similar one in mind but lacked ingenuity or rhyming talent to make the ballad any longer and took the course of avoiding all problems.

The language of this ballad, which is in a repetitive metre, is of low quality; we find lack of case-endings, a wrongly inflected adjective and a lack of rhyme. In spite of some awkward constructions, there are several features in the language of the ballad that cannot possibly be considered as word-by-word translations from another language, but sound genuinely Icelandic.

There is little profit in guessing at the origin or age of this ballad. It could be the attempt of an Icelandic ballad singer to recall an older ballad, presumably of foreign origin, in which Gunnlaugur went through some kind of trouble before he got the woman. It might also be an attempt by some poetaster, who knew a few *fornaldarsögur* and had a vague memory of some ballad stanzas, to compose an Icelandic ballad. The result, in either case, is either totally botched or was badly treated in oral tradition.

ÍF 64 Kvæði af Gunnlaugi og Sigurði

Sigurður comes with his ships to some islands, proposes to Sigríður but she refuses him. Sigurður says (to Gunnlaugur) that, even though his sister Sigríður is pretty, there is a more beautiful girl on his ships. Gunnlaugur becomes angry and wagers twelve rings that this is not the case. Sigurður goes to the ships and tells his sister Sesselja to get dressed. She dresses up in

³²⁴ Text: I, p. 48.

her finery and walks with five maidens into the palace. Everyone considers her beautiful to behold, and this fills Sigríður with envy. 'Thus ended the poem: Sigríður had a child with a slave.'³²⁵

Here, a pattern is followed where a woman who is fastidious about suitors is humiliated in some way (cf., e.g., ÍF 89). The ballad has, however, no direct parallels outside Iceland. It is in the same metre as *Tristrams kvæði*, and like some other ballads in that metre, its phrasing is very Icelandic. True, the language gives no definite indication that the ballad must be Icelandic, but there are, on the other hand, no signs of a direct translation, and it is as a rule not possible to reconstruct Scandinavian models for the stanzas.

It is noteworthy that the names Gunnlaugur and Sigurður occur as the names of foster-brothers in *Víglundar saga*.³²⁶ It cannot be excluded that this is a fragment of a longer ballad which could have been of foreign origin, but it seems more likely that this ballad should properly be placed among ballads in the same metre which are of Icelandic origin.

ÍF 65 Kvæði af Bóthildi

Pétur has three daughters. He summons the king and all his men. The king's marshal, Logi, comes there and asks him to give him the hand of his daughter Bóthildur in marriage. Pétur refuses and Logi draws his sword and swings it towards him. Pétur asks him to stop and says he will get Bóthildur. Bóthildur wakes up and asks who can help, but somebody (Pétur?) answers that he cannot help her as he is being held by Logi's men. Bóthildur kills Logi and enters a nunnery.³²⁷

It is mentioned in the first edition of *Íslenzk fornkvæði* that this ballad is related to DGF 189, but this is just a question of a thematic relationship. Still more tenuous is the relationship with DGF 199, also mentioned in the same place.³²⁸ Though there are similar motifs in 189, there are considerable differences in the narratives and no indications in the phrasings that there is a common basis for these two ballads.

The first stanza of the Icelandic text is a commonplace one, appear-

³²⁵ Texts: A = I, p. 15, B = V, p. 102 (probably derived from A).

³²⁶ See *Kjalnesinga saga* 1959, pp. 65ff.

³²⁷ Text: I, p. 57.

³²⁸ *Íslenzk fornkvæði*, II, p. 323.

ing frequently in Scandinavian ballads and also used in Iceland in ÍF 92, *Hökulsmokks kvæði*.³²⁹

The language of the ballad is of poor quality and indicates that it was translated from Danish. In the third stanza, we find the word *sölfi* or *solli*; it seems to be a rendering of Danish *selle* (from *geselle*, comrade) and indicates Danish origin. Another word giving evidence of Danish origin is *minnilega* in stanza 6. The rhythm is rather clumsy in some of the lines: *vaknaði hún Bóthildur, upp að hún sá, Bóthildur situr og heldur sinni trú*. Rhymes in this ballad are very poor: *blanda: senda, menn:inn, lifi:gefi, brá:hjó, mig:gef*. It is possible that the carelessness in rhyming is connected with the stanza form. The ballad is in that kind of repetitive metre where the lines that rhyme never appear together whole in the same stanza, and under these circumstances it was perhaps felt that there was less need to be careful about the rhymes.

The general tone of this ballad is similar to that of ballads brought to Iceland from Denmark at a rather late date, and it should be put in a category with those, though there is no comparative evidence to support this.

ÍF 66 Ingu kvæði

Inga rides to the assembly and talks to the Danish king. She says that she has three brothers who hold all her property and that she would rather give it to the king than go on like this. He thanks her for the gifts and says she should choose a husband from among his knights. She answers quickly that she would prefer Logi Stígsson. Logi says that he has little experience with farming and is more used to riding with shield and spear against young knights. She says that it should not take him long to learn to use his body and that she will teach him the farmer's trade. Then they ride home and are happy.³³⁰

There is one Danish variant of this ballad, DGF 222, from the 16th century. The ballad has been cut considerably by the move to the West Fiords of Iceland, and some features have changed: e.g., Inga's property is being held by her uncles in the Danish version, which makes her

³²⁹ As an example of non-Icelandic ballads beginning with this stanza, we might mention some Norwegian variants of ÍF 13 *Hörpu kvæði*, and, slightly farther removed, some Danish variants of the same ballad.

³³⁰ Text: I, p. 55.

problems more understandable. Each of the stanzas of the Icelandic text is derived directly from the Danish version except for the last one, which nevertheless has the same content as the conclusion of the Danish ballad. Two examples ought to be sufficient to show the similarity in phrasing:

i 1 Ung var hún Inga,
hún reið sig til þinga.

5 “Hafðu þökk fyrir gáfur þín,
kjóstu þér mann af riddurum mín.”

d 1 Liden wor stolltt Enge,
saa ienne rider hun till tingi.

18 “I haffuer tak, iumfru, for eders gaffue!
huelken aff myn rider daa well y haffue?”

The ballad is in a repetitive metre which probably accompanied it to Iceland, although the Danish variant is not in that metre but in the more common couplet metre with a split refrain.

There are clumsy lines with bad rhymes in stanza 2: *Hún reið sig á velborið þing, / hún talar við danskan konunginn*; but most of the lines are fairly supple. There are more cases of incomplete rhymes: *fimm: þeim, vera:gefa, svara:hafa, sig:sið, læra:bera, mér:sið*.

There is no reason to believe that this ballad was brought to Iceland at an early date, but as it is not written down in Denmark after 1600, it would seem most natural to assume that it was brought to Iceland during the 16th century, probably directly.

ÍF 67 Kvæði af Elenu og Andrési Stígssyni

Lady Elena sees ships coming to the shore, wishes that it might be Andrés Stígsson and has her wish fulfilled. Andrés rides to her farm, and she immediately offers to put all her property in his power, but when he asks for her, she says there is the obstacle that she is guarded by so many people, father, mother, sister, brother, sister-in-law. Still, she asks how she should get away. He tells her to ride to the forest and says that his eighteen sisters will serve her in various ways. The ballad ends by saying that Andrés stepped on the end of the pier and kept his word well.³³¹

³³¹ Text: I, p. 21.

This ballad is fragmentary and ends abruptly; it is, in fact, the introduction to an abduction that never takes place. Although most of the stanzas are known from other ballads, this fragment has no direct parallels.

The initial stanza has a parallel in the opening of a Faroese variant of *Dronning Dagmar og Junker Strange*:

i 1 Stoltsfrú Elena stóð undir loftsins sala,
hún sá segl af sundi fara.

2 Hún sá segl af sundi fara.
“Guð láti hann Andrés Stígsson vera.”

CCF 122 A 1 “Eg sá segl á sundi fara,
tað mundi hann harra Strangir vera.”

The 3rd stanza is also a commonplace, found, e.g., in a variant in Danish written in the Faroes of the ballad referred to above:

DGF 132 D 3 Alt førend de havde halvtalet Ord,
før var Her Strange ind for Bord.

Faroese variants of this ballad are, in fact, also connected to *Taflkvæði*, as has been mentioned above.³³²

The promises Andrés gives to Elena and her enumeration of those who guard her have their closest parallel in various Danish variants of *Ribbalds kvæði* and *Ásu kvæði*. The distribution and origin of these sequences of stanzas have been discussed by Ernst von der Recke.³³³ Despite his efforts, we are not likely to be able to determine the origin of these stanzas in the near future, but we can be sure that *Kvæði af Elenu og Andrési Stígssyni* is not their original location.

The ballad is in a repetitive metre, and the style and language are reminiscent of those ballads brought to Iceland from Denmark at a late date. The greatest number of parallel stanzas is found in Danish ballads, and the names also point to Denmark. The diction and rhythm appear clearly in the stanzas quoted above, but more examples can be added: *Úti stóð hún Elena og heldur sína magt, hann klappar undir*

³³² p. 263.

³³³ Recke 1906, pp. 20–24.

hennar hvítu kinn, mín kærasta gefðu mér viljann þinn, þar heldur so margur vakt uppá. The rhymes are poor: *sala:fara, makt:vald, so:uppá, sæng:band*, etc.

All indications are that this ballad was brought to Iceland from Denmark at a late date, perhaps not until the 17th century. There is no telling whether it is a translation of a single ballad or a mixture of several, but it seems most likely that it existed as a whole in Danish before it was translated. Certainly, nothing was added to it in Iceland.

ÍF 68 Kvæði af Þorkeli og Margrétu

Porkell rides out, gets Margrét for a wife, thinks she is a virgin, carries her home with him. Porkell rides singing but Margrét rides sorrowful; he asks her what is the matter; she asks him to raise a golden tent over her and ride to the forest to enjoy himself. Margrét gives birth to three sons. Porkell asks his men how she is doing; they tell him of the sons and he says they are his. (This intermediary function of the men is not in all variants.) Porkell asks her who is the father of the children. She says his name is Ívar (or something else), that he came to her home and gave her presents, a golden fur, a golden chain, a golden band. Porkell asks her what she wants to do with the children. She says she will bury them and bear her sorrows alone. He says that instead they shall give them presents, keep them in their company and call them nephews (B: in their friends' company and called their nephews). Here, most variants end. J adds, in prose, that the sons grew up with them, fought a battle with their real father and won. R adds that he took her on his knee, gave her gifts, and, as they were young and amorous, they had eighteen children.³³⁴

This ballad (TSB D 182) is also found in the East-Nordic area, Denmark, Sweden and Finland. There, it is usually longer than the Icelandic version. There is an added description of how the protagonist brings his wife home and his mother is suspicious. Apart from the Icelandic variants, this ending is missing from the second oldest Swedish variant, from around 1670, and some of the recordings from Swedish Finland. On the other hand, it accompanies the oldest Swedish

³³⁴ Texts: A = I, p. 185, B = III, p. 256, C = IV, p. 94, D = IV, p. 121 (one stanza), E = IV, p. 244, F = V, p. 41, G = V, p. 95 (fragm.), H = V, p. 135, I = VI, p. 54, J = VI, p. 70, K = VI, p. 170, L = VII, p. 32 (fragm.), M = VII, p. 48, N = VII, p. 71, O = VII, p. 104, P = VII, p. 136, Q = VII, p. 145 (fragm.), R = VII, p. 168, S = VII, p. 195.

version, from c. 1570, and all the Danish ones, which date from the 16th, 17th and 19th centuries. In some of the East-Nordic variants, it is revealed that the bridegroom is the father of the children, e.g., in the oldest Danish recording and the second oldest Swedish one.

In Norway, there is a ballad, *Margit og Tarjei Risvollo* (TSB A 57), which is in quatrains and indeed a wholly different ballad but connected to this one: Margit takes care of the sheep and has a love affair with Jón í Vaddelío (who may be one of the hidden people, though this is vague). When Margit comes home, she is rebuked by her maid (a shepherdess has a maid!) who nevertheless offers to take her place on the wedding night. Young Tarjei comes to fetch Margit and finds her with two sons. Disguised as a woman, he takes the sons to church; they are baptized and buried in consecrated ground (nothing is said of the cause of their deaths). He then rides back to Margit, tells her the news and then goes back in sorrow; the bride's horse runs unbridled.³³⁵

Sverker Ek has maintained that this ballad is originally a Swedish one and that the shorter version (lacking the scene in the bridegroom's home) is more original. According to Ek, the ballad was transmitted from Sweden to Norway where it was influenced by the ballad about Margit and Tarjei, and furthermore he maintains that it influenced the Norwegian version of *Sonarharmur*.³³⁶

Ek's argument for assuming an influence of *Margit og Tarjei Risvollo* on the Icelandic version of *Kvæði af Þorkeli og Margrétu* is, in addition to the similarity in names, the fact that the father of the child is named in the Icelandic version. Still, it should be borne in mind that there is no agreement among the Icelandic variants on this point; the father has six names in the Icelandic variants, and in some of them he is called 'a king's son', 'a king', or even 'a knight'. This confusion suggests that he had no name in the prototype of these variants, and in some Swedish and Danish variants he is called 'a king's son'. It is impossible to state anything definite about the relationship between this ballad and *Sonarharmur*. The influence could just as well have been the other way around. Further, this is a question of stanzas containing a fairly large number of formulas and thus of limited value for comparison.

Ek has stronger arguments for his theory that the shorter version is more original. He points out that the ending coheres badly with the main

³³⁵ Utsyn 132, NB, p. 60.

³³⁶ See Ek 1958.

body of the ballad in its oldest variants and how there have been various attempts at emending this. The Swedish and Danish variants are so closely related that it seems impossible to find out whether the ballad was actually composed in Sweden, as Ek believes. If his assumption is right, that the ballad is originally Swedish and was brought from Sweden to Iceland through Norway, one must expect to find fairly marked differences between the Icelandic and the Danish versions. To find this out, we must compare the versions.

The opening of the Icelandic version is found, with different variations, in both Swedish and Danish variants, but it is most closely related in Swedish ones:

i-A 1 Þorkell ríður sig undir ey,
kaupir Margrétu og þenkir mey.

s-D 1 Herr Peder han reser sig söder under ö,
(other var.: *rider* or *red*)
han fäste liten Kerstin, han tänkte hon var mö.³³⁷

On the other hand, the stanzas which mention the bride's sorrow have the closest parallel in a Danish text:

i-A 4 Þorkell spurði Margrétu sín:
“Hvað syrgir þig, sætan mín?”

d-B 8 Her Peeder klappedt hinnder veed huidenn kinnd:
“Hui ridder i saa sørgende, aller-kiereste minn?”

Stanzas stating that the journey is long and the saddle narrow are found everywhere and give no indication, but where she asks him to go to the forest and enjoy himself, there are close parallels in i-A and d-A:

i-A 7 “Slái þér tjöldum yfir mig,
farið á skóg og skemmtið yður.”
(Some variants have *ganga*.)

d-A 12 “I ganger y luddenn och skeemtter edder,
i-men ieg gaar bortt och huiller meeg!”

³³⁷ DGF, V:1, p. 344.

The stanzas containing their dialogue after the childbirth and his inquiries about the father are everywhere equally related; the same is true of the presents given her by the father. This is, in fact, true of the rest of the ballad. A few instances can be found where there are parallels between the Danish and Icelandic versions, and no parallels can be found in Swedish texts, but these are mostly insignificant linking features where use is made of formulaic expressions:

i-B 20 Þorkell talar við kæru þá:
“Annað kann eg betra ráð.”

d-B 28 “Thie kuer, staltten Ingerlille, sig icke saa!
edt halfft beder raad saa ville wi faa.”

The conclusion of the comparison is that there is so little difference between the Danish and the Swedish texts that it is impossible to say with any certainty which of these versions is more closely related to the Icelandic one, even though there are a few more parallels in the Danish texts. The correspondence between these and the Icelandic texts is so close that it must be regarded as rather unlikely that this is a Swedish ballad which was transmitted from Sweden through Norway to Iceland without any direct connection with the Danish tradition.

Margit and Tarjei Risvollo has a rather sentimental and thus more recent appearance than our ballad, and nothing in the phrasing connects the two. Nevertheless, it is likely that TSB D 182 or other ballads on related themes inspired the composer of the Norwegian ballad. The names of the characters could indicate that a Norwegian version of *Kvæði af Þorkeli og Margrétu* was the model, but this is a weak argument because these are common names of ballad characters, and furthermore Tarjei and Þorkell are not the same name though the first component is the same.

There is nothing in the rhythm, rhymes or diction of the Icelandic variants of this ballad that indicates that it had been recently translated from Danish. Therefore, it is most natural to assume that it was brought to Iceland before the Reformation. The phrasing of the Icelandic variants is not so different from that of the East-Nordic ones that it constitutes any reason to assume a special West-Nordic version behind it, and since the ballad has neither been recorded in Norway nor in the Faroes, one cannot be sure that such a version ever existed.

ÍF 69 Signýjar kvæði

Signý sits alone in the house and hears someone call (for a ferry). She conveys a man across the river; he orders her to serve him in the bath. She stares hard at the man, and he asks her why she does this; she says she has seen one man who resembles him very closely. He asks what his name was, and she says his name was Sigmundur. He says he is Sigmundur and tells her to throw away her sorrows (thus A, puts her on his knee and gives her gold and money, B).³³⁸

Although closely related, the two 17th century recordings of this ballad must be based on independent oral variants, e.g., the refrain is not the same. The ballad looks like a fragment of a longer story, though it can stand independently. The language is good Icelandic without any signs of translation. In two stanzas in A (one in B), there is no rhyme; apart from this, however, the stanzas are correctly rhymed, although the rhymes are very banal and poor.

There is no way of determining whether this is an Icelandic composition or a fragment of an old foreign ballad.

ÍF 70 Kvæði af herra Jóni og Loga

A farmer comes home from the assembly; his daughter asks about Jón, and he says that Sir Logi has become betrothed to her. She says she had better go and see Jón and asks her father to hold the wedding in Skáney. She then rides off to see Jón but is met by Logi and his men by the town gate. She is offered a seat on a bench, and Logi and his men serve her wine; then she is led to the bridal chamber, and Logi and his men carry a light before her. Finally, she is put down on the bed and a stocking drawn off her foot. But then Jón arrives, sits down on the bed beside the bride and bids Logi good night. Logi comes before the king and complains that Jón sleeps with his bride. The king says that they should test their strength. The next morning they fight, and with the first blows Jón kills Logi (thus BD, they fight for a whole year and then Jón wins, A).³³⁹

A peculiar feature of this ballad, in Iceland and elsewhere, is the refrain which is repeated with variations that are part of the narrative. The ballad (TSB F 11) is undoubtedly of Danish origin, and in Den-

³³⁸ Texts: A = II, p. 16, B = III, p. 175.

³³⁹ Texts: A = II, p. 34, B = III, p. 218, C = IV, p. 125 (one stanza), D = V, p. 153, E = VI, p. 201.

mark the earliest recordings date from around 1650. It was printed in Syv's collection and as a broadside shortly after 1700. It has also been preserved in popular oral tradition up to the 19th century. In Sweden the ballad is found as a broadside and in recordings from the 18th and 19th centuries. In Norway there are several recordings from the 19th century, though it is a characteristic of these as well as of the Swedish recordings that they seem to be rather recently descended from the Danish version.

The varying refrain indicates that the ballad is rather young. It accompanies the ballad everywhere, which is of course natural as it is a part of the narrative.

The Icelandic version is most closely related to the Danish variants, especially the earliest ones. This is, for example, the opening of the ballad:

i-A 1 Bóndinn kemur af þingum heim,
vel, vel bún,
dóttir hans stendur upp í bý
og spyr að um Jón.
Bindum hjálm af gulli
og ekki kemur hann herra Jón.

d-A 2 Her Peder hand kom fra tinge hiem,
i verre vel bon!
lidenn Kirstenn hans datter gaar hannem igien,
spør hun om her Ion.
I binder op hielm af guld, i følger her Ion!

i-B 1 Cecilia spurði föður sinn:
“Hvað er nú títt af þingum þín
um herra Jón?”

d-A 3 “Wel-komen, her Peder, kier fader min,
och huad var tiden i dag paa ting?”
alt om her Ion.

i-B 2 “Þau eru tíðindin allra mest
hann Logi hefur þig, mín dóttir, fest
en ekki Jón.”

d-A 4 “Det var de tiden, det var der mest:
liden Kiersten, min daatter du est nu fest,”
och iche her Ion.

d-A 6₂ — — —
her Laffue haffuer dig paa tinge fest,”
och iche her Ion.

i-B 3 “Þó að hann Logi hafi mig fest
það skal verða hönum blíðu brestur,
finni eg hann Jón.”

d-A 7 “Haffuer her Laffue mig paa tinge fest,
da skal det bliffue hanem til sorgemest!”
och leffuer her Ion.

The subsequent passage in the Icelandic version describing how the girl rides to meet Jón has no foreign parallels and is probably an Icelandic distortion. When it comes to the wedding, the difference is that in the Icelandic version it seems that Jón does not appear until the bride is in bed, while in the Danish version he is present from the beginning of the wedding. In spite of this difference, the course of the narrative is the same and the phrasing closely related in Icelandic and Danish variants. No more examples need to be given to show this.

The language of the Icelandic recordings shows unmistakable signs of the Danish original. The refrain in Danish rhymes better than in Icelandic although the same words are used. The rhyming words in the three Icelandic variants differ considerably, and the poorest rhymes by far are found in A, the earliest recording, while the best ones are in D, the latest one, which indicates that the rhymes were improved by the singers as time passed. Samples of the clumsy language of this ballad can be seen in the examples given above, *dóttir hans stendur upp í bý, það skal verða hönum blíðu brestur*, etc. Others can easily be found:

A 12 Árla morguns þá dagur er ljós,
Logi í sín klæði fer skjótt.

Here we have in one stanza an un-Icelandic expression, *dagur er ljós*, lack of rhyme and unnatural word order in line 2. However, the rhythm of the Icelandic variants is fairly smooth and fits the subject well.

Those who have written on this ballad generally agree that it is fairly young, though they consider it to be medieval.³⁴⁰ There is, however, no reason to assume that it was brought to Iceland in the Middle Ages. Its close relationship to Danish 17th century variants, as well as linguistic characteristics, indicate that *Kvæði af herra Jóni og Loga* was brought to Iceland directly from Denmark in the late 16th or early 17th century. In Norway the ballad has undergone a rather independent development, but there are no signs of that special development in Iceland and, consequently, no reason to assume that the ballad could have been brought to Iceland through Norway.

So far, we have not taken into consideration the E-text, recorded in the East around the middle of the 19th century.^{341a} This is a completely independent version and has been brought to Iceland separately. In this version, *Logi* is either called *Ólafur* or *Láfi* and the latter form (a common diminutive of *Ólafur*) is obviously directly derived from Danish *Lave*. An investigation shows that this text is a fairly close translation of Syv's text, though with certain exceptions. The correspondences are as follows: E 1–4 = Syv (d-D) 1–4, E 6–16 = Syv 7, 9, 11, 12, 14–17. The translation is competently done, fairly accurate and the phrasing is treated rather freely. The translator uses a kenning, *auðar eik* (woman), but still one glimpses the Danish through the Icelandic text.

It is rather surprising to find such a late variant derived directly from Syv, as there are no other examples of whole ballad variants written in Iceland that can be traced directly to Syv.^{341b} The missing stanzas have no doubt been lost through failing memory, and this shows that the ballad lived for some time in oral tradition. A tougher problem is the 5th stanza which is not from Syv but has parallels in the other Icelandic variants and in a variant in Danish recorded in the Faroes. The most natural explanation of this stanza is that it is influenced by the older Icelandic version. When we take into consideration, however, that Syv was very popular in the Faroes and his texts were frequently spread in oral tradition there while this text is almost unique in Iceland, the question arises whether the Syv text has not been transmitted to

³⁴⁰ See DGF, VII, p. 54, Ek 1931, *Danmarks Fornviser*, III, pp. 310–13.

^{341a} It is mentioned in a list of initial lines made in 1859, but the preserved text is a copy of the manuscript the list refers to, cf. ÍF, VI, pp. xli and 159.

^{341b} A fragment derived from Syv is mentioned above, p. 264.

Iceland through the Faroes.³⁴² This question can hardly be answered. On the other hand, we know that this variant could not have been brought to Iceland before 1700, and transfer may even have occurred as late as the early 19th century.

ÍF 71 Kvæði af Pétri ríka

Sir Pétur dwells in the kingdom of Sweden; it occurs to him to travel to Jerusalem and he asks the lady Kristín (thus A, B calls her Elen) how long she will wait for him and desires that it might be nine winters. She promises to wait for nine winters and marry no man alive even if the king himself were to ask for her hand. Then he leaves, and when nine years have passed, she walks down to the seashore and meets traders. She asks them for news of her nephew who has sailed abroad. A small boy tells her that Pétur dwells in Austria and drinks the ale of oblivion and is betrothed to a lady there. Kristín summons her maids; they all dress up as men and sail on the salt sea for three weeks. Kristín then steps ashore and meets Sir Pétur, who recognizes her but hides the fact. He then asks the lady Margrét to be allowed to accompany his nephew for part of the way. She asks him to provide well for his nephew but send his men to accompany him. Sir Pétur then takes leave of Margrét and says she will never see him again. Margrét wades out into the sea after him, while Kristín boasts that now their roles are reversed.³⁴³

This ballad (TSB D 72) is found in all the Nordic countries, and the Danish recordings date from the 16th to the 19th centuries, while all other recordings, apart from the Icelandic ones, date from the 19th century. Grundtvig has this to say about its origins:

Sagnformen er i alle Opskrifter væsenlig den samme, og selv Udtrykket er i det hele taget særdeles fast, ikke alene i de gamle og nye danske, men ogsaa i den islandske fra 17de Aarh. og i den færøske fra dette, mindre i den norske og mindst i den svenske Opskrift. I enkelte Tilfælde kan der spores en særlig Overensstemmelse mellem den islandske og den færøske Form; men det er ellers gjennemgaaende, at alle Egenheder i enhver af de ikke-danske Opskr. kun findes i en enkelt af disse og derved vise sig som Nydannelser ligeover for, hvad der udgjør den faste Kjærne,

³⁴² Olrik says in DGF, VII, p. 65 about this Faroese text that it "grunder sig for største Delen paa Syv og Flyvebladet med en fyldig Mængde af Nydannelse."

³⁴³ Texts: A = III, p. 123, B = IV, p. 126 (one stanza).

som har sin oprindeligste Form i de gamle danske Opskrifter. Det bliver herved sandsynligst, at den gamle danske Tradition staar Kilden nærmest, og at det er en oprindelig *dansk* Vise, der har spredt sig over hele Norden.³⁴⁴

The name Pétur is common to all variants and is undoubtedly original to the ballad. In d-ABCDEFGP, his betrothed is called Ellensborg, and she has the same name, Elin(i)borg, in f-ABC. She is given a shorter version of this name, Ellen, in later Danish variants, d-IOQR (the letters KLMN are used by Grundtvig to designate Swedish, Faroese, Icelandic and Norwegian texts), the Swedish variant (which is from Skåne and can therefore just as well be regarded as Danish) and i-B. On the other hand, she is called Kristín/Kjersti in i-A and n-AB. The names of the rival are so varied that it must be assumed that she was originally anonymous, as she still is in many texts. The variation in the name of the heroine in the Icelandic variants is noteworthy as one has parallels in Norwegian, the other in Danish and Faroese variants. This could indicate that two independent versions of the ballad were brought to Iceland. Unfortunately, only one stanza is left of the B-text, and this is hardly sufficient evidence of a separate version, especially since the name Kristín is one of the most common names of ballad heroines.

It is a relatively simple matter to compare the texts of this ballad, as only one or two variants are found in each country outside Denmark, apart from the Faroes where there are three, all very similar. The problem is that the variants are everywhere so closely related that it is difficult to find enough significant differences to classify them. As an example, we can take three stanzas from the beginning of the Icelandic text, where one stanza is closest to the Norwegian variant, another to the Faroese version and a third to a Danish one:

- A 1 Herra Pétur sat í Svíaríki,
gyrtur var hann sverði,
þá kom honum fyrst í hug
að byrja Jórsalaferðir.
- 2 “Heyrðu það, frú Kristín, á,
hvörsu lengi viltu mín bíða
meðan eg sigli um saltan sjá
að bæta syndir mínar.

³⁴⁴ DGF, IV, p. 238.

Stanza 3 and 4 do not fit into the dialogue and are obviously Icelandic additions.

A 5 En þó eg bíði um níu vintur
að minna frænda ráði
eg gifti mig öngum lifandi manni
þó kongurinn sjálfur mín bæði.

The first stanza has a parallel only in the Danish variants:

d-A 1 Her Peder hand ganger i gaarde,
och leeger hand med sin suerd:
da kom hanem i hue
den lange Iørselferd.³⁴⁵

The next stanza has close parallels both in Denmark and Norway:

n-A 1 Höyre du liti Kersti,
hossi lenge vil du meg biðe,
með eg reiser pá annað land
og lærer báð lesa og skrive?³⁴⁶

d-A 3 “Hør i, stalten Ellins-borg!
huor lenge vil i mig bide,
mens ieg farer mig ud aff land,
at bedre synderne mine?”

The girl's answer is related everywhere but most closely in the Faroese version:

n-A 2 Eg skal biðe deg i átte ár
endá i árinne nie,
höyre du herre Per i Riki
lenger vil eg 'ki biðe.

d-A 4 “I aatte aar vil ieg eder bide,
alt med min frenders raad:
ieg vil mig iche mand-giffue,
det kongen mig selffuer bad.”

³⁴⁵ Olrik believes that *gaarde* refers to *Garðaríki* (Russia) and is more original to the ballad than *Svíaríki*, see DGF, X, pp. 533–4.

³⁴⁶ Landstad, p. 596.

f-B 4 “Bíða vil eg í níggju ár
við mína frænda ráð,
gifti meg ongum livandi manni,
um mín kongur bað.”

As for the whole opening part of this ballad, it is most closely related in the Icelandic and Danish variants, while individual features are as closely related to the Faroese and Norwegian variants. Those are later recordings, and it is not unnatural that the distinctive features of the opening should have been replaced by formulaic stanzas. Similarly, it is clear that Pétur's explanation of his travels in the Norwegian variant, that he is going to learn to read and write, is a distortion which has probably been substituted for the line found in this place in the Danish and Icelandic variants.

In Kristín's conversation with the traders, there are two stanzas which have closer parallels in the Faroes than elsewhere:

A 11 “Heilir og sælir, kaupmenn,
hvað hafið þér að selja?”
“Skrúða, lín og skarlat,
hvað sem frú vill velja.”

12 “Eg hirði ei um þann skróða
eða yðar skarlat rauða,
minn systurson af landi er sigldur,
það aflar mér nauða.”

Here, the Norwegian version speaks of *deð kvite lín/og sá deð lerefti granne* and the Danish one of *leret och zindal* or *lerrit och linn*, while in the Faroese version this is almost word for word identical with the Icelandic version:

f-A 12 “Hoyrið tit, ríku keypmenn,
hvat hava tit at selja?”
“Vit hava skróður og skarlak reyð,
tað besta frú kann velja.”

13 “Lítið er mær um skróður,
og ei um skarlak reyða,
mín bróðir er av landi úti,
tí syrgi eg meg til deyða.”

The brother who appears here must be a distortion, for both Danish and Norwegian variants have nephew. However, an uncle (*moderbroder*) is mentioned in n-B, but this is probably an independent feature, as *moderbroder* is a stock figure in West-Nordic ballads.³⁴⁷ The words *skróði* and *skarlat* which connect the Icelandic and Faroese versions are, on account of the alliteration, likely to be a secondary West-Nordic feature and therefore an indication of a special connection between the Icelandic and Faroese versions.

The Faroese version next goes on to say that Pétur is in Denmark and is betrothed to a Danish lady; in the Norwegian version it is only said that his wedding is imminent, while Icelandic and Danish variants are in fairly close agreement here, except that the ale of oblivion seems to be an Icelandic addition:

i-A 15 “Sé hann yðar systurson,
herra Pétur ríki,
hann hefur fengið sér festarkvon
og er í Austurríki.”

d-A 8 “Iche er det eders søstersøn,
vel kiender ieg Peder den rige:
och hand haffuer sig en frue loffuet
i Øster-kongens rige.”

A continued comparison would not alter the conclusion.³⁴⁸ The relationship between the various versions is unusually close. As the early Danish variants and the Icelandic one are older than the others and better preserved, they show several parallels with each other not found elsewhere. These two versions are, for the most part, paralleled by the Faroese version, which is sometimes verbally closer to the Danish version, sometimes to the Icelandic one. The Norwegian version is the most badly preserved one and is generally further removed from the Icelandic version verbally than Danish and Faroese variants.

Although the Icelandic variant is closely related to the Danish version, it is unavoidable to assume a special connection with the Faroese version. Possibly, this cannot be explained unless we assume that the ballad was brought to Iceland twice, and that the West-Nordic

³⁴⁷ See, e.g., NB 37, *Sigurd svein*, and CCF 173, *Sveinur í Vallalið*.

³⁴⁸ See, e.g., i-A 19 and f-A 20.

version was later influenced by the Danish version. But the differences between the variants are so slight that it might get us closer to the truth to envisage the ballad sung in Danish, with a few West-Nordic alterations, in a place such as Bergen at the end of the Middle Ages, and spreading from there to Iceland and the Faroes.

This ballad is among those ballads in quatrain metre with the greatest proportion of feminine rhymes. This is not only true of the Icelandic variant, where 50% of all the rhymes are feminine, but also of the Norwegian one where a majority of the rhymes are feminine. In the Danish and Faroese variants, fewer than half of the stanzas have feminine rhymes, but still the proportion is unusually high. Gun Widmark has pointed out that feminine rhymes in quatrains is a characteristic West-Nordic feature mainly found in the East-Nordic area in heroic ballads brought from the West.³⁴⁹ This raises the question whether *Kvæði af Pétri ríka* could be West-Nordic. The major obstacle to such an assumption is that the preservation of the ballad is much better in Denmark than in other places and that it has had deep roots in oral tradition there. Ernst von der Recke, who had a very sensitive ear for West-Nordic characteristics in Danish ballads, does not evince any doubts about the Danish origin of this ballad. No attempt will be made to come to a final conclusion about this issue here, but it is tempting to imagine that the ballad was composed in Danish in Norway under the influence of West-Nordic balladry. This would have had to have taken place after the Danish aristocracy had gained a foothold in Norway and the Danish language had started to replace Norwegian as the official language of the country.³⁵⁰

The language and metre of the Icelandic variant are handled with skill when it is taken into account how closely the wording of the Danish version is followed in many places. Now and then alternate rhymes occur, and alliteration makes a rather frequent appearance. Nevertheless, the poem is in a genuine ballad style, and it is one of the clearest examples we have of an independent and assured treatment of a ballad in translation where the style is not broken nor the Icelandic language abused.

³⁴⁹ See Widmark 1970.

³⁵⁰ A parallel can be seen in some novelistic ballads (*romanviser*), cf. above, p. 340–41.

ÍF 72 Kvæði af Pána og Gunnvöru

Sir Páni invites Gunnvör to his home; she asks advice from her nurse who warns her not to accept the invitation, for Páni is planning to betray her. Gunnvör says she will outwit him and puts up her horse as a stake for a bet. She dresses her page in finery and puts on a grey robe herself. Páni stands outside and greets them; the page is helped from his horse while Gunnvör stands by. The page is led to a bride's room; Páni and his sister carry a light before him. The page then sits drinking while Gunnvör feeds the horses with grain; finally, he is led to bed, and Gunnvör pulls off his sock and then bids him good night. Páni asks Gunnvör to turn to him and says he will give her all his possessions. Then the page reveals his identity, Páni seizes bow and spear, but the page jumps out of the window where Gunnvör is waiting for him. The news is carried far and wide around Norway that Sir Páni caught a page and lost a maiden.³⁵¹

This ballad (TSB D 153) is found in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. In the earlier Danish recordings, from the 16th and 17th centuries, and one of the Swedish ones, there is an introductory passage describing how Gunnvör went to church, met Páni and had to promise him to come to see him later. On the other hand, Danish 19th century recordings and Swedish and Norwegian recordings all start where Gunnvör asks whether she will be allowed to go to him for a Christmas feast. The names are everywhere the same, with slight variations. The same thing happens here as in ÍF 22, Palle or Palne becomes Páni.

Comparison of texts shows that the great majority of the stanzas in the Icelandic variant have parallels abroad. Most often, these stanzas are found in all the non-Icelandic versions, and the differences are so slight that they give no indication of the origin. Where differences are found, they tend to show that the Icelandic text is closest to the Norwegian ones:

i 7 Klæddi hún sinn reiðarsvein
með gulu og blá
en hún frúin Gunnvör
á stakkinn grá.

n-A 5 Hó klæer út sin kjøresvenn
alt båd' í gúlt á blátt:

³⁵¹ Texts: A = IV, p. 117 (one stanza), B = IV, p. 164 (the opening stanza of this text is identical with A).

sjóv gjenge stolsans Gundelill
 á slíte de vallmáli smátt.³⁵²

d-A 7 Klede hun sin kiyresuend
 i brunt och blaatt:
 selff gick iomfru Gundelill
 i weimell graa.

In fact, there is little to choose between here; the second line is more closely related to the Norwegian variant and the fourth one to the Danish text. Still it seems obvious that the Norwegian variant has been distorted and originally had *grátt*.

The 12th stanza has greater similarity to the Norwegian than to the Danish version. On the other hand, however, there exists a Swedish variant which is almost identical word for word to the Norwegian one, so that this cannot be used as a guideline.

The dialogue between Páni and the page in bed is most closely related by far in the Icelandic and Norwegian variants:

i 15 “Heyrðu, frúin Gunnvör,
 þú snúst að mér,
 allt mitt góss og skógana
 gef eg þér.”

16 “Þú þarft ekki að kalla mig
 so unga frú,
 eg er so kaskur karlmaður
 sem sjálfur þú.”

n-B 8 “Hör du, stoltan Gundelill,
 snú deg no hit tæ mæg!
 de vi’ eg for sannheti seie
 eg hev lengstom trátt ette deg.³⁵³

n-A 17 “Höyrer de, riddaren Palli!
 nå talar eg mæ trú:
 eg æ’ so væl vaksen karmann
 eg so væl som dú.”

³⁵² DGF, IV, p. 393.

³⁵³ NFS, Bugge a, pp. 126–9.

Both in Swedish and Danish variants, Páni asks the page to turn towards him; but the wording is not so closely related. In Danish, Swedish and Norwegian variants, he is called a *køresvend*, while some Norwegian variants have *leiesvein*, which could go back either to *leiðarsveinn* or *reiðarsveinn* as in the Icelandic variant.

One stanza has a closer parallel in Danish than in Norwegian variants:

i 18 Sjálfur komst hann reiðarsveinn
fyrir gluggann niður
en hún frúin Gunnvör,
hún stóð þar viður.

d-E 22 Det da vaar den Kiøresvend,
Hand ud af Vinduet sprang:
Der holte hun Jomfru Gunder lille
alt med sin hengendis Karm.

In the Norwegian variants, the content of this stanza is divided into two stanzas.

Although the results of the comparison are not decisive, they give a clear indication that the Icelandic version of the ballad is derived from a Norwegian one.

The Icelandic variant is in the same metre as *Tristrams kvæði*, i.e., with only six stressed syllables in each half stanza, and it is fairly regular, although some of the lines are on the longer side. Elsewhere in the Nordic countries, an ordinary quatrain metre is prevalent. Nevertheless, stanzas can be found here and there with very short lines that are most suitable scanned in the Tristram-metre. This indicates that the Tristram metre is original to this ballad, but has everywhere been changed and the lines lengthened.³⁵⁴

As the Icelandic version of the ballad seems to have preserved an original metrical characteristic better than any other variant in the

³⁵⁴ Examples of short lines in non-Icelandic versions are: d-A 7, quoted above, s-B, st. 1, 3 and 4 (DGF, IV, p. 391): *Stólts Gunilla talte/ till modren så/ . . . , När som de kommo/ i rosende lund/ . . . , Honom kläder hon/ i sabel og mård/ . . .*; moreover in n-A, 6–7, and in this stanza from another Norwegian text: *Eg kann inkji, junkar Palmi,/ meg ti deg snú:/ eg æ' líksovæl ein útklædde karmanne/ eg som dú.* (DGF, IV, p. 393.)

Nordic countries, it is likely to be relatively old in Iceland. The language of the ballad is of a fairly high quality, although there is a number of inaccurate rhymes like *háls:fals*, *spjót:út*, *ljós:hús*, *eykur:leikur*,³⁵⁵ and a distorted phrase: *vakta korn!* Thus the tentative conclusion drawn from the comparison is strengthened by metrical and linguistic details while there is nothing to contradict it: *Kvæði af Pána og Gunnvöru* was brought to Iceland from Norway during the late Middle Ages.

ÍF 73 Salomons kvæði

King Salomon celebrates his wedding and gives a splendid feast . . .³⁵⁶

This is the first stanza of a ballad which is found in Denmark, Sweden and the Faroes (TSB D 256). Salomon (Salmon, Selamon) is the chief character in the Faroes and Sweden, but in Danish texts the chief character is called Vellemand, while Sallemand plays a different role. Sverker Ek made the conjecture that the ballad was of Norwegian origin, and Ernst von der Recke was of the same opinion.³⁵⁷ In the Danish version, half of the refrain is identical with the one accompanying the Icelandic stanza, but the inserted refrain is missing. In the Swedish version, on the other hand, the refrain is identical with the Icelandic one. The Faroese version has a different refrain, but its beginning is most closely similar to the Icelandic stanza in that the wedding is already mentioned in the first stanza:

f-A 1 Selamon læt sær klæði skera,
tí hann skyldi sítt brúdleyp gera.

As has been pointed out before, there are verbal similarities between Faroese variants of this ballad and ÍF 1, though it is impossible to tell what kind of relationship there is between them.

This ballad was probably brought to Iceland from Norway or the Faroes.

³⁵⁵ If the last rhyme is taken as a sign that *ey* had lost its rounding when the ballad was re-composed in Icelandic, it can hardly have happened before the 16th century; but it could also be an inaccurate rhyme of a similar kind as the other examples. But, it could also be a distortion.

³⁵⁶ Text: IV, p. 124 (one stanza).

³⁵⁷ See Ek 1921, p. 97, and *Danmarks Fornviser*, III, p. 3.

ÍF 74 Kvæði af Heiðabæjar draug

Riddarinn reið með keldu,
hann batt sinn folann við feldu.

The single stanza classified as ÍF 74,³⁵⁸ must belong to a ballad found in Denmark and Norway, *Hedebys genganger* (TSB A 69). A Danish version is printed in Vedel, but fragments of the ballad were recorded in the last century and at the beginning of the present one. Grüner-Nielsen thinks it certain that these fragments can be traced back to Vedel, and this may be so, but it is strange that they agree better in the rhyme words with the Icelandic stanza than with Vedel or Norwegian variants, for the opening in the fragments α , γ , δ is:

Jeg drog mig udi Fælde
og satte min Hest i Helde.³⁵⁹

The Icelandic variant seems to have been the only one that has had a third person narrative. If it is the case that the late Danish recordings are derived from Vedel's text, this example would nevertheless indicate that they are based on an oral tradition reaching back to the 17th century, at which time the ballad must have been brought to Iceland, if it is based on Vedel.

ÍF 75 Sjö bræðra kvæði

Ríddu þig ekki fram á þann skóg
né undir þá grænu heiði,
þú finnur þar mína bræðurnar sjö,
þeir bera so þunga reiði.
Grasið grór undir grænum hlíðum.³⁶⁰

This stanza is from a ballad known all over the Nordic countries (TSB D 69). The Faroese variants are slightly different from the others; the Norwegian ones are closely related to Danish variants. The closest parallel to this Icelandic stanza is found in a Swedish text:

³⁵⁸ Text: IV, p. 124 (one stanza).

³⁵⁹ See DGF, X, p. 180, and Bugge 1858, p. 80.

³⁶⁰ Text: IV, p. 125 (one stanza).

Ridh så warliga gienom dän Skogh
 öfwer dhe länge heeder
 Achta tigh för mine Bröder siu
 som alle äre wrede.³⁶¹

It is no doubt the case that both these variants contain original phrasing. The refrain is nowhere the same as that of the Icelandic stanza, but it is usually related in some way. The origin and age must be considered as entirely uncertain.

ÍF 76 Samtal mæðgina

A mother asks her son why his sword is dripping with blood; he says that he has killed a man today (missing in B which begins with a question not found in A, what was their disagreement and his answer that they both wanted the same woman); she asks what he is going to do; he says he is going to move away from the country. She asks what he is going to do with his hawk, horse, hound, children, wife, herself (hawk and hound have been replaced by a cow in B). He is going to have all these take care of themselves except the children whom he will take to their uncles and the wife whom he will carry on his back. She then asks when he will come back: when the swan is black and the raven white and the stone floats on water. In B there is a final stanza where she asks: "But, if that never happens?" and he responds by asking God to do His will.³⁶²

The B-text has obviously suffered more damage, and it may be concluded that its explanation of the killing in the beginning and the pious ending are independent additions. The same can be said of the lowering in social status that appears in the substitution of the domestic cow for the aristocratic hunting animals, the hawk and the hound.

This is quite a famous ballad found in Denmark, Sweden and Norway (TSB D 320) and among English speaking peoples (Child no. 13). The best known variant is the one named after the hero there, *Edward*, and first printed in Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* in 1765. Doubt has frequently been cast on whether Percy's text is a genuine oral variant. In the East-Nordic area there are many recordings of this ballad, most of them from Sweden and Finland, and the earliest Scandinavian recording is Swedish from the 17th century.

³⁶¹ *Visböcker*, II, p. 293.

³⁶² Texts: A = V, p. 14, B = VI, p. 49.

In Denmark, on the other hand, only two variants have appeared, from the 19th century, in addition to one line in a legal manuscript from the 18th century, which seems to be the opening of this ballad. From Norway, there is only one recording in pure Danish.³⁶³

A great deal has been written on this ballad, and there is a good review of the research in DGF, X, pp. 786–90. Of greatest relevance here are studies by Archer Taylor, Wolfgang Schmidt and Jón Helgason.³⁶⁴

As Jón Helgason points out in his paper, there are various features in the Icelandic version not found elsewhere in the Nordic countries, which, on the other hand, link it with English variants. First, there is the opening of the ballad. The Scandinavian variants begin with the mother asking the son where he has been for so long or with other introductory stanzas, while both the English texts and i-A start abruptly with the question about blood:

i-A 1 “Því flóir blóð á sverði þín,
einvalds son minn?”
“Ég hefi drepið mann í dag,
mín móðir mild undir hlíða.”

Child B 1 ‘Why dois your brand sae drap wi bluid,
Edward, Edward,
Why dois your brand sae drap wi bluid,
And why sae sad gang yee O?’
‘O I hae killed my hauke sae guid,
Mither, mither,
O I hae killed my hauke sae guid,
And I had nae mair bot hee O.’

Another feature linking i-A with the English variants are the hawk, horse and hound, the disposition of which the mother seems most concerned about. They have, in fact, changed position in the Icelandic version, for in the English version he tries to conceal the real cause of the blood by claiming that he killed his hawk, his horse and hound. These animals have been almost totally lost from the Scandinavian versions: only in one variant is a hound mentioned. The third feature

³⁶³ Printed as d-C in DGF, VI.

³⁶⁴ See Taylor 1931, Schmidt 1933, and Jón Helgason 1960.

that Jón Helgason points out as a connecting link between the Icelandic and English variants is the inserted refrain *einvalds son minn*. He shows that this is probably a distortion of a Scandinavian name, 'Envald', 'Enevold'. But again, he feels this is in support of Edward's having been the original name of the hero:

But if the Icelandic ballad had the name Einvald(r), then it supports the genuineness of the name Edward. Etymologically the two names are of course different, but they bear a strong resemblance to each other. No other forms of the ballad from two distant countries have a common name.³⁶⁵

Apart from these features, the Icelandic version is obviously most closely related to Scandinavian variants, and Jón Helgason reaches this conclusion regarding its origin:

It appears from the preceding discussion that the Icelandic ballad is in many respects most like the other Scandinavian versions, but it has also some features which are known only from the English texts. We do not know any certain examples of direct import of ballads from Scotland to Iceland. The most probable explanation is then that the ballad came to Iceland from Denmark and that its Icelandic forms are derived from a Danish form which was older, probably much older, than the texts which have been preserved in the Scandinavian countries.³⁶⁶

Here we must take a closer look at the probability of Jón Helgason's belief that the ballad was brought to Iceland from Denmark. It is then necessary to look into the history of the ballad outside Iceland.

Archer Taylor, who did not know the Icelandic version, thinks that the English version of the ballad is older than the Scandinavian one, and he has this to say about the position of these main branches of the tradition:

The branching off of the Scandinavian tradition occurred long before the rise of the modern corrupt oral versions of the English and American tradition.³⁶⁷

One of Taylor's main arguments for an English origin is the vulgar-

³⁶⁵ Jón Helgason 1960, p. 28.

³⁶⁶ *loc. cit.*

³⁶⁷ Taylor 1931, p. 54.

ization of the material, which sinks from aristocratic milieu down to the social environment of farmers. Of course, the strength of this argument is diminished when it has been shown by the Icelandic version that such a development occurred in Scandinavia. But there is no shortage of arguments pointing in the same direction. Wolfgang Schmidt shows very clearly how *Edward* has developed from older ballads and ballad forms existing in England and Scotland, so that we may assume that there existed a ballad in which a dialogue between mother and son formed only a part, and which was preceded by a description of the killing and its causes. An example of a ballad of this type is *Lizie Wan* (Child no. 51). It is in every respect more probable that a ballad of the *Edward* type is derived from a *Lizie Wan* type than vice versa. As both phases of this development exist in the English tradition, there is an overwhelming probability that the *Edward* type was formed there and that the ballad was then brought to Scandinavia.³⁶⁸

One argument can be added to this: the Scandinavian variants are, with a few exceptions, unrhymed. The simplest explanation of this lack of rhyme, which is very rare in Scandinavian ballads, is that the quatrain lines of the English metre, rhymed *xaya*, have been changed to couplets by transforming the even lines to a divided refrain. This was easily accomplished, as it follows from the form that the even lines are repeated unchanged or with slight variations. We cannot use Percy's text where rhymes have been inserted here, but the situation appears clearly in Child A where a question is followed by an answer without repetition:

Child A 7 'What about did the plea begin,
 Son Davie, Son Davie?'
 'It began about the cutting of a willow wand
 That would never been a tree.'

All things considered, one has to conclude that the ballad was brought from Britain to Scandinavia. The archaic features of the Icelandic version show without doubt that it is, as maintained by Jón Helgason, derived from an older phase of the Scandinavian tradition than the one that appears in the extant variants. This is also supported by comparison of individual variants. The correspondences between the

³⁶⁸ See Schmidt 1933, esp. pp. 293–5.

Icelandic texts and other Nordic texts are all of such a nature that they must be original features in the Scandinavian version, and no conclusion can be drawn from them about the interrelationship of the variants. On the other hand, there is no special reason to conclude that the ballad must have passed through Denmark on its way to Iceland. The centre of the Scandinavian tradition is undoubtedly Sweden. There it is first recorded and there the greatest number of recordings is found. From Sweden it was transmitted to Finland where it caught foothold among Swedish- and Finnish-speaking Finns. In Denmark, it was only recorded twice, and it is noteworthy that these recordings were made in Southern Seeland and Funen, while the ballad has not been found in Jutland, otherwise so rich in balladry. The only Norwegian recording is, as stated above, in almost pure Danish, but as Olrik points out, the name of the family in which it was preserved sounds as if it might have come from Sweden.³⁶⁹

It is by far most likely that the ballad was brought from Britain to Sweden. From Sweden, it could then have got to Iceland by various routes, probably through Denmark or Norway. Considering the fact that the Icelandic version has preserved such archaic features, it is more likely that its branching off from the Scandinavian tradition and its transmission to Iceland took place before the Reformation, and then it is more likely to have passed through Norway; but nothing definite can be stated about this.

ÍF 77 Kvæði af syndugri konu

One swore in the South that she was a nun; one swore in the west that she was innocent of laymen and priests alike. There came a big man who said his name was Sunday. She falls to her knees and asks Christ to shrieve her. He asks her not to swear; she has had three children, one with her father, another with her brother and the third with her father confessor. He tells her to walk that sand where foot and hand are burnt, sit under the church wall where there is frost and never rain, walk on that hill where the moon shines but never the sun; she should not wear shoes but wade in snow; all this should she do for nine long winters (years). When she had been through all this, Christ came and asked how she had liked the penance. She says that

³⁶⁹ See DGF, VI, p. 143.

it was like walking a smooth road, like drinking clear wine. He says she is to be his dove and fly to Heaven.³⁷⁰

As is shown by A, this ballad existed in Ární Magnússon's time in a recording from the early 17th century, but something must have been missing from the beginning of the variant in his possession. Unfortunately, this recording was destroyed, and all we have got is one line quoted by Ární Magnússon.³⁷¹ Apart from this, the ballad was not written down in Iceland until the latter half of the 19th century.

This is actually a variant of the ballad about Mary Magdalene (TSB B 16), which is known all over the Nordic area. The greatest number of variants is found in Finland and Sweden, and in Norway there are 22 recordings or fragments of recordings. In Denmark there are a few recordings from 19th century oral tradition and also a broadside from the 17th or 18th century. In the Faroes there is one variant which was written down in Danish but seems to be based on Faroese phraseology. The connection of this text with Norwegian variants and the Icelandic one support the idea that this is a variant that was actually sung in Faroese.

The content of the ballad is obviously of legendary origin; it comes from legends that can be traced to the Biblical story of the Samaritan woman (John 4) and from legends about the Egyptian Mary.³⁷²

The Icelandic version lacks the opening found in this ballad in other countries, which describes how Jesus, or an old man, comes to a well and asks a woman for water to drink. She has no drinking vessel, and he says he would drink from her palm if he knew her to be clean. Clearly, the first stanzas of the Icelandic version are corrupt and the order confused, but if stanza 3 is moved to the beginning and stanza 4 is placed between 7 and 8, the story becomes fairly coherent.

The majority of the stanzas in the Icelandic version have parallels in other countries. They can be divided into two groups. In one group belong those stanzas that have parallels in all places in the Nordic countries where the ballad has been preserved, i.e., i 4, 5, and 6; in the other group belong stanzas that have parallels only in Norway and the Faroes. Among those are the two initial stanzas, where the word *nunna*

³⁷⁰ Texts: A = IV, p. 15 (one line), B = VI, p. 211, C = VII, p. 102 (fragm.).

³⁷¹ See ÍF, IV, pp. xiii–xv.

³⁷² See Blom 1971, pp. 139–47.

is found in the Faroese variant, while the directions are found in Norwegian variants. Neither feature is found outside the West-Nordic area.

i 1 Ein sór fyrir sunnan,
hún sagðist vera nunna.

2 Ein sór fyrir vestan
fyrir leikmenn og presta.

f-A 5 Hun svor tað af munni,
hun var saa sker en nunne.

n-D Hó svor um Gud, hó svor um mann.

— — —

n-IV 4 Hó svór seg ífrá øst te vest
at hó va' möy a dem ølle best.³⁷³

The penances that Jesus gives the woman are of many different kinds, and clearly their number has grown with time in the oral tradition. Stanzas 8–10 in the Icelandic variant have no parallels in other countries, though the first of these stanzas, where she is told to walk on the sand where hand and foot will burn, is in amazingly close agreement with one of the sources of the ballad, where it is assumed that the Egyptian Mary will dwell in the desert.

On the other hand, one of the penances is confined to the West-Nordic variants:

11 “Þú skalt ekki hafa skó,
berum fótum vaða snjó.”

f-A 13 “Troe frost og kolden sne,
barfod og i ingen skoe.”

n-IV 12 “Dú ska' 'kje ana ha te sko,
hell trå i snjoen mæ din bære fót.

When he comes back and asks how she liked the penances, the answer is related in Danish, Norwegian and Faroese variants but less

³⁷³ NFS, Bugge h, p. 66.

closely related in Swedish ones. Still, it is clear that the closest relationship is between the West-Nordic variants.

The refrain of the Icelandic variant is of unusual length and has no parallel anywhere. It is more formally intricate than such refrains commonly are and bears an obvious resemblance to Catholic hymns. There can hardly be any doubt that the refrain is a free translation or imitation of the opening lines of the famous hymn by Jacopone da Todi:

Stabat mater dolorosa
Juxta crucem lacrymosa
Dum pendebat filius.³⁷⁴

The refrain was probably composed during the Catholic period and most probably was already connected to the ballad at that time.

The above comparison shows beyond reasonable doubt that the Icelandic variant of *Kvæði af syndugri konu* belongs to a West-Nordic branch of the ballad's tradition. It is also generally most likely that a ballad with such content would have enjoyed its greatest popularity in Catholic times and been transmitted between countries then. This conclusion is supported by the language of the ballad.

ÍF 78 Kvæði um sankti Hallvarð

Vébjörn and Oddný at Hlíðarendi have a son and give him the name Hallvarður. He asks his mother to cut for him a robe of white cloth so that he can be called Gestur. Hallvarður owns two pairs of scales and weighs too sparingly for himself but in excess for the poor. When he comes to social gatherings, he is happy and joyous. A man was stuck on a cliff-face, twenty fathoms up and down; he calls Hallvarður's name and then runs up to the top of the cliff, as if across level fields. A poor farmer is rowing out to sea, sees a large piece of wood float by his boat, calls upon Hallvarður to transform it into a whale; then a storm starts blowing and a fog comes up (which is rather unusual); he calls Hallvarður's name once more and manages to reach land, towing the handsome whale. Along comes a sick man who has to be kept in bonds because he wants to take his life. He eats of the whale and is cured. A woman is out in the forest about to be delivered of a baby, but her labour is hard. She calls upon Hallvarður, then sees a man with fair hair and a dark hat who recites a hymn over her; then her labour eases and

³⁷⁴ About translations of *Stabat mater* into Icelandic see Stefán Einarsson 1953, where this refrain is not mentioned.

the child is delivered. The child falls upon a knife and the point thrusts out of its abdomen, but it is healed three nights later. Men start searching the forest and the child calls out in a loud voice that its mother rests there but speaks no more after they come upon it. 'Hallvarður spoke through its mouth, and Jesus was in its heart.'³⁷⁵

As is evident from the plot summary, this is not an ordinary ballad but rather a religious poem based on fragments from the saint's *vita et miracula*. Nothing is said here of Hallvarður's death nor of the miracles that caused him to be canonized.³⁷⁶ There did exist in Icelandic a narrative about Hallvarður, which has been lost except for the opening and end, but the preserved parts indicate that it was concordant with the Latin legend printed in *Acta Sanctorum* and in *Heilagra manna sögur*, and in lections in *Breviarium Nidrosiense*.³⁷⁷ The ballad has nothing in common with the legend except Hallvarður's name and the name of his father, and he is said to have grown up in *Hlíðarendi*, in *Hlíðum* in the legend. Hallvarður's mother is called Oddný in the ballad and Þórný in the legend, which is not an unnatural distortion.³⁷⁸

But, even though the narrative structure of this ballad is very different from typical ballad structure, the metre and partly the style connect it with the ballad genre. It is true that the style is by no means typical ballad style, and it is heavily influenced by Catholic religious poetry; *rímur* style can be discerned here and there, mostly in places where the influence from *rímur* metres makes its appearance. One of the peculiarities of this ballad is that it has no refrain, but in this it follows the example of *Óláfs vísur*, *Þorgeirs rímur*, etc. All things considered, it is doubtful whether it actually belongs within the ballad tradition, and in fact Jón Helgason has included it not only in his ballad edition but also in his edition of medieval religious poetry.³⁷⁹

There is no way of stating anything definite about the origin of this ballad. Either it is Icelandic, or it has been brought from Norway to Iceland, where it has enjoyed a lengthy oral existence. It is *prima facie* more probable that oral tales about Hallvarður's miracles should have

³⁷⁵ Text: IV, p. 106.

³⁷⁶ See *Heilagra manna sögur*, I, pp. 396–9.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁸ Thus the name *Oddný* is written *Orny* in the 14th century and sometimes later, cf. Björn K. Þórólfsson 1925, pp. xxxi–ii.

³⁷⁹ *Íslensk miðaldakvæði*, II, pp. 363–6.

been common in Norway than in Iceland, and the ballad must be based on such tales.

ÍF 79 Kvæði af Imnar og Elínu

Two children of kings, Imnar and young Elín, fall in love. Imnar leaves home and comes to Elín in the middle of the night and asks to be allowed to sleep with her. She demurs and pleads kinship. Nevertheless, they lie down and trust in God's mercy; Elín swears that she will do penance for this and makes the sign of the cross at the foot of the bed. Elín carries a boy for nine months, and King Prjámus, her father, discovers the whole truth. He calls an assembly and chooses five champions to take revenge on Imnar. Then he has slaves tie a stone around Imnar's neck and throw him into the sea, but Imnar floats and sings from the psalter. Then they are both sunk, but Elín floats with an infant child in her arms. They get to shore, send the child to God, then walk the whole day and are so dear to Christ that all their sins fall off them. Towards evening they come to a place where a bishop commands a nation. Here one might think that a new part of the story is about to commence; but instead the ballad is finished abruptly on this stanza, which is unique in Icelandic ballads:

Hvur sem þessa rímu kveður,
gangi þeim allt í hag,
Hallur gamli hana hefur ort
á Tómás messudag.³⁸⁰

The structure and the content of the narrative suggest that it might be based on a legend or a folktale, but so far nothing has been found, neither story nor poem, treating this same material. The opening of the ballad is similar to that of other ballads that describe a forced entry into a woman's chamber, but kinship is added here. As we continue, it becomes clear that Imnar is no ordinary West-Nordic hero, for he does not try to defend himself at the assembly. Later, miracles with a very Catholic appearance begin to occur. It would probably be near the end of the Catholic period that one might expect such an easy absolution as the one described here.³⁸¹ At least, it is certain that the ballad's

³⁸⁰ Text: VI, p. 193.

³⁸¹ See, e.g., the religious poem *Ljómur* in *Íslensk miðaldakvæði*, I, pp. 111–39, esp. stanzas 28–31.

morality is fundamentally different from that of the Lutheran authorities as it appeared in legislation around 1600.³⁸²

Stanza 9 is very strange and must be corrupt, but it might be the remnants of a stanza about a traitor who has revealed all. The name of the king, *Prjámus*, is a peculiar one in a ballad of this kind and might indicate a connection with chapbooks.

The language of the ballad is genuine ballad language, and it is, in general, good Icelandic without any signs of translation. Old Hallur, if the last stanza is not a recently added joke, was a fairly competent poet, as can be seen by his descriptions of the love affair and the absolution. The kenning *sólar gramur* (stanza 6) is also found in the poetry of the twelfth century skald Einar Skúlason, but of course it could arise independently.

If this ballad is Icelandic, it is remarkably free from influence from the *rímur* style. It is true that it has the poetical words *víf* and *rekkur*, both characteristic *rímur* words, and the above-mentioned kenning, but this is hardly more than is to be expected in any poem in fairly good Icelandic, if it is not a slavish translation. Apart from this, the style and the rhythm are genuinely balladic.

Since the ballad is only found in Iceland and there are no positive signs that it is of non-Icelandic origin, we must accept it as Icelandic. It was probably composed before the Reformation but does not have the appearance of being old.

ÍF 81 Eyvindar ríma

The queen of the realm is unnaturally stout, so that the court is astonished. A strange creature in a wrinkled coat springs from underneath her clothes. The queen is so heavy that eighteen men are unable to drag her coach. The queen gives birth to a son and, it seems, also to a colt and a tower "with a wand"; the boy is clad in armour with a bright sword in hand. *Nunna* (Nun?) is the first to hold the boy and gives him favourable prophecies; then *Flakinmunna* (The Harelipped One?) talks (here it is assumed that stanzas 7 and 8 are in reverse order) and puts a spell on him to the effect that he will kill his father and three other kings unless he proposes to a girl called *Mundíá*. He grows up and learns where that lady rules a city, leaves home with five thousand men. Citizens enter and tell the lady that a handsome man has entered her lands. She asks him his name. He says he

³⁸² See esp. the *Stóridómur, Íslenzkt fornbréfasafn*, XIV, pp. 271–6.

is called Eyvindur and has come to propose to her. She says he does not need to bother to propose to her unless he first kills the vikings Sóti and Hrólfur. Eyvindur goes to see Sóti and challenges him to a duel. Sóti accepts the challenge. Eyvindur kills him and all his men and then gets both land and the bright lady.³⁸³

This ballad is not known anywhere except in this single recording written down "from an old woman" for Árni Magnússon. It has no refrain, and most of the rhymes are feminine. It must be classified as a heroic ballad, though it does not particularly resemble Faroese and Norwegian ballads of that category. Ólafur Marteinsson thinks that this is most probably a parody of a heroic ballad.³⁸⁴ This is not easy to determine, both because it is difficult to know how much it has been distorted, and also because it is hard to draw the line between exaggeration made for humorous purposes and that made to arouse wonder in this kind of poetry.

Eyvindar ríma is a strange conglomerate and, on a closer look, quite literary. The opening is rather obscure and the strange creature (the word used actually means girl) in the wrinkled coat resembles various weird phenomena in folktales, although here it is a totally blind motif. The protagonist enters the world fully armoured like Pallas Athene; he is even on horseback! In stanzas 5 to 8, there is a clear case of a Sleeping Beauty motif; the cause of the anger of the one who puts the spell on him is lack of a cloth. On the other hand, the spell is reminiscent of the Eddic poems *Grógaldr* and *Fjölsvinnsmál*, where a young man is compelled by spell to search for a certain girl, a subject matter that has found its way into a Danish ballad (TSB A 45). (There is hardly any reason to linger over the fact that the terrible fate he is to suffer is partly the same as that of King Oedipus.)³⁸⁵ On the other hand, it does not seem that the maiden in question is hard to find or guarded by supernatural forces, as she should be if this were a variant of the story told in *Grógaldr* and *Fjölsvinnsmál*. The last part of the ballad, the proposal and the killing of the vikings, has numerous parallels in *fornaldarsögur*, though no one more closely related than the others.³⁸⁶

³⁸³ Text: IV, p. 110.

³⁸⁴ Ólafur Marteinsson, pp. 61–2.

³⁸⁵ See editions of *Sæmundar Edda (The Poetic Edda)* and TSB A 45. These poems and comparable Celtic instances of magical curse implying command to search for a far away princess are discussed in Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1975.

³⁸⁶ See Boberg: *Motif-Index*, H335.

There is nothing in this ballad that particularly indicates that it is translated from a foreign language; on the contrary, it must be regarded as likely that this hodge-podge of miscellaneous motifs is Icelandic. The style, metre and diction also support this conclusion.

ÍF 82 Þorgeirs rímur

Þórir attends a Christmas feast at Earl Hákon's. The earl asks him who the huge man sitting beside him is. This man answers, says his name is Þorgeir and he is an Icelander. The earl says that he must be a good wrestler and orders him to wrestle with his black slave the following day. Þorgeir says he will not wrestle with giants, magicians or slaves and asks to be allowed to wrestle with a free man. In the morning, Þórir gives Þorgeir a charmed wrestling garment and tells him to wear this and not let anyone trick him into taking it off. The black slave is led from the forest and kept in chains like a wild beast. Then a wrestling stone is taken and placed on the field. The black slave is unruly; they wrestle most of the day; but he does not succeed in getting a grip on Þorgeir with his teeth. The earl then asks Þorgeir to take off the garment so that he can wrestle with greater ease. He refuses. Þorgeir proves to be the weaker and retreats to the wrestling stone until his heels ram against it. Then he jumps backwards over it, fells the slave on top of it and jumps on top of his shoulders so that the slave is cleft in two. He then takes the head part of the black slave and hits the earl with it so that two teeth are struck from his mouth. When the earl intends to seize him, Þórir arrives with 400 men and takes him away. Þórir sends him to a widow called Ragnhildur and gives him a fine horse called Krákur. Hákon holds both hands before his eyes and sees where Þorgeir rides; he runs to the temple and throws himself down in front of Hörgabrúður and worships her. Þorgeir rides and expects no evil when the feet of his horse are suddenly tied by magic. He steps off the horse, ties all his baggage on his back and puts the horse on top of that. He then comes to the widow who is surprised that he was sent there, because she has a slave who tears everything apart. Then we are told of a man called Hárekur who wants to marry Ragnhildur. She says he will never get into her bed unless he follows Þorgeir. Hárekur says that marauders have always pursued him and fought him so that he does not dare to go to Heiðarskógur. Nevertheless, they go and come to a stable where there are fifteen horses. They put their own horses inside and let the marauders' horses out. There were two brothers there, Rauður and Svartur, and eight men with them. Svartur offers them money if they will ride away from Heiðarskógur; Hárekur wants to accept this, but Þorgeir whets his courage. The fighting starts, and first Þorgeir and Hárekur kill the brothers' companions, and then they fight the brothers. Rauður kills Hárekur, but Þorgeir takes revenge and kills Rauður. Þorgeir and Svartur now throw

off their armour and wrestling garments and fight for a long time. Finally Svartur gives up, says that Earl Ævar of Hálogaland is his father, while his foster-father is called Ölver and lives by the forest; that he has a sister, Æsa, whom he wants Þorgeir to marry. He thereupon asks Þorgeir to cut off his head. Here the first *ríma* ends. The second *ríma* starts without any introduction as Þorgeir cuts off Svartur's head. He then goes to see Ölver and tells him what he has done. Ölver thanks him for the news and says he will tell Earl Ævar of this and he will then have Þorgeir hanged. This ends with a prose narrative describing how Þorgeir found Æsa, gave her Svartur's things, found her father the earl and finally married Æsa.³⁸⁷

As can be seen from this summary of the contents of *Þorgeirs rímur*, they tell a longer and more detailed story than any other Icelandic ballad. The preservation shows that they must be recorded from oral tradition. The narrative breaks off abruptly and is finished with a short prose account; there are, moreover, some loose ends and inconsistencies in the narrative which are best explained as caused by slips of memory and confusion by people who knew the poem.

Árni Magnússon called this ballad *Rímur af Þorgeiri stjakarhöfða* and wanted to connect the plot with stories about a character mentioned in a King's saga from the 14th century and known from folktales of Árni's own time, but it is impossible to argue for this connection.³⁸⁸

Þorgeirs rímur could easily have been composed on the basis of an Icelandic saga or *þáttur*, as the structure or pattern of the narrative fits so well to that of written sagas, but no *Þorgeirs saga* exists now, nor is it known to have existed. It is also possible that the original singer made up the story himself using sagas he knew as models. The first part of the story deals with a young inexperienced man from Iceland who has a Norwegian chieftain for friend and protector but gets into trouble with an earl or a king, from which his protector manages to save him. Nevertheless, the protector has to send him away with the result that he gets into all kinds of scrapes on heaths and in forests where his exceptional strength solves all problems. The earliest example of this kind of story may be *Egils saga*, but the closest correspondence to the first part of *Þorgeirs rímur* is found in *Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls*.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁷ Text: IV, p. 167.

³⁸⁸ Cf. ÍF, IV, p. xlv, and Bjarni Einarsson 1955, pp. cxix–xxiv.

³⁸⁹ This saga is printed in *Kjalnesinga saga* 1959. In the Introduction to the edition, it is argued that it was written in the 15th c., cf. p. lxxiv.

The second part of the *rímur* has close parallels both in *Vatnsdæla saga* and in *Áns saga bogsveigis*.³⁹⁰

The poet who composed *Þorgeirs rímur* must have been an Icelander. His knowledge of old Icelandic literature is revealed not only by his use of patterns and motifs from *Íslendingasögur* (Sagas of Icelanders) and *fornaldarsögur* (Legendary Sagas), but also, e.g., by his portrait of Earl Hákon. Moreover, the fact that the protagonist is explicitly said to be an Icelander, although the events take place in Norway, proves this conclusively.

It is natural to ask whether it is indeed correct to classify *Þorgeirs rímur* as a ballad, or whether we should not go by the name and classify them as *rímur*. The decisive factor here is the metre. The poem is in ballad metre, and the whole style is indeed balladic in nature. It is true that in narrative method and structure it differs considerably from other Icelandic ballads because of its length and the numerous scenes. However, this is not greater than can be found in Norwegian heroic ballads, not to mention Faroese ones. In the Faroes, there are, moreover, many heroic ballads that are much closer to specific written sources than *Þorgeirs rímur*. Many aspects of the narrative method are much closer to ballads than *rímur*: the poem begins abruptly; characters are not introduced in the beginning; the hero introduces himself in a conversation shortly after the opening. Scenes are very loosely connected, as is the rule in ballads. It is uncertain whether the prose passages inserted between stanzas in some places to connect scenes always refer to lost stanzas. Some of them may have been inserted by the scribe or a singer to tighten the context.

The metre and style have a balladic appearance in the majority of the stanzas. This can, for example, be seen in the first two stanzas:

- 1 Margur hyggur sér til fjár,
mun sá virðing þiggja,
Þórir vill hjá Hákon
jólaveislu þiggja.
- 2 Margir eru í höllinni
sterkir menn og stórir.

³⁹⁰ The relationship to these texts is discussed by S.F.D. Hughes in an unpublished paper which he has kindly allowed me to quote, where he emphasizes the indebtedness of *Þorgeirs rímur* to *Áns rímur bogsveigis*.

“Hvör er sá hinn mikli maður
hjá þér situr, Þórir?”

A still clearer example is the 9th stanza, which is in fact formulaic and is also found in a Norwegian heroic ballad, as pointed out by Ólafur Marteinsson.³⁹¹

9 Það var einn so fagran myrgin,
sólin skein á sala,
Þórir og hann Þorgeir ungi
tóku so margt að hjala.

NB 38 A 1 Árle om morgen
då sola hun rende på sale
opstoed unge Herre Dag
han toeg sin søster itale.

The ballad does not seem to contain any other formulas found outside Iceland, but examples of pure ballad style could be multiplied. However, the poem also contains *rimur* characteristics, cross rhymes and regular alliteration, and there are examples of pure *rimur* style. Padding, which particularly occurs in second lines of stanzas, is reminiscent of *rimur*, more often than is to be expected in a ballad. The important thing about these signs of influence from the style and diction of *rimur*, as well as the handling of the metre, is that they are not evenly scattered throughout the text, but appear in clusters that are limited to a comparatively few stanzas. The stanzas preceding the already quoted 9th stanza are as follows:

6 Þar til jarlinn ansar strax
og so náði greina:
“Þorgeir, skaltu að morgni dags
við minn hirðmann reyna.”

7 “Heyri þetta hirðin öll
hvað eg kann að mæla,
glími eg ei við grimmlig tröll,
galdramenn né þræla.

³⁹¹ See Ólafur Marteinsson, p. 55.

8 Fáðu mér heldur frjálsan mann,
 fleygir talaði spjóta,
 “svo reyna megí eg afl við hann
 og orku minnar njóta.”

Here we have cross rhyme, regular alliteration in two of the stanzas, padding, a kenning, and in general a *rímur*-like diction. The same is true of stanzas 14–15, and other examples could be pointed out though they are not as clear (st. 21, 38, 48, 50, 54).

The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from this is that the stanzas *rímur* metre and under heavy influence from *rímur* style were added to the ballad, either to expand the narrative and make it more lively (stanzas 7–8) or because earlier stanzas had been lost. This was also Knut Liestøl's view, but others have imagined that this might be a case of *rímur* that have been corrupted in oral tradition.³⁹² This latter suggestion must be considered inconceivable because of the absolute predominance of ballad metre and ballad style. A more acceptable hypothesis would be that the ballad was under *rímur* influence from the beginning, but it is very unlikely that a storyteller so fluent in a ballad style would insert single stanzas contrasting to the others with regard to metre and style.

Little can be ascertained about the age of *Þorgeirs rímur*. If they are modelled upon *Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls*, they cannot be older than the 15th century; but we cannot be sure that the saga was not based upon a lost source or even that it was influenced by *Þorgeirs rímur*, though this is not very likely. In two stanzas *ei* and *ey* rhyme (st. 6 and 48), but these are among those that show influence from *rímur* and could therefore be late additions, as there are no other examples of confusion between rounded and unrounded vowels in rhymes.

ÍF 83 Kára kvæði

An ogre comes to the window of a girl who sits with a child and asks her where she went; she says she went to *Áradalir* (the hidden valleys) where she saw many fair maidens; he asks whether one of them was not chosen for him, and she answers that they had all been given to a man. He now starts praising her beauty, her cheek, eye, hand, foot, but she is always ready

³⁹² See Jón Þorkelsson 1888, pp. 139–40.

with a retort. He then asks if he can go to bed with her, but she demurs. Then the dawn is in the east, and he is turned to stone.³⁹³

The whole ballad, which is not found outside Iceland, is in dialogue form of the same type as in *Samtal mæðgina*, so that question and answer form one stanza, while a divided refrain containing an address is the only rhymed part of the stanza. In some variants, parts of the narrative, especially the opening and ending, are in prose.

There are no parallels to this ballad in verse in Iceland, but the chief motif, a giant turned into stone by sunlight, is common in Icelandic legends. Thompson has only Icelandic references in his Motif-Index (F531.6.12.2), but the motif is also found in Faroese legends.³⁹⁴

The only clue to the age of the ballad is that it existed in the days of Árni Magnússon. How much older than that it might be is impossible to ascertain. There is no reason to believe that it is not Icelandic.

ÍF 84 Ísungs kvæði

As the only variant of this poem is probably not traditional, it will not be treated here. I have published a study of it elsewhere.³⁹⁵

ÍF 85 Þjófa kvæði

Steinfinnur and Stálir go out to steal, as the farmer is dead. They draw lots to decide who is to steal from the pantry. One of them goes in and asks the housewife to give him permission to sing about thieves. She allows this, and Stálir starts singing and Steinfinnur stealing. He tells him to steal as the song prescribes: go to the chests and let no noise be heard from the locks, steal twelve silver bowls, finespun clothes from the woman's casket, bowls, jugs and vessels from the table, beer from a barrel, meat and furs; then he is to steal enough for two horses to carry and wait outside. Then a child who lies in a crib asks why the man sings like this and asks her mother Ása whether she has locked the pantry. Then Stálir continues singing and first warns the thief that the housewife is coming with a light and then says he does not have to hurry so much as she has lost her keys. The keys are found

³⁹³ Texts: A = IV, p. 118 (one stanza), B = VI, p. 12, C = VI, p. 16, D = VI, p. 120, E = VI, p. 135, F = VII, p. 27.

³⁹⁴ See Hammershaimb 1891, I, pp. 344–5.

³⁹⁵ Vésteinn Ólason 1975.

in a scarf, but the thief has slipped out of the window with the farmer's best spear.³⁹⁶

Þjófa kvæði is found in Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland (TSB F 75), but i-A is by far the earliest recording. Elsewhere, the ballad has not been written down until the 19th century. Up to that time, it has probably been regarded as too trivial to be committed to paper.

Knut Liestøl has defined the relationship of the Icelandic version to other Nordic variants.³⁹⁷ As he points out, the opening of the ballad and the names are so closely related in Norway and Iceland that it is most probable that the ballad has come to Iceland directly from Norway. The names Steinfinnur, Stálir and Ása are all Norwegian but neither Danish nor Icelandic. Occasional examples can be found of closer parallels to the Icelandic text in Swedish or Danish texts than in the Norwegian ones, but examples where the phrasing is very closely related in the Icelandic variant and one of the Norwegian ones are much more numerous. There is no reason for going into detail, as Liestøl has treated this ballad so thoroughly. But, just because the Icelandic-Norwegian connection is so well established, it is noteworthy that both the old Icelandic text and the Danish texts are in a repetitive metre and in the same rhythm, so they are likely to have been sung to the same tune. From this we must draw the conclusion that the repetitive metre was well known in Norway in earlier times, though this was not the case after the recording of ballads commenced there.

The rhythm of the ballad is supple and the language quite good. The old rules of quantity are followed, and consequently, there is nothing in the ballad's style or metre that contradicts the conclusion that it was brought to Iceland from Norway before the Reformation. The agreement in stanza form between the Danish and Icelandic variants makes it likely that the ballad is not very old, however. Perhaps it was brought to Iceland around or just after 1500.

³⁹⁶ Texts: A = III, p. 119, B = VII, p. 99 (one stanza), C = VII, p. 103 (an incomplete prose summary with one stanza), D = VII, p. 200 (prose summary and one stanza).

³⁹⁷ See Liestøl 1915a, pp. 22–4.

ÍF 86 Konuríki

The wife wakes the farmer early one morning and tells him to go and grind; he grinds corn, lights the stove, sits down and spins on a spindle, washes laundry in the river, cleans the room and sweeps the floor. He finishes this before sunrise, then goes and wakes up his wife and asks her whether he should lead her by the hand. The wife scolds the farmer and hits him, but then she sits down on a bench and sticks out her foot while the farmer is churning. He is going to put salt in the butter but puts ash instead; the wife breaks a pole and a birch on his body, and the farmer falls unconscious. The wife splashes water on the farmer, says she has twelve hens beneath the wall and he will get no food until they lay eggs. The farmer runs down to the bogs and collects the eggs while his neighbours make fun of him.³⁹⁸

This ballad is found in all the Nordic countries and in a fragmented state in the Shetlands (TSB F 33). This extensive circulation indicates that it is rather old. Still, it is not possible to draw firm conclusions from this. Although one might assume that the existence of the ballad in the Shetlands proves its great age, this is not necessarily the case as there were close connections between Western Norway and the Shetlands up to the 17th century.³⁹⁹

The text of the ballad is usually very similar in the various places where it has been recorded. Thus, the initial stanza of the Icelandic version has parallels practically everywhere the ballad has been recorded (CCF 179 1, NB 54 1, Säve 298 1, ETK 23 B 1).

The Faroese variant is singular in various ways and seems to have been recreated to some extent. A few stanzas apart from the first one are very similar to the Icelandic text, but the Faroese one also shows connections with the Danish tradition, e.g., in that the farmer has a name, Jógvan stolti. By far the greatest number of parallels to the Icelandic texts are found in Norwegian variants and in d-C, which is a broadside in Danish preserved only in Norway; it seems to be based on a Norwegian variant.⁴⁰⁰

A few examples reveal this relationship:

³⁹⁸ Texts: A = II, p. 29, B = IV, p. 121 (one stanza, repeated IV, p. 126), C = VI, p. 95, D = VI, p. 205, E = VII, p. 202.

³⁹⁹ The connections between Norway and the Shetlands are discussed by Liestøl 1937, pp. 86ff.; the Norn version of the ballad is edited and commented upon in Jakobsen 1897, pp. 19 and 153, Liestøl 1936, pp. 79–82.

⁴⁰⁰ See *Danske Skæmteviser*, pp. 331–2.

i-A 3 *Glaðlegana eldur*

í ofni brann,
bóndi tók þá snældu sína,
settist niður og spann.

n-B 3 Som en ha' gjort på varmen
å varmen i ovnen brann
tok en seg rukk å snelde
sette seg te spann.⁴⁰¹

d-C 4 Da han nu havde qvæget,
Og det tog til og brand,
Da tog han til sin Skotte-Rok,
Og satte sig til og spand.

i-C 4 En sem hann hafði spunnid
á teinana tvo,
þá tók hann sér fatabagga
og gekk til lækjar að þvo.
(og fór til ár að þvo, A.)

n-B 4 Som en hadde spunne
ei snelde eller to
tok en seg ei klæbytte
ræste at åi tvo.

i-A 5 Þegar hann hafði þvegið
og gjört fötin hrein,
þá tók hann sinn fatabagga
og fór til hallar heim.

n-B 5 Som en hadde tveggi
og fagre klæi skjein
hengde di atte på garle'e
å sjave gjekk en heim.

As the ballad progresses, the connection with the Norwegian text is better confirmed. One more example should do:

⁴⁰¹ NB, p. 335.

i-A 8 “Ekki þarftu bóndalyrfa
að vera so stimamjúkur,
þú mundir ekki leiða mig
hefði eg verið sjúk.”

n-A 3 Aa höyre du deð du bondegút,
du tar 'ki vera sá mjúk;
du var no inki sá ifjór,
deð bilið eg lág sjúk.”⁴⁰²

The stanza describing how the farmer puts ash in the butter instead of salt connects the Icelandic, Faroese and Norwegian traditions. The two last stanzas in the Icelandic version deal with the farmer's search for eggs, which plays a large part in other versions, not least in the Faroese one (f 7–15, cf. also d-B 12–14), but it appears everywhere including the fragment from the Shetlands. One of these stanzas is closely related in the Icelandic and Faroese versions:

i-A 18 Bóndinn ofan um mýrar hleypur
og tínir eggin saman.
Úti standa grannar hans
og henda að honum gaman.

f 8 Úti standa grannar hans,
halda sær at gaman,
Jógvan gongur um allan bœin,
jagar hœsnini saman.

The comparison has shown clearly that the West-Nordic variants are very closely related, though signs of later Danish influence can be traced in the Faroese recording. The language is comparatively pure, and there are no signs that this is a late translation. Everything leads to the conclusion that this is a ballad that was brought to Iceland from Norway in medieval time.

⁴⁰² Landstad, p. 851.

ÍF 87 Hústrúar kvæði

The wife sits and wants a man, sees a knight's son ride past and wishes he was her suitor. She gets up in the morning and hits all the people with her chain of keys, either one or two blows; but the impotent farmer gets seven. She meets her uncle, the bishop, and tells him that she has an impotent husband. The bishop gets her a young husband, and now she gets up late in the morning and gives her people one or two eggs; but the young husband gets seven.⁴⁰³

The same ballad (TSB F 32) is found in Denmark and Sweden. Two Danish variants recorded in the 19th century have been printed. There are some differences in the narrative, and the Danish version is shorter and gets more directly to the point. No bishop is mentioned in the Danish nor in the Swedish version, and he may look like an interloper in the ballad, but it should be pointed out that in another Danish jocular ballad a bishop serves as a court of appeal in a marriage problem.⁴⁰⁴ It is thus probable that he accompanied the ballad from Scandinavia.

The Icelandic ballad undoubtedly has its source in the Danish version, although the Icelandic recording is two hundred years older than the Danish ones. On the other hand, it is impossible to say whether there were any intermediary links or whether there existed a separate West-Nordic branch of the tradition, because of the ballad's poor state of preservation.

The ballad's rhythm is generally rather smooth, with one or two exceptions, and the language is also fairly good. The old rules of quantity are observed. The ballad must have been brought to Iceland before 1600, but whether it is older and, in that case, how much older, is impossible to tell.

ÍF 88 Kvæði af Loga Þórðarsyni

A priest's daughter disdains all her suitors and finds nicknames for them, also for Logi Þórðarson, whom she calls Harelip. He hears of this, calls his men with him and goes to visit the priest. He meets the priest's daughter and asks to see her father. She answers mockingly; he then asks her where her bed is. (In E, he then gives her a drink which makes her eager to go to bed

⁴⁰³ Text: II, p. 54.

⁴⁰⁴ TSB F 30.

with him.) They sleep together. The priest asks his daughter why her dress is shortened and she says that a bird flew past and gave her a bitter drink. The priest says this must have been Logi Þórðarson and rides to see him demanding compensation. Logi refuses, and they fight; the priest is killed. The priest's daughter gives birth to three children with harelips and advises her maids not to mock suitors. (The fight and the death of the priest are only in A.)⁴⁰⁵

This ballad is related in content to ÍF 89, but, contrary to that ballad, it cannot be called jocular, as its attitude towards its subject is chivalrous rather than comic.

There is a small group of Danish ballads (DGF 363–7) which is related to this one, but the relationship is obviously closest with one of them, *Hr Lave af Lund og den spotske Mø* (DGF 367). No priest appears in that ballad, however, and in fact the priest's daughter in the Icelandic version is probably there through influence from ÍF 89. Nor does the Danish version have a fight as does the Icelandic A-text, and this is probably an Icelandic addition. One more difference between the versions is that in the Danish ballad Logi in the end takes the girl as his wife.

Logi's nickname is *sluppermund* in Danish. The relationship between the ballads can be shown through one example, the girl's answer when she is asked about her condition:

i-A 17 "Fuglinn flaug hér yfir haf,
beiskan drykkinn að mér gaf."

d-A 17 "Her fløy en fugel for ofven wor tag,
saa beesk en drick der hand mig gaff."

Most of the lines in this ballad are not very long; but some of them are clumsy and do not look Icelandic: *spottar lítið oss jómfú, hann skenkir vín á varir þunnar* (here the old quantity rules are not observed), *aktar lítið flakinmunna, hún er sig upp í bý, sá fuglinn mér kunnugur mun*. The rhymes are also rather poor: *bý:sín, lút:fót, munn:son, sjá:frú, mun:son*.

Since this ballad is not found anywhere outside Denmark, except in Iceland, and the language of the oldest Icelandic variant is of poor quality and shows ample signs of late translation, we can assume that

⁴⁰⁵ Texts: A = II, p. 18, B = IV, p. 115 (one stanza), C = IV, p. 180 (one stanza), D = IV, p. 197, E = VI, p. 173.

this ballad came directly from Denmark to Iceland in the late 16th or perhaps the 17th century.

ÍF 89 Prestsdóttur kvæði

The priest's daughter in Óðalsey (Óðinsey, B) is pretty and rich and does not want to marry anyone except Oddur in Danavík. Geirmon the smith comes and proposes to her, but she says he is so dirty that she does not want him. He rides back and asks his foster-mother how he should pay the priest's daughter for this ridicule. (In B, it is Sir Pétur Jóhannsson who comes to propose, says he has many castles and money enough, but she calls him a tramp and refuses him. He then goes and seeks advice from his foster-father.) The foster-mother tells him to have some rings made which the priest's daughter will want to own, but he says he will get her in an easier way. Now there is an incident at a dance gathering: an old woman wants to participate in the dance, and the priest's daughter mocks her. The priest's daughter goes to her room, but Geirmon the smith jumps over three walls and comes down where the priest's daughter lies. (B says that the foster-father advised Pétur to follow the priest's daughter into a forest; he does this, jumps over three men and comes down in the priest's daughter's bed.) The priest's daughter (Gunnfríður, B) wakes up and asks with great sorrow who this large man lying on her arm is. He answers that this is Geirmon (the tramp, B) whom she mocked and who is now the priest's son-in-law. In B, she asks about the castles he said he owned. He answers that he owns enough of those but now she should go home to her father, and he gives her no more than a patch to mend her shoe for the journey. She has no more luck, but Sir Pétur marries the sister of Oddur in Danavík. A has it that, when he has told her who he is, she cannot see the sun and asks her maids never to mock suitors.⁴⁰⁶

This ballad (TSB F 24) is also found in Denmark and Sweden where its core has been better preserved: a scorned suitor disguises himself as a tramp or clown and seduces the one who had rejected him, then mocks her and goes away. This is an old story which has been dealt with in various languages and literary genres.⁴⁰⁷ The names are the same or related in A and the non-Icelandic versions, i.e., Geirmon, the priest's daughter and Óðinsey. Oddur í Danavík, on the other hand, is not found outside Iceland and is, in fact, a superfluous character.

The Icelandic variants have no verbal parallels with the other versions except in the opening stanzas, as the Icelandic version goes in

⁴⁰⁶ Texts: A = IV, p. 101, B = VI, p. 26.

⁴⁰⁷ See DGF, VI, p. 329.

its own direction later on. In fact, it is most likely that the Icelandic version has been created through a mixture of two or more ballads. It is impossible to see whether this happened before or after the ballad was brought to Iceland, but it is not unlikely to have happened during its transmission from one language to another. The most probable influences are ÍF 88 and 90.

The initial stanza of the A-text has no foreign parallel, but the stanzas describing Geirmon's arrival and proposal are very similar to each other in i-A, the Swedish text dating from the 16th century, and in the Danish ones from the 17th and 19th centuries. Her answer, the most peculiar feature of all this, is most closely related in the Icelandic and Swedish texts:

i-A 4 “Þú ert so kolugur um þinn munn
og bikugur um þín bein,
ég nenni ekki að draga þig
á mín klæði hrein.”

s 3 “Tw är så kálligh om tin mun,
och kimigh om tinn beenn,
tw gå thig i möllnere dam,
och twette tigh well reenn.”⁴⁰⁸

d-A 5 “Du est skidden om din mund,
och kulstu er din øyen;
du est nu bedre voxssøn thel
at vocte min faders suinn.”

The Icelandic A-text and the Danish version agree that he goes to see his foster-mother and gets her advice, but in the Swedish variant he asks his mother. Nevertheless, all the stanzas have related phrasings. The rest of this ballad is not comparable with TSB F 24, but passages in B can be compared with TSB F 26, as Olrik has pointed out.⁴⁰⁹

This ballad has generally been considered young, though Olrik has argued that it is older than the Reformation. The comparison gives no grounds for inferring from which country the ballad was brought to Iceland. The language of the Icelandic variants is of a fairly high

⁴⁰⁸ *Visböcker*, I, p. 41.

⁴⁰⁹ See DGF, VI, p. 336.

quality, and the translation seems not to be slavish. The lines are often very short. These characteristics do not furnish us with any reason to suspect that the ballad was translated a short time before its recording, but it is safest to abstain from guessing about its age or origin.

ÍF 90 Fants kvæði

The fragment classified as ÍF 90 seems to belong to the type TSB F 26, though the stanza is not found in Scandinavian variants.⁴¹⁰ No doubt the whole ballad was known in Iceland in earlier times; this stanza is written down among other initial stanzas, and, furthermore, signs of the existence of the type can be found in the B-text of *Prests-dóttur kvæði*.

The most interesting part of the fragment is the refrain which refers to the story of Roland and the battle of Roncevaux and would have been well suited to a ballad on that subject. Perhaps it can be taken as evidence that such a ballad once was found in Iceland.⁴¹¹

The word *fantur* is found in all Norwegian variants of this ballad but only in very late Danish recordings.

ÍF 91 Sekkjar kvæði

Where is the sack to be placed so that the mouse cannot spoil it? Put it at my daughter's bedside. There are fewest mice there.⁴¹²

This fragment is long enough to show that this is a version of a well known tale, most famous in the form Chaucer gave it in the Reeve's Tale but also preserved as a ballad in Denmark, Sweden and Norway (TSB F 17). Both here and elsewhere, the stanzas are accompanied by a long nonsensical refrain, but the Icelandic one is different from others and probably an Icelandic composition.

Two stanzas are a poor basis for comparison, especially as the second one is found in an almost identical form both in Norway and Denmark. The closest parallel to this Icelandic fragment is, however,

⁴¹⁰ Text: IV, p. 116 (one stanza).

⁴¹¹ See above, p. 217.

⁴¹² Text: III, p. 170 (fragm.).

found in a recording by H. Ross from Fyrresdal in Telemark, which undeniably indicates that the ballad was brought from Norway to Iceland:

- i 1 “Hvar skal sekkurinn standa
þar músin má ekki granda?”
- 2 “Settu hann hjá minnar dóttur sæng,
þar er sá minnsti músagangur.”
- n-C 3 Hor skal Sekkjen stande
so Musi ho ska 'ki grande?
- 4 Set ho i mi Datters Seng,
der slett ingis Muse gjeng.⁴¹³
- d-A 6 “Du sætter den for min datters seng,
der falder slet ingen musegang.”⁴¹⁴

Needless to say, the material is too meagre for any conclusions to be drawn.

ÍF 92 Hökulsmokks kvæði

A farmer lives by the river, has three (two) daughters. He is told that his eldest daughter has gone away. He rides off to search for her, meets a little girl and asks her if she has seen courtly people riding. She has seen 15 (60) courtiers riding, and she has also seen a fair maiden in the middle of the group. The farmer forces his horse on until it lies down dead; he goes on on foot but never catches up with the courtiers.⁴¹⁵

All the texts are fragmentary, but the above story emerges when they are put together. It is hard to guess whether this is an attempt, which never came to anything more than we have here, to make a ballad or whether this is a fragment of an older ballad and the main events, the fate of the girl, have been forgotten. If the first is the case, this fragment

⁴¹³ Text in NFS.

⁴¹⁴ Kristensen 1901, p. 160.

⁴¹⁵ Texts: A = II, p. 3, B = IV, p. 181 (one stanza), C = VI, p. 147, D = VI, p. 216, E = VII, p. 14, F = VII, p. 41, G = VII, p. 98.

could be classified as a jocular ballad. If the latter is the case, it could have been a chivalric ballad. The refrain is strange, an enumeration or description of aristocratic dress, a description which seems to belong to late medieval times, around the 14th and 15th centuries.⁴¹⁶ This refrain must have had a comic effect on people in later ages, which is no doubt the main reason why it has been preserved.

There are no foreign parallels, but a fair number of the stanzas are composed of well known formulas. There are no indications whether this ballad was brought to Iceland from a foreign country, nor are there indications of its age.

ÍF 93 Giftingahjal

A daughter asks her mother whether no one wants to propose to her; the mother offers her a priest, but she refuses as the bishop's power is so strong; she also refuses a smith for he always makes himself dirty, a small farmer's son for he does not know how to behave, but she says she wants to be a courtier's wife. The mother says that a courtier would beat her, but she does not care as she says she would have so many nights of pleasure with him. In B, a girl is offered a man who knows how to sing, but she refuses and says he has a cowardly heart; a man who knows how to sail is refused because the wave deceives many a man; the smith resembles a pig and is obsequious.⁴¹⁷

This jocular ballad is not found outside Iceland, but in many countries there is found a ballad similar in theme and structure, where a mother offers her daughter various gifts, while the daughter wants nothing but a man (TSB F 1). There is also a Danish jocular poem which has parallels in Germany, where a girl's father and mother offer her men of various social classes and she states her reasons for declining until they come up with one (in this case a fiddler) which she accepts.⁴¹⁸ This poem, however, is not in ballad metre and has not been included in TSB. It can hardly be said to be related to *Giftingahjal* in its phrasing and will not be considered further here. A related Icelandic poem, *Giftingarþula*, is printed in ÍF, VIII, p. 89.

⁴¹⁶ See for instance, the information about *strútur* in *Meddelelser om Grønland*, LXVII, pp. 168–77.

⁴¹⁷ Texts: A = II, p. 52, B = IV, p. 186 (42 C, st. 5–10).

⁴¹⁸ *Danske Skæmteviser*, XXII, and Kristensen 1901, no. 36.

The origin of this ballad must be regarded as uncertain, but it is most likely to be of Danish origin. It seems that the old rules of quantity are observed, but, on the other hand, rather clumsy lines occur, as for example: *Hirði eg ei þó hófmaðurinn blaki smátt*. The refrain varies from stanza to stanza, and this seems to be more usual in jocular ballads and poems than in other ballads, so that it can hardly be seen as evidence that the ballad is very young.

ÍF 94 Konukaup

Þorsteinn manni asks *Þorleifur skjanni* for the price of his wife, whom he carries on his back, and offers him a grey sheepskin, four fish, the head of a ram, three trout for her. The bargain is closed in the end.⁴¹⁹

It must be considered highly doubtful whether this rhyme can be classified as a ballad. The editors of TSB reject it because it is not in ballad metre. Nevertheless, its metrical form may be regarded as couplet stanzas with a divided rhyming refrain. The poem is in dialogue form, the first line a question, the second an answer, as in ÍF 76 and 83.

Parallels in content do not exist, but there is a very similar rhythm and style in a Faroese ballad, *Kall og Svein ungi* (CCF 182). This is its opening stanza:

“Hvar rakst tú neyt míni?”
 — segði Kall —
 “Beint niðan í akur tín,”
 — segði Svein ungi.

There is no reason to believe that *Konukaup* is an imported poem. On the other hand, it is possible that a similar-looking foreign ballad was the model for this rhyme as well as the Faroese one. Although the male chauvinism demonstrated in *Konukaup* is an international phenomenon, there is, unfortunately, no reason to believe that its appearance in an Icelandic poem is the result of foreign influence.

⁴¹⁹ Texts: A = VI, p. 78, B = VI, p. 148, C = VII, p. 40.

ÍF 95 Kvæði af pilti og stúlku

A young man and a young woman (servants) talk together; she asks how he is going to feed her when they are married; he is going to catch fish; what if he does not catch anything? then he will pick corn at the farmer's; but if there is no corn? then he will blow his horn on a shepherd's knoll; but if the horn does not make a sound? then he will build ships and boats; but if the nails will not go in? He then tells her to go to Odin and get provisions there.⁴²⁰

The same ballad is found in all the Nordic countries and elsewhere (TSB F 7), but the Icelandic version is most closely related to an old Danish variant (DSK XXVI) and to the Faroese version. The relationship is, however, of such a nature that the Faroese and Icelandic versions are about equally related to the Danish one, while one stanza clearly links the Icelandic and Faroese versions:

i-A 5 “Hvurninn ætlarðu að fæða mig
ef lúður vill ekki láta?”
“Ég skal þá á stræti,
smíða skip og báta.”

f-A 5 “Hvussu skalt tú fæða meg,
tá ið lúður vil ekki láta?”
“Eg skal taka mær tong í hond
og hamar at smíða bátar.”
 (“Vit skuljum taka okkum hamar og tong
og smíða skip og bátar.” B 63-4)

The Danish variant most closely related to the Faroese and Icelandic ones dates from the 16th century, and it is not unlikely that the ballad was brought somewhat earlier than that to the Faroes and Iceland, or not later than the early part of the 16th century. The special connection between the Faroese text and the Icelandic one is an indication of a separate West-Nordic tradition, even though the Norwegian version is not closely enough related to them to be able to confirm that idea. The language of the ballad bears no signs of translation and is easily reconcilable with this notion.

⁴²⁰ Texts: A = VII, p. 95, B = VII, p. 109 (fragm.), C = VII, p. 112 (fragm.), D = VII, p. 114 (fragm.), E = VIII, p. 14.

ÍF 96 Áls kvæði

Although this poem only exists in recordings of oral variants, it is, in fact, a written composition based on a collection of *exempla* published in Denmark in the early 17th century.⁴²¹

ÍF 97 Gyrðis kvæði

Gyrðir relates his dream: an eagle picks him up and flies with him far and wide, takes him into a cave (where there are twelve giants, B). Gyrðir is then cut to pieces, put into a cauldron and boiled for a long time. B ends here, but A goes on to say that he was taken up and a piece cut off his loin. Finally, he asks his friend to interpret the dream.⁴²²

It is hard to form any notions about the age or origin of this ballad. Its opening and the main idea, that a man wakes up in bad shape having dreamt that he suffered terrible hardship, could have been influenced by *Skiða ríma*.⁴²³ On the other hand, both the metre and the style are unmistakably balladic, and a few ballad formulas are employed. The refrain is a long rigmarole with Latin tags like some other refrains in jocular ballads. There is no reason to believe that this is not an Icelandic composition.

ÍF 98 Spélof

A man rides past a window and looks in. He sees three women sitting there; the third one is beautiful as a lily and fair as a rose; her spirit is sweet, the bosom broad, the sleeve linen like a brightly shining sun, the hand clean like ivory, the stomach smooth as a silken cloth; the girl has only one fault: she wets her bed.⁴²⁴

The similes of this ballad are mainly drawn from chivalric ballads and romances but the sudden anticlimax makes it clear that this is a parody. A similar anticlimax is found in a Danish ballad, *Forsmaaet Bejlers Spot* (DGF 510), which is nevertheless a totally different poem

⁴²¹ See Vésteinn Ólason 1975.

⁴²² Texts: A = VI, p. 97, B = VII, p. 174.

⁴²³ See *Rímnasafn*, I, pp. 10ff.

⁴²⁴ Text: VI, p. 68.

with no connections to *Spélof*. The rhythm and phrasing indicate that this parody is Icelandic, although it is impossible to be certain about this.

ÍF 99 Skeggkarls kvæði

It happened in a castle that a man came to visit dragging his beard; he is invited into the house, and five men carry the beard; they lead him through a broad corridor, and each curl of the beard resounds; when he jumps into the hall, he steps on the beard; he wants to kiss the wife but cannot get to her because of the beard; he wants to kiss the girls in the corner, but tangles them in his grey beard. He is put on a broad bench, and the beard hangs down on either side; he is given a gruel in a bowl, but the beard gets half the food. Whatever he does, the beard gets in the way, and when he starts dancing, the beard joins in. The narrator finally says that he has seen many a strange beard but never anyone who was so intelligent with such a beard. 'Once he went outside and then the beard was written on paper.'⁴²⁵

This is a poem of exaggeration, not dissimilar in nature to the ballad about the big crow known in many places in Scandinavia (TSB F 58). It is noteworthy that the narrator is quite intrusive, both in the opening and the conclusion. In the opening of the poem, it is said that a man came to a castle, but the subsequent description fits an Icelandic farmhouse. The last stanza, where the beard is said to have been written on paper, probably refers to the poem itself: a man with a great beard has come to an Icelandic farmhouse, and one of the people on the farm has composed the poem while the man stepped outside. This is, of course, only a hypothesis, but there is an unusual amount of alliteration in this poem, and although it is in a correct ballad metre and the style can pass as balladic, it reveals no certain signs of ever having been oral. Nothing can be said with any certainty about its age, but there is no reason to suppose that it is old.

ÍF 100–105

All these ballad-imitations are based on a printed source from the 17th century, the Danish translation, printed 1615, of Johannes Pauli's *Schimpf und Ernst*. ÍF 100, *Kirkjuklerks kvæði*, has been recorded

⁴²⁵ Text: VI, p. 190.

from oral tradition in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, but the others were probably never circulated in oral tradition.⁴²⁶

ÍF 106 Klæða vísur

Though nothing has been preserved of this ballad, except one stanza from the 18th century,⁴²⁷ it is obvious that this is the opening of a jocular song in ballad metre which has been preserved in the Faroes, Denmark and Sweden.⁴²⁸ The refrain is related to the Icelandic one in a Swedish as well as a Danish recording, but in all four countries the wording is so close that nothing can be inferred about the history of this poem, except that it was not composed in Iceland. The age is very uncertain.

ÍF 107 Linda kvæði and 108 Húfan dýra

A poor young man has a cap (buys a belt A); the king offers him two horses, black, red, white, grey, piebald, brown, yellow, and finally his daughter for the cap, but he does not want to sell it. Finally, an old man with a fur comes along and offers him two boiled herrings, and then the cap is sold.⁴²⁹

Although these two ballads are classified as two separate types in ÍF as well as in TSB (F 46 and 47), it is likely that *Húfan dýra*, which is only found in Iceland and the Faroes, is derived from *Linda kvæði*, which is found in all the Nordic countries except in the Faroes. There is only one stanza left of *Linda kvæði*, and its phrasing is very close to the Norwegian version of *Mit Belte*:

i-A 1 Eg var mig einn ungur mann
og ekki peningasterkur,
keypta eg mér lindann þann
sem kostaði hundrað merkur.

⁴²⁶ See Vésteinn Ólason 1975.

⁴²⁷ Text: IV, p. 119 (one stanza).

⁴²⁸ CCF 184, Kristensen 1901, no. 85, *Visböcker*, II, p. 225.

⁴²⁹ Texts: A = IV, p. 122 (one stanza), B = VI, p. 209, C = VII, p. 201.

n X 1 “Eg va’ meg so liten ’n Gut,
aa Penngann va inkji mange,
so kaupt eg meg eit Belte;
eg ville me Skruvli skramle.”⁴³⁰

The Norwegian version then describes how the boy goes to church: the belt is much admired, and he is offered various treasures for it, but he does not want to sell. Finally, he exchanges the belt for a pair of old mittens, and in fact the belt was not as fine as it looked, having been made of herring scales and straw.

In *Húfan dýra*, the object in question is not a belt but a cap. But, the relationship between the Icelandic cap-version and the Norwegian belt-version is not only apparent from parallels in content and structure but also in phrasing:

i-B 2–3 Kongurinn bauð mér hesta tvo,
þeir voru báðir hvítir,
ei vildi eg mína húfu selja,
mér þóttu þeir ónýtir.

Kongurinn bauð mér hesta tvo,
þeir voru báðir brúnir,
ei vildi eg mína húfu selja,
mér þóttu þeir lúnir.

n-Y 3 Konjen bou meg hestane tvo
aa baae so va di quite
eg ville inkje mit belte selje
Eg totes de blei forlite.

4 Konjen bou meg hestann tvo
aa baae so va di brone,
eg ville daa inkje mit belte selje
eg totes di va ‘fortoune’.⁴³¹

As in some other jocular ballads, there seems to be a tendency here to pile up varied repetitions. In the Icelandic version, there are repeated

⁴³⁰ NFS, Johannes Skar 3, p. 14.

⁴³¹ NFS, M.B. Landstad 1, b, p. 69.

offers of horses of different colours; in the Faroese version, on the other hand, we get a long list of the various kinds of people who came to see the cap. This is obviously a Faroese interpolation, but the best offer is the same in the Faroese version and the Icelandic one, and its main point is also in the Norwegian variant quoted above:

i-B 8 Kongurinn bauð mér dóttur sín,
þá hina vænu mey,
en annar bauð mér skipið það
er skreið fyrir Skáney.

f 16 Kongur beyð mær dóttur sína,
tann hin væna moy,
annar beyð mær knörrin tann,
ið sildi fyrri Skánoy.⁴³²

n-Y 5 Konjen bou meg Dote si
aa Hælti i sit land aa Rikje,
eg ville daa inkje mit belte selje,
eg Totes de blei forlite.

The outcome in the Faroese variant is also that the cap is exchanged for something worthless. There, it fetches two rusty knives and one ladle of stock.

This ballad does not seem to have been recorded in the Faroes in the 19th century, and therefore it is not inconceivable that it might have been brought to the Faroes from Iceland comparatively late. It is, however, so independent and is so Faroese in appearance, that it is much more likely to have lived a long life in the Faroes. Since the Icelandic cap-version is much closer to the Norwegian belt-version than the Faroese cap-version is, it is probable that either the ballad was brought to Norway from Iceland and thence to the Faroes, or that the cap-version was formed in Norway and brought from there to Iceland and the Faroes.

⁴³² See Evensen 1929, pp. 31–3.

ÍF 109 Skrifta kvæði

An old woman runs up to the priest's farm and asks him to shrive her, and then she will give him nine salmon heads. He refers her to the arch-deacon, where everything goes the same way, and he refers her to the bishop and the bishop to the pope. The pope says he cannot shrive her unless she gives him some valuable object.⁴³³

This ballad (TSB F 73) was recorded in all the Nordic countries in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th, and there is, in addition, a Danish recording from the 16th century. These non-Icelandic variants are much longer, particularly the old Danish one. The most important omission in the Icelandic version is the first half of the ballad which relates the woman's crime. In most non-Icelandic variants, other judges succeed the pope, usually the Devil, and in the youngest Danish recording the pope has been totally forgotten. Parallels to the Icelandic variant are found in the Faroes, in Norway and Denmark, not the least in young Danish variants, but there is not enough material for comparison.

The language shows some signs of translation, but none that can be used to determine whether it is West- or East-Nordic in origin. The single line preserved from the early 19th century, *Kerlingin hún Ampa grá*, recalls, in sound, a Faroese line from this same ballad, *Kellingin saðlar sær gumpin grá*, and could be a distortion of a line similar to the Faroese one.

ÍF 110 Drengs dilla

A woman is singing to her child, blesses the eye she has seen through the window, says that her husband is sitting on the dais and everyone is at home; it has not occurred to her to raise up the log this evening. She asks him to go away and come back the following evening. In an accompanying prose passage, this is further explained: the upraised log by the haystack is used as a sign to tell the lover when it is opportune for him to call.⁴³⁴

This ditty is found in Norway and Sweden, but it has been excluded from TSB for stylistic reasons. Both versions are related to the Icelandic one. In a Swedish variant, we find this parallel:

⁴³³ Texts: V, p. 219 (one line), B = VII, p. 38, C = VIII, p. 16.

⁴³⁴ Texts: A = VI, p. 127, B = VII, p. 38.

i-A 2 “Vel verði því auga blá
er eg út um gluggann sá.”

s-B “Gud signe ditt lilla blá öga,
Som tittar i gluggen den höga!”⁴³⁵

The closest parallel in Norwegian texts is found in a recording of Sophus Bugge's from Hæge Årnoti.

i-A 4 “Mér kom ekki til hugar í kvöld
drumbinn upp að reisa.”

n-X “Eg kom inkji i hóg í kveld,
kubben upp te reise.”⁴³⁶

This is probably a poem brought to Iceland from the West-Nordic area, but the material is too scant for this to be determined with any certainty.

Conclusions

At the end of this long chapter, the results of the studies of individual ballads may be summarized by a few conclusions about the ballad genre in Iceland, and, to a certain extent, about the medieval Scandinavian ballad.

It is not possible to decide the origin of each of the ballad types recorded in Iceland, but the 110 types printed in ÍF can be divided as follows: 1) Twenty three ballads show every sign of having been brought to Iceland from Norway or the Faroes and to belong to a distinct West-Nordic tradition; they are ÍF 1, 2, 3, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 31, 34, 35, 39, 43, 48, 55, 72, 77, 80, 85, 86, 107, 108. In addition, twenty other ballads are most likely of this same category, though here the certainty is less: ÍF 17, 21, 22, 28, 29, 30, 41, 42, 52, 53, 60, 62, 68, 71, 73, 76, 78, 91, 95, 110. 2) Thirteen ballads or ballad versions can, on fairly strong evidence, be considered to have been brought to Iceland directly from Denmark; they are ÍF 2C, 8, 16, 18, 20, 24,

⁴³⁵ Arwidsson 1834–42, III, p. 157.

⁴³⁶ Rec. by Bugge, IV, 93, in NFS.

31E, 38, 40, 54, 67, 70, and 88. In addition, seven ballads can be placed in this category with less certainty: ÍF 5, 9, 19, 26, 47, 65, and 66. 3) Fifteen ballads show signs of a Scandinavian origin but can not be localized further: ÍF 6, 25, 27, 44, 45, 46, 59, 74, 75, 87, 89, 90, 93, 106, 109. 4) Twelve ballads appear to be genuine ballads composed in Iceland; they are: ÍF 4, 23, 36, 50, 56, 57, 58, 79, 81, 82, 83, and 97. In addition, four ballads are more likely than not to be Icelandic compositions, though this is uncertain: ÍF 33, 37, 64, and 98. 5) Four types are poems composed in the 17th century on the basis of written sources, but have later circulated in oral tradition; they are ÍF 10, 49, 96, and 100. Seven ballad-like poems seem to be literary imitations that have never been traditional: ÍF 84, 99, and 101–105. To this last group could be added a few poems in ballad metre not included as types in ÍF. 6) This leaves us with seven ballads of entirely uncertain origin. It seems impossible to tell whether they are Icelandic or imported; these are ÍF 32, 51, 61, 63, 69, 92, and 94.

It should be unnecessary to emphasize that the placing of a ballad in one of these categories is often disputable, and the reader must be referred to the sections on individual ballads.

These numbers demonstrate the crucial importance of Norway in the history of the Icelandic ballad. The first ballads must have come to Iceland from Norway, and Icelandic balladry has during its formative period belonged to a West-Nordic tradition. As was demonstrated in Chapter III, the transmission of ballads from Norway to Iceland is bound to have ended in the fourth decade of the 16th century. Nevertheless, a considerable part of the Icelandic ballad corpus has retained its West-Nordic flavour into the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, although, obviously, many ballads of West-Nordic origin must have been forgotten before the period of collection.

The question naturally arises whether Icelandic ballads of West-Nordic origin could be used to draw some conclusions about the ballad in Norway in the Middle Ages, and it must certainly be answered in the affirmative. First, the supposition that the ballad was firmly rooted in Norwegian tradition, and, indeed all over the West-Nordic area (including the Faroes and the Shetlands), in the 15th century is here supported by tangible evidence. Ballads were not written down in Norway before the 17th century, and there is no mention of them before the late 16th century. Although scholars have for long believed

that the ballad flowered in Norway from the 13th century onwards, this is certainly a hypothesis which needs all the support it can get. Second, the kind of ballads that the Icelanders have learnt from the Norwegians is interesting. They are ballads of the supernatural, ballads of chivalry, legendary ballads, and jocular ballads. These sub-genres are usually considered to have developed in the East-Nordic area. It so happens that all or almost all the evidence, direct or indirect, there is of the existence of ballads in Norway before 1600, relates to a different kind of ballad, i.e., the heroic ballads. Now we can be certain that the East-Nordic type of ballad flowered in the West-Nordic area in the 15th century. There is, of course, nothing in our results that contradicts the supposition that this was the case also in the 14th, or even 13th centuries, but as far as those centuries are concerned, the argument must be based on general likelihood, as previously. It should be mentioned here, however, that one Icelandic ballad, *Tristráms kvæði*, with the possible addition of *Bjarnarsona kvæði*, which both must have been composed when the main conventions of the genre had been well established, is more likely to stem from the 14th than the 15th century; but this dating is very uncertain. Third, what is the significance of the absence of Norwegian or Faroese heroic ballads from the Icelandic ballad corpus? In this case, we must retain our former conclusion, that the heroic ballad style is a development parallel to that of Icelandic *rímur* style, and that Icelanders chose to treat heroic matters in *rímur* rather than in ballads. However, traces can be found in Iceland of at least two Norwegian heroic ballads,⁴³⁷ and besides, traces of heroic style appear now and again in Icelandic ballads (see, e.g., the section on ÍF 62, *Þorkels kvæði Þrándarsonar*), and two indigenous Icelandic ballads, ÍF 81 and 82, demonstrate Icelandic attempts at composing ballads on heroic matters in the heroic ballad style.

Ballad import from Denmark has obviously been more limited than that from the West-Nordic area, and Icelandic singers have had greater difficulties in adapting Danish ballads directly to their own idiom. These ballads often show clumsy diction and language that is only partly adapted to accepted linguistic norms. However, the differences between 17th century recordings of these ballads and later recordings show that the ballads were gradually adapted to rhythm and diction more congenial to Icelandic ears than they had in the earliest versions.

⁴³⁷ See above p. 80.

When this is the case, it is only reasonable to infer that these ballads had not been sung by many generations of Icelanders before they were first recorded. Since most of these ballads, nevertheless, conform to rules of syllable quantity that were about to disappear shortly before and after 1600, one must assume that they were brought to Iceland in the late 16th or, in some cases, the early 17th century when the ties between Denmark and Iceland were being strengthened considerably. This does not mean that ballad import to Iceland had a definite end some decades before the recording had started. We have evidence that certain ballad versions were orally received and adapted as late as the 18th century, e.g., a variant of ÍF 70 based on Syv's printed collection that appeared in 1695.

We can conclude that the import of ballads to Iceland began in the 15th century, or earlier, and that it had almost ended by the first decades of the 17th century. However, the ballads lived on, as is witnessed by the ballad collections. The gradual decline of the tradition from the late 17th century up to the present time is outlined in the Introduction and need not be repeated here.

The reception of Scandinavian ballads in Iceland is a problem that could be studied more systematically than the scope of this book has allowed, but the comparative studies of individual ballads should provide a firm base for such a study. Here, a few brief and general remarks on this matter will be made.

It is an accepted postulate that the reception of ballads in Iceland has been mainly passive, and the paucity of indigenous Icelandic ballads seems to corroborate this. It is certainly true that a great majority of the Icelandic ballads are imported; they have often been repeated with slight changes in subject matter and with minimal linguistic alterations, and the changes there are seem often to have come about through forgetfulness, confusion and misunderstanding, in one word, through *Zersingen*. However, one should not overlook signs indicating that opposite, creative forces have also been operating in many cases. There is no reason to belittle the creative effort that has been put into remoulding the verbal texture itself. The modern reader is frequently struck by the divergencies from rhythmical and linguistic norms respected in other kinds of poetry (just as today's popular songs shock people by a similar kind of deviation from literary norms when occasionally printed). In spite of this, the general impression of these

texts is one of fluency and smoothness, especially in the case of the ballads of West-Nordic origin or the ballads composed in Iceland. The ballad singers achieved a rhythm and diction which survived centuries and is more appealing to modern readers than most of what is found in other poetry from the time when the ballad tradition was in full force. Creative forces have been operative at the structural level as well. We have seen, most notably in the case of *Ásu kvæði* (ÍF 60), how a new structure has been formed from the scattered remains of a former structure that has collapsed. Less striking instances of such restructuring can be found, albeit less thorough-going; but, naturally, they have not always been successful, and *Ásu kvæði* is certainly no artistic success. In one instance, however, *Sætrölls kvæði* (ÍF 5), a veritable jewel of a poem has come into being by what seems to be a crystallization from a longer and more complicated poem. In *Ásu dans* (ÍF 61), a highly independent treatment of a ballad theme has resulted in a ballad which must be considered an Icelandic composition; here, the singers have greatly expanded an imported story and even in places given it a local colour that is rarely found in Icelandic ballads. In other cases, it is impossible to judge whether aesthetically successful versions of ballads, say, *Kvæði af kong Símoni* (ÍF 26), *Ebbadætra kvæði* (ÍF 30), or *Kvæði af Knúti í Borg* (ÍF 31), which only have artistically inferior parallels in Scandinavia, owe their merits to a Scandinavian original, or whether these merits are, at least in part, acquired after the transfer to Iceland. One usually tends to choose the former explanation, under the influence from the romanticist idea that the oldest versions have been the best; but the other possibility should not be disregarded.

It is difficult to see any tendency to a shift in ideology in the Icelandic versions of Scandinavian ballads. Certainly, there are examples where a religious emphasis or moral has been added, e.g., in *Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós* (ÍF 1), but in other cases a similar emphasis seems reduced in Icelandic versions, e.g., in *Kaupmanna kvæði* (ÍF 6) and *Kvæði af vallara systrabana* (ÍF 15). There is absolutely no tendency to make the 'world' of the ballads more familiar or to adapt characters and settings to everyday reality. On the contrary, the exotic characteristics of this world, as well as the vehemence of the feelings displayed in it, has no doubt been one of the main attractions of this kind of poetry.

Finally, the issue of a recreative or reproductive reception of foreign ballads leads to the consideration of the really creative effort of Ice-

landers in this field: the ballads composed in the country. From previous treatments of the Icelandic ballad corpus, e.g., Liestøl 1931, one gets the impression that very few ballads have been composed in Iceland. Although our investigation has confirmed the conclusion that the ballad is mainly an imported genre in Iceland, we have been able to establish that the number of indigenous ballads is by no means negligible and that these ballads are, as a whole, quite on a level with the imported ones artistically. There is no reason to repeat the analysis already presented of these poems, but it must be pointed out that we find in them certain prominent features which make it easier to distinguish them from imported ballads.

It is striking that six of the ballads composed in Iceland have no refrain: two (ÍF 81 and 82) are heroic ballads, and three others (50, 56 and 58) share at least some features with the West-Nordic heroic ballads. This raises the question whether it is to be assumed that lack of refrain was more frequent in heroic ballads in medieval times than in the East-Nordic type of ballad, but the material is too scant to allow any conclusions. In these five ballads, and some other ballads in this group, the narrator is more prominent than is usual in Scandinavian ballads; this may have been caused by influence from *rímur*. Four of the ballads that appear to be Icelandic are composed in what we have called the Tristram-metre, with only six stressed syllables in a half stanza. On the whole, the general preference for short lines and even rhythm, which characterizes the Icelandic ballad corpus, is marked in this group.

The limited number of indigenous Icelandic ballads and the features that unite these ballads indicate that there have never been many creative ballad singers in Iceland. The ballads we have got could have been composed by a very limited number of people in a short period. Whoever they were, and whenever they lived, they succeeded in producing a handful of ballads that defend their place among the best that were composed in Scandinavia.

It would be wrong to make a sharp distinction between imported ballads and those that seem to have been composed in Iceland. They have all been sung and resung, learnt and cherished by the people, and it is this fact which truly makes them all, regardless of origin, the traditional ballads of Iceland.

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Errata

- 21. line 32: for 'prodecure', read 'procedure'
- 30. line 8: for 'school.', read 'school,'
- 90. line 26: for 'Ólafur', read 'Ólafr'
- 96. note 38, line 3: for 'Ida', read 'Ide'
- 146. line 20: for 'thuonne', read 'thuoonne'
- 174. note 96: for '96', read '96a'
- 185. line 3: for 'for', read 'of'
- 216. line 28: for 'whathever', read 'whatever'
- 224. line 20: for 'variants', read 'variant'
- 231. line 17: for 'elle', read 'eller'
- 256. line 11: for 'reason', read 'reasons'
- 292. line 28: for 'in', read 'is'
- 340. line 31: for 'it it', read 'it is'
- 364. line 6: for '*was*', read 'was'
- 382. line 10: for 'stanzas', read 'stanzas in'
- 390. line 33: for 'í', read 'in'

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