

Report for the Viking Society

Rosemary Power, RSF grant recipient. 13/10/2022

A grant was given for work in Iceland in 2021 but was delayed for use in 2022 due to the limitations due to Covid in Iceland. Instead, it took place over 3 weeks in September-October 2022.

The intention was to complete research and check people's recollections in order to complete a series of articles and a book on farm life, social interaction and folk beliefs in the 1970s and 1980s in Vatnsdalur. At that time I engaged with very elderly people at all times of year, as well as with those whose are my contemporaries. I stayed mainly with Sveinn, a grandson of the elderly couple from the farm Grímstunga, the land of which is much associated with *Grettis saga*, and was the birthplace of Hallfreður *vandræðaskald*. With him I visited the property (now in other hands), while staying on his late mother's farm in Vatnsdalur. She was also one of my key informants, and her farm is now owned by another of her sons, who was partly raised at Grímstunga by his grandparents. The time spent in Vatnsdalur allowed further contributions over hospitality received from the remaining family members; and also gave the opportunity to take images to compare with those taken in the 1970s and later.

The visit also comprised study and consultation with scholars in the relevant fields of folklore and ethnomusicology in Reykjavík. The Stofnun Árna Magnússonar hosted my work, and I benefited extensively from access to the library, and to discussion with local and visiting scholars, both old acquaintance and new, who provided generous help.

My text as it stands was read over by a number of relevant people and their descendants, and changed as deemed necessary. The text includes detail regarding the nineteenth and early-twentieth century Icelandophiles who visited the farm, because of *Grettis saga* and because it stood at the foot at what was then the main track to and from the south-west of the island. They often left their own written or artistic record.

The spontaneous folk-singing (*að kveða*, to sing in folk style to traditional tunes) has only very recently died, with the loss of common farming opportunities, such as the shearing or round-up, and with the deaths of the valley's two lead singers. However, recordings I had taken during the last 20 years were given to Dos. Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir of the ethnomusicological section of Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, for her to re-record and analyse, along with the words of the occasional and similar folk-style verses I learnt from the Grímstunga farmers and their neighbours. This was extremely important, as, while I had recorded some singing sessions, I have no musical training or ability to interpret in this field.

My recordings may identify what I have noted over the years, that the notation and methods of voice production were slowly being influenced by modern international music as experienced through radio and television, though the basic tunes remained the same, and certain internationally-known tunes were included in the musical corpus no later than the first half of the twentieth century. My description of how communal singing occurred is, I trust, one of the contributions the proposed book can make to the study. I consulted the professional folk singer Bára Grímsdóttir, who is also a grandchild of the elderly couple, who was raised in part on Grímstunga, and is the Chair of one of the societies dedicated

to the form's preservation. It is to be hoped that she will reproduce the verses collected in the style her parents and other relations sang, to accompany archived material. Her uncles, also from the farm, were recorded singing a third apart one of the songs from the *rímur*, which used some of the same traditional tunes.

I was also able to use the SÁM library to complete an article on Norse-Gaelic relations in the Hebrides for the *Éigse Cholmcille* conference publications series of the University of Ulster. In return for hospitality I offered two lectures, one in English on the Hebrides in the late Norse period in English, primarily for the international M.A students, but attended by members of the public. The other was prepared for *Sögufelag Steini* (the Kjalarnes local history group) in Icelandic. However, it was due to be delivered on my last full day in Iceland, when a major storm affecting the peninsula meant that it has been postponed until a later visit.

My intention now is to write up the drafts during the coming winter. The proposed book has raised considerable interest among the direct descendants, and Rósa has given advice on how it should be structured. My original preference was a book in English with a substantial Icelandic summary. The other option is both a series of articles, the first of which is already published in *Folklife 2022* and the second promised: the two on folk belief and folk music can be offered, as more relevant, to *Saga Book*. These would accommodate scholarly readership; while she has suggested I also produce a book for a more general readership within Iceland. A translator's grant of this second text will be under discussion of the book if accepted by the Icelandic publisher *Bókaútgáfan Sæmundur*, with whom I re-established contact. They will also seek a publisher's grant. At the least, the articles will be published in English, and the book would have a home online for the directly interested parties, while the research grant will have also assisted with the provision of a small archive of papers and recordings to SÁM.