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DOMESTICATING PROPHECY IN VERSE: THE TRANSLATION STRATEGY AND POLITICS OF *MERLÍNUSSPÁ*

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THE TWO POEMS KNOWN collectively as *Merlínusspá* and ascribed to the Icelandic monk Gunnlaugr Leifsson (d. 1218/1219) occupy a unique position within Old Norse literature. As a two-part poetic rendering of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetiae Merlini*, they represent the earliest known Arthurian translations into Old Norse (Sif Rikharðsdóttir and Eriksen 2013, 3), as well as the only known instance of a translation from Latin prose into Old Norse verse (Poole 2017a, 38; Gropper 2011, 48). At the same time, they are considered remarkably faithful translations (Poole 2017a, 44; Gropper 2011, 51; de Vries 1998, II 74–75), and they have consequently suffered from the stigma attached to works that are not 'original'. Examining the translation strategy at work in *Merlínusspá*, however, illuminates the sophisticated cultural poetics underlying the two texts. As we shall see, they can be described as 'domesticating translations' following the model established by Lawrence Venuti (2008). This self-conscious rewriting of the Latin prose *Prophetiae* as native verse prophecy can thus be set against the later translations of European verse romances into Old Norse prose commissioned by King Hákon IV Hákonarson of Norway (1204–63). In this context, *Merlínusspá* gains particular significance, not only as an intervention into Icelandic politics, but also as an engagement with verse poetics and cultural politics similar to the work of Gunnlaugr's younger contemporary Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241).

While *Merlínusspá* has benefited from two recent editions by Russell Poole (Gunnlaugr Leifsson 2017) and Susanne Horst (*Merlínusspá* 2012),¹ the two poems continue to receive comparatively little scholarly attention, with much of it devoted to their complex textual history. The texts survive in only one copy and in a substantially damaged state (Poole 2015–18, 200–03), inserted into the Old Norse translation of Geoffrey's *Historia regum Britanniae* (*HRB*) in the fourteenth-century Hauksbók (AM 544 4to), where they are presented in inverse order compared with the *Prophetiae*. They were most probably translated around 1200 by Gunnlaugr Leifsson,

¹ All references to *Merlínusspá* are to Poole's edition (Gunnlaugr Leifsson 2017). All translations are my own.

a monk at the Benedictine abbey of Þingeyrar (see Poole 2017b), and they probably circulated independently of the *HRB* before being reinserted into the translated *Breta sögur* (Tétrel 2021, 351; Lavender 2006, 113). There has been debate concerning the order of the poems, and even whether they were both translated by Gunnlaugr.² Their most recent editor Russell Poole (2017a, 46), however, considers them ‘two installments’ of an entire poem. For clarity, I will follow Poole in referring to the longer poem, which renders the first part of the *Prophetiae* and is presented second in Hauksbók, as *Merlínusspá I*, and to the shorter poem as *Merlínusspá II*.

Yet as important as the distinctions between the two poems is their largely shared translation strategy. Philip Lavender (2006, 114) recognises that ‘The translation of a prose text into poetry and, moreover, poetry that uses eddic verse forms and skaldic diction, is highly unusual and, thus, probably significant’. In this respect, the lens of translation theory can add much to previous readings by further drawing out the implications of *Merlínusspá*’s use of poetic forms to render the *Prophetiae*. This is especially relevant given that the Latin text of the *Prophetiae* was generally treated almost as reverentially as the Bible (Crick 2011, 70). In 1155, Wace famously omitted the *Prophetiae* from his Norman translation of the *HRB* (2002, 190, ll. 7539–42) with the justification:

Ne vuil son livre translater
Quant jo nel sai interpreter;
Nule rien dire nen vuldreie
Que si ne fust cum jo dirreie.

I do not wish to translate his book when I do not know how to interpret it; I would not want to say anything of it, lest it should not happen as I say.

Translating the riddling *Prophetiae* was an open act of interpretation, indeed an act of prophecy in itself, which could have been politically risky for Wace in the reign of King Henry II of England (Blacker 1996, 37). The choice to rewrite the *Prophetiae* in the tradition of Old Norse verse prophecy, ‘at a time of contestation of power between chieftains and church as intense . . . as that witnessed in England’ (Poole 2014, 18), is therefore inherently political. It is these underlying politics that Venuti’s model of domestication, within which ‘translation serves an appropriation of foreign cultures for agendas in the receiving situation, cultural, economic, political’, can reveal (Venuti 2008, 14).

² Sveinbjörn Rafnsson (1999) argues for an order of composition that follows Hauksbók; conversely, Horst (2006) argues that the poem presented first in Hauksbók is the work of a later imitator.

The translation practice Venuti terms domestication, in opposition to foreignisation, entails adaptation to literary norms predominant in the language of the translation. Despite a translation's apparent faithfulness, 'the foreign text is imprinted with values specific to the receiving culture' (Venuti 2008, 40). Venuti associates this approach with the translation strategy of *fluency*, which conceals the translated text's status as a translation and makes it seem to have been originally written in the translating language (2008, 47). This model strikingly illuminates the verse poetics, blending typically Eddic metre and skaldic diction (Poole 2017a, 45),³ that underlie Gunnlaugr's rewriting of Geoffrey's *Prophetiae*. It also goes beyond Lavender's slightly reductive assessment of *Merlínusspá* as a Christian repurposing of Eddic verse prophecy in the tradition of *Vǫluspá* (2006, 124), which largely leaves aside its indebtedness to skaldic poetry. In fact, Gunnlaugr's translation demonstratively draws on all aspects of contemporaneous Icelandic verse poetics to produce a *fluent* translation, deeply rooted in Icelandic history and traditional poetic forms. The resulting text acts as a cultural and political tool: impenetrable prophecies are made to seem relevant to the domestic Icelandic situation, and the decoding of historical prophecy is primarily positioned as a reading of Icelandic poetry.

Gunnlaugr Leifsson is known as the author of several Latin histories, working within the 'distinguished historiographic and hagiographic milieu' of Þingeyrar Abbey in the diocese of Hólar (Poole 2017b, 38).⁴ His domesticating translation of Geoffrey's *Prophetiae* fits perfectly into this context by embedding Merlin's prophecies into Icelandic history. This begins with the use of the Eddic metre *fornyrðislag*, or 'old story metre'⁵ for all of *Merlínusspá I* and most of *Merlínusspá II*. Lavender (2006, 115) rightly notes that this metre is 'generically appropriate' for Eddic verse prophecies like *Vǫluspá*. More broadly, however, it also ties *Merlínusspá* into highly valorised narratives of ancient history, as Hélène Tétrel argues (2006, 260). The prologue to *Merlínusspá I* presents the prophecies as a matter, not of translation, but of ancient legends embedded in pre-existing literary traditions (st. 1.1–4):

³ The binary distinction between Eddic and skaldic verse is a modern concept, and the boundary is in fact often fluid (see Clunies Ross 2005, 14; Whaley 2005, 481); it can be further complicated by a distinction between Eddic and skaldic metres, content and diction, as well as social context (see Clunies Ross 2012; Leslie-Jacobsen 2016–17).

⁴ On Þingeyrar's place in Icelandic literary culture, see Gottskálk Jenson (2021).

⁵ For a brief account of *fornyrðislag* and its 'legendary associations', see Poole (2005, 265–66); see also Fulk (2016, 255–60).

Nú skalk flotnum, þats forðum vas,
— hlýði fróðir mér fyrðar — segja.

Now I shall tell men what once was — listen to me, wise men.

The audience is addressed, and referred to, with poetic *heiti*: *flotnar* ‘seamen, men’ and *fyrðar* ‘men’ (Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson 1931, 142, 163), which together with the metre immediately domesticates the prophecies. This is emphasised through the later repetition of the line *í sǫgum fornum* ‘in ancient stories’ (st. 3.4, 4.4). Similarly, *Merlínusspá II* sets out to narrate prophecies *forra minna* ‘from ancient memories’ (st. 3.6). Although *Merlínusspá* is explicitly set in Britain, its chosen poetic form thus serves to integrate it into a legendary past framed in distinctively Icelandic terms.

In fact, Gunnlaugr translates *Merlínusspá* to slot neatly into Icelandic historiographical continuity, producing readings that occasionally puzzle editors. Notably, he expands the prophecy regarding King Arthur’s conquests. For the Latin *Insule oceani potestati ipsius subdentur, et Gallicanos saltus possidebit* ‘the islands of the ocean will come under his authority, and he will seize the passes of France’ (Geoffrey of Monmouth 2007, 145), *Merlínusspá I* (st. 25) reads:

Fersk undir hann foldu grœnni
ok eyja fjöld í úthafi,
Íra ok Engla ok Út-Skota,
viðum lǫndum valskra þjóða,
Nóregs síðu ok Norðr-Dana

The green land is brought under his rule, and a multitude of islands in the outer sea, of the Irish and the English and the Outer Scots, with wide lands of the French people, the coast of Norway and of the North-Danes.

In his edition of *Merlínusspá I* (Gunnlaugr Leifsson 2017, 64), Poole remarks on this incorporation of Arthurian conquests that only occur later in the *HRB*, possibly drawn from a commentary on the *Prophetiae*, but cannot explain why Iceland, which explicitly figures among these conquests, is omitted. Historiographically, however, this makes perfect sense: in clarifying the phrase *insule oceani* ‘the islands of the ocean’, the translation accords with Icelandic historiography by not having Iceland settled in Arthur’s time. Although Iceland could still implicitly be included among the *eyja fjöld í úthafi* ‘multitude of islands in the outer sea’, it is striking that the same pattern is also found in *Breta sǫgur*, in which Norway replaces Iceland among Arthur’s conquests (see Kalinke 2015, 29–30). Gunnlaugr’s domestication produces a kind of historiographical fluency,

ensuring that *Merlínusspá* can naturally lead up to Icelandic history and thereby remain relevant to Icelandic audiences.

Yet the fluency demanded by alliterative verse also drives domestication in another way. The paratactic structure of alliterative verse does not allow for the same kind of pronominal reference as Latin prose (Poole 2015–18, 199), therefore relying on *heiti* and kennings that necessarily invoke a specific cultural framework. The prologue to *Merlínusspá I* introduces Merlin not as a prophet but as *yngva vinr* ‘the king’s friend’ (st. 9.5–6). Poole (2014, 24) attributes this circumlocution to the posited influence of Geoffrey’s *Vita Merlini*, which depicts Merlin as a king. But as J. S. Eysteinnsson notes, the use of kennings recalling ‘great warrior kings and vikings’ is a highly conventional practice (1953–57, 96–97); Merlin thus appears as *verdags hǫtuðr* ‘hater of the sea-day [GOLD > GENEROUS MAN]’ (st. 10.2), *fleinþollr* ‘spear-fir [WARRIOR]’ (st. 11.8), or *spillir bauga* ‘despoiler of rings [GENEROUS MAN]’ (st. 13.8). The kennings’ conventionality does not make them meaningless. On the contrary: this choice of kennings demonstrates a self-conscious effort to further tie *Merlínusspá* into the literary tradition and historical continuity associated with its poetic form. Thus, even when closely translating the Latin text, *Merlínusspá I* renders the Latin pronoun *eius* ‘his’ (Geoffrey of Monmouth 2007, 141) as the mythological kenning *Týr . . . Hristar* ‘Týr <god> of Hrist <valkyrie> [WARRIOR]’ (st. 14.8–9).

Indeed, the use of the residual mythological framework characteristic of Old Norse poetry becomes a key strategy to domesticate the animal allegory of Geoffrey’s *Prophetiae*. The *Prophetiae*’s first symbolic animals, two *dracones dormientes* ‘sleeping dragons’ (Geoffrey of Monmouth 2007, 141), are translated in *Merlínusspá I* as *lindar lands* ‘girdles of the land’ (st. 12.5–6) or *seil rás* ‘rope of the earth’ (st. 12.7–8), kennings that are not attested elsewhere but implicitly recall the mythological *Miðgarðsormr*. In the same way, in *Merlínusspá I*, the pagan king Gormund, represented in the Latin *Prophetiae* by an *aequoreus lupus* ‘wolf of the sea’ (Geoffrey of Monmouth 2007, 145), becomes *Fenrir sjóvar* ‘wolf of the sea’ (st. 29.2). Like the *Miðgarðsormr*, the *heiti Fenrir* ‘wolf’ carries mythological connotations that seem to pre-empt Gormund’s apocalyptic assault on Christianity. The *Prophetiae*’s riddling predictions are consequently subsumed to become practically an extended function of poetry; as Tétrel remarks, traditional poetic form ‘permet de réunir dans la même lecture le bestiaire du texte original . . . et les comparants traditionnels de la *kenning*’ (‘makes it possible to combine in the same reading the bestiary of the original text and the traditional comparisons of the *kenning*’) (Tétrel 2006, 264). What emerges is a type of prophecy deeply rooted in domestic poetic practice. As a result, even as the *Prophetiae* move past

Geoffrey's own time and cease to map neatly onto real historical events, they still present the illusion of being decipherable through poetic imagery. Their vagueness is what keeps the prophecies potentially applicable and politically dangerous, as Jean Blacker argues (1996, 39); and the key to understanding *Merlínusspá*'s riddling predictions and applying them to Icelandic history seems to lie in understanding all facets of Icelandic poetry.

Most obviously, *Merlínusspá* seems indebted to Eddic verse prophecy. Jan de Vries primarily identifies parallels with *Völuspá* and *Gripisspá*, which he rather patronisingly takes to illustrate 'die Unselbstständigkeit dieses dichtenden Mönches' ('the lack of independence of this versifying monk') (de Vries 1998, II 76). Lack of independence is of course the point — and as Poole (2017a, 45) argues, most of these supposed parallels are probably the product of 'a general eddic style'. In two instances, however, *Merlínusspá II* appears to draw directly on *Völuspá*'s depiction of *ragnarök* (*Völuspá* 2014, 302, st. 44):⁶

Bræðr munu berjask
ok at þonum verðask,
munu systrungar
sifjum spilla;
hart er í heimi,
hórdómr mikill,
skeggöld, skalmöld,
skildir ro klofnir,
vindöld, vargöld,
áðr veröld steypisk;
mun engi maðr
qðrum þyrma.

Brothers will fight each other and kill each other, sisters' sons will spoil the kinship bond; hard it is in the world, great fornication, axe-age, sword-age, shields are cloven, storm-age, wolf-age, before the world sinks; no man will spare another.

This stanza seems to underlie passages in *Merlínusspá II* as it skips forward in the *Prophetiae* to describe the end of the world, including the only other occurrence of the compound *vargöld* in the Old Norse corpus: *víg ok vélar, vargöld ok qöld* 'battles and treacheries, wolf-age and cold' (st. 51.5–6). The same stanza may also have inspired the translation of the Latin *Nesciet pater filium proprium* 'the father will not know his own son' (Geoffrey of Monmouth 2007, 157) in *Merlínusspá II* (st. 54.1–4) as:

⁶ Although Sveinbjörn Rafnsson suggests that *Völuspá* may be more recent than *Merlínusspá* (1999, 415), most scholars agree that the opposite is more likely.

Verst es í heimi; veitat sonr fǫður;
slíta þeir sífjum svá synir við feðr

It is worst in the world; the son does not know the father; thus sons break the kinship bond with fathers.

As a result, Merlin's apocalyptic predictions are framed within what Laverder (2006, 117) calls 'culturally familiar terrain', creating an eschatological vision following established poetic patterns.

At the same time, *Merlínussþá* is clearly not to be read as mythology, but as mythological verse explicitly situated within Christian history. This entails an adaptation for contemporary Icelandic audiences by domesticating the ambiguously pagan terminology of the *Prophetiae*. *Merlínussþá I* (st. 29.5–10) renders *Delebitur iterum religio* 'religion will be destroyed again' (Geoffrey of Monmouth 2007, 145) as

Verðr kristnibrot of kyni þjóðar;
þó munu sjalfir síðar nøkkvi
enskir lýðir allir skírask.

There is a breakdown of Christianity among the kindred of the people; but the English people will themselves later all be baptised.

The passage expands on the Latin *Prophetiae* to preserve the continuity of Christian history. But its primary importance lies in translating the general term *religio* 'religion' specifically as *kristni* 'Christianity', which establishes a pattern for all further occurrences of the term. Equally, the Latin *Tonantis* 'of the Thunderer' (Geoffrey of Monmouth 2007, 147), which can designate God but is also the traditional epithet of Jupiter, is translated as the kenning *buðlungs himins* 'of the king of heaven' (st. 36.2), which can only designate the Christian God and coincidentally eliminates any possible resonances with Þórr; similar translations occur throughout for the term *Tonans*. Other explicit references to non-Christian religions are suppressed, both by omitting the Latin text's mentions of Venus (Geoffrey of Monmouth 2007, 149, 151), and by largely eschewing mythological kennings invoking major gods (see Tétrel 2006, 263). *Merlínussþá II* goes even further by explicitly describing Merlin as a Christian prophet: *Kærr vas hann kristnu kynni þjóðar* 'he was dear to the Christian family of peoples' (st. 2.5–6). At every instance, the translation brings the prophecies closer to Christian Icelandic society. For all its mobilisation of an Eddic verse form, *Merlínussþá* presents historical prophecy and a legendary past made accessible through a resolutely contemporary, Christian poetic lens.

That the purpose of this is not to Christianise Eddic prophecy, but to present all aspects of an already Christian poetic art as a key to Icelandic

history, becomes apparent through Gunnlaugr's ostentatious display of typically skaldic mythological diction. This goes far beyond a simple 'interest in traditional skaldic subject matters', as Lavender has it (2006, 116). Both poems amplify battle scenes to insert poetic descriptions, with no Latin sources, into the prophecies. A comparison of the repetitive battles shows that they essentially function as skaldic set pieces to display the translator's poetic skill. Thus, *Merlínusspá I* (st. 65) reads:

Svífr it hvassa hagl tvíviðar
 — hnígr hǫlða lið — hart af strengjum.
 En geyst hinig gaflok fara;
 megut Skoḡlar ský við skotum halda.

The sharp hail of the bow [ARROWS] flies — the troop of men falls — hard from the strings. And javelins violently travel this way; the clouds of Skoḡul [SHIELDS] cannot withstand the shots.

This passage is then practically echoed and amplified in *Merlínusspá II* (st. 34.5–12):

Gnýr es á glæstum Gǫndlar himni
 ok í hǫrðum hlam Hlakkar tjöldum.
 Erut skjólsamar Skoḡlar kápur;
 hrytr hagl boga hlíf í gegnum.

There is a clashing on the shining heaven of Gǫndul [SHIELD] and a thudding on the hard awnings of Hlǫkk [SHIELDS]. The capes of Skoḡul [MAILSHIRTS] are not protective; the hail of bows [ARROWS] pierces through armour.

As Poole notes (2018, 275), the mythological kennings employed are all 'highly conventional and predictable'. There is no reason to suppose that Gunnlaugr needed to reclaim kennings involving valkyries for a Christian poetry that had already thoroughly assimilated them. Their use could as well be described with Christopher Abram's assessment of the ostentatiously mythological poem *Øxarflokkur* by the significantly earlier Christian skald Einarr Skúlason (fl. 1153) as 'an extremely self-conscious and learned exercise in traditional kenning-composition' (Abram 2014, 50). But beyond simply providing an aesthetic flourish, *Merlínusspá* uses these traditional literary forms to establish its authority and historical relevance. This learned exercise in prophetic composition demonstrates that Merlin's prophecies can only be understood through all the aspects of contemporary Icelandic verse that Gunnlaugr so demonstratively deploys.

In this respect, *Merlínusspá* parallels the twelfth- or thirteenth-century *Hugsvinnsmál*. This widely attested, and highly influential, Icelandic gnomic poem transposes the hexametrical Latin *Disticha Catonis* into Old

Norse *ljóðaháttir*,⁷ a form associated with Eddic wisdom poetry which it notably shares with *Hávamál* (see Larrington 1993, 104; Schorn 2011, 144–45).⁸ Like *Merlínusspá*, it deliberately deploys a traditional form to transmit the advice of a *heiðinn maðr* ‘heathen man’ (*Hugsvinnsmál* 2007, 361, st. 1.5), no longer identified with Cato but integrated into Iceland’s pagan past. But it also operates within an explicitly Christian contemporary framework. Not only does it consistently omit references to pagan gods (see Bauer 2009, 40–41); it also transforms the late antique *Disticha Catonis*’s equivocal *Si deus est animus nobis, ut carmina dicunt* ‘if God is a spirit, as songs tell us’ (1952, 34, Book I, st. 1.1) into a straightforward exhortation *at göfga æztan guð* ‘to worship the highest God’ (*Hugsvinnsmál* 2007, 371, st. 17.3). Most importantly, like *Merlínusspá*, it openly relies on the authority of Icelandic verse traditions. Carolyne Larrington (1993, 116) notes that *Hugsvinnsmál* goes so far as to contradict its source to insist on the high cultural value of poetry. Where the *Disticha Catonis* (1952, 176, Book III, st. 18.2) assert that *miranda canunt, sed non credenda poetae* ‘poets sing of things to be marvelled at but not to be believed’, *Hugsvinnsmál* (2007, 421, st. 102.1–3) instead reads:

Gamansamlig ljóð skaltu af greppum nema
ok mörg fræði muna

Entertaining songs you must learn from poets and remember much knowledge.

The verse translator can thus claim the poet’s traditional role as a ‘conduit for the transmission of this valuable wisdom’, as Brittany Schorn has it (2011, 141). Together with *Merlínusspá*, *Hugsvinnsmál* might therefore be said to belong to a distinct tradition of very consciously poetic verse translation in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iceland.

Merlínusspá and its translation strategy must then also be seen in the wider context of the literary development charted by Guðrún Nordal, through which skaldic poetry became ‘the tool with which the grammarians and learned men of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries forged a

⁷ The influence of *Hugsvinnsmál* on Old Norse literature is extensively, if sometimes tenuously, documented by Hermann Pálsson (1985). For a brief account of *ljóðaháttir* and its frequent pairing with *fornyrðislag*, see Poole (2005, 268–69) and Fulk (2016, 260–62).

⁸ The relationship between *Hugsvinnsmál* and *Hávamál* is not unlike that between *Merlínusspá* and *Völuspá*, in that they tend to be seen as closely connected, and the translation is occasionally argued to predate the ‘native’ poem; see notably von See (1999). In the case of *Hugsvinnsmál*, Carolyne Larrington (1993) convincingly argues for the priority of *Hávamál*; see also McKinnell (2007, 76–91) and Wills and Würth (2007, 360).

link between native traditions and classical learning' (Nordal 2001, 118). In fact, following Venuti's model, *Merlínusspá*, like *Hugsvinnsmál*, goes even further by domesticating the Latin *Prophetiae* and presenting them as *part of* native Icelandic traditions. The prophecies therefore draw their authority not from the Latin text, but from their roots in ancient history and poetic tradition, which also serve to emphasise their historical relevance to contemporary Icelandic audiences. Furthermore, the domestication of Geoffrey's increasingly impenetrable allegories in the form of Eddic and skaldic poetry makes them seem, in Lavender's words, 'tantalizingly decipherable' (2006, 124). Yet the power to decipher them ultimately rests with the poet who uses *Merlínusspá* to display his multifaceted poetic prowess. *Merlínusspá II* refers to itself as a *ljóðborg* 'fortress of song', a questionably refreshed manuscript reading that Poole emends to *ljóðbók* 'song-book' (st. 4.2). Both terms are *hapax legomena*, and a case can be made for either of them.⁹ What is important is that both highlight the importance of the prophecies' poetic form. Gunnlaugr's mastery of verse poetics conspicuously signals his ability to deploy verse prophecy as a powerful historical, cultural and political tool, the concrete applications of which will become apparent in comparison with later Old Norse translation projects.

Poole's emendation of *ljóðborg* to *ljóðbók* suggests a comparison with the *Strengleikar*, Norwegian translations of Marie de France's Anglo-Norman *Lais* commissioned by King Hákon Hákonarson of Norway in the quarter-century following Gunnlaugr's death. A similar term is proposed as a name for the *Strengleikar* in the collection's prologue (1979, 4): *bok þessor er hinn virðulege hacon konongr let norræna or volsko male ma hæita lióða bok* 'this book, which the worthy King Hákon had translated into Norse from the French language, may be called Book of Songs'. Yet this *ljóðabók* is fundamentally different from the domesticated *Merlínusspá* in verse. The *Strengleikar* (1979, 4) explicitly reference their foreign sources: *gærðo skolld i syðra brætlande er liggr i frannz lióðsonga* 'poets in Brittany, which is in France, composed songs'. Furthermore, these songs are not translated in verse, but in the alliterative and repetitive 'courtly' prose style typical of the translated *riddarasögur* (Goeres 2019, 78). This style, which Stefanie Würth describes as 'eine Annäherung an die poetische Form der französischen Vorlagen' ('an approximation of the French sources' poetic form') (1998, 131), serves as a constant reminder of the *riddarasögur*'s

⁹ Notably, Horst's edition (*Merlínusspá* 2012, 68–69) follows previous editors in maintaining the reading *ljóðborg* as a kenning referring to the poem.

origins in foreign romance and their distinction from native historical genres. In this regard, the *Strengleikar* reflect a translation practice that is diametrically opposed to the domestication of *Merlínusspá*. They tend towards what Venuti calls foreignisation: translation that intentionally disrupts pre-existing cultural values and ‘signifies the differences of the foreign text’ (2008, 15), even though it can only foreignise the text by using linguistic tools that are ultimately domestic.

This is not to say that the *Strengleikar* fulfil Venuti’s idealised notion of foreignisation. As part of a translation programme commissioned by Hákon ‘to Europeanise his own court’ (Eriksen 2007, 99; see also Irlenbusch-Reynard 2011; Sif Ríkharðsdóttir 2012), they are as much cultural tools as the domesticating *Merlínusspá*. As Venuti emphasises, however, domestication and foreignisation do not constitute a neat binary; instead, they reflect broad ethical attitudes to texts, and the *Strengleikar* certainly reflect a foreignising practice in constructing ‘a certain image of the foreign that is informed by the receiving situation but aims to question it by drawing on materials that are not currently dominant’ (Venuti 2008, 19–20). In characteristic courtly style, the ancient Bretons featuring in the *Strengleikar* are positioned as a source of foreign learning, *því at þeir varo listugir i velom sinom glægsynir i skynsemdom. hygnir i raðagerðom vaskir i vapnom hæverskir i hirðsiðum* ‘because they were skilled in their arts, clear-sighted in their reason, wise in their counsels, valiant with weapons, courteous in courtly customs’ (*Strengleikar* 1979, 4). The *Strengleikar* thus draw on a vernacularised *translatio studii*, a transfer of authoritative learning that, as Rita Copeland notes (1991, 121), is marked by ‘a linguistic rupture with the *antiqui*’. The text consequently appears as a mediator of foreign authority, largely separate from native historical traditions, which then allows it to instrumentalise *translatio studii* in order to legitimise innovation (see Angerer 2022). In this way, foreignisation is integral to Hákon’s project of effecting political and cultural change.

This new thirteenth-century translation strategy for romance stands in stark contrast to the domestication of earlier Icelandic verse translations like Gunnlaugr’s rendering of the *Prophetiae Merlini*. Instead of mediating foreign authority, *Merlínusspá* consolidates existing cultural authority by blending the voices of Merlin the prophet and Gunnlaugr the poet. Although Sveinbjörn Rafnsson distinguishes between the presentation of *Merlínusspá II* as an originally poetic prophecy and *Merlínusspá I* as a later poem about prophecy (Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 1999, 382), both texts explicitly have Merlin speaking in verse. *Merlínusspá II* introduces the prophecies with the phrase *nú skal brag kveða* ‘now the poem shall be

recited' (st. 4.8) and refers to itself as *folkstafs fornu kvæði* 'the ancient poem of the people-stave [LEADER]' (st. 62.3–4). Similarly, *Merlínusspá I* creates the effect of direct speech by including the reporting clause *kvæð bjóðr bragar* 'said the offerer of poetry' (st. 21.3). It is true that *Merlínusspá I* (st. 94.7–10) reflects more fully on its form, and to some extent differentiates between Gunnlaugr and Merlin, by appending Gunnlaugr's remarks that

ek mynt hafa mál at hætti,
þeims spár fyrir spjöllum rakði

I have shaped the matter after the style in which he recited prophecies in words before.

But Gunnlaugr's domesticating claim to preserve Merlin's *háttir*, a broad term generally meaning 'manner' but also 'verse form', maintains a sense of poetic equivalence (*ONP*, s.v. *háttir*; see also Cleasby and Vigfusson 1874, 244). *Merlínusspá*'s judicious use of literary form makes one of prophet and poet.

The historical and moral authority Gunnlaugr arrogates to himself through poetry is implicit in the interpretive framework provided at the end of *Merlínusspá I*, which Sveinbjörn Rafnsson (1999, 414) calls 'varnarræða fyrir [*Merlínusspá II*] og form þess' ('a defence of *Merlínusspá II* and its form'). The fact that it is also a defence of poetic form gets somewhat lost when Lavender quite rightly describes the framework as 'a Christian hermeneutics' (Lavender 2006, 124). *Merlínusspá I* does set Merlin in the tradition of Daniel and David's biblical prophecy rather than *Vóluspá: sem fyr hönnum fyrðar helgir* 'like holy men before him' (st. 96.9–10). Importantly, however, the mention of Daniel and David is followed in *Merlínusspá I* (st. 97) by a defence of the form of prophecy:

Virði engi þat vitlausu,
þótt hann hoddskötum heiti gæfi
viðar eða vatna eða veðrs mikils
eða alls konar orma eða dýra.
Táknar eðli alðrar skepnu
spjorráðanda spjöll eða kosti.

Let nobody think this foolish, though he gives treasure-chieftains [KINGS] the names of trees or of lakes or of a great storm or of all kinds of serpents or beasts. The nature of the recounted creature signifies the flaws or virtues of the spear-wielders [WARRIORS].

This passage effectively defends allegorical prophecy at the same time as the poetic use of *heiti* and kennings. The underlying proposition is rather more radical than Lavender's notion (2006, 122) of repositioning

the imagery of Eddic poetry as a key to divine revelation. Instead, as an *ars poetica et prophetica*, *Merlínusspá I* suggests a fundamentally poetic hermeneutics through which both past and future may be understood, and within which historical and moral signification is controlled by the Christian poet.

As a defence of, ultimately, the timeless political power of traditional Icelandic poetry, this interpretive framework presents a striking parallel with Snorri Sturluson's slightly later prose *Edda. Merlínusspá I* (st. 95.7–10) proposes to teach its audience

hverr fyrða sé framsýnna hǫttr
mól at rekja, þaus menn vitut

What the style of prophetic men is in unfolding matters which men do not know.

In this instance, Poole (2009, 313) may be right to note that the term *háttr* 'relates not to metrical form . . . but to figurative language'. Yet, given the importance of poetic form to Gunnlaugr's translation strategy, in this context the word cannot be separated from its secondary significance of 'verse form'. Gunnlaugr's defence of poetic prophecy is then not dissimilar to Snorri's later efforts to preserve the verse forms and mythological terms underlying skaldic poetry (1998, I 5):

En þetta er nú at segja ungum skáldum þeim er girnask at nema mál skáldskapar ok heyja sér orðfjólða með fornum heitum eða girnask þeir at kunna skilja þat er hulit er kveðit

But these things must now be told to young poets who desire to learn the language of poetry and add to their vocabulary with ancient *heiti*, or who desire to understand that which is hidden in speech.

Snorri, too, is keen to present traditional poetic forms as a way of decoding the past, which similarly puts the poet in a position of historical and political power. As Kevin J. Wanner argues, Snorri's *Edda* attempts to restore the importance of poetry as a form of cultural capital by demonstrating its 'historic contribution to the legitimation of Scandinavian kings and the memorialization of their reigns' (Wanner 2008, 159). In light of Poole's suggestion (2009, 309) that Snorri's *Háttatal* may partly emulate *Merlínusspá*, it is tempting to think that Snorri found a model there in a more general sense. Gunnlaugr's poetic prophecy emerges as a statement of the Christian skald's importance in determining the meaning of past and future history, and the place of worldly leaders within it.

This is particularly significant in the political context of Iceland around 1200. Poole argues (2014, 19) that the *Prophetiae* were brought to Iceland as 'a weapon in current controversies about the primacy of ecclesiastical

versus secular authority'; *Merlínusspá* may have been directly commissioned by Guðmundr Arason (1161–1237), whose tenure as bishop of Hólar was marked by repeated clashes with Icelandic chieftains (see also Sverrir Jakobsson (2018, 202–05); Helgi Þórlaksson (2007, 146); Orri Vésteinsson (2000, 174–78)). The fact that Gunnlaugr's domesticating translation, as a targeted act of cultural politics, enhances its political potential even further lends additional weight to this supposition. The explicit poetics of *Merlínusspá I* especially highlight the Christian poet's role as the arbiter of history and prophecy, which may also explain why the poem articulates the question of fame remarkably transparently. The Latin prophecy regarding Arthur's fame is couched in highly metaphorical terms: *In ore populorum celebrabitur, et actus eius cibus erit narrantibus* 'he will be celebrated in the mouth of the peoples, and his deeds will be food to those who recount them' (Geoffrey of Monmouth 2007, 145). In contrast, Gunnlaugr's translation in *Merlínusspá I* (st. 27) unpacks this sentence to produce a very straightforward reading:

Hann munu tígna tungur lýða;
 sá mun gramr vera gumnum tíðastr.
 Ey mun uppi qðlings frami
 ok hans hróðr fara með himinskautum

The tongues of men will honour him; that ruler will be the most famous of men. The lord's prowess will always be remembered, and his glory will travel to the corners of heaven.

It comes as a clear reminder of the poet's role in making historical judgments and propagating fame, and of the power the prophetic poet holds over worldly rulers throughout history. Poole states (2018, 280) that Gunnlaugr 'constitutes himself partly as prophet, partly as chronicler'. But having concentrated historical and poetic authority in himself, Gunnlaugr also openly constitutes himself as chronicler of both past and future. The domestication of *Merlínusspá* and its sustained engagement with verse poetics thus appears, like Snorri's interest in the cultural capital of poetry, 'overwhelmingly political in nature' (Wanner 2008, 158).

While none of the translated prophecies maps directly onto contemporaneous Icelandic events, they give rise to the explicitly homiletic conclusion of *Merlínusspá II*, once more without precedent in the Latin *Prophetiae*. This is accompanied by a switch to *kviðuhátt*, which is not an Eddic metre but one *Merlínusspá II* shares with poems traditionally classified as genealogical, like *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal*. Kate Heslop, however, has recently reassessed *kviðuhátt* as a form emphasising the skald's agency in the construction of poetic memory, set against the

‘deep past’ of *fornyrðislag* (Heslop 2022, 45–46).¹⁰ In *Merlínusspá II*, the passage to this more skaldic metre thus highlights the transition to the Christian poet’s moral conclusions and his power to relate them to his audience. In content, these are partly gnomic in character, and in fact Hermann Pálsson identifies a potential borrowing from *Hugsvinnsmál* in *Merlínusspá II*’s pronouncement that *Skrjúpt es líf lýða barna* ‘frail is the life of the children of men’ (st. 65.1–2) (Hermann Pálsson 1985, 60). This parallels *Hugsvinnsmál*’s statement that *Brigt er lýða líf* ‘fickle is the life of men’ (2007, 390, st. 48.6). But since this gnomic phrase does not very closely translate the Latin *Cum dubia incertis versetur vita periculis* ‘since doubtful life is overthrown by uncertain perils’ of the *Disticha Catonis* (1952, 73, Book I, st. 33.1), it may equally be a variant on a popular idiom. More than its origins, what is important is that this piece of gnomic advice in *Merlínusspá II* derives its force from the role of the poet constructed throughout the preceding verse prophecies. His very position as a Christian poet, conversant with the idiom of both prophecy and memory, gives him political and moral authority and allows him to encourage his audience not to trust in earthly life.

There is once again a stark contrast with the later *Strengleikar*, in which Hermann Pálsson also finds parallels with *Hugsvinnsmál* (Hermann Pálsson 1985, 49). In one instance, *Hugsvinnsmál* warns (2007, 382, st. 35):

Af annars dauða væntu aldri,
 at þér gagn geriz;
 aldragi sínu ræðr engi maðr;
 nær stendr höldum hel.

Never expect to benefit from another’s death; no man controls his fate; death is close to men.

This is echoed in the *Strengleikar*, but drawing on a fundamentally different type of authority. The gnomic statement occurs in a moralising codicil added to the translated *Equitan* by *sa er þessa bok norrænadoe* ‘he who translated this book into Norse’ (*Strengleikar* 1979, 78). The translator concludes: *Girniz ok ængi at auðga sec af annars dauða. þui at marger dæyia þeir fyrr illum dauða er oðrum æfna ok ætla skiotan dauðan* ‘and no one should wish to enrich themselves through another’s death, for many die sooner of an evil death who prepare and plan a swift death for others’ (*Strengleikar* 1979, 78). This is of course part of a wider pattern of moralising in the *Strengleikar* identified by Andrew Hamer (1994). Yet

¹⁰ On the form of *kviðuháttur* and its difference from *fornyrðislag* more generally, see also Heslop (2022, 18).

crucially, the authority underlying the translator's moral injunction is now explicitly that of foreign sources and imported knowledge. Tellingly, the passage ends with quotations from Augustine, the Bible — emphasised by the assertion that *Sua sannar hæilagtr bokmal* 'thus affirms the holy Latin' (*Strengleikar* 1979, 80) — and two Latin distichs. In the *Strengleikar*, the translator's authority derives from the ostentatiously multilingual, foreignising practice through which he reproduces the sources of his knowledge for Hákon's Norwegian court.

Not so in *Merlínusspá's* homiletic conclusion: the role that carries authority here is much more that of the poet, learned in Icelandic verse traditions and arbiter of men's future fame, than that of the translator. In *Merlínusspá II* (st. 64.1–4), the poet directly addresses his audience in the first-person plural in the manner of a preacher:¹¹

Sjám við synð ok svikaráðum
ok alls kyns illum verkum

Let us eschew sin and treacherous counsels and all kinds of evil deeds.

This injunction is extremely general, but as with the opaque prophetic language of the poem, it is within the poet's power to apply it to specific situations. This is not the foreignising recourse to external authority deployed in Norwegian translations as a source of innovation. This is an authority that, through domestication, naturally proceeds out of the traditions of Icelandic poetry and historiography. And it is perhaps no coincidence that, in the case of the disputes between Bishop Guðmundr and the chieftains of Northern Iceland, the force of this authority was subsequently validated by the bishop's successful memorialisation as *Guðmundr inn góði* 'Guðmundr the Good' through the poetry and sagas produced by Þingeyrar monks in the following centuries (see Gottskálk Jenson 2021, 10; Nordal 2001, 100–10). Gunnlaugr's translation of Geoffrey's *Prophetiae* thus constitutes a self-conscious engagement with verse poetics and cultural politics that allows the learned Christian skald to assume a position of historical and moral authority over both past and future.

Overall, a reading of *Merlínusspá* as a domesticating translation reveals how this largely neglected poem engages with Icelandic verse poetics to reinforce the poet's historical authority. The effectiveness of this strategy is reflected in the two extant mentions of *Merlínusspá* in medieval manuscripts

¹¹ A very similar usage occurs in the roughly contemporaneous *Old Norwegian Homily Book*: the *Sermo ad populum* closes on the exhortation *siom við houuð-syndum* 'let us eschew deadly sins' (*Gamal norsk homiliebok* 1931, 73).

of the translated *Breta sǫgur*. Additionally, these two manuscripts also illustrate the relevance of Venuti's model as a more general way of approaching Old Norse translations. *Merlínusspá* is, as previously noted, included in the shorter redaction of *Breta sǫgur* in Hauksbók, and it is also mentioned, but not included, at the same point in the longer redaction of *Breta sǫgur* in AM 573 4to. Interestingly, these two redactions of a lost original translation themselves broadly align with a domesticating, historical practice and a foreignising, romance style. As Stefanie Gropper notes (2014, 235), the Hauksbók version that includes *Merlínusspá* has probably been reworked to fit traditional modes of historiography, while the redaction in AM 573 4to is much closer in style to the translated *riddarasǫgur*. Although *Breta sǫgur*'s own complex textual history should not be oversimplified, the inclusion of *Merlínusspá* in Hauksbók and its exclusion from AM 573 4to does suggest that the categories of domestication and foreignisation have, to some extent, distinct generic functions.

The fourteenth-century Hauksbók, an encyclopaedic compilation largely in the hand of the Icelandic lawspeaker Haukr Erlendsson (c.1265–1334), reveals a broad interest in history, both of Iceland and the world.¹² Its text of *Breta sǫgur* prefaces *Merlínusspá* with the following statement (*Hauksbók* 1892–96, 271):

siðan sagði Merlinvs langt fram vm konvnga æfi ok morg onnvr stortiðinði þav er en eru eigi fram komin. her eftir hefir Gvðlavgr mvnkr ort kvæði þat er heitir Merlinvs spá

Then Merlin spoke at length about the lives of kings and many other great events, which have not yet come about. Based on this, Gunnlaugr the Monk composed a poem that is called *Merlínusspá*.

This presentation confirms the successful domestication of *Merlínusspá*: it is framed as a historical poem primarily concerned with kings' lives that, as Tétrel notes (2021, 337), derives its historical authority from Gunnlaugr rather than Geoffrey's *Prophetiae*. Its inclusion in the manuscript then furthers the domestication of this redaction of *Breta sǫgur*, bringing the translated text closer to the prosimetrum of historical sagas, which characteristically use skaldic verse as corroboration.¹³ There is still an element of generic ambiguity, associated with *Merlínusspá*'s status as a *ljóð*: Judy Quinn finds (1998) that this term is typically used to introduce

¹² The compilation of Hauksbók is notably discussed by Sverrir Jakobsson (2007) and Rowe (2008).

¹³ On the function of verse in historical sagas, see particularly Stavnem (2014, 93), O'Donoghue (2005, 11) and Harris (1997, 142).

prophetic verse in the *fornaldarsögur*, which might have provided another impetus for the poem's inclusion in the Hauksbók text. Haukr's historical encyclopaedia, however, contains both historical sagas and *fornaldarsögur*, and so the overall effect of *Merlínusspá*'s inclusion in Hauksbók still maintains a certain level of adaptational consistency.

Conversely, *Merlínusspá* is conspicuously absent from the redaction of *Breta sögur* in the fourteenth-century AM 573 4to. In this manuscript, *Breta sögur* is followed by the courtly *Valvens þátr*, translated from Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte del Graal*, which suggests a romance reception context (see Kalinke 2015, 11). *Merlínusspá* is mentioned at the same place in the narrative, in a passage similar to that found in Hauksbók, which describes it as *id stærsta af kvædi* 'the greatest of poems' while adding, *ok kunna margir menn þat kvædi* 'and many men know that poem' (*La Saga des Bretons* 2021, 516). Again, this suggestion that the poem may have circulated widely in oral form testifies to Gunnlaugr's poetic success, validating his emphasis on the poet's role in shaping history. However, its relegation to the sphere of common knowledge also serves as a justification for keeping the poem separate from *Breta sögur*, maintaining the redaction's similarity to the *ridðarasögur*: these do not take the form of prosimetrum and are generically distinguished from historical sagas by their 'courtly' style (Würth 1998, 135).¹⁴ A domesticating, historicising translation like *Merlínusspá* may have seemed out of place in the context of a text that was closer to the foreignising *ridðarasögur*, products of a later romance translation programme that soon came to dominate translated literature in Old Norse.

As an enterprise in historicising poetic translation, *Merlínusspá* thus seems to have been quite successful. Gunnlaugr's poem maintains and even enhances the political potential of Geoffrey's *Prophetiae* while adapting them for Icelandic audiences. Like the skaldic poetry that Snorri Sturluson attempted to restore to its position of cultural importance, however, the Icelandic domesticating practice that Gunnlaugr deployed to assert his poetic authority was later displaced by the foreignising cultural capital of the prose translations undertaken for King Hákon Hákonarson of Norway (see Wanner 2008, 146). Ultimately, *Merlínusspá* remains a striking testament to an early culture of Icelandic verse translation, experimenting

¹⁴ In fact, the only clear exception to the prose form of the *ridðarasögur* occurs in the *Strengleikar*, with the insertion of the two Latin distichs at the end of *Equitan* (Harris 1997, 136). Another slightly less overt recourse to poetic forms can be found in *Parcevals saga* and *Valvens þátr*, which use rhyme to emphasise their didactic significance; see Bornholdt (2011, 102–03) and Kalinke (2002).

with historical authority and cultural politics, that differs radically from the later Norwegian translations of Arthurian romance.

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MARKÚS SKEGGJASON'S *EIRÍKSDRÁPA*:
HISTORICAL THEMES AND POETIC PATTERNS

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MARKÚS SKEGGJASON'S *EIRÍKSDRÁPA* is one of the longest commemorative praise-poems in the skaldic corpus. In thirty-two stanzas the poem recounts the highlights of King Eiríkr góði Sveinsson's reign (1095–1103), and how he embodies the virtues of Christian kingship. These include the ruler's patronage of the Church, his upholding of laws, his successful defence of the realm and the concern he shows for his own salvation. *Eiríksdrápa* was composed sometime between 1104 and 1107 and it is addressed to Eiríkr's successor on the Danish throne, Niels Sveinsson (1104–34).¹

Eiríksdrápa includes eighteen full stanzas, twelve half-stanzas and two quarter-stanzas. *Knýtlinga saga* preserves all the full stanzas along with ten half-stanzas (*ÍF* 35, 212–39). The two opening stanzas and concluding stanzas, half-stanzas and quarter-stanzas respectively, feature in *Snorra Edda's Skáldskaparmál* section. There, as in the case of the *Knýtlinga saga* stanzas, they are attributed to Markús Skeggjason (Faulkes 1998, 111, 391, 398, 409). If all the original stanzas survive either intact or in part, those surviving only as fragments indicate that about twenty-five percent of the text has been lost. Editors have sequenced the stanzas as they appear in *Knýtlinga saga* (stanzas 3–30, as numbered in the *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* edition), where they serve as the principal source for Eiríkr's reign. Apart from stanza 31, *Eiríksdrápa's* most recent editor, Jayne Carroll, considers the sequence below unproblematic and this is the order I adhere to in this essay:

Stanzas 1–2: Address to King Niels and praise of Eiríkr.

Stanzas 3–7: Eiríkr's renown in the East; return to Denmark and just rulership.

Stanzas 8–12: Eiríkr's pilgrimage to Italy and the benefits it brings his kingdom.

Stanzas 13–22: Eiríkr's victorious war against the Wends.

Stanzas 23–25: Eiríkr secures a papal approval for an archbishopric within his kingdom and his visit to Emperor Henry IV.

¹ I am grateful to Richard North and *Saga-Book's* editorial committee for their invaluable guidance on different aspects of this essay.

Stanzas 26–28: Eiríkr's pilgrimage/Crusade to the Holy Land.

Stanzas 29–32: Praise of Eiríkr.

The following scholars have done most to illuminate this under-explored poem. Magnus Olsen emphasised *Eiríksdrápa's* religious dimension which, he argued, reflects the occasion for which it was composed (Olsen 1921). Bjarni Guðnason focused on *Eiríksdrápa's* medieval afterlife, namely its use by Saxo Grammaticus in his *Gesta Danorum* (Friis-Jensen, 2015, XII.3.1–7.6) and by the author of *Knýtlinga saga* (*ÍF* 35, 212–40; Bjarni Guðnason 1976). Judith Jesch showed how *Eiríksdrápa* adapts the poetic tradition to a new type of Christian Norse kingship (Jesch 2003). Most recently, Jakub Morawiec has explored how the skaldic tradition shaped Markús Skeggjason's portrayal of Eiríkr's principal enemies, the pagan *Vindar* or Wends (Morawiec 2018). Jayne Carroll has introduced, edited, translated and annotated the poem for the Skaldic Poetry Project. This study will follow her text and translation (*SP* II, 332–60).

My aim in this article is to build on these studies to understand *Eiríksdrápa* further in its broadly contemporary contexts. The first section focuses on how Markús Skeggjason achieves a strong structural unity through thematic patterning. This thematic patterning relies principally on two aspects relating to the poem's historical background. One, which is the focus of the second section, involves the historical memory associated with the Danish royal dynasty. The other, which is the subject of the third and final section, concerns Markús's own Icelandic political and intellectual context.

I. Themes and Patterns

Markús Skeggjason's *Eiríksdrápa* was not the first skaldic commemoration of a recently deceased ruler. Earlier examples are Hallfreðr Óttarsson's *Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar* and Sighvatr Þórðarson's *Erfidrápa Óláfs helga* (*SP* I, 400–41; 663–98). Both poems centre on the kings' final battles, at Svǫlðr (Svolder) in 1000 and Stikla(r)staðir (Stiklestad) in 1030 respectively. Still earlier, there is Eyvindr skáldaspillir's *Hákonarmál* which has Hákon góði's death at Fitjar (Fitje) in c.960 as its focal point (*SP* I, 171–95). Nearer to the time of Markús's composition in 1104x1107, we have Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson's *Haraldsdrápa*, a memorial poem on King Haraldr harðráði Sigurðarson (reigned 1046–66), which foregrounds the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066 (*SP* II, 260–80).

Arnórr also commemorated rulers who did not die in battle. *Magnússdrápa* and *Þorfinnsdrápa* focus on a series of martial victories of King

Magnús góði Ólafsson (reigned 1035–42) and Jarl Þorfinnr Sigurðarson of Orkney (reigned c.1016–65). Arnórr offers in these poems a template for a more biographical type of memorial poetry, in as much as they follow a ruler's career from its beginning to his death. This is also the approach in Þjóðólfr Árnason's *Sexstefja*, which commemorates Haraldr harðráði (*SP* II, 108–47), and likewise in Gísl Illugason's memorial poem on Magnús berfœttr Ólafsson (reigned 1093–1103) (*SP* II, 416–31).

The overall form of Markús Skeggjason's *Eiríksdrápa* was therefore hardly innovative. Neither is his choice of *hrynhent* metre, which, though unusual, had previously been employed by Arnórr in his *Hrynhenda*, a praise-poem for Magnús góði (*SP* II, 181–206). Markús's originality lies in his poem's content, more specifically in his way of working through this content to create a poem of striking thematic coherence.

Gift-giving is arguably *Eiríksdrápa*'s dominating concept. Gift-giving often features in skaldic composition within courtly settings, as when the poet explicitly or more subtly solicits recompense in return for his creative offering. In *Eiríksdrápa*, however, the role of gift-giving is far more varied. Judith Jesch has highlighted the theme's prevalence and she concludes that the poem 'shows a new kind of gift-giving altogether, a gift-giving which is political and diplomatic, and which reaches out beyond the war-band' (Jesch 2003, 271). Insightful as this is, I shall argue that gift-giving in *Eiríksdrápa* is also significant for the poem's structural cohesion. Further, in this study's final section I argue that the theme of gift-giving and, importantly, the way in which Markús Skeggjason develops it reveal his underlying preoccupation with the concept.

Eiríksdrápa begins with the poet summoning a king to hear the praise of his predecessor. Although the name of the king addressed is not directly mentioned, this is Eiríkr's younger brother, King Niels Sveinsson. In Kyivan Rus' (*austr í Garða*, stanza 3) where Eiríkr is admired and honoured by all, it is probably he to whom Markús refers when he says that *auði gæddu allvald þrúðan/ítirir menn* 'glorious men endowed the magnificent mighty ruler with wealth' (stanza 3). No context is given for Eiríkr's stay in the East.² The implication is that the wealth he received there paved the way for his triumphant

² *Knýtlinga saga* relates that before becoming king, Eiríkr had held Zealand as a jarl. As such he had undertaken military expeditions to the East (*i austrveg*) directed at pagans, which explains his resplendent reception in Rus' (*ÍF* 35, 2012–13).

return to Denmark. In stanza 5 it is now Eiríkr who bestows gifts on his followers (*SP* II, 437):

Drengir þógu auð af yngva;
 qrr fylkir gaf sverð ok knörru;
 Eirekr veitti opt ok stórum
 armleggjar rǫf dýrðarseggjum.
 Hringum eyddi harra slongvir
 hildarramr, en stillir framði
 fyrða kyn, svát flestir urðu,
 Fróða stóls, af hǫnum góðir.

The warriors received wealth from the king; the generous leader gave swords and merchant ships; Eiríkr granted glorious men often and freely the amber of the arm [GOLD]. The battle-mighty disperser of lords [RULER] destroyed rings, and the controller of Fróði's seat [= Denmark > = Eiríkr] advanced the kin of men, so that most became wealthy through him.

Eiríkr's just rulership in Denmark is foregrounded. The king terminates piracy, punishes thieves and upholds God's law. This involves gift-exchange of a specific kind, for in return for his deeds Eiríkr can expect God's grace (stanza 6): *hóla kunni sér til sælu / sigrs valdari guðs lög halda* 'the wielder of victory [WARRIOR] knew well to observe the laws of God for his well-being' (*SP* II, 438).

The theme of reciprocity is extended to Eiríkr's kingdom as a whole. His Italian pilgrimage is explicitly related to the spiritual good with which it will endow his realm. In return, the furthering of Christianity in Denmark will aid his own prospects in the afterlife (stanza 9, *SP* II, 441):

Bróðir gekk í Bǫr út síðan
 — bragningr vildi guðdóm magna —
 (hylli guðs mun hlífa stilli)
 hǫfuðskjöldunga fimm (at gjǫldum).

The brother of five principal kings [=Eiríkr] then walked out to Bari; the ruler wanted to strengthen God's dominion; the grace of God will in return protect the prince.

During his pilgrimage, Eiríkr generously donates valuable gifts to the shrines of saints along his path: *hringum varði áttkonr yngva / auðig skrin ok gollu rauðu* 'the descendant of a king [KING] adorned rich shrines with rings and red gold' (stanza 10; *SP* II, 442). The pope, who was probably Urban II (1088–99), rewards these bountiful deeds by allowing Eiríkr to establish an archbishopric within his kingdom. Eiríkr relays this precious gift to his people (stanza 11; *SP* II, 442–43):

Eirekr náði útan fœra
 erkistól of Saxa merki;
 hljótum vér, þats hag várn bœtir,
 hingat norðr at skjöldungs orðum.

Eiríkr was able to bring back from abroad an archbishopric over the border of the Saxons; we receive here in the north according to the king's bidding that which improves our [spiritual] situation.

The next ten stanzas recount Eiríkr's victorious campaign against the *Vindar* (Wends), which in this context was probably a catch-all term for Slavs living along the southern Baltic shore. The king's war with these pagans is triggered by their treachery during his Italian pilgrimage. This is an important point, for it shows Eiríkr engaging not in an aggressive campaign of plunder and destruction but rather in a defensive and justified war against a pagan foe. With his Wendish war Eiríkr is seen reclaiming an ancestral part of the Danish kingdom.³ This notion appears to be expressed in stanza 21 (*SP* II, 450):

Yngvi talði erfðir þangat;
 alþýða varð stilli hlýða;
 veldi réð því ástvinr aldar
 einart; lá þat fyrr und Sveini.

The king declared his inheritance rights there; all the people had to obey the prince; the beloved friend of people [RULER] ruled that realm continuously; that lay previously under Sveinn.

The 'Sveinn' referred to in this stanza may be either Sveinn tjúguskegg ('Forkbeard') Haraldsson (king of Denmark 986–1014), whose interest in the Baltic is known from other sources (for further contextualisation see Bolton 2009, 216–18), or Sveinn Úlfsson (Ástríðarson/Estridsen) (reigned 1047–74/76). The former interpretation is favoured by the author of *Knýtlinga saga* (*ÍF* 35, 226).

The Wendish expedition occupies about a third of *Eiríksdrápa*. This part portrays and eulogises Eiríkr's martial prowess and strong command. The king conducts his men into battle, slaughters treacherous enemies and burns down their dwellings. The section prefigures Eiríkr's pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which, at the time of the poem's composition, was

³ This domination could have been expressed through the extraction of tribute from the Wends. The sense here is of the Wends breaking a truce and making incursions into the Danish kingdom. As for the actual historical context, I do not place any emphasis on the depiction of events in either Saxo's account or *Knýtlinga saga* (Friis-Jensen 2015, 2, 75–76; *ÍF* 35, 221–22).

generally seen by the crusaders and subsequent Christian commentators to have been liberated from heathens in a justified war (Riley Smith 2009, 91–119).

This section also looks back to Eiríkr's first pilgrimage which concludes in Bari in Southern Italy. Stanza 8 depicts the king and his retinue traversing regions where Christianity is deeply rooted and securely defended. This point is both literally and figuratively expressed as the northern pilgrims behold the fortified Venice (*SP* II, 439–40):

Lýst skal hitt, es lofðungr fýstisk
 langan veg til Róms at ganga
 — fylkir sá þar friðland balkat
 Fenneyjar hlið — dýrð at *nenna*.

It shall be brought to light, that the leader desired to walk the long way to Rome to engage in glory; the ruler saw there the protected secured land, the gates of Venice.

Eiríkr returns from his first pilgrimage with papal consent for an archbishopric in Denmark. This precious cargo, and the king's establishment and patronage of churches, align the kingdom with the Christian lands the pilgrims had seen on their southern journey. The war against the Wends is a prerequisite for this transformation, for it brings a peace and stability to the North enjoyed by the *balkat friðland* 'protected secured land' (i.e. Venice) of stanza 8. The adjective *balkat* is a *hapax legomenon* derived from *bǫlkr*; which can mean a partition of any kind. The partition here is *Fenneyjar hlið* 'gates of Venice', the gate which protects the city from outside enemies.

But why does Markús choose Venice to evoke a deep-rooted and securely defended Christian city? At first sight his choice of the renowned lagoon island city for this purpose may seem surprising. This stems from the fact that Venice's security depended not on any land-based fortification, such as that provided by a castle or a surrounding wall (see, for example, Gelichi 2016). Rather, Venice's defence relied on the lagoon's natural features and waterways, the latter guarded by the city's fleet. In other words, Venice was defended from seaborne attack.

Markús's evocation of Venice's maritime defence comes into focus when read in conjunction with stanza 22 (*SP* II, 450–51):

Flaustum lukði folka treystir
 foldar síðu brimi kníða;
 qrr vísi það oddum læsa
 úrga strönd ok svalri rönðu.
 Hlífum keyrði hersa reifir

harða nýtr of land it ýtra;
 hilmir lauk við hergang olman
 hauðr Eydana skjaldborg rauðri.

The trier of men [RULER] barricaded the wave-lashed edge of the land with ships; the generous leader commanded the wet shore to be sealed with spear-points and a chilly shield. The very bountiful gladdener of *hersar* [RULER] drove shields around the outer land; the prince shut off the earth of the Island-Danes with a red shield-wall during the furious onslaught.

This stanza includes a known skaldic trope which depicts a ruler blocking the coast with ships and spears.⁴ The image shows the king arranging his fleet to form a protective shield around the Danish islands. In this instance the image has both a literal and a figurative meaning. In the literal sense, it shows Eiríkr securing the Danish kingdom against a specific threat from the Wends. In a figurative sense, it shows the king holding a protective hand over his Christian kingdom. There is both a visual and a thematic correspondence between this image and the earlier reference to the Venetian maritime fortification that secures a Christian heartland. Both point forward to the centre of Christendom, Jerusalem and the Holy Land, which had been reconquered from non-Christians and now enjoys a similarly peaceful existence (stanza 26; *SP* II, 455):

Harri bjósk til heims ins dýrra;
 hann gerði fǫr út at kanna

⁴ One example is in Þórðr Kolbeinsson's *Eiríksdrápa* where Jarl Eiríkr Hákonarson of Norway (reigned c.1000–c.1014) musters his fleet to his father's realm and forms a protective shield against the Jómsvíkings (ed. Jayne Carroll, *SP* I, 491):

Mjök lét margar snekkjur
 (mærdarǫrr) sem knǫrru
 (óðr vex skalds) ok skeiðar
 skjaldhlynr á brim dynja,
 þás ólítinn útan
 oddherðir fǫr gerða
 — mǫrg vas lind fyr landi —
 lönd síns fǫður rǫndu.

The shield-maple (WARRIOR) made very many warships, as well as merchant ships and longships, resound on the surf — the praise-liberal poetry of the skald grows —, when the point-hardener [WARRIOR] advanced at full strength from offshore to enclose the lands of his father with the shield; many a linden-shield was before the land.

— buðlungr vildi bjart líf qðlask —
byggð Jórsala friði tryggða.

The lord prepared himself for the better world; he made his way out to explore the settlement of Jerusalem, secured with peace; the prince wished to gain a glorious life.

The Wendish section therefore prefigures Eiríkr's second pilgrimage on which he sets out to defend this state of affairs in the Holy Land, leading a *helming harðan* 'fierce unit'. This combines with his desire *sál at græða* 'to heal his soul'.

Jakub Morawiec has stressed that Markús Skeggjason depicts the Wends in ways that 'fitted the expectations of the receivers of the poem' (Morawiec 2018, 41). In the eyes of the Danish élite around 1100 they were treacherous truce-breakers who were worthy of neither dignity nor respect. Markús may have inherited this view of the Wends from earlier skaldic poetry: they are depicted similarly in Arnórr Þórðarson's *Hrynhenda* (composed 1045x1047) and *Magnússdrápa* (composed not long after the death of Magnús inn góði in 1047). In the latter poem the Wends are referred to as *illvirkjar* 'evil-doers', an 'evil tribe' that Magnús crushes mercilessly (stanza 8, *SP* II, 217). Here, as in *Eiríksdrápa*, the king seals his total victory by burning the Wendish strongholds.

The question of influence aside, Eiríkr's Wendish campaign plays a different role in *Eiríksdrápa* to that of Magnús góði's battle with the same people in Arnórr jarlaskáld's poems. In the latter, the king's clash with the Wends is only one episode in a string of glorious martial undertakings. In *Eiríksdrápa*, however, the Wendish section accounts for about a third of the poem. As such it forms a central section in a poetic triptych, flanked by pilgrimages of different kinds.

After Eiríkr brings security and peace to his kingdom, he adorns it with churches (stanza 23). There follows his visit to Emperor Henry IV (who reigned 1084–1105) (stanza 24, *SP* II, 453):

Blíðan gæddi bjortum auði
Bjarnar hlýra Frakklands stýrir;
stórar lét sér randgarðs rýrir
ríks keisara gjafir líka.
Hönum lét til hervígs búna
harra spjalli láðmenn snjalla
alla leið, áðr qðlingr næði
Jóta grundar Césars fundi.

The ruler of France [= Philip I] endowed the pleasant brother of Björn [= Eiríkr] with bright wealth; the diminisher of the shield-wall [WARRIOR] found

himself pleased with the great gifts of the powerful emperor [= Henry IV]. The companion of lords [RULER = Henry IV] gave him brave guides, ready for battle, all the way, before the noble leader of the land of the Jótar [= Denmark > = Eiríkr] was able to meet Caesar.

Interpreting this stanza, *Knýtlinga saga* relates how Eiríkr received gifts from the king of France, and thereafter from the German emperor, who furnished the Danish king with a contingent that escorted him to Constantinople (*ÍF* 35, 233). As just seen, *Eiríksdrápa*'s most recent editor, Jayne Carroll, also favours this interpretation. Alternatively, and more plausibly in my estimation, the stanza refers to Eiríkr's visit to the German king and Holy Roman Emperor at the outset of his expedition to the Holy Land (on this interpretation, see Foote 1984, 115–16; Helgi Skúli Kjartansson 2008, 96–98).

The theme of gift-giving now returns to the fore. Eiríkr honours Henry IV who gives him gifts of two kinds. The first is in the form of material wealth — 'bright wealth' (*björtum auði*) —, whereas the second is the previously noted imperial cortège. The escort is not mentioned as a practical matter but to illustrate the high esteem in which Henry IV held the Danish king. An imperial escort of this kind evokes *adventus regis*, which involves the ruler travelling through the realm being ceremoniously received as he enters towns and cities (see, for example, Warner 2006). This is precisely the honour accorded to King Eiríkr on his second pilgrimage (stanza 27, *SP* II, 456):

Bǫru menn ór borgum stórum
 bleyðiskjarrs á móti harra
 — sungit vas, þás herr tók hringja —
 hnossu gøfðuð skrin ok krossa.
 Aldri fær í annars veldi
 jǫfra ríkir metnað slíkan;
 eitt vas sér, þats jafnask mátti
 engi maðr við Dana þengil.

Men carried reliquaries, decorated with precious ornaments, and crosses out of great towns towards the cowardice-shy lord; there was singing, when men began to ring. A ruler of princes [KING] will never receive such honour in the realm of another [ruler]; unique it was, that no man could equal the prince of the Danes [= Eiríkr].

But this is not Eiríkr's first triumphant procession. Stanza 4 has already depicted his imposing voyage from the East to Denmark, a voyage that effectively marked Eiríkr's elevation to kingship. In skaldic poetry depiction of the ruler's arrival is commonly a stylised, even ritualised, affair.

Thus Þórarinn loftunga's *Glælognskviða* opens with Sveinn Knútsson's (reigned 1035–40) arrival in Trondheim to become Norway's new king (*SP* I, 854). Similarly, Arnórr Þórðarson's *Hrynhenda* features a vivid and stately tableau of young Magnús góði's journey from Rus' to claim his Norwegian patrimony (*SP* I, 865). In *Eiríksdrápa* this Norse type of the ruler's arrival prefigures a different kind of *adventus regis*. The earlier martial show of splendour, expressing the glorious potential of Eiríkr's imminent rule, is here transformed into a triumphant procession of a religious kind. The latter procession shows a king who has lived up to his role as a model Christian ruler.

The gift theme continues in Constantinople where the emperor grants Eiríkr a resplendent reception (stanza 28). He gives the Danish king *hæst lof* 'the highest praise', half a *lest* of *gulli rauðu* 'red gold' and fourteen *herskip* 'warships'. The emperor's bestowing of the ships recalls Eiríkr's first display of munificence when he gave swords, rings and cargo ships to his followers (stanza 5). The third instance of ship-giving immediately follows the Wendish section (stanza 23, *SP* II, 452–53):

Víða setti vísdóms græðir
virki skryðdar höfuðkirkjur;
gørva lét þar hollvinnr herjar
hreinn musteri fimm af steini.
Vöru þau með tryggðar tiri
tíða flaust, es gramr lét smíða
bøðvar snjallr ok beztr at öllu,
borði merkð, fyr Saxland norðan.

The nourisher of wisdom [JUST RULER] established far and wide principal churches adorned with artwork; the loyal friend of the people [JUST RULER] had five shining minsters built from stone there. Those ships of services [CHURCHES], which the king, skilled in warfare and best in everything, caused to be crafted with the fame of security north of Saxony, were adorned with wood.

In this instance the ships appear as 'naves', with the metaphorical meaning of churches. Earlier the fine churches that Eiríkr built for the salvation of his people were likened to ships (*tíða flaust*). Now the eastern emperor gives Eiríkr warships with which he can continue his journey to salvation.

This is another example of Markús Skeggjason's distinctive way of bringing a sense of organic cohesion to his poem. Markús achieves this by including elements that share similar thematic qualities, yet which appear in different guises at different stages in King Eiríkr góði's career. The

primary method he uses to maintain this coherence is through the tightly knit thread of gift-giving which runs throughout the poem.

II. The Danish Context

Magnus Olsen associated the composition of *Eiríksdrápa* with the consecration of Jón Ögmundarson (1052–1121) to the northern Icelandic see of Hólar in 1105. Olsen argued that Jón had brought the poem to Lund in written form, perhaps to be read in the presence of Archbishop Asser (or Ascer, 1104–1137) and King Niels. In support of this proposition, Olsen highlighted the poem's emphasis on Eiríkr's acquisition of papal approval for the new archbishopric in Lund, and its direct reference to Archbishop Asser (Olsen 1921). This interpretation has influenced the poem's more recent students (e.g. Morawiec 2018; Jesch 2003), but it offers an unconvincing backdrop to *Eiríksdrápa*'s origin. Most importantly, there is no trace of such a scenario in the hagiographic corpus on St Jón Ögmundarson. *Jóns saga helga* relates how the bishop elect arrived in Lund for his consecration, only to be sent to Rome to secure a papal dispensation relating to his marital status. The saga, composed in the early thirteenth century, describes the investiture in Lund in the following manner (*ÍF* 15, 199):

Ok er [erikibyskup] verðr þess varr af bréfum páfa, þeim er inn helgi Jón bar frá páfa fundi, at honum var fullt frelsi á gefit at vígja hann, þá verðr erkibyskup forkunnliga feginn ok þakkar almáttkum Guði er honum skyldi þess auðit verða at láta þat erendi ins helga Jóns verða sem menn mundu vilja. Ok beið hann nú með sjálfum erkibyskupi þeirar stundar er honum sýndisk til fellt at vígja hann. Eptir þat kallar erkibyskup saman kennimenn þá sem við þyrftu at vera þetta embætti. Ok at öllum hlutum til búnum þá vígir hann inn helga Jón til byskups á dróttinsdegi, tveim nóttum fyrir tveggja postola messu Philippi ok Jacobi.

When the archbishop learned from the papal letters that the blessed Jón had brought from the pope that he had received permission to consecrate Jón, the archbishop was extremely glad, and gave thanks to Almighty God that it should have been ordained for him to allow Jón's business turn out as people would have wished. And he now waited with the archbishop himself for the moment that seemed to him appropriate to consecrate him. Then the archbishop called together the clergy who were necessary for the performance of that ceremony, and, when everything was prepared, he consecrated Jón as bishop on the Sunday two nights before the feast of the two apostles Philip and James [April 29].

In around the year 1200 the monk Gunnlaugr Leifsson of Þingeyrar Abbey composed the Latin Life of St Jón on which *Jóns saga helga* is largely

based. Gunnlaugr seems to have had relatively limited material on St Jón's long pre-episcopal life. This scarcity, as I have argued elsewhere, led him to construct narrative scenes that illustrated Jón's sanctity prior to becoming bishop (Haki Antonsson 2021). In this respect, two interrelated elements are of interest. The first is the hagiographer's eagerness to associate St Jón with the Danish king and his court. The second is the emphasis on Jón's mellifluously impressive voice (*ÍF* 15, 181–87). Accordingly, one would expect the hagiographer not to have missed the opportunity to present a scene showing the Icelandic saint reciting poetry in the presence of a Danish king. Gunnlaugr Leifsson and the early hagiographers of St Jón may have been unfamiliar with *Eiríksdrápa*. This, however, seems exceedingly unlikely if the poem had been in any way associated with St Jón Ögmundarson.

Markús Skeggjason's impetus to compose *Eiríksdrápa* should be sought elsewhere, and here *Skáldatal*, a thirteenth-century list of poets and Scandinavian rulers, is the most promising point of departure. *Skáldatal* includes Markús among the poets of Knútr Sveinsson (reigned 1080–86), Eiríkr góði and King Ingi Steinkelsson of Sweden (reigned c.1080–1105/1110) (Guðni Jónsson 1953, 340). There is no reason to distrust these claims, although, as far as is known, Markús composed poetry about rather than for King Eiríkr (he may have done both, of course). Indeed, Markús's service of Knútr Sveinsson is confirmed by a half-stanza on the royal martyr preserved in *Skáldskaparmál* from around 1220 (Faulkes 1998, 270). Thus Markús Skeggjason was established as the skald of Danish and Swedish kings when he crafted *Eiríksdrápa* sometime between 1104 and 1107.

To contextualise *Eiríksdrápa* within its Danish historical setting is difficult owing to the scarcity of contemporary sources on Niels's reign (for overviews and interpretations of his kingship, see Breengaard 1986, 183–203 and Nyberg 2007). It is from Eiríkr góði's reign that we have the oldest preserved non-runic writing from Denmark. This is *Passio Sancti Kanuti Regis et Martyris*, which recounts the life, martyrdom and *translatio* of St Knútr Sveinsson (Gertz 1908–12, 62–76), and was composed sometime between 1095 and 1101. More relevant for our purpose is Ælnoth of Canterbury's *Gesta Swenomagni et Filiorum eius et Passio gloriosissimi Canuti Regis et Martyris* 'The History of Sveinn the Great and his Sons and the Passion of the Glorious Knútr, King and Martyr', which he dedicated to King Niels (Gertz 1908–12, 77–136). According to his own testimony, Ælnoth had lived in Denmark for twenty-four years at the time of writing. The most likely date of composition of Ælnoth's

work is considered to be between 1110 and 1117 (Gelting 2011, 38–43; Hope 2019, 104).

Thus *Eiríksdrápa* and *Gesta Swenomagni* are effectively the two surviving literary compositions from Niels's reign. The king is the dedicatee or intended receiver of both works, each of which dwells on one of his brothers and predecessors, Eiríkr and St Knútr. Further, *Gesta Swenomagni* and *Eiríksdrápa* agree on the qualities an ideal Christian king should possess. In his prologue, Ælnoth explicitly presents Knútr's virtues as those that King Niels should take to heart. These consist of enacting and upholding the laws, vanquishing enemies and guaranteeing the kingdom's peace and security. Should the king follow the example of his saintly brother he will reap a celestial reward (Gertz 1908–12, 78). These themes should be familiar from our reading of *Eiríksdrápa*. In this respect the two compositions, dissimilar as they are in form and content, may be regarded as royal mirrors of a kind for the recently established Danish king.

Both Eiríkr góði and Niels Sveinsson supported the cult of their brother. In 1095 or not long thereafter, Eiríkr arranged for the arrival in Odense of twelve monks from Evesham Abbey. They established a new Benedictine community that would have attended St Knútr's cult, whose relics had only recently been translated by the local clergy into a church dedicated to the martyr (Gazzoli 2013). According to Ælnoth, Eiríkr also secured the papal canonisation of Knútr before his second translation in 1100 or 1101 (Gertz 1908–12, 133–34). A royal charter, issued sometime between 1104 and 1117, attests to Niels's material support for Knútr's church and the associated brothers (*Diplomatarium Danicum* 1:2, nos 32, 75). The king's patronage of the Odense community is also mentioned in a letter from Paschal II in 1117. This letter validates the creation of a cathedral chapter in Odense, which was attended by the Benedictine brothers (*Diplomatarium Danicum* 1:2, nos 41, 86–88).

It may seem surprising that *Eiríksdrápa* mentions Eiríkr's saintly predecessor only once (stanza 4), and then in an innocuous circumlocution which refers to Eiríkr as *bróðir Knúts*. Elsewhere Eiríkr is indicated as a brother of King Haraldr hen ('Whetstone', reigned 1076–80) in *Haralds hlýri* (stanza 10), and of King Bjørn in *Bjarnar hlýri* (stanza 24). Knútr's low profile may appear still more surprising considering both Markús's own association with the king and the fact that Eiríkr had not only supported his brother's cult but had also, according to both Ælnoth and *Knýtlinga saga*, been present at his martyrdom (Gertz 1908–12, 113; *ÍF* 35, 191).

Yet Knútr's apparent absence from *Eiríksdrápa* is in line with a general tendency not to feature saintly predecessors in skaldic praise-poetry for rulers. Most obviously, in this type of poetry about Magnús góði Óláfsson, references to his father, St Óláfr, are notably muted. This is so even in places where one would expect to find them. Arnórr jarlaskáld's *Hrynhenda* and *Magnússdrápa* are cases in point. Although Arnórr was not the first skald to weave Christian motives into skaldic praise and memorial poetry, he made this a hallmark of his style (Diana Edwards 1982–85, 34–53). Nevertheless, Arnórr's religious references in these poems on Magnús góði only feature God and angels (including the Archangel Michael), whereas Óláfr Haraldsson the saint is all but absent.⁵ Here, as in *Eiríksdrápa*, there is a reluctance to overshadow the primary subject of praise by involving a saintly predecessor.

Stanza 12 of *Eiríksdrápa* may include a reference, albeit an oblique one, to Knútr, or rather his cult (*SP* II, 443):

Eyðisk hitt, at jafnstórt ráði
annarr gramr til þyrftar mǫnnum;
leyfði allt, sem konungr krafði,
Krists unnanda páfi sunnan.

It will not happen that another prince shall achieve so much for the need of men; the Pope from the south granted the devotee of Christ [= Eiríkr] all that the king requested.

⁵ Arnórr's treatment of the Battle of Hlýrskógsheiðr (Lyrskovshede) is telling in this respect. There manifestly existed a tradition about St Óláfr miraculously coming to Magnús's aid in this battle against the Wends. Einarr Skúlason's *Geisli*, a hagiographic poem on St Óláfr composed in 1152, highlights this miracle, which also features in kings' sagas (*SP* VII, 55). *Magnússdrápa*, however, only has God choosing Magnús's as the victorious side (*SP* II, 215), whereas *Hrynhenda* contains a fleeting and distinctly understated allusion to St Óláfr aiding his son at Hlýrskógsheiðr (*SP* II, 191). In Þjóðólfr Árnason's *Magnússflokk*, St Óláfr's intervention is entirely absent (*SP* II, 61–86). The two exceptions to this near silence on St Óláfr are Þórarinn loftunga's *Glælognskviða* (*SP* I, 863–70) and Steinn Herdísarson's *drápa* on King Óláfr kyrrí (reigned 1067–93). The former, of course, is not a praise-poem in honour of the addressee, Sveinn Knúttson, but rather a testimony to King Óláfr's sanctity and a prayer that the martyr will allow the Danish ruler to command his earthly kingdom as his patrimony. Steinn Herdísarson, composing some fifty years later, seems to allude to *Glælognskviða*, as he states that the holy ruler who rests in Trondheim will never allow King Sveinn Knúttson to take away Óláfr kyrrí's ancestral properties (i.e. Norway) (*SP* II, 370). The poem reflects the seemingly strong notion of Óláfr's status as Norway's eternal ruler, which had no Danish parallel at the time Markús composed his *Eiríksdrápa*.

Here the words *leyfði allt* 'granted all' manifestly refer to the pope granting Eiríkr's wish to establish an archbishopric in his kingdom. They may also refer to a papal acknowledgement of Knútr's sanctity. This would amount to an official papal canonisation, which was a rare honour at the time. The author of *Knýtlinga saga* understood the half-stanza in this way (*ÍF* 35, 35). Such an interpretation, it should be stressed, relies solely on Ælnoth's testimony. He claims that in the sixth year of his reign the king sent legates to Rome with the purpose of securing papal approval of the cult, which Paschal II (1099–1119) duly granted in writing (Gertz 1908–12, 133–34). Should stanza 12 refer to a papal recognition of Knútr's sanctity, it was obviously different in nature from the one Ælnoth of Canterbury describes (Haki Antonsson 2009, 172–80). If *Eiríksdrápa* intended to allude to a papal recognition of St Knútr's cult, this attests to how Eiríkr's personal qualities, specifically his verbal persuasiveness, profited his kingdom (see below). For Ælnoth, however, the papal canonisation is above all a prestigious recognition of the universality of Knútr's holiness.

If Knútr's cult is all but absent from *Eiríksdrápa*, two other themes are ubiquitous, namely warfare against pagans, and pilgrimage. The latter, of course, reflects the fact that during his eight-year reign Eiríkr undertook not just two, but possibly three, costly and time-consuming pilgrimages.⁶ As we have seen, *Eiríksdrápa* focuses on three principal phases of the king's career: his pilgrimage to Italy, his defence of the Danish realm against the Wends and his penitential expedition to the Holy Land. Leading into all three sections the poem highlights Eiríkr's just rulership and ecclesiastical patronage. The Wendish section points both back to the Italian pilgrimage and forwards to his final venture. The earlier pilgrimage features as the natural extension of Eiríkr's exemplary rulership, for it brings the kingdom into line with the established Christian lands through which he had passed. The Wends threaten this achievement, but Eiríkr crushes them in a justified war. Peace and security is restored and now he can focus on the salvation of his own soul, combining this with a broader defence of Christendom. One way of appreciating *Eiríksdrápa*'s structure is to see the third and

⁶ The appearance of King Eiríkr and his wife, Bodil, in the confraternity book of Durham's monastic community, *Liber vitae Dunelmensis*, indicates that both had visited this centre of the cult of St Cuthbert. This third possible pilgrimage would have combined, as did his journey to Italy, matters of statecraft with a pious undertaking (and so following in the footsteps of his predecessor, Knútr the Great) (see Gazzoli 2019, 84–89).

concluding part as a kind of synthesis, a fulfilment, of the previous two parts. It combines the principal elements of both: pilgrimage and war against Christendom's foes.

The poem being composed and delivered near the beginning of Níels's reign, its historical content had to resonate with the king and his courtly circle. It was by no means self-evident which elements of Eiríkr's reign Markús should choose to include in his poem. As I have already observed, one could well envisage the king's loyalty to St Knútr Sveinsson and patronage of his cult featuring more prominently. Yet Markús chose to focus on the two other aspects just highlighted.

Along with the crown, Níels inherited his dynasty's complex association with the reforming papacy. This relationship began in the reign of Sveinn Úlfsson and, from the Danish side, it centred on establishing a new metropolitan see within the kingdom. Sometime during his papacy (1061–73), in response to Sveinn's request for a Danish archbishopric, Pope Alexander II replied that his wish might be granted if he were to place Denmark under the vassalage of St Peter (Cowdrey 1998, 454). Nothing came of this plan. In a letter of 1075, however, Gregory VII reminded Sveinn of this exchange and added that the chance of a favourable outcome would be enhanced if he sent one of his sons to fight against Christendom's enemies (Cowdrey 2002, 143–44). After Sveinn's death, Gregory VII (1073–85) held up his image to his successor, Haraldr hen (reigned 1076–80), as an ideal Christian ruler. In letters of 1077 and 1080 Gregory presented Sveinn as a paragon of Christian virtues, a man who had purged his sinful soul through repentance, so setting an example to his successors (Cowdrey 2002, 255–56; 351–52; Cowdrey 1998, 456–57).

It is easy to see these sentiments reflected in Knútr Sveinsson's view of his own kingship, which posthumously bore fruit in his cult in Odense (see below). Although the written sources become decidedly patchy on this subject after his death and until Eiríkr góði's reign, the papacy continued its policy of cultivating the Danish kings as allies throughout the Investiture Contest.

Thus King Eiríkr góði would have been seen as one of the more likely first responders to Urban II's call in November of 1095 for the liberation of Jerusalem, were it not that he had just ascended to the throne. Nor did any other king participate in the First Crusade. Eiríkr still became the first monarch to set out for the Holy Land following Jerusalem's capture in 1099. Moreover, one of his brothers did take part. This was Sveinn Sveinsson, who, along with his wife Florine of Burgundy, died in Anatolia

in 1097, reportedly at the head of a large Danish contingent of crusaders (Bysted 2004, 17–19). *Eiríksdrápa* therefore tapped into a reservoir of historical memory that had accumulated around the Danish royal dynasty since the reign of Sveinn Úlfsson.

Placing warfare against pagan Slavs in the Baltic region and Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula on the same footing as Holy War in the Outremer became the defining feature of the papacy's summons to the Second Crusade (1145–49) (see, for instance, Roche 2015). But even before the First Crusade (1096–99), the notion had gained traction that fighting non-Christians was meritorious and might improve a warrior's prospects in the afterlife (see, for example, France 2002). For instance, Adam of Bremen tells us that Archbishop Adalbert of Hamburg-Bremen (1043–72) encouraged Sveinn Úlfsson (probably c.1060) to conquer and convert the Slavs, an act which would aid the king's journey to salvation (Schmeidler 1917, 163–64).

Not surprisingly, the First Crusade encouraged a way of thinking that equated defence of the Holy Land with fighting non-Christians nearer to home. Thus in 1108 Archbishop Adelgoz of Magdeburg (1107–19), along with a number of other bishops and seemingly without papal knowledge, circulated the so-called *Magdeburg Letter* that called the Saxon nobility and other Christian leaders to war. More specifically, they were to liberate the Baltic territories that had been lost to rebellious Wends. The letter refers to these territories as *Hierusalem nostra* 'our Jerusalem' and places the spiritual benefits gained from fighting in the Holy Land on a par with battling pagans in the North (*Diplomatarium Danicum* 1:2, nos 39, 84–86; Constable 2009; Jensen 2000, 301–02). The *Magdeburg Letter* presents the pagans as the aggressors, informing those in power of their duty to defend their territories everywhere. It states that the German emperor had spearheaded this conflict, while the Danish king and other regional princes were ready to participate. Whether Markús Skeggjason was familiar with ideas of this kind is impossible to say. However, the preceding analysis of *Eiríksdrápa* indicates that he may have been and, further, that he expected his audience to associate Eiríkr's Wendish campaign with the defence of the Outremer.

I also suggest that the details Markús included were intended to stimulate the historical memory of *Eiríksdrápa*'s earliest audience. One such detail is the reference to Eiríkr visiting Bari on his first pilgrimage: *Bróðir gekk í Bór út síðan* 'The brother . . . then walked out to Bari' (stanza 9). Since 1087 the city of Bari had been the home of St Nicholas's relics, following their translation, or rather theft, from Myra in Anatolia (Hayes 2016). This

was an event of great import throughout Latin Christendom — including Iceland, according to *Hungrvaka*. This thirteenth-century history of the diocese of Skálholt refers to it as one of the main events that happened during Gizurr Ísleifsson's episcopacy (1082–1118) (the martyrdom of St Knútr Sveinsson and the death of Markús Skeggjason also featuring among other events) (*ÍF* 16, 22).

The cult of St Nicholas had been associated with the Danish royal dynasty for some time. This is shown by Sveinn Úlfsson's choice of the saint's name for his son, the future King Niels (born *c.*1065). Some fifteen years later Aarhus cathedral was founded by royal patronage and dedicated to St Nicholas. Further, King Eiríkr Sveinsson supported the construction in stone of a St Nicholas church in Slangerup (Garipzanov 2010, 235–36). The appropriateness of an allusion to the cult of St Nicholas in *Eiríksdrápa*, a poem dedicated to a king named for the saint, should not be missed.

In Bari and its cult of St Nicholas the most salient themes of *Eiríksdrápa* converge. It is not that the poem's early audience would necessarily have been conscious of all the historical associations raised here. Even so, these associations illustrate the ideology that bound Denmark to southern Italy at the turn of the eleventh century. In this way, *Eiríksdrápa* preserves allusions to recent history which are essential for a better comprehension of this poem.

The cult of St Nicholas was important for the Norman warlords who, capturing Bari in 1071, had long ago carved out a principality in southern Italy. In 1089 Bari's rulers, Bohemond (*c.*1054–1111) and his half-brother, Roger Borsa (*c.*1060–1111), attended a ceremony in which Pope Urban II consecrated the crypt of a new church for St Nicholas's relics (Hayes 2016, 504–05). In 1098 Bohemond, having become the sole nominal ruler of Bari, commanded a contingent in Asia Minor that captured Antioch, which became the centre of a crusader principality. Thus when Eiríkr visited Bari in the same year, and even more so when Markús composed his poem, the city was not only a prestigious pilgrimage destination but also a port from where crusaders embarked for the Outremer. The cult of St Nicholas became associated not only with the city of Bari, but also with Norman power, the reform papacy and armed pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Bari was also where Pope Urban II presided over a council of episcopal delegates from around Latin Christendom in the autumn of 1098. For Eiríkr the Council of Bari may have offered an opportunity to combine plans for the pilgrimage with furthering his plans for a new northern

metropolitan see. Against that backdrop, in return for the pope's granting of his wish, Eiríkr may have promised a penitential expedition to the Holy Land. As has been shown, the establishment of new archbishoprics in the European peripheries was closely associated with crusading activity (Villads Jensen 2017). That on this occasion Urban II also gave some kind of recognition to St Knútr's cult is possible. In fact this scenario agrees with the pope's other canonisation activity during the Council of Bari.⁷ It is noteworthy in this context that some six years earlier, in 1092, Duke Roger Borsa had married Adela of Flanders (c.1064–1115), the former queen of Knútr Sveinsson. Indeed, according to Ailnoth of Canterbury, Adela sent precious objects to adorn the shrine of St Knútr's canonisation in 1100/1101 (Gertz 1908–12, 127–29).

Along with Bari, Markús's inclusion of locations as specific as Venice and Jerusalem served as an *aide-mémoire* that called forth not only the events of Eiríkr góði's reign but also some more long-standing themes relating to his dynasty — themes which were still topical in the reign of his brother, King Níels Sveinsson.

III. The Icelandic context

Ari Þorgilsson twice mentions Markús Skeggjason in his *Íslendingabók* (1122x1133). Ari writes that Markús gave him information about past lawspeakers and their terms in office. He claims Markús learnt this lore from his brother, Þórarinn, and from their father, Skeggi. Ari also states that Markús, along with Sæmundr fróði Sigfússon (1056–1133), helped Bishop Gizurr Ísleifsson (bishop 1082–1118) to introduce Iceland's tithe law (in 1096 or 1097; see *ÍF* 1, 22).

⁷ At the time Bari was the focal point of a relatively new development, namely the papacy applying its authority and prestige to acknowledge, in one form or another, the validity of local cults. As has just been mentioned, Urban II presided over the interment of St Nicholas's relics and the dedication of his new church in Bari. This was effectively a papal sanction for the relocation of this ancient cult which, of course, carried a political dimension, with the city's Norman lords having requested Urban II's involvement. Still more relevant for our purpose is the case of another saintly Nicholas, St Nicholas 'the Pilgrim', an eremitical wandering monk of Greek origin who in 1094 had died in the city of Trani. Urban II gave papal blessing for the cult during the Council of Bari 'although there is some confusion over the exact process in which the canonization was confirmed' (Oldfield 2008, 171). The confusion is understandable as the process of papal canonisation of local saints had not yet become standardised.

Markús belonged to a distinguished family that included previous law-speakers.⁸ *Hungrvaka* refers to Markús as the ‘greatest sage and skald’ (*mesti spekingr ok skáld*, *ÍF* 16, 17). *Kristni saga*, composed in the mid-thirteenth century, refers to Markús as ‘the wisest of Iceland’s lawspeakers, apart from Skapti [Þóroddsson]’ (Grønlie 2006, 52) (*Hann hefir vitrastr verit logmanna á Íslandi annarr en Skapti*, *ÍF* 15, 40). In both accounts the positive judgment of Markús reflects his role in introducing the tithe law, of which more in a moment.

As mentioned, *Skáldatal* cites Markús as a poet of Knútr Sveinsson of Denmark and Ingi Steinkelsson of Sweden (reigned 1079–84 and 1087–1105), besides King Eiríkr góði. In terms of dates, Markús might have begun his association with Knútr and Ingi before becoming lawspeaker in 1084. In any case, the common association of lawspeakers with poetic abilities suggests that skill in versifying was considered a desirable trait for this role (Burrows, 2009). Further, Markús’s links with Scandinavian royal dynasties, the Danish one in particular, would have been useful in a period when ecclesiastical issues called on Icelanders to engage more frequently with foreign centres of authority.

If the three kings associated with Markús have one trait in common, it is their reputation for unswerving support for the Church. In this respect, King Eiríkr’s reign needs no further introduction. Knútr’s brief rule was characterised by his attempt to expand royal authority at the expense of local power through closer co-operation with the nascent Danish Church. In this endeavour, he was probably inspired by outside examples, such as that of the County of Flanders, to which the king was linked through his marriage to the aforementioned Adela, daughter of Count Robert I of Flanders (reigned 1071–93) (Esmark 2009, 18). As we have seen, this effort involved constructing a more exalted image of the kings, as men ruling by God’s grace. Markús Skeggjason’s single preserved half-stanza on King Knútr highlights this notion (*SP* III, 292):

Ríkr es harra hneykir;
heldr goð jofurs veldi
sanndyggs; vitut seggir
Sveins bræðr konung æðra.

The confounder of lords [RULER] is mighty; God supports the power of the truly loyal prince; men do not know a king superior to Sveinn’s brother [= Knútr Sveinsson].

⁸ Including Skapti Þóroddsson, who served as lawman 1004–30 (Grønlie 2006, 29). His brother was probably the same Þórarinn Skeggjason who composed a *Haraldsdrápa* in honour of Haraldr harðráði of which only a half-stanza remains (*SP* II, 294–95).

Knútr's ambitions in this direction seem to have led him into an attempt to introduce the Church tithe. This, compounded by his plan to invade England, led to a revolt against him and to eventual martyrdom in St Alban's Church in Odense.

Ingi Stenkelsson's relatively long rule is less well documented than Knútr's. In two letters from around 1080, Pope Gregory VII encouraged Ingi to uphold Christianity and the Church (Cowdrey 2002, 376–77, 414–15). Apart from these we are reliant on later Icelandic and Swedish sources, and these indicate that Ingi's religious policy triggered a rebellion in the early 1080s which was headed by his pagan brother-in-law, Sveinn ('Blótsveinn') (Sävborg 2019). Ingi, however, was able to return to power in 1087 and reign until 1105x1110. Thus, around the time Markús Skeggjason became lawspeaker in 1084, the reigns of two kings had been either disrupted or terminated thanks to agendas which were out of step with more traditional forces within their kingdom.

This brings us to the historical context in Iceland in the same period. Ari Þorgilsson describes the period's most pivotal event in the following way (*ÍF* 1, 15):

Gizurr byskup var ástsælli af öllum landsmönnum en hvern maðr annarra, þeira es vér vitim hér á landi hafa verit. Af ástsæld hans ok af tölum þeira Sæmundar með umbráði Markúss lögsögumanns vas þat í lög leitt, at allir menn tölðu ok virðu allt fé sitt ok sóru, at rétt virt væri, hvárt sem vas í lönnum eða í lausaaurum, ok görðu tíund af síðan. Þat eru miklar jartegnir, hvat hlýðnir landsmenn váru þeim manni, es hann kom því fram, at fé allt vas virt með swardögum, þat er á Íslandi vas, ok landit sjálft ok tíundir af görvar ok lög á lögð, at svá skal vesa, meðan Ísland es byggt.

Bishop Gizurr was more popular with all his countrymen than any other person we know to have been in this country. Through his popularity and his and Sæmundr's persuasions, with the guidance of the lawspeaker Markús, it was made law that everyone should reckon up and value all their property and swear an oath that it was correctly valued, whether it was in land or in movable possessions, and pay a tithe on it afterwards. It is a great sign of how obedient the people of the country were to that man, that he brought it about that all property in Iceland was valued under oath, including the land itself, and tithes paid on it, and laws laid down that it should be so as long as Iceland is inhabited (Grønlie 2006, 11–12).

The adoption of the tithe law in the year 1096 or 1097 provided institutional foundations for the Icelandic Church and ensured that the propertied class agreed to pay tax to support religious observance. Further, the tithe law played an important role in development of consolidation and expansion of local power (Orri Vésteinsson 2019).

Such a major innovation had to align with the interests and outlook of Iceland's landed élite. The selected members of this class who formulated the tithe law doubtless had to secure its approval by higher ecclesiastical authority, most notably the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen. Yet their greatest challenge would have been to convince their peers about the benefits of this novel arrangement. As far as the sources tell us, the task of doing so, which fell to Lawspeaker Markús Skeggjason, Bishop Gizurr Ísleifsson and the priest Sæmundr Sigfússon, involved assimilating new ideas to their society's traditional modes of thought.

Reciprocity was fundamental to the functioning of this society (see, for example, Viðar Pálsson 2016). The establishing, maintaining and strengthening of vertical and horizontal ties relied on gift exchanges of various kind. This might involve giving valuable objects, offering hospitality, holding feasts, and supporting individuals or factions engaged in legal disputes or even violent confrontations. Every gift led to the expectation of a beneficial return in one form or another.

At the outset the tax would only have been accepted if its central premise was comprehensible to an outlook profoundly steeped in the culture of reciprocity. The tithe law meant parting with a proportion of one's wealth. But this was only the initial act in a process of reciprocity which required tangible wealth to be handed over in the hope and expectation of receiving God's grace and eventual salvation. In its ideal form, the tithe transformed material wealth into spiritual wealth. In essence, it involved a permutation of Christianity's universal, age-old and often problematic theme — a theme which Peter Brown has memorably formulated as 'the joining of God and Gold' (Brown 2015, 29).

The 'joining of God and Gold' lies at the heart of *Eiríksdrápa*. Essentially the poem is structured as an extended sequence of gift exchanges. It begins with Eiríkr receiving wealth in the East, which helps to secure his rule in Denmark, and concludes with the Greek emperor donating warships to the king for his continued journey to the Holy Land. The cumulative effect is that of blurring the boundaries between, on the one hand, secular gift-giving, which is intended to increase honour and accrue followers, and on the other hand spiritual gift-giving, which supports Christianity, the Church and the individual's salvation. This intricate web of wealth, honour and spiritual benefits is spun from selected episodes in the life of an exceptional individual, King Eiríkr góði Sveinsson.

For Iceland's élite the 'joining of God and Gold' entailed the broadening out of what can be termed the 'gift-giving spectrum'. Linked to development was the emergence in this period of novel ways of gaining prestige,

status and honour. These flowed from the introduction of Christianity and included chieftains (*goðar*) taking holy orders, landowners building churches on their properties and elite individuals, like Sæmundr Sigfússon and Gizurr Ísleifsson, acquiring knowledge abroad.

Ari Þorgilsson highlights how Gizurr and Sæmundr employed the power of the word, the power of persuasion, to accustom the Icelandic elite to the tithe law: *Af ástsæld hans ok tölum þeira Sæmundar, með umbráði Markús lögsgumanns, vas þat í lög leitt* 'Through Gizurr's popularity and his and Sæmundr's persuasions, with the guidance of the lawspeaker Markús, it was put into law'. Although the art of persuasion was undoubtedly deeply rooted in Iceland's contractual political landscape, Ari understands that a novelty such as the tithe law called especially for the rhetorical skills of three of Iceland's finest minds. *Eiríksdrápa* reflects this attitude in stanza 7 as it highlights the king's qualities: his memory (*minni*), common sense (*manvit*) and knowledge of many languages. In stanza 11 these are skills he uses to persuade the pope to accede to his requests. Note here the emphasis on Eiríkr's use of words (*at skjöldungs orðum*) to achieve that aim.

In this way, *Eiríksdrápa* can be read as a precious source for Icelandic history around the turn of the eleventh century. The poem is not of help, of course, regarding specific events, but rather in how it reveals the underlying thought patterns of an elite member of Icelandic society in a period of negotiation between secular and spiritual interests. For sure, more comprehensively than any other text, Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* crystallises the resulting symbiosis. Yet Markús Skeggjason's *Eiríksdrápa* offers a quite different insight into the same phenomena by another member of the elite who himself played a central role in guiding Iceland's society on a new path.

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THE VERNACULAR SCRIBE IN MEDIEVAL ICELAND.
ON TEXTUAL TRANSMISSION AND LANGUAGE CHANGE
IN THE MANUSCRIPTS OF *NJÁLS SAGA*

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PRACTICALLY ALL SURVIVING medieval Icelandic manuscripts are copies of still earlier manuscripts, most of which have not survived. This inevitably complicates their use as sources of linguistic evidence, as for any given manuscript text, the question is bound to arise whose language it reflects, to what extent it contains the language of the scribe and what can be attributed to an earlier exemplar. For instance, if we accept, as is commonly done, that *Njáls saga* was first written around 1280 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, lxxxiv), should a copy of *Njáls saga* in a fifteenth-century manuscript be regarded as a thirteenth-century text in terms of language and therefore not be admissible as evidence for fifteenth-century language? *Njáls saga* has survived in over sixty manuscripts dating from around 1300 down to the nineteenth century. The rich manuscript legacy is a testament to the sustained interest in the saga through the centuries and relentless demand for new manuscript copies. Were scribes through the centuries reproducing *Njáls saga* (and other similar texts) in thirteenth-century language for readers and audiences as late as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? Did the scribes view *Njáls saga* as a relic or was it a text in a living language? How dynamic was the language in the copying process? In this paper, selected linguistic features of the manuscript transmission of *Njáls saga* from around 1300 down to the eighteenth century will be examined, with the aim of getting an insight into the linguistic evolution of the saga as it was copied by one generation after another. The study suggests the vernacular scribe was an active participant in the textual transmission, reading and processing the text before recreating it by writing it down. The principal purpose of copying a text was to produce a text suitable for reading aloud to an audience or, in a sense, fit for ‘performing’. The medieval vernacular scribe was conscious of this; he participated in the performance by applying his ‘communicative competence’, essentially his active (or productive) linguistic skills, in adapting the text to the needs of the intended audience. Passing a text on from one generation to the next through textual copying thus required the agency of the scribe, and linguistic deviation from an (old) exemplar was probably

the norm. As Cerquiglini noted (1999, 77–78), ‘medieval writing does not produce variants; it *is* variance’. This kind of textual transmission is thus the reproduction of a ‘living text’ in a ‘living language’ (Kålund 1889–91, xxxvi; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1953, 15–17; Machan 1989). This approach to the text will be contrasted with a fundamentally different view, emerging in Iceland in the seventeenth century, where the text is viewed as sacrosanct, a historical object or a relic, and great emphasis is placed on accurate reproduction. Under this latter view, bringing the language of the text up to date was not welcome.

The manuscripts of *Njáls saga*

The longest of the sagas of Icelanders, probably written in the late thirteenth century, perhaps around 1280 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, lxxxiv), *Njáls saga* has survived in over sixty manuscripts. The earliest manuscripts have been dated to around 1300, and the saga was still being copied by hand in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹ None of the extant medieval manuscripts is complete; sometimes multiple leaves have been lost, of some there are only one or two leaves remaining, and an untold number of manuscripts has been lost altogether. Copying *Njáls saga* was no small undertaking, and, no doubt as a result of its length, *Njáls saga* often circulated as a stand-alone text in manuscripts (Lethbridge 2014). Reproducing the lengthy text took a long time and sometimes, perhaps, a borrowed exemplar had to be returned to its owner before the copying was finished, requiring the scribe to obtain a new exemplar to finish the work. Moreover, sometimes the exemplar may have been incomplete, and lacunas needed to be filled from other manuscripts. Not surprisingly, the resulting manuscript transmission is quite complicated. An overview of the surviving manuscripts compiled by Jón Þorkelsson (1889) can be found in the two-volume edition of *Njáls saga* by Konráð Gíslason and Eiríkur Jónsson and their collaborators (1875–89), a classification of the

¹ The *Njáls saga* copy in Lbs. 747 fol. was written by Guðlaugur Magnússon (1848–1917), a farmhand at Hafursstaðir in Fellsströnd in the West, during the winter of 1871–72, and probably copied from the 1844 print edition (*Sagan af Njáli Þorgeirssyni og sonum hans* 1844). Furthermore, Guðlaugur’s copy of *Njáls saga* is of particular interest for its numerous colour illustrations (Þorsteinn Árnason Surmeli 2018). A fragment of another nineteenth-century manuscript copy of *Njáls saga*, SÁM 168, was discovered in Seattle in 2016; it is now in the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies in Reykjavík (Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir 2018, xviii). On the nineteenth-century dissemination of the sagas of Icelanders through manuscript copying and printed books, see Davíð Ólafsson (2002).

manuscripts was offered by Lehmann and von Carolsfeld (1883), and Finnur Jónsson (1908) also presented an overview in his edition of *Njáls saga* in *Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek*. The most comprehensive examination of the manuscript transmission of *Njáls saga* is found in the studies by Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1953, 1952) and his edition in the *Íslensk fornrit* series (1954), and most recently in a study by Susanne M. Arthur (2015) and in papers in a volume edited by Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir and Emily Lethbridge (2018); see also Lethbridge (2014). On the postmedieval transmission of *Njáls saga* in particular, see Margrét Eggertsdóttir (2018).

In this paper, data will be presented from a subset of the surviving manuscripts of *Njáls saga* spanning the period from around 1300 down to the second half of the eighteenth century. Six of the manuscripts are dated to the fourteenth century, two to the fifteenth century and five each to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Regrettably, the sixteenth century is not represented, as only a few very fragmentary manuscripts of *Njáls saga* have survived from this period.² Data will be presented from the following manuscripts:³

[1] AM 162 B δ fol., Þormóðsbók, dated to *c.*1300, currently consisting of twenty-four parchment leaves which are four fragments from a single manuscript. The single leaf in AM 162 B β 4to may also have belonged to this manuscript.

[2] GKS 2870 4to, Gráskinna, dated to *c.*1300, currently consisting of 121 parchment leaves, of which twenty-seven are sixteenth-century replacements (referred to as Gráskinnuauki ‘Gráskinna supplement’) of leaves that presumably had been lost or severely damaged by then.

[3] AM 468 4to, Reykjabók, dated to *c.*1300–25, presently consists of ninety-two parchment leaves. Only two leaves have been lost (one after

² Admittedly, there is always an inherent risk of circularity when discussing dates of manuscripts and dates of language changes, as each plays a role in establishing a date for the other. The risk is mitigated, however, by the fact that, in the absence of other types of evidence, the dating of medieval Icelandic manuscripts typically derives from the combination of a variety of criteria in script, orthography and language. Thus, no single language change could have constituted the sole basis for the dating of a manuscript. Furthermore, sometimes other types of evidence, entirely non-linguistic in nature, can be adduced to strengthen the dating of a manuscript. For a discussion of the dating of medieval Icelandic manuscripts, see, for instance, Stefán Karlsson (1999).

³ For further information on the manuscripts, see the sources referred to above, as well as the manuscript catalogues compiled by Kålund (1889–94, 1900) and Páll Eggert Ólason et al. (1918–96) and the more recent online manuscript catalogue *Handrit.is* (<http://handrit.is>) where images of most of the manuscripts are accessible.

fol. 6 and another after fol. 33), which makes Reykjabók the most complete of the fourteenth-century manuscripts (*Njáls saga: the Arna-Magnaean manuscript 468 4to* (Reykjabók) 1962).

[4] AM 132 fol., Möðruvallabók, dated to *c.*1330–70, is a large parchment manuscript containing eleven sagas of Icelanders. *Njáls saga*, which is the first saga in the manuscript (1ra–61rb), has three lacunas which have been filled by a seventeenth-century hand, fols 1–10, 18v–20r, and 29rb–29va. These additions have not been included in the present study.

[5] AM 133 fol., Kálfalækjarbók, dated to *c.*1350, consists of ninety-five parchment leaves, all written in one hand, but in its present state the text has seven lacunas. Kálfalækjarbók is written in a large and beautiful script, and has several illuminated initials, which is rare for a saga manuscript.

[6] GKS 2868 4to, Skafinskinna, dated to *c.*1350–1400, currently consists of forty-five parchment leaves (some of which may be palimpsest; hence the name Skafinskinna ‘scraped vellum’). It has three lacunas, one of which is filled with a leaf in a seventeenth-century hand (fol. 31); this insert has not been included in the present study.

[7] AM 466 4to, Oddabók, dated to *c.*1460, consisting of forty-six parchment leaves, but with five lacunas.

[8] AM 309 4to, Bæjarbók, dated to 1498 based on a scribal colophon, contains excerpts from Flateyjarbók, GKS 1005 fol., fragments of *Laxdæla saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga*, as well as four fragments on ten leaves from *Njáls saga*.

[9] AM 396 fol., Melanesbók or Lambavatsnbók, is a large composite volume of 201 paper leaves in several hands containing several sagas, including *Njáls saga* (Jón Þorkelsson 1889, 732–35). The volume consists of six units from different manuscripts from different periods, some with ties to the West of Iceland or the Westfjords, of which *Njáls saga* (100r–145v) is the oldest, dating to *c.*1600–50 (Arthur 2015, 63–64, 234–42). The hand of *Njáls saga*, which may also have written a marginal note in AM 466 4to, Oddabók (51v), is identical to the one on the vellum fragments AM 921 4to I, Lbs. fragm. 2, JS fragm. 4, and (the now lost) fragment Þjms. I, all from the same manuscript containing *Njáls saga* (Arthur 2015, 224–29).

[10] AM 136 fol., a paper manuscript dated to *c.*1640–43, written by Jón Gissurarson (1590–1648) of Núpur in Dýrafjörður in the Westfjords, once part of a larger compilation dismembered by Árni Magnússon (Arthur 2015, 64).

[11] AM 555 c 4to, Breiðabólstaðarbók, a paper manuscript dated to *c.*1640–60, written by Halldór Guðmundsson of Silastaðir in Eyjafjörður in the

North, once part of a larger compilation dismembered by Árni Magnússon (Jón Þorkelsson 1889, 741–42; Stefán Karlsson 1970a; Arthur 2015, 65).

[12] GKS 1003 fol., from 1670, is part of a two-volume vellum manuscript (GKS 1002 fol. + GKS 1003 fol.) written by Páll Sveinsson for Jón Eyjólfsson, a farmer at Múli (Eyvindarmúli) in Fljótshlíð in the South (Slay 1960; Arthur 2015, 58).

[13] Lbs. 3505 4to, a paper manuscript written, possibly in Western Iceland, by an unknown scribe in 1698 according to the title page, where it is furthermore stated that it is copied ‘after the most accurate old books that people consider to be most complete and most truthful’ (Arthur 2015, 74).

[14] AM 469 4to, Fagureyjarbók, a paper manuscript, according to the colophon written in Fagurey Island in Breiðafjörður in the West from March 13 to April 19, 1705, probably by a certain Einar Eiríksson who is known to have been a farmhand in the neighbouring Bjarneyjar Islands in Breiðafjörður in 1703 (Jón Þorkelsson 1889, 737–39; Arthur 2015, 78–79).

[15] ÍB 261 4to, Lágafellsbók, a paper manuscript written in 1740 by a certain Jón J(ónsson?) who is otherwise unknown. The first five leaves and the last two have been lost and replaced by leaves in a younger hand. The ownership history has several references to Western Iceland, suggesting that the manuscript may have been written in the Breiðafjörður region (Jón Þorkelsson 1889, 750–53; Arthur 2015, 81).

[16] ÍB 270 4to, Urðarbók, dated to *c.*1770, is a large paper volume containing *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* and *Njáls saga*, as well as verses about characters from *Njáls saga*. It was written by Magnús Einarsson of Tjörn in Svarfaðardalur in the North, it seems, for his friend Jón Sigurðsson at Urðir in Svarfaðardalur (Jón Þorkelsson 1889, 752–58; Arthur 2015, 89–91; Wawn 2012).

[17] Lbs. 1415 4to, a paper manuscript dated to *c.*1770, written by an unknown scribe. The ownership history suggests it may have originated in the Eyjafjörður or Þingeyjarsýsla regions in the North (Arthur 2015, 89).

[18] Lbs. 437 4to is a large paper volume containing several texts. According to the colophon at the end of *Njáls saga*, it was written in 1773, but the scribe is unknown. A later hand has adjusted the chapter numbers to match the 1772 print edition and also added chapter headings from the print edition (Arthur 2015, 91–92).

In addition, data will be presented from two of the earliest print editions of *Njáls saga*; these will be discussed in a separate section below.

[19] The 1772 edition *Sagan af Níáli Þorgeirssyni ok sonum hans* edited by Ólafur Ólafsson Olavius (Copenhagen).

[20] The 1844 edition *Sagan af Njáli Þorgeirssyni og sonum hans* edited by Ólafur Magnússon Stephensen (Viðey Island).

In the tables presenting the examples from the manuscripts of *Njáls saga*, AM 468 4to, Reykjabók, will be used as the text of reference at the top of each table, as it is the most complete among the earliest manuscripts. To minimise redundancy, the examples from Reykjabók will be presented in normalised fourteenth-century orthography which deviates only slightly from the orthography typically used in the *Íslensk fornrit* series. Later examples are likewise presented in normalised orthography consistent with their date.⁴ References will be made to leaves in the manuscripts and to chapter and page number in Einar Ól. Sveinsson's edition in the *Íslensk fornrit* series, abbreviated *ÍF*. Occasionally, the example may be lacking due to a lacuna in the manuscript, indicated with [Ø], or different wording, marked with [≠].

Let us briefly discuss language change in general before turning to specific examples from the transmission of *Njáls saga*.

The linguistic variant

The main question addressed in this paper is to what extent language change affected the transmission of a late-thirteenth-century text from one generation to the next over a span of five centuries. The Icelandic language spoken in the fifteenth or seventeenth century was not identical to the language of the thirteenth century. Moreover, if we remove the time factor, there was probably some synchronic variation at any given point in time; for instance, the language in the North may have differed somewhat from the language in the South. The reproduction of *Njáls saga* was, however, not confined to a particular period or a particular region of Iceland.

Using A and B as placeholders for any phonological, morphological, syntactic or semantic feature, when A changed to B in the language (language change), as illustrated in Figure 1, there was at first a period when

⁴ The examples are presented in normalised orthography to minimise redundancy. Greater clarity of presentation is thus attained without loss of information relevant to the linguistic features under examination. For instance, in the first example discussed below, the contrast between the forms *bjoggust* and *bjuggust* is ordinarily quite clear and unambiguous in the unnormalised manuscript orthography. The mid-vowel is denoted 'o' and the high vowel either 'u' or 'v'; the variation in the latter case is purely orthographic and has no phonological relevance. Other points of orthographic variation regularly encountered in these examples are likewise without phonological value for the question at hand; it is, for instance, of no consequence in this context whether *bjuggust* is spelled 'bivgvz', 'biuguz' or 'biuggvzt'.

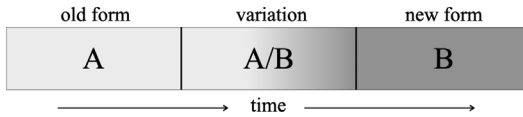


Figure 1. Language change ($A > B$) and linguistic variation.

both A and B were in use in the language. Ultimately, A became obsolete and disappeared from the language; its replacement by the new form B was complete.⁵

A scribe operating in a period prior to the language change $A > B$ obviously used A in his writing; B did not exist yet in the language. Even so, the absence of B in a manuscript is not inevitably proof of the absence of B in the language, as the scribe may have known B but decided against using it or reproducing it based on an exemplar he was copying. In fact, the variant B may have been quite established in the language when it first emerged in the written sources (Haraldur Bernharðsson 2002).

The period of linguistic variation after the new form B appeared in the language, and before the old form A disappeared, varied from one change to the next, from only a few decades up to several centuries, as some language changes progressed more swiftly than others. The linguistic variation may have been conditioned by a variety of factors, both geographical (geographical dialects) and social (in particular, generational difference), but regrettably the evidence shedding light on such factors in the history of the Icelandic language is very limited, as very few of, in particular, the early manuscripts can be localised with any certainty. During the period of linguistic variation when both A and B were in use

⁵ These are, to be clear, references to changes in language, not changes in spelling without phonological basis. The change in the middle voice from *kallask* to *kallast*, for instance, was a language change; the pronunciation of the middle voice morpheme *-sk* changed to *-st* through assimilation of place of articulation. The earlier morpheme *-sk* was denoted orthographically as ‘sk’ or ‘sc’, both of which had the same phonological value. The later morpheme *-st* had several different orthographic representations over time. At first, in the second half of the thirteenth century and throughout the fourteenth century, it was primarily denoted as ‘z’. The spelling ‘z’ was then gradually replaced by ‘zt’ in the fifteenth century, with the occasional ‘zst’, and ultimately ‘st’ prevailed in the sixteenth century. The changes from ‘z’ to ‘zt’ and ‘zst’ to ‘st’ are changes of spelling without any phonological basis; these are, as far as we know, nothing more than different orthographic representations of the same phonological sequence, namely *-st* (Kjartan G. Ottósson 1992, esp. 116–36).

Table 1. The preterite plural stem of the strong class 7.2 verb *búa*: *bjogg-* → *bjugg-*.

AM 468 4to, Reykjabók, 1300–25: Þeir játtu, at þessi ráðagerð skyldi fram koma. Síðan bjoggust þeir austr í fjörðu, ok varaðist Gunnarr þat ekki (22v29; cf. <i>ÍF</i> ch. 41, p. 108).	
AM 162 B ð fol., Þormóðsbók, c.1300	[Ø]
GKS 2870 4to, Gráskinna, c.1300	bjoggust (35v)
AM 132 fol., Möðruvallabók, c.1330–70	bjuggu (15va)
AM 133 fol., Kálfalækjarbók, c.1350	bjuggust (20v)
GKS 2868 4to, Skafinskinna, c.1350–1400	bjuggust (18r)
AM 466 4to, Oddabók, c.1460	bjuggust (13v)
AM 309 4to, Bæjarbók, 1498	bjuggust (39v)
AM 396 fol., Melanes-/Lambavatnsbók, c.1600–50	bjuggust (110v)
AM 136 fol., c.1640–43	bjuggust (24v)
AM 555 c 4to, Breiðabólstaðarbók, c.1640–60	bjuggust (20v)
GKS 1003 fol., 1670	bjuggust (75ra)
Lbs. 3505 4to, 1698	bjuggust (43r)
AM 469 4to, Fagureyjarbók, 1705	bjuggust (34v)
ÍB 261 4to, Lágafellsbók, 1740	b(j)uggu (32v)
ÍB 270 4to, Urðarbók, c.1770	bjuggust (48r)
Lbs. 1415 4to, c.1770	bjuggust (53v)
Lbs. 437 4to, 1773	bjuggust (108r)
1772 print edition	bjoggust (63)
1884 print edition	bjuggust (94)

in the language, the scribe who knew both forms had to make a choice. If the text in the exemplar contained the earlier form A, the scribe could either reproduce it or replace it with B. As A was not obsolete, the scribe would have other reasons for replacing it, perhaps regarding it as dialectal variation or even as a matter of style. Conversely, a scribe copying from an exemplar containing the younger form B could replace it with the earlier form A. Such changes (of both types) are, however, not easily identified, as the exemplar from which a given manuscript was copied is typically unknown. Furthermore, the reasons for such changes remain beyond recovery. Yet there is clear evidence already in the fourteenth-century manuscripts of *Njáls saga* showing how the scribes adjusted the language to their own taste (Haraldur Bernharðsson (2018); see also Haukur Þorgeirsson (2014) on the intervention of copyists, Machan (1989) on the role of the scribe; textual variation is discussed in the papers included in the volume edited by Quinn and Lethbridge (2010)).

Ultimately A became obsolete, and it seems not unreasonable to assume that the copying scribe encountering A in his exemplar would

Table 2. The preterite plural stem of the strong class 7.2 verb *hlaupa*: *hljóp-* → *hlup-*.

AM 468 4to, Reykjabók, 1300–25: ‘Guð hjálpi mér, en fyrirgefi yðr!’ Hljópu þeir þá at honum allir ok unnu á honum (56r26; cf. <i>ÍF</i> ch. 111, p. 281).	
AM 162 B 8 fol., Þormóðsbók, c.1300	[Ø]
GKS 2870 4to, Gráskinna, c.1300	hljópu (73r)
AM 132 fol., Möðruvallabók, c.1330–70	hljópu (39va)
AM 133 fol., Kálfalækjarbók, c.1350	hljópu (64r)
GKS 2868 4to, Skafinskinna, c.1350–1400	hlupu (44v)
AM 466 4to, Oddabók, c.1460	hlupu (39r)
AM 309 4to, Bæjarbók, 1498	[Ø]
AM 396 fol., Melanes-/Lambavatsnbók, c.1600–50	hlupu (127v)
AM 136 fol., c.1640–43	hlupu (57r)
AM 555 c. 4to, Breiðabólstaðarbók, c.1640–60	hlupu (46r)
GKS 1003 fol., 1670	hlupu (93ra)
Lbs. 3505 4to, 1698	hlupu (109r)
AM 469 4to, Fagureyjarbók, 1705	hlupu (87r)
ÍB 261 4to, Lágafellsbók, 1740	hlupu (80v)
ÍB 270 4to, Urðarbók, c.1770	hlupu (94v)
Lbs. 1415 4to, c.1770	hlupu (134v)
Lbs. 437 4to, 1773	hljópu (167v)
1772 print edition	hljópu (170)
1884 print edition	hlupu (257)

typically replace it with the more current B. Admittedly, the boundary between the period of variation and the time when A had become obsolete is not clear-cut. A scribe may have been tempted to reproduce a form that was no longer part of his active or productive linguistic competence but still recognisable and processable; essentially an archaism that was only part of his passive or receptive linguistic competence. Unfortunately, such forms are hard to identify. There are, however, as we shall see below, numerous examples showing how a scribe has replaced a presumably obsolete linguistic form with a more current form. Most of these are plain linguistic substitution triggered by language change, essentially a matter of bringing the language of the text up to date. Occasionally, however, it is evident, as we shall see below, that the scribe did not associate the obsolete A with the current B. Instead, A was subject to reinterpretation and replaced, not with B but something else, perhaps a resembling form of a different word. This is thus a kind of folk etymology.

Examples from the manuscript transmission of *Njáls saga* will be presented in the following section. It should be kept in mind when contrasting manuscripts that have the old form A with those that have the

Table 3. The demonstrative pronoun *sjá/þessi*, fem. dat. sing. *þessi* → *þessari*.

AM 468 4to, Reykjabók, 1300–25: Þá gekk Bergþóra at pallinum ok Þórhalla með henni, ok mælti Bergþóra til Hallgerðar: ‘Þú skalt þoka fyrir konu þessi ’ (19r12; cf. <i>ÍF</i> ch. 35, p. 91).	
AM 162 B 8 fol., Þormóðsbók, c.1300	[Ø]
GKS 2870 4to, Gráskinna, c.1300	fyrir konu þessi (20r)
AM 132 fol., Möðruvallabók, c.1330–70	fyrir konu þessi (13r)
AM 133 fol., Kálfalækjarbók, c.1350	fyrir konu þessi (16r)
GKS 2868 4to, Skafinskinna, c.1350–1400	fyrir konu þessi (15r)
AM 466 4to, Oddabók, c.1460	fyrir konu þessi (12r)
AM 309 4to, Bæjarbók, 1498	[Ø]
AM 396 fol., Melanes-/Lambavatnsbók, c.1600–50	fyrir konu þessari (108v)
AM 136 fol., c.1640–43	fyrir konu þessari (20r)
AM 555 c 4to, Breiðabólstaðarbók, c.1640–60	fyrir konu þessari (17r)
GKS 1003 fol., 1670	fyrir konu þessari (73va)
Lbs. 3505 4to, 1698	fyrir konu þessari (35r)
AM 469 4to, Fagureyjarbók, 1705	fyrir konu þessari (28r)
ÍB 261 4to, Lágafellsbók, 1740	fyrir konu þessari (27v)
ÍB 270 4to, Urðarbók, c.1770	fyrir konu þessari (42v)
Lbs. 1415 4to, c.1770	fyrir konu þessari (44v)
Lbs. 437 4to, 1773	fyrir konu þessari (101r)
1772 print edition	fyrir konu þessi (52)
1884 print edition	fyrir konu þessari (77)

new form B that we typically do not know the exemplars from which these manuscripts were copied. Some of the manuscripts with the new form B may have been copied from exemplars that already had the new form; there is simply no way of knowing. Similarly, a manuscript with old form A may, in theory at least, have been copied from an exemplar that had the new form B. The transmission of a text such as *Njáls saga* involves a long chain of exemplar and copy through several centuries, and linguistic replacement could, in principle, have taken place at any stage in the transmission.⁶

⁶ It should also be kept in mind that in the eighteenth century, not many old parchment manuscripts of *Njáls saga* remained in the country. As a result of Árni Magnússon’s (1663–1730) extensive collecting effort in the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, most of the surviving parchment manuscripts had probably been transported to Copenhagen (Már Jónsson 1998). It is hard to tell if any such manuscripts remained and later perished without any record, but it seems likely the eighteenth-century manuscripts of *Njáls saga* were typically copied from relatively young manuscripts.

Also, scribes operated with varying degrees of consistency; some were unfailing in updating the language of the text they were copying while others allowed an occasional archaism to slip from their pen. This is, however, not a quantitative study presenting numerical data on how often a particular scribe replaced or failed to replace a particular feature throughout the entirety of *Njáls saga*. Instead, the focus will be on representative examples showing the manifestation of selected language changes throughout several centuries of textual transmission, a sort of longitudinal study. While the choice of language changes examined is somewhat arbitrary, the main criterion for the selection was that the changes have a clear manifestation in the written text, thus providing an insight through representative examples into the working habits of the scribes.

Let us now look at some examples from the transmission of *Njáls saga*.⁷

Obsolete linguistic features replaced with more current features

Examples abound of scribes replacing an obsolete linguistic feature with a more current feature. Typically, this is plain linguistic substitution triggered by language change: A changed to B in the language, and the scribe copying an earlier exemplar with A followed suit by replacing it with B. Let us look at some examples, numbered (1) through (4).

(1) In the strong verbs *búa* ‘prepare; dwell’ and *hlaupa* ‘leap’, both belonging to Class 7.2, the preterite plural stems *bjogg-* and *hljóp-* were analogically reshaped as *bjugg-* and *hlup-*, respectively, on the model of strong verbs of Class 2, for instance, pret. sing. *fló*, pret. plur. *flugu* of *fljúga* ‘fly’ (Noreen 1923, 338 [§503]; Heusler 1932, 93 [§315.2]). The new stem forms *bjugg-* and *hlup-* appear sporadically already in sources from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, *bjugg-* somewhat earlier (first half of the thirteenth century) than *hlup-* (fourteenth century).

This development is reflected in the *Njáls saga* manuscripts, as shown with examples in Table 1 for *bjogg-* → *bjugg-* and in Table 2 for *hljóp-* → *hlup-*. As can be seen in Table 1, only AM 468 4to, Reykjabók and GKS 2870 4to, Gráskinna have the older stem *bjogg-* (but there is a lacuna in AM 162 B δ fol., Þormóðsbók). The new stem thus appears already in AM 132 fol., Möðruvallabók, AM 133 fol., Kálfalækjabók, and GKS 2868 4to, Skafinskinna in the fourteenth century, and in fact all the remaining manuscripts under examination have the younger stem. In Table 2, four of the fourteenth-century manuscripts have the older

⁷ This paper concerns itself with the literary transmission of prose. Some of the generalisations made may not apply to the literary transmission of poetry.

Table 4. The demonstrative pronoun *sjá/þessi*, fem. gen. sing. *þessar* → *þessarar*.

AM 468 4to, Reykjabók, 1300–25: ... muntu þurfa at vanda til ferðar þessar bæði lið ok skip (41r17; cf. <i>ÍF</i> ch. 82, p. 199).	
AM 162 B 8 fol., Þormóðsbók, c. 1300	[Ø]
GKS 2870 4to, Gráskinna, c. 1300	til þessar ferðar (51v)
AM 132 fol., Möðruvallabók, c. 1330–70	til ferðar þessar (29ra)
AM 133 fol., Kálfalækjarbók, c. 1350	til ferðar þessar (46r)
GKS 2868 4to, Skafinskinna, c. 1350–1400	til ferðar þessar (32v)
AM 466 4to, Oddabók, c. 1460	til þessarar ferðar (27v)
AM 309 4to, Bæjarbók, 1498	til þessarar ferðar (45r)
AM 396 fol., Melanes-/Lambavatnsbók, c. 1600–50	til þessarar ferðar (119v)
AM 136 fol., c. 1640–43	til þessarar ferðar (43v)
AM 555 c. 4to, Breiðabólstaðarbók, c. 1640–60	til þessarar ferðar (35r)
GKS 1003 fol., 1670	til þessarar ferðar (84vb)
Lbs. 3505 4to, 1698	til þessarar ferðar (80v)
AM 469 4to, Fagureyjarbók, 1705	til þessarar ferðar (64r)
ÍB 261 4to, Lágafellsbók, 1740	til þessarar ferðar (59r)
ÍB 270 4to, Urðarbók, c. 1770	til þessarar ferðar (75r)
Lbs. 1415 4to, c. 1770	til þessarar ferðar (97r)
Lbs. 437 4to, 1773	til þessarar ferðar (142v)
1772 print edition	til ferðar þessar (122)
1884 print edition	til ferðar þessarar (184)

form *hljópu* (again, lacuna in AM 162 B 8 fol., Þormóðsbók), but GKS 2869 4to, Skafinskinna has the younger *hlupu* and so do all the younger manuscripts except the eighteenth-century Lbs. 437 4to which contains occasional archaisms.

While we do not know the exemplars from which these manuscripts were copied, it seems reasonable to assume that several of them, at least the earliest ones, were copied from exemplars that had the older stem form. At the earliest stage, there must have been variation as both stems had some currency in the language; the scribes thus had a choice. Ultimately, though, the older stems became obsolete, and, evidently, the scribes decided to replace them. The older stem form is rarely seen in post-medieval non-scholarly copies of *Njáls saga*, no doubt because it was obsolete.

(2) The demonstrative pronoun *sjá* ‘this’ was subject to several analogical changes in the history of the Icelandic language. These have been studied most extensively by Katrín Axelsdóttir (2014, 165–239); see also Kjeldsen (2010). These included the analogical extension of the stem *þess-* to *þessar-* in the feminine dative and genitive singular,

Table 5. Analogical changes in the 1st person present indicative of the middle voice.

<i>Sing.</i>	1	köllumst → kallast
	2	kallast
	3	kallast
<i>Plur.</i>	1	köllumst → köllunst/köllust → köllunst-um/köllust-um
	2	kallizt
	3	kallast

þess-i → *þessar-i* and *þess-ar* → *þessar-ar*, respectively. The earliest signs of this change date to the thirteenth century, but by the sixteenth century the new forms seem to have practically ousted the older forms (Katrín Axelsdóttir 2014, 192–95); in the Bible translation of 1584 (*Guðbrandsbiblíá*), for instance, the new stem has completely replaced the older one (Bandle 1956, 353). It comes as no surprise that the post-medieval scribes copying *Njáls saga* typically replace the old stem *þess-* with the more current stem *þessar-*, and in fact the change already starts in the fifteenth-century AM 466 4to, *Oddabók*, as shown with examples of the feminine dative singular in Table 3 and feminine genitive singular in Table 4. Note also variation in the word order: *ferðar þessar* and *þessar(ar) ferðar*.

(3) The middle voice underwent a series of changes that have been examined in detail by Kjartan G. Ottósson (1992). Following the thirteenth-century phonological change *-sk* > *-st*, analogical changes occurred in both the 1st person singular and 1st person plural; these are summarised in Table 5 using the verb *kalla* ‘call’ as an example. The 1st person singular had a form that was distinct from the forms of the 2nd and 3rd person but starting in the second half of the fifteenth century, the 1st person adopted a form that was identical to the other singular forms. The old distinctive form of the 1st person singular disappeared around the middle of the eighteenth century (Kjartan G. Ottósson 1992, 179–207). In the 1st person plural, forms in *-unst* and *-ust* began appearing in the second half of the fifteenth century, suggesting the nasal was no longer identified with the general 1st person plural ending *-um* in the active, and forms in *-unstum* and *-ustum* with the addition of a new ending *-um* then emerged around 1600, the latter being much more frequent than the former. The old *-umst* seems to have disappeared in the early sixteenth century (Kjartan G. Ottósson 1992, 209–27).

Both changes appear in the manuscript transmission of *Njáls saga*, as shown with examples in Tables 6 and 7. In the 1st person singular, the

Table 6. The 1st person singular present indicative of the middle voice.

AM 468 4to, Reykjabók, 1300–25: ‘Standa munu nökkurir hans makar á götu minni, áðr en ek hræðumst þá,’ segir Gunnarr (37r8; cf. <i>ÍF</i> ch. 72, p. 177).	
AM 162 B δ fol., Þormóðsbók, c.1300	ek hræðumst (16va)
GKS 2870 4to, Gráskinna, c.1300	ek hræðumst (46r)
AM 132 fol., Möðruvallabók, c.1330–70	ek hræðumst (26va)
GKS 2868 4to, Skafinskinna, c.1350–1400	ek hræðumst (29r)
AM 466 4to, Oddabók, c.1460	eg hræðumst (24r)
AM 309 4to, Bæjarbók, 1498	eg hræðumst (43r)
AM 396 fol., Melanes-/Lambavatnsbók, c.1600–50	eg hræðunst (117v)
AM 136 fol., c.1640–43	eg hræðunst (39v)
AM 555 c 4to, Breiðabólstaðarbók, c.1640–60	eg hræðist (31v)
GKS 1003 fol., 1670	eg hræðist (82va)
Lbs. 3505 4to, 1698	eg hræðist (72v)
AM 469 4to, Fagureyjarbók, 1705	eg hræðist (57v)
ÍB 261 4to, Lágafellsbók, 1740	eg hræðist (53r)
ÍB 270 4to, Urðarbók, c.1770	eg hræðist (70r)
Lbs. 1415 4to, c.1770	eg hræðist (89r)
Lbs. 437 4to, 1773	eg hræðist (135r)
1772 print edition	ek hræðumst (109)
1884 print edition	eg hræðumst (163)

new analogical form is used in this particular example in three of the five seventeenth-century manuscripts examined and all the eighteenth-century ones. In the 1st person plural, the new form with the added morpheme *-um* is used in three of the seventeenth-century manuscripts and one of the eighteenth-century manuscripts and one has *-ust*. In these manuscripts, Gunnarr is thus speaking what was probably ordinary seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Icelandic.⁸

(4) Sometimes, though, an obsolete feature encountered in an earlier exemplar was subject to reanalysis by the scribe. The demonstrative pronoun *sjá* ‘this’, in addition to the changes discussed above, also underwent analogical change in the nom. sing. in masculine and feminine whereby the form *sjá* was replaced by *þessi*. The new form *þessi* first appeared in the thirteenth century and gradually gained ground at the expense of *sjá* which seems to have disappeared in the sixteenth century (Katrín Axelsdóttir 2014, 186–92). Both the older *sjá* and the younger *þessi* appear

⁸ The 1st person plural form in GKS 2868 4to, *Skafinskinna*, 22v19, reads ‘finnu[z]m’. What is probably ‘z’ is partly obscured by a smudge of ink, followed by ‘m’. This is probably a scribal error for ‘finnumz’ (*finnumst*). The 1st person pronoun *mið* (< *mit*) is a variant form of *við* (< *vit*).

Table 7. The 1st person plural present indicative of the middle voice.

AM 468 4to, Reykjabók, 1300–25: Gunnarr mælti: ‘Þá er vit finnumst næst skaltu sjá atgeirinn’ (28v; cf. <i>ÍF</i> ch. 53, p. 134).	
AM 162 B 8 fol., Þormóðsbók, c.1300	[Ø]
GKS 2870 4to, Gráskinna, c.1300	vit finnumst (34v)
AM 132 fol., Möðruvallabók, c.1330–1370	vit finnumst (21rb)
AM 133 fol., Kálfalækjarbók, c.1350	vit finnumst (28v)
GKS 2868 4to, Skafinskinna, c.1350–1400	mið finnu[st]m (22v)
AM 466 4to, Oddabók, c.1460	við finnumst (17v)
AM 309 4to, Bæjarbók, 1498	[illegible] (40v)
AM 396 fol., Melanes-/Lambavatnsbók, c.1600–50	við finnumst (113v)
AM 136 fol., c.1640–43	við finnumst (31r)
AM 555 c 4to, Breiðabólstaðarbók, c.1640–60	vér finnumst (25v)
GKS 1003 fol., 1670	við finnumst (78va)
Lbs. 3505 4to, 1698	við finnumst (55r)
AM 469 4to, Fagureyjarbók, 1705	við finnumst (44v)
ÍB 261 4to, Lágafellsbók, 1740	[≠] (41r)
ÍB 270 4to, Urðarbók, c.1770	við finnumst (58v)
Lbs. 1415 4to, c.1770	við finnumst (68v)
Lbs. 437 4to, 1773	við finnumst (120r)
1772 print edition	við finnumst (82)
1884 print edition	við finnumst (123)

side by side in the earliest *Njáls saga* manuscripts, and there is reason to believe that both forms were used in the archetype of *Njáls saga* (Haraldur Bernharðsson 2018). Both forms thus seem to have had currency in the language for quite a while. Ultimately, however, *sjá* became obsolete and outdated to the point where it was no longer recognisable. Instead of being identified as an archaic form whose current equivalent was *þessi*, some scribes replaced *sjá* with the other demonstrative pronoun *sá* in the masculine and *sú* in the feminine, as shown in Tables 8 and 9. Moreover, there are also examples where *sjá* was replaced by the adverb *svo* ‘so’.⁹ There cannot be much doubt that these readings with *sá*, *sú* or *svo* can be traced (directly or indirectly) to an exemplar with the form *sjá* rather than *þessi*, a replacement that is essentially a reinterpretation or folk etymology.

These examples show how the scribes replaced presumably obsolete linguistic forms with more current forms. The role of the scribes was

⁹ For instance, in the passage ‘Sömdu þeir nú þessa ráðagerð með sér, at *sjá* skyldi fram koma’ (AM 468 4to, Reykjabók, 36v, cf. *ÍF* ch. 71, p. 174), the fem. nom. sing. *sjá* has become *svo* in AM 396 fol., Melanes-/Lambavatnsbók, 117r, GKS 1003 fol., 82va, and Lbs. 3505 4to, 71r.

Table 8. The demonstrative pronoun *sjá/þessi*, masc. nom. sing. *sjá* → *þessi*.

AM 468 4to, Reykjabók, 1300–25: Skarpheðinn mælti: ‘ Sjá maðr hefir þó helzt verit feigr,’ segir hann, ‘er látizt hefir fyrir fóstura várum, er aldri hefir sét mannsblóð’ (22r14; cf. <i>ÍF</i> ch. 40, p. 104).	
AM 162 B 8 fol., Þormóðsbók, c.1300	Sjá maðr (3vb)
GKS 2870 4to, Gráskinna, c.1300	Sjá maðr (24v)
AM 132 fol., Möðruvallabók, c.1330–70	Sjá maðr (15ra)
AM 133 fol., Kálfalækjarbók, c.1350	Þessi maðr (19v)
GKS 2868 4to, Skafinskinna, c.1350–1400	Sjá maðr (17v)
AM 466 4to, Oddabók, c.1460	Þessi maður (13r)
AM 309 4to, Bæjarbók, 1498	Þessi maður (39v)
AM 396 fol., Melanes-/Lambavatsnbók, c.1600–50	Þessi maður (110r)
AM 136 fol., c.1640–1643	Sá maður (23v)
AM 555 c. 4to, Breiðabólstaðarbók, c.1640–60	Sá maður (19v)
GKS 1003 fol., 1670	Þessi maður (75ra)
Lbs. 3505 4to, 1698	Sá maður (41v)
AM 469 4to, Fagureyjarbók, 1705	Sá maður (33v)
ÍB 261 4to, Lágafellsbók, 1740	Sá maður (31v)
ÍB 270 4to, Urðarbók, c.1770	Þessi maður (47r)
Lbs. 1415 4to, c.1770	Sá maður (52r)
Lbs. 437 4to, 1773	Sá maður (106v)
1772 print edition	Sjá maðr (60)
1884 print edition	Sá maður (91)

thus much more than a matter of mechanically reproducing the text of the exemplar through slavish copying. Instead, the scribes were active participants in the transmission of the text. To a degree, this also lends credibility to the linguistic forms that remain; they have been processed by the scribes and deemed suitable for their audiences.¹⁰

Transmitting a text in a current language

The examples presented above indicate that the language of *Njáls saga* was quite dynamic in the copying process through the centuries. As the scribes were working with their native language, it should come as no surprise that their own native mental grammar or linguistic competence played a role in the copying process. While reading from the exemplar (or listening to dictation) and reproducing it in his own writing, the scribe interpreted and processed the text of the exemplar with his own

¹⁰ Instances of mechanical copying no doubt occurred, even if they were not the rule. In particular, scribes may have been inclined to be more faithful to the exemplar when copying poetry.

Table 9. The demonstrative pronoun *sjá/þessi*, fem. nom. sing. *sjá* → *þessi*.

AM 468 4to, Reykjabók, 1300–25: Gunnar mælti: ‘Hvat biðr sinnar stundar, en ekki mun þeim för sjá til sæmðar verða’ (27v8, cf. <i>ÍF</i> ch. 50, p. 130).	
AM 162 B 8 fol., Þormóðsbók, c.1300	ferð þessi (8va)
GKS 2870 4to, Gráskinna, c.1300	ferð sjá (33r)
AM 132 fol., Möðruvallabók, c.1330–70	[Ø]
AM 133 fol., Kálfalækjarbók, c.1350	för sjá (27v1)
GKS 2868 4to, Skafinskinna, c.1350–1400	ferð sjá (21v)
AM 466 4to, Oddabók, c.1460	för sjá (17r)
AM 309 4to, Bæjarbók, 1498	för sjá (40r)
AM 396 fol., Melanes-/Lambavatnsbók, c.1600–50	för sú (113r)
AM 136 fol., c.1640–43	för sú (30r)
AM 555 c 4to, Breiðabólstaðarbók, c.1640–60	för sú (24v)
GKS 1003 fol., 1670	för sú (78ra)
Lbs. 3505 4to, 1698	för sú (53r)
AM 469 4to, Fagureyjarbók, 1705	för sú (43r)
ÍB 261 4to, Lágafellsbók, 1740	sú för (39v)
ÍB 270 4to, Urðarbók, c.1770	för sú (56v)
Lbs. 1415 4to, c.1770	sú ferð (66r)
Lbs. 437 4to, 1773	ferð sú (118r)
1772 print edition	för sjá (79)
1884 print edition	för sú (118)

native phonology, morphology and syntax.¹¹ Linguistic features that were inconsistent with the scribe’s own language would thus typically be altered to conform to his own grammar. This partly happened subconsciously without the scribe paying any attention to it. In particular, the orthographic representation of certain aspects of the phonology was probably adapted subconsciously.¹² Deviations in morphology and in particular syntax probably called for somewhat more conscious intervention, but the changes would have been induced by the scribe’s subconscious grammar, his *Sprachgefühl*. For the vernacular scribe in

¹¹ The solitary scribe working alone may have read out loud from the exemplar while copying or perhaps subvocalised, but even without that, he subconsciously processed the text through his native phonology. It remains unclear to what extent Icelandic scribes copied from dictation. It may not have been a common practice, but one possible indication of it was observed by Louis-Jensen (1980).

¹² It seems reasonable to assume that as a rule the scribe read the text with his own pronunciation rather than some reconstructed or artificial pronunciation. Typically, the scribe would not have been in a position to know much about the pronunciation of earlier generations, nor is it obvious what could have motivated the scribe to use anything other than his own pronunciation.

medieval Iceland, the process was thus fundamentally different from when scribes worked with Latin in the high Middle Ages, a language that no longer had native speakers. The use of Latin, oral or literary, was in one way or another measured against literary texts; literary texts, not native speakers, were the principal authority on the Latin language, which by that time had become what Ong (1984) has branded a ‘textualized language’. For Icelandic in medieval Iceland, oral language seems thus to have held primacy over the literary language.

While the scribe’s own native mental grammar or linguistic competence played a central role in the copying process, he was not unsusceptible to external influence. As the scribe reproduced the text in writing, he was probably to a certain degree influenced by different values and conventions. In instances of synchronic variation in the language, the scribe had to select a variant based on his preference; he would apply a *linguistic norm*. The scribe would obviously be compelled to select the variant that was part of his own language, but in some instances external forces might push him to opt for a variant that was not in his language, perhaps based on prestige. Examples of what can probably be characterised as synchronic variation in six fourteenth-century manuscripts of *Njáls saga* is discussed by Haraldur Bernharðsson (2018).¹³

The seasoned scribe with years of practice would probably apply the mapping between phonology and its orthographic representation without much conscious effort; he would apply an *orthographic norm*. Similarly, the scribe would apply his own script and graphemic inventory, rather than attempting to reproduce the script of the exemplar; this could be referred to as a *scribal norm*. His own orthographic and scribal norms—scribal mannerisms developed and solidified over time—no doubt took precedence most of the time over the orthographic and scribal norms displayed in the exemplar. The orthographic and scribal norms were probably shaped

¹³ The term *linguistic norm* is used here to refer to linguistic preference in a broad sense. If there was synchronic linguistic variation, the speaker/scribe may have had a personal preference for one variant over another. This preference may have been shared by others in his community; it would thus have been a socially constructed norm. The data presented above seem to suggest the scribes generally did not treat archaic linguistic forms with particular reverence. On the contrary, they seem to have regularly replaced them with more current forms. Their linguistic preference (or linguistic norm) seems thus not to have been particularly biased in favour of archaic forms; the norm was thus not especially retrospective, contrary to the linguistic norm that emerged in Iceland in the nineteenth century (Kjartan G. Ottósson 1987, 1990). The scribes may have treated diachronic variation in the same way as synchronic variation.

by several different contributing factors, such as the scribe's tutor and training, the professional environment or scribal milieu, perhaps also the patron for whom the scribe was writing, and then it was partly determined by individual taste and preferences; on norms and scribal practices, see, for instance, Johansson (1997); Kjeldsen (2013, 21–26); Mårtensson (2013); and Haraldur Bernharðsson (2022); on copying also Hagland (1976); Haraldur Bernharðsson (1999); Kjartan G. Ottósson (2001); and Kjeldsen (2013, 467–74). Figure 2 shows an attempt to visualise the copying process where the exemplar written by Scribe 1 becomes the input for Scribe 2 producing the copy. The process can, of course, be cyclic resulting in a chain of exemplar-copy spanning several generations and centuries.

If the scribe failed to act on his linguistic intuition, a linguistically incongruous form would slip from his quill. This form would thus have been transferred directly from the exemplar to the resulting copy without being adapted or brought up to date by the scribe. Presumably, this was the exception. Similarly, the scribe might occasionally fail to apply his own orthographic and scribal norm, replicating an orthographic or scribal feature of the exemplar. The novice scribe with underdeveloped orthographic and scribal norms may have been particularly prone to orthographic influence from his exemplar. In Figure 2, such influence from the exemplar is shown with dotted lines.

The written text resulting from the copying would thus typically be processed by the scribe at three levels, at (a) the linguistic level, (b) the orthographic level and (c) the scribal level, as illustrated in Figure 2. The typical Icelandic scribe would probably never have been compelled to bypass this process altogether and endeavour instead to produce an accurate facsimile transcription of his exemplar.¹⁴ The audience for whom the text was written would not have been directly affected by the orthography or the script unless they in some way impeded the delivery of the text through oral reading. Incongruous linguistic features, by contrast, could diminish the quality of the text and even divert attention from the contents.

¹⁴ As Ong observed (1984, 2), the identity of a work depended only to a small degree on what the book as a physical object looked like; a copy was thus not expected to match its exemplar as a physical object. The work was what it *said* when it was read out loud. Medieval Icelandic saga manuscripts are typically quite unpretentious, lacking illuminations or other decorative features (with a few exceptions, though; see, for instance, Chesnutt (2010, esp. 156–57)). They were generally not magnificent display books designed for the eyes of the public but rather for their ears.

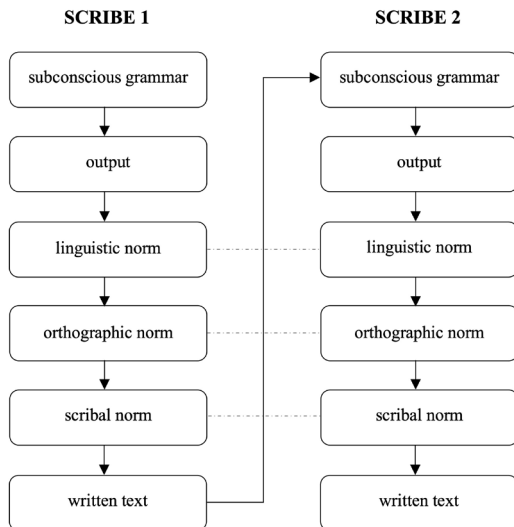


Figure 2. The copying process: The exemplar written by Scribe 1 becomes the input for Scribe 2 producing the copy.

The examples presented above from the transmission of *Njáls saga* suggest the role of the scribe was far greater than simply reproducing faithfully the text of the exemplar word by word or letter by letter. The scribes exercised not only their ability to read and write but also their ability to speak their native language, their communicative competence within their own community, and thus participated in the ‘performance’, as argued by Doane (1994). The work of the scribe was only partly solitary; it was first and foremost a social enterprise. The scribe’s first allegiance was to a contemporary audience for whom the text was read aloud.¹⁵ Consequently, it was imperative for the scribe to produce a text that was linguistically agreeable to the intended audience; the text had to be transmitted and ‘performed’ in the current language. Thus, the time came when reproducing forms such as *hljópu, fyrir konu þessi, ek hræðumst* and so forth, as seen above, defeated that purpose. These forms were no longer

¹⁵ The presence of the audience can be inferred from words such as *heyra* ‘hear’, *hlýða* ‘listen’, *fram flytja* ‘present’, often used in prologues to works by Icelandic authors (Sverrir Tómasson 1988, 301–08). The verb *hlýða* ‘listen’ referring to a listening audience also appears in scribal colophons, for instance, in AM 589 e 4to from c.1450–1500 at the end of *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* (13v) and at the end of *Ála saga flekks* (23r).

part of the current language and had to be replaced. This was probably self-evident and required no discussion or debate at the time; moreover, as this replacement was prompted by the scribe's subconscious linguistic competence, typically, minimal conscious effort was involved. Processing and modifying the text was the unspoken duty of the scribe, and as a rule the copy differed from the exemplar (Machan 1989). 'Variance is the main characteristic of a work in the medieval vernacular', as Cerquiglini observed, '... one could say that every manuscript is a revision, a version' (1999, 37–38). In this regard, the transmission of the written text was similar to oral transmission: the same story is never told twice with exactly the same wording.

Transmitting a 'relic text'

In Iceland, a different perspective emerged in the seventeenth century, manifested most clearly in the Rev. Jón Erlendsson's (d. 1672) two surviving copies of Ari fróði Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* 'Book of Icelanders', believed to have been written in the period 1122–33. Jón Erlendsson's copies in AM 113 a fol. and AM 113 b fol. were commissioned by Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson of Skálholt (1605–75). The first was completed in 1651, but the latter is a later copy of the same exemplar. It is evident from both copies that the now lost exemplar was quite old; in a note in the first copy, Jón Erlendsson states that it was believed at the time that the exemplar was in fact Ari fróði's autograph. While this cannot be correct, there is a general consensus that the exemplar probably dated from around 1200 or possibly even a little earlier. This can be inferred from features of language, orthography and script in Jón Erlendsson's seventeenth-century copies which seem to be remarkably faithful to the old exemplar, in particular the latter of the two. Árni Magnússon conjectured that Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson instructed Jón Erlendsson to produce the second copy because he considered the first one not sufficiently accurate (Jón Jóhannesson 1956, vij–x; Hreinn Benediktsson 1965, 23–24; Jakob Benediktsson 1968, xlv–xlvii).

Similar standards can be witnessed in many of the copies made by the manuscript collector and scholar Árni Magnússon (1663–1730) who, at times, strove to replicate not only language and orthography but also features of script and abbreviations, and instructed his assistants to do the same where he felt it was relevant. For quality assurance, Árni then sometimes compared copies made by his assistants with the exemplar and corrected them (Már Jónsson 1998, 41–71; Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2001). Copies made by Árni Magnússon have even been used to shed

light on the orthography of a lost exemplar and even to identify its scribe (Stefán Karlsson 1970b, 1988).

The effort to reproduce the language, orthography and even features of the script of the exemplar stands in stark contrast to the practice of the *Njáls saga* scribes examined above. They transmitted the text in a current language, viewed the text of *Njáls saga* as ‘living text’ to be reproduced for a contemporary audience. The scribes were active participants in the transmission of the text, both reading and processing the text before reproducing it in writing, as a text fit for ‘performing’. They reproduced the text in their own variety of Icelandic, a language that they themselves commanded.

By contrast, the philological school of thought represented by Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson, Árni Magnússon and their followers viewed the text as a historical object or a relic. The ‘relic text’ represented the past and had limited contemporary appeal beyond being a historical object to be carefully preserved and not meddled with. The text was in a variety of Icelandic belonging to an earlier time, of which there were no longer native speakers; the written text itself was the sole authority.

The first print edition of *Njáls saga* was published in Copenhagen in 1772 under the title *Sagan af Niáli Þórgeirssyni ok sonum hans*. It was edited by Ólafur Ólafsson Olavius (c.1741–88) who based the text primarily on AM 468 4to, Reykjabók, c.1300–25, while also using AM 132 fol., Möðruvallabók, c.1330–70 and AM 133 fol., Kálfalækjarbók, c. 1350. This is a scholarly edition with an introduction in Latin, and selected textual variants are given in footnotes. The text itself is presented in normalised orthography which generally resembles typical fourteenth-century orthography (for instance, rendering the middle voice morpheme with ‘z’) and, moreover, retains some characteristics of the orthography of AM 486 4to, Reykjabók (for instance, rendering the vowel *æ* as ‘*ę*’) (*Sagan af Niáli Þórgeirssyni ok sonum hans* 1772; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, clix; Jón Helgason 1962, xvii). In the 1772 print edition, the text of *Njáls saga* is treated as a ‘relic text’; it is presented to late-eighteenth-century readers in a fourteenth-century form, as illustrated by the linguistic examples presented above in Tables 1–4 and 6–9. In this edition, *Njáls saga* is thus presented in a variety of Icelandic that was no longer spoken in the late eighteenth century; it belonged to an earlier time. Perhaps, though, this edition was not intended primarily for an Icelandic readership, but rather, as suggested by the Latin introduction, for foreign scholars for whom eighteenth-century Icelandic was of little value.

The next print edition of *Njáls saga* was produced by Ólafur Magnússon Stephensen (1791–1872) on Viðey Island in 1844. It appeared under the title *Sagan af Njáli Þorgeirssyni og sonum hans*, and, as stated on the title page, it is a reproduction of the 1772 edition. The language and orthography have, however, been changed to conform more or less to nineteenth-century language (and there is no introduction in Latin). In the 1844 print edition, the text of *Njáls saga* is thus treated as a ‘living text’, as can be seen by the linguistic examples presented above in Tables 1–4 and 6–9. In all but one of the examples, the editor of the 1844 edition has replaced an archaic form with a more modern one; only the 1st person singular present indicative of the middle voice, *eg hræðumst* in Table 6, retains its old form. The editor, working from the 1772 print edition, thus operates in much the same way as the scribes examined above. The 1772 print edition is his exemplar, and he processes the text and updates it to conform to his language and that of his intended readers.¹⁶

For precisely this, the editor of the 1844 edition received criticism. In his review for the journal *Fjölfnir*, Halldór Kr. Friðriksson (1845, 57–76) was not impressed. The text has been twisted and contorted from beginning to end, he said; the modernised orthography gives the impression that the saga was written in the nineteenth century. Almost four decades later, Janus Jónsson (1882) maintained that the 1844 edition had a poor reputation. The spelling is all distorted to reflect the changes that have occurred in our language; this is untenable in a saga edition, he argued. Its only merit is that it gave the public an opportunity to get to know the saga; apart from that, he continued, it is a clear example of how saga editions should not be.

The two early print editions of *Njáls saga* thus represent two different views of the text and its transmission. These two views have existed side by side for a long time. Viewing the text as a relic is, of course, part of a larger scholarly endeavour, gaining foothold in Iceland in the seventeenth century. It is, however, secondary to the other view of the text, transmitting

¹⁶ Kapitan (2018, 128–29) observed a clear difference among eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scribes copying from print editions of *fornaldarsögur*. While the non-Icelandic scribes (Danish and, possibly, German) with only a limited working knowledge of Icelandic copied the text meticulously, reproducing the orthography and punctuation of the exemplar, the Icelandic scribes freely changed the orthography and wording. For the non-native scribes, the text of the exemplar was the authority while the Icelandic scribes, working with their native language, considered themselves in a position of authority.

it in a current language or viewing it as ‘a living text’, which seems to be an unbroken strand through the literary history of Iceland from the earliest writings in Icelandic down to modern times.¹⁷

Conclusion

This study of the manuscript transmission of *Njáls saga* from around 1300 down to the eighteenth century suggests the language of the text was quite dynamic in the copying process through the centuries. The role of the scribe was not simply to replicate the exemplar letter by letter or word by word. Instead, the evidence suggests that the scribes read the text of the exemplar and processed it before reproducing it. As the scribes were working with texts in their native language, their own native mental grammar or linguistic competence played a significant role in the copying process. The purpose was to produce a text that was fit for reading aloud to a contemporary audience. The scribe’s responsibility was to his contemporary audience, and this required the text to be transmitted and ‘performed’ in the current language. The scribe thus applied his communicative competence and essentially participated in the performance through his processing of the text. Over time, the written text was thus routinely subject to modifications at the hand of each and every scribe, generation after generation. In this regard, the transmission of a written text resembles that of oral transmission where the same story is never told twice with exactly the same wording. A different view emerged in Iceland in the seventeenth century where the text was not viewed as ‘a living text’ but as a relic. This scholarly approach to the text called for a very different kind of transmission placing emphasis on faithful reproduction of the text. Transmitting texts in the current language, viewing them as ‘living texts’, seems to have been part of Icelandic manuscript culture from the beginning down to modern times.

¹⁷ The contest between these two opposing views is manifested in different ways, but perhaps its most fiery display arose surrounding Halldór Kiljan Laxness’s saga editions in the 1940s. Halldór insisted on presenting the sagas in modern Icelandic orthography (and language), but authorities objected and demanded the sagas be printed in normalised classical Old Icelandic orthography. A legal battle ensued, culminating in the Icelandic supreme court passing a decision in favour of Halldór Kiljan Laxness and his use of modern Icelandic orthography (Jón Karl Helgason 1998, 115–68; Halldór Guðmundsson 2004, 465–517). The use of modern Icelandic orthography for documentary editions of pre-modern texts has been the subject of discussion, but it has been pointed out that what is often characterised as the normalisation of orthography is in fact the normalisation (or, more accurately, modernisation) of the language itself (Haraldur Bernharðsson 2005).

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WERE THE WOMEN WHO SETTLED ICELAND ‘GAELIC’? GENETICS AND IDENTITY IN THE SCANDINAVIAN DIASPORA

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THE PAST TWO DECADES have seen an explosion in the use of genetic data to study historic populations and migrations (Geary 2018; Lawson et al. 2012; Herrera and Garcia-Bertrand 2018). One of the populations most extensively studied is the Icelanders (Agnar Helgason et al. 2000; Als et al. 2006; Sunna Ebenesersdóttir et al. 2018; Margaryan et al. 2020). As a small, stable island population, this group has been seen as ripe for genetic analysis to answer a range of research questions, from historical questions concerning the identity of those who migrated to Iceland, to medical questions about the development of genetic disorders. Initially, this evidence took the form of a large project that sampled the DNA of the modern Icelandic population (Gísli Pálsson and Rabinow 2001). Later, techniques using ancient DNA (aDNA) were developed and have been of particular interest to historians and archaeologists of the Viking Age (750–1100 CE) (Margaryan et al. 2020). However, the subsequent conclusions drawn concerning the events of the Viking Age have gone largely without the sophisticated contextualisation necessary to make the most of the information provided, as Judith Jesch and Alexandra Ion have observed (Jesch 2021, 230–31; Ion 2019, 28). Indeed, this tempting windfall of apparently quantitative information about population demographics in the Viking Age has been inserted into our understanding of the history of the North Atlantic without the kind of scrutiny that tends to accompany new archaeological or historical information. Perhaps most problematically, the concepts of DNA and identity, or even ethnicity, have been, implicitly or explicitly, elided in some scholarship (Hofmann 2019, 134). This includes but is not limited to the tacit acceptance within some studies of Icelandic DNA that a person with ‘Gaelic’ or ‘Scandinavian’ DNA is themselves ‘Gaelic’ or ‘Scandinavian’ (Agnar Helgason et al. 2000, 714; Gísli Sigurðsson 2022, 164–65). The conflation of the concepts of DNA and identity has meant that the presence in the Icelandic population of high levels of female genetic ancestry from Britain and Ireland has been taken as a sign that the female settlers were ‘Gaelic’ (most recently, Gísli Sigurðsson 2022, 161).

Concerns over the use of genetics to study identity have long been expressed. As early as 1995, M. N. Mirza and D. B. Dungworth (1995) emphasised the potential academic and social problems caused by using DNA to study ethnicity, arguing that race and ethnicity are social constructs which do not lend themselves to being studied through biological techniques. This caution has been reiterated by many scholars since, including recently by Sebastian Brather, who has summarised the issue by reminding us that identities such as ethnicity ‘reflect the consciousness of social groups and societies under specific circumstances’, while genes ‘reflect biological descent’ (2016, 35; see also Ion 2019; Hofmann 2016; Eisenmann et al. 2018). These general cautions, while frequently expressed, have struggled to make themselves heard within specific fields, such as Norse studies, perhaps owing to the disciplinary structure of academia. Much methodological and theoretical discussion of the use of genetic evidence has been published in spheres not usually accessed by historians, including palaeoarchaeology and geography, which diminishes the likelihood of historians fully engaging with the ongoing debates around these issues (for example, Nash 2013; Herrera 2018). The scientific data, on the other hand, is often published in short and digestible articles with little or no framework to contextualise the academic debate surrounding the information, making it appear to historians hoping to use the data that it is uncontroversially factual (for example, Sunna Ebenesersdóttir et al. 2018; Agnar Helgason et al. 2009; Margaryan et al. 2020). The problems generated by scientists taking an interest in areas usually reserved for historians and archaeologists, and *vice versa*, have also been noted repeatedly in the scholarship (including Burmeister 2016; Geary and Veeramah 2016; Hofmann 2019; Ion 2017; Jesch 2021; Samida and Feuchter 2016). The solution presented by many scholars is to call for greater interdisciplinary cooperation and suggest greater inclusion of archaeologists and historians in scientific work (Jesch 2021, 321; Burmeister 2016, 57; Brather 2016, 42; Ion 2019, 30). While this is undoubtedly a long-term solution and work is already underway in some fields, it is also possible for historians and archaeologists to navigate the scientific data in order to answer research questions if sufficient care is taken.¹ The purpose of this article is to determine how much we know from genetic data about the identity of the people who settled Iceland. I will first lay out the genetic evidence generated by studies of Icelandic DNA and aDNA, then consider the

¹ One such cross-disciplinary project concerning the DNA of early medieval England has already published its initial findings (Gretzinger et al. 2022).

implications of this data in the light of humanities scholarship concerning identity and ethnicity.

Icelandic DNA and aDNA

Iceland was settled in the late ninth century as part of an expansive diaspora from mainland Scandinavia that spanned much of the North Atlantic (Orri Vésteinsson 1998, 326; Price 2020, 362–81; Jesch 2021, 217).² There are numerous textual sources that tell the story of the settlement either as a whole or from the perspective of a single family, but these all date from well after the settlement period. The popular narrative is that following the rise to power of King Haraldr hárfagri around the 870s, the powerful families of Iceland who did not wish to accept his rule or pay his taxes fled Norway and travelled to the newly founded community in Iceland, stopping in various Scandinavian outposts in the North Atlantic on the way. This time spent in Britain and Ireland is often envisaged as a pitstop to collect goods and supplies, including enslaved people from the local area, perhaps owing to the brief accounts of this journey given in the Icelandic histories *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók*, both probably written in the twelfth century (*Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* 1968; Whaley 2000, 172–73; Grønlie 2006, xii–xxiii; Etchingham et al. 2019, 268). However, scholars have worked to problematise the traditional narrative, and accounts from Norse sagas suggest a much longer period was spent in Britain or Ireland by some migrants, such as Auðr (or Unnr) in *djúpúðga*, whose story is recounted in *Laxdæla saga* (1934). In the saga, she and her father go first to Scotland while her brothers travel straight to Iceland. She stays there and marries a Hiberno-Norse man; when he is killed she takes the son she has with him to the Hebrides, where her son marries and has children. When her son is subsequently killed, she decides to join her brothers in Iceland with what is left of her family, pausing only to marry off one of her granddaughters in Orkney and another in the Faroe Islands (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 4–9). The historicity of the events described in *Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók* or any of the Norse sagas is unclear, and therefore the extent to which any of these texts, *Laxdæla saga* included, provide accurate information concerning the identities of the settlers is doubtful. *Íslendingabók* is the earliest and

² The term ‘diaspora’ to describe the movement of people outwards from Scandinavia and the various settlements they inhabited across Europe was coined by Lesley Abrams (2012) and provides a useful model for thinking about this cultural zone.

least detailed account, and it was probably written between 1122 and 1133, around a century and a half after the migration (Grønlie 2006, xii–xxiii). The later accounts become steadily more detailed, suggesting either a strong oral tradition or invention (or a mixture of the two). While these texts, the detailed *Landnámabók* in particular, are still used to provide context for the genetic information gained from DNA studies, none provides comprehensive or entirely reliable information about the settlement (Agnar Helgason et al. 2000a, 999; Agnar Helgason et al. 2000b, 697).

Before the genetic evidence is considered, it is necessary to establish the terminology that will be used here. Jesch has counselled against using terms that relate to a modern nationality when discussing pre-modern genetics, such as ‘Danish-like’ and ‘Norwegian-like’, and I have attempted to avoid doing so where possible (Jesch 2021, 226–27). It is usual to refer to individuals with DNA suggesting a geographic origin in Britain and Ireland, such as many of the women who settled Iceland, as ‘Gaelic’. ‘Gaelic’ is the term used to describe those people native to Britain and Ireland, particularly Ireland and Scotland. ‘Celtic’ has also been used in this way in the twentieth century — as in Sayer’s 1994 ‘Management of the Celtic Fact in *Landnámabók*’ — but ‘Gaelic’ is now more common. The modern samples that provide data for ‘Gaelic’ DNA are usually drawn from Ireland and Scotland (Sunna Ebenesersdóttir et al. 2018, 1030), and these are also areas that saw significant interaction with groups from Scandinavia (Etchingham et al. 2019, 1). However, just as Ireland, Scotland and the associated islands do not constitute a single group today, neither did they necessarily do so in the early medieval period. Gaelic was a shared language in Ireland and western Scotland, but this alone is not enough evidence to suggest the existence of a single ‘Gaelic’ group (Edmonds 2019, 5–7). It was difficult for ethnic groups to exist over large geographical areas in this period (Brather 2016, 29), so the likelihood is that Britain and Ireland were home to a number of culturally linked Gaelic ethnic groups rather than one single Gaelic group, but this is speculative. Our lack of knowledge surrounding the breakdown of ethnicity in the Gaelic cultural zone means that using the term ‘Gaelic’ to describe individuals can be misleading if not done with care. It is also not clear to what extent DNA from the areas providing the ‘Gaelic’ sample groups would have been different from the DNA of Brittonic individuals from further south in Britain. The recent study by Gretzinger et al. has found what the authors identify as western British and Irish (WBI) DNA in skeletons from the early Middle Ages across Britain, suggesting that the difference between

groups from 'Gaelic' areas and groups from other areas of Britain was not clear in this period (2022, 4). Individuals can therefore not be identified as 'Gaelic' purely by their DNA, and 'Gaelic' should not be considered a singular ethnicity.

'Scandinavian' should also not be considered an ethnic term, as there were various Scandinavian identities in this period and what form they took prior to the establishment of the Norwegian, Danish and Swedish kingdoms is unclear. The Scandinavians who came to Britain and Ireland did not call themselves 'Viking' as they are often called today, and differences between Scandinavian groups, particularly between people who would now be considered Norwegian and Danish, were noted by external observers during the Viking Age (Brink 2008, 5–7; Hofmann 2016, 94–95). The term 'Icelanders' does not appear in the written record until the twelfth century, when it is used by writers such as the anonymous author of the *First Grammatical Treatise*, who describes the inhabitants of Iceland as *oss íslendingum* 'us Icelanders' (Haugen 1950, 13). It is therefore possible that as an ethnic name, 'Icelanders' is an anachronistic term to use of the settlers of Iceland in the ninth century, but it is also not clear whether any other term was used by early inhabitants of the island. Given that we know so little about the identity of those who lived in the Scandinavian diaspora and subsequently settled Iceland, we must be careful of the nomenclature used. There is no perfect solution, but it seems prudent where possible to use terms that denote a geographic region rather than imply an ethnic group when describing the results of genetic data, as Jesch suggests (2021, 227). This approach is not always possible because there is a limited number of names that can be used to describe groups and there is an overlap between names which indicate geographic origin and names which suggest an ethnic affiliation. 'Icelanders' and 'Icelandic' are examples of this overlap, as they can describe people who come from Iceland and also those who have Icelandic identity. An alternative solution is to use linguistic names to indicate geographic areas or groups, as Colmán Etchingham et al. do in *Norse–Gaelic Contacts in a Viking World*, such as 'Gaelic' for Gaelic-speaking areas or groups and 'Norse' for Norse-speaking areas or groups (2019, 1). This approach is used very effectively by Etchingham et al., but is only possible where language can be accurately mapped onto areas and groups, and would not allow this article to distinguish between Iceland and other parts of the Norse-speaking world.

In this article, I will use 'Icelanders' or 'Icelandic' of the people living in Iceland between the twelfth century and the present day, but not those

living in Iceland before the twelfth century. This is an inelegant solution and may create an artificial delineation between pre- and post-twelfth-century identity. We do not know at what point ‘the people living in Iceland’ became ‘the Icelanders’ — the *First Grammatical Treatise* provides only a *terminus ante quem* — and we do not know how widely this name was used at any given time. Nevertheless, I will use ‘the population of Iceland’ and ‘the settlers of Iceland’ to describe those living in settlement-era Iceland as this seems to make the best use of the available evidence. Likewise, I will describe people as being ‘from Britain and Ireland’ rather than being British or Irish. Where ‘Scandinavian’ is used it is intended to mean ‘from Scandinavia’ rather than to indicate identity. However, when referring specifically to the findings of genetic studies I will continue to use the terminology used by the authors in order to preserve their original findings. ‘British Isles DNA’ is the terminology used by the majority of studies on this subject, and so although it is not widely accepted as a geographical term, it will be used here to describe the DNA group. Similarly, ‘Scandinavian DNA’ is widely used even though it is a broad term, and will therefore be reproduced here where it appears. As stated above, the more recent Gretzinger et al. has used the term ‘western British and Irish DNA’ (WBI) rather than ‘British Isles DNA’. A future point of collaboration between historians and geneticists could be the development of a standard terminology.

Systematic study of Icelandic genetic origins began in the late 1990s with the deCODE Genetics company, which has taken genetic data from relatively large samples of the modern Icelandic population and published papers on a variety of topics (Agnar Helgason et al. 2000a, 1000).³ These studies of DNA from the modern population involved sample groups of Icelandic men numbering in the hundreds and tested either their mtDNA (genetic material passed along the female line) or Y chromosomes (passed along the male line) to gather information about the origins of either their matrilineal or patrilineal ancestors. The results indicated that there may have been high contributions of British Isles mtDNA, while Y chromosomes showed a much lower British Isles contribution — estimated between 19.5% and 25.6% (Agnar Helgason et al. 2000a, 1012; Agnar Helgason et al. 2000b, 714). Further investigation suggested that the modern Icelandic population showed 62.5% British Isles mtDNA and 37.5% mtDNA from Scandinavia (Agnar Helgason et al. 2001, 735). These

³ There has been some concern raised around the ethics of genetic projects undertaken by companies such as deCODE (Gísli Pálsson and Rabinow, 2001).

genetic contributions were estimated through the study of haplotypes, sections of genetic material that are inherited in their entirety and can assign their bearers to geographically specific haplogroups. There have, of course, been questions raised as to the validity of the methodology, and, as genetic ancestry is a new and evolving field, methodological improvements are constantly in development (Samida and Feuchter 2016, 11; Lawson et al. 2012). Historians hoping to use the data generated through these methods have to accept the possibility that the results will later be found to have been flawed when new and more sophisticated methods are developed or defects in the old methodology are found. However, if we commit to continual engagement with the field and update our knowledge as new information becomes available then there is no reason for this to be any more problematic than new developments in our own fields. For the moment, it can be said that the studies that have been done on modern Icelandic DNA suggest a founding population with higher proportions of British Isles mtDNA and Scandinavian Y chromosomes.

These studies of modern DNA, however, are less satisfactory than studies of aDNA from the medieval populations themselves owing to the occurrence of genetic drift — the change in the genetic makeup of the population over time (Samida and Feuchter 2016, 11; Agnar Helgason et al. 2000b, 715). As our ability to extract and analyse genetic material has developed, it has become possible to turn to aDNA for further information about medieval populations. This involves taking samples from the remains of the people we wish to study and analysing their DNA. There are limitations to this method as well, in that samples can be contaminated and survival of human remains is patchy. Furthermore, not all groups buried their dead, and burial practices may reflect social differences within groups (Samida and Feuchter 2016, 11). Scandinavian funerary practices in the Viking Age varied and included cremation, which diminishes the likelihood of aDNA survival (Price 2008). Nevertheless, some genetic evidence has been sampled from individuals thought to be among the first settlers of Iceland. deCODE Genetics has been active in this area as well as in modern genetics, and the study by Agnar Helgason et al. of seventy-three individuals believed to have died in Iceland before 1000 CE indicated that these members of the early population of Iceland had approximately 64.7% British Isles mtDNA (2009, 1–5). This study appears to confirm their earlier findings from modern DNA studies. However, there have been other studies of aDNA from Iceland, including the more recent S. Sunna Ebenesersdóttir et al. published in 2018. This smaller study sampled twenty-five individuals thought to be from the settlement

population and analysed both their mtDNA and, where possible, Y chromosomes. It suggested a mean Scandinavian ancestry of 56.6% with no significant difference between male Scandinavian ancestry (57.9%) and female (52.1%) (Sunna Ebenesersdóttir et al. 2018, 1030). These results suggest a somewhat lower level of British Isles mtDNA than Agnar Helgason et al. (2009) found, and are at odds with the earlier studies by Agnar Helgason et al. (2000, 714) that found higher levels of Scandinavian Y chromosomes than Scandinavian mtDNA in the modern population. Sunna Ebenesersdóttir et al. noted a similar discrepancy between their results for aDNA and the modern DNA analysis they themselves carried out, which yielded a mean Scandinavian ancestry of 70.4%, and they suggested the possibility of selective reproduction that favoured Scandinavian males in the period since settlement (2018, 1030). Sunna Ebenesersdóttir et al. also completed isotope analysis for some of the individuals and were able to determine that three individuals did not grow up in Iceland, labelling them 'migrants'. Of these three, one had Scandinavian ancestry, one British Isles, and one had mixed Scandinavian and British Isles ancestry, demonstrating the possibility of genetic mixing before the settlement. Similarly, there were individuals designated as 'non-migrant' who showed dual genetic ancestry and other who showed single (Sunna Ebenesersdóttir et al. 2018, 1030). The problem with both of these studies is the small sample size, as it is impossible to determine how representative these samples may be of the population of Iceland in the settlement period. However, the combination of modern DNA and aDNA studies may help to overcome some of the problems of both methods, not least to problematise the conclusions drawn by modern DNA studies.

There have also been a number of studies that look more broadly at genetic evidence from across the North Atlantic. Most recently, a study by Ashot Margaryan et al. (2020) used both modern DNA and aDNA from Northern European sample groups numbering thousands. A number of different results were garnered from this large-scale study. The size of the samples allowed the authors to draw conclusions about the movement of populations in the Viking Age, suggesting that individuals with 'Swedish-like' DNA from the east of Scandinavia moved eastwards across Europe, while individuals with 'Norwegian-like' DNA moved west to Iceland, Greenland and Ireland, and individuals with 'Danish-like' DNA settled in England (Margaryan et al. 2020, 392). However, interesting conclusions were also drawn on a far smaller scale, including the discovery that individuals from the Viking Age whose burials were furnished in ways that suggested they were Scandinavian had no Scandinavian DNA (Margaryan

et al. 2020, 392). Margaryan et al. even suggest that two such individuals buried in Orkney may have had 'Pictish' DNA, and that other individuals show a mixture of 'Pictish' and Scandinavian DNA, although as this would be the first time 'Pictish' DNA has been identified this attribution needs further substantiation (2020, 392–93). These findings may not answer the question of large-scale identity, but there is clearly the potential for DNA and aDNA to shed some light on life in the Scandinavian diaspora in the Viking Age, and on the interaction between incoming Scandinavians and extant populations.

Studies focusing on gender discrepancies within population demographics in the wider diaspora have demonstrated similar results to those found in Iceland, but there are variations between settlements. Most of these studies have used DNA from the modern populations of Britain, Ireland, Shetland, Orkney, the Faroes and Iceland. An early study by Agnar Helgason et al. (2001) suggested that low levels of mtDNA from Scandinavia existed in areas of Britain known to have had Scandinavian communities — Skye (12.5%), the Western Isles (11.5%) and the north-west Scottish coast (13.5%) — and higher levels were found in Orkney (35.5%) and Iceland (37.5%). Notably, in Iceland, levels of British and Scandinavian mtDNA resembled those in Orkney in spite of Iceland's greater distance from Britain and differing political history. A study by Goodacre et al. looked at both mtDNA and Y chromones from modern populations across the North Atlantic (2005, 130). The results largely support the Agnar Helgason et al. findings concerning levels of Scandinavian mtDNA (Skye and the Western Isles grouped together 11%, the north west Scottish coast 14.5%, Orkney 30.5% and Iceland 34%) and further included samples from Shetland that showed 43% Scandinavian mtDNA. The study also introduced Y chromosome analysis that showed the percentages of Scandinavian Y chromosomes as Shetland 44.5%, Skye and the Western Isles grouped together 22.5%, the north-west Scottish coast 15%, Orkney 31% and Iceland 75% (Goodacre et al. 2005, 132). Significantly, the discrepancy of genetic origin between the sexes visible in results from Iceland and Orkney is not visible in results from Shetland, Skye and the Western Isles, or the north-west Scottish coast. This has led the authors of the study to speculate that more distant communities were treated as 'frontier' settlements and therefore suggest that families did not settle in these places. Rather, it is argued, the settlers from Scandinavia came alone and sought partners among the population of Britain and Ireland (Goodacre et al. 2005, 134). A study by Thomas D. Als et al. (2006) using modern DNA suggested that the Faroe Islands

had a similar demographic in the founding population. Female settlers were estimated to have contributed 17% Scandinavian mtDNA and 83% British Isles mtDNA, while male settlers contributed 87% Scandinavian Y chromosomal DNA and 13% British Isles Y chromosomal DNA (Als et al. 2006, 501). However, the authors caution that such pronounced discrepancy between sexes suggests that a high level of genetic drift has occurred since settlement, casting doubt on the results (Als et al. 2006, 501). Nevertheless, the authors argue that their results fit into the pattern proposed by Goodacre et al. of more distant settlements showing lower levels of Scandinavian mtDNA (Als et al. 2006, 503). While it is clear from these findings that there have been different population demographics in different areas of the diaspora, there is not yet enough evidence to support Goodacre's 'frontier' hypothesis. These three studies all use modern DNA samples, and so it is possible that genetic drift has obscured the Viking-Age demographics. Moreover, the social causes for such demographic differences are not illuminated by genetic evidence. The idea that places like Shetland were considered 'safe' and therefore were settled by Scandinavian women requires an acceptance that there was communication within Scandinavia that caused widespread consensus that women should travel there on a large enough scale to be visible in modern DNA, and the reverse for 'dangerous' places such as Iceland. This theory cannot be confirmed purely from genetic data, and there are limitations to the information that other sources can provide about the period. While we can observe the differences in gender demographics across the diaspora, we cannot yet explain them.

The inference most often made from the above data is that 'frontier' areas such as Iceland were settled by men from Scandinavia and the enslaved women they brought from Britain and Ireland, as well as by smaller numbers of women from Scandinavia and men from Britain and Ireland (Agnar Helgason et al. 2001, 735; Agnar Helgason et al. 2000a, 999; Sunna Ebenesersdóttir et al. 2018, 1030; Gísli Sigurðsson 2022, 165–66). This assumption is based partly on information gained from Norse texts, particularly *Landnámabók*, which only mentions non-Scandinavian settlers as inhabiting positions low in the social hierarchy (Agnar Helgason et al. 2001, 732; Gísli Sigurðsson 2022, 168).⁴ Some scholars have been confident in the likelihood that *Landnámabók* is

⁴ In contrast, some of the élite genealogies in *Landnámabók* contain figures with Gaelic names who are described as royal or aristocratic, but these figures do not appear to have been considered settlers (Etchingham et al. 2019, 319–25).

accurate about the role of people from Britain and Ireland in settling Iceland. If the information contained in *Landnámabók* concerning the stated origins of a small portion of the population is extrapolated to a population-wide figure, it would suggest a figure of 30–40% origin from Britain and Ireland, a figure similar to an average of the mtDNA and Y chromosome percentages discussed above (Gísli Sigurðsson 2022, 161, 164). However, this is not persuasive when considered critically, because the genetic evidence suggests an extreme discrepancy between sexes, while *Landnámabók* mentions a fairly large number of enslaved men from Britain and Ireland (Sayers 1994, 134–41). Furthermore, *Landnámabók* contains the migration stories of mostly those families whose descendants occupied the upper echelons of Icelandic society in the late twelfth century, and so is not representative of the settlement population as a whole (Sayers 1994, 130; Etchingham et al. 2019, 349). The phonological accuracy of the ‘Gaelic’ names contained in *Landnámabók* does suggest that they had been used in Iceland for a significant length of time, but the text itself does not provide us with historical evidence as to how these names entered the lexicon and who the ancestors of the medieval Icelanders were (Etchingham et al. 2019, 356–59). Indeed, Etchingham et al. have suggested that the specific historical details of ‘Gaelic’ lineage claimed by some Icelandic families in *Landnámabók* are largely, although not exclusively, fictitious, and were crafted in order to meet social demands in the thirteenth-century context in which it was written (2019, 324, 344). This suggestion is persuasive given the passage of time between settlement and the writing of *Landnámabók* and the political concerns of the Icelanders regarding their relationship with mainland Scandinavia (Etchingham et al. 2019, 344–56). In order to interpret the genetic data and determine what information it provides concerning the origin of those who settled Iceland, we must look away from *Landnámabók*.

The discovery of high British Isles mtDNA and Scandinavian Y chromosomes in the population of Iceland does appear to suggest on first reading that most of the women who settled were from Britain and Ireland and most of the men were from Scandinavia. However, mtDNA and Y chromosomes only give information about matrilineal and patrilineal heritage respectively, and therefore even analysing the DNA or aDNA of a man who provides both mtDNA and Y chromosomes will only give information about two of his four grandparents — his maternal grandmother and paternal grandfather. This means that, when it is stated by archaeogeneticists that the mtDNA shows a high level of ‘Gaelic’ ancestry, what they

have found is that a large proportion of the women who settled Iceland had British Isles maternal ancestry. It does not demonstrate that these women were ‘Gaelic’ or had two ‘Gaelic’ parents; it could signify just one grandparent, the maternal grandmother, with British Isles mtDNA. Likewise, the discovery of Scandinavian Y chromosomes indicates that a man has Scandinavian ancestry down a single paternal line but cannot tell us the origin of his other male ancestors. Taking the circumstances of Auðr in djúpúðga’s journey to Iceland as a hypothetical case, without making claims to its historicity, it is evident that the origins of those who settled Iceland are far from clear even in the light of genetic evidence. Auðr is a Scandinavian woman with Scandinavian parents, and therefore has Scandinavian mtDNA. She travels to Ireland and marries a man, Óláfr hinn hvíti, who is part of the Hiberno-Norse community and has a Scandinavian father. The son they have, Þorsteinn rauðr, therefore has Scandinavian mtDNA and Scandinavian Y chromosomes in spite of being born and brought up in Britain or Ireland. The maternal origin of Þorsteinn’s wife, Þuríðr, is unclear, but if she hypothetically has British Isles mtDNA then Auðr’s grandchildren will have British Isles mtDNA despite growing up in Scandinavian communities in Britain and Ireland and certainly not being enslaved or low-status (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 4–10). The grandchildren that Auðr brings with her to Iceland contribute their mtDNA and Y chromosomes to the population, and the Y chromosomes are Scandinavian even though those individuals may never have been to Scandinavia, while the mtDNA is British Isles despite being contributed by the sisters of those contributing Scandinavian Y chromosomes. It is clear that the complex circumstances of the Scandinavian diaspora mean that even without venturing into the murky waters of ethnicity and identity, genetic data only tells us a limited amount about the people who settled Iceland.

That is certainly not to say that genetic data is useless. It does tell us that at some point women with maternal ancestry linking them to Britain and Ireland had children with men who had paternal ancestry linking them to Scandinavia. It just does not tell us when this happened, and certainly not that it happened in Iceland immediately following the settlement. If texts such as *Laxdæla saga* are to be believed, and there are of course caveats to that, much of the genetic mixing that gave rise to a population with high British Isles mtDNA and Scandinavian Y chromosomes may have occurred in the Scandinavian communities in Britain and Ireland, not in Iceland, and it is perfectly possible that many of the women who brought this British Isles mtDNA to Iceland

considered themselves to share the same identity as the men bringing Scandinavian Y chromosomes. While the information gained from genetic studies does not tell us who the women who settled Iceland were, it does raise new questions about life in diasporic communities and the interactions between men and women in those communities. If these were the sites of genetic mixing, then the social structures behind the mixing bear further investigation. Slavery is still an option, of course, as there is plenty of written evidence attesting its existence, but marriage, perhaps for political purposes, concubinage and plural marriage must all also be considered (Raffield, Price and Collard 2017). The genetic data outlined above may not be able to shed a great deal of light on the social dynamics behind DNA mixing, but it does point us towards the Scandinavian communities in Britain and Ireland for further information. It is also possible that study of kin networks through aDNA may offer further illumination in the future.⁵ Already, the fine-grained results of existing aDNA studies can offer some interesting points for consideration. The fact that, of the three individuals designated 'migrant' by Sunna Ebenesersdóttir et al., one had Scandinavian DNA, one British Isles, and one mixed, suggests that there was a diversity among the settlers of Iceland (2018, 1030). Similarly, the discovery by Margaryan et al. (2020, 392–93) that two individuals buried in Orkney who had Scandinavian material culture associated with them did not have Scandinavian DNA suggests a complexity of experience within the Scandinavian diaspora. It may be in these smaller and more detailed discoveries that the true value of DNA and aDNA data lies for historians and archaeologists. Neither of these findings is based on large enough sample sizes to make any generalisations, but they do offer a valuable check on any impulse to make generalisations about the origin or identity of those living in Scandinavian communities in the North Atlantic.

Identity and the Icelandic Settlement

Alongside the information contained within *Landnámabók*, a second reason for the frequent assumption that the women who contributed British Isles DNA to the population of Iceland were enslaved is that it appears that there was very little 'Gaelic' influence on medieval Icelandic culture. Even Gísli Sigurðsson's enthusiastic defence of Gaelic influence in Iceland admits that the 'Gaelic' content of medieval Icelandic culture appears to have been very limited (2020, 161). Gísli Sigurðsson

⁵ Such as that done on a Viking-Age mass grave in Sweden (Buš et al. 2019).

explains this by suggesting that British Isles DNA was introduced by those of low status who then largely shed their ‘Gaelic’ identity when they joined the community in Iceland (2020, 161–66). This suggestion is not unreasonable given what we know about identity and ethnicity. They are functional and situational attributes, meaning that if a section of society found their identity disadvantageous, they might alter it (Brather 2016, 26). I would argue, though, that the premise itself is flawed because it assumes that a population with a significant genetic origin from Britain and Ireland would automatically exhibit a ‘Gaelic’ identity if not dissuaded from doing so. Indeed, Gísli Sigurðsson has stated that the DNA information means that ‘we now have the genetic evidence suggesting that around half the original population of Iceland was of Gaelic ethnic stock’ (2020, 169).⁶ However, ethnicity is not genetic, and therefore the identity of the people who settled Iceland is not discernible from their DNA. Furthermore, ‘Gaelic’ identity is sought in language and literary themes of Icelandic texts, which were written significantly after the settlement of Iceland. Neither DNA nor these later texts tell us about the ethnicity of earlier generations.

Before considering the types of evidence available concerning the ethnicity of the people who settled Iceland, it is first necessary to determine what ethnicity actually is. Most people, whether they are academics or not, are generally able to understand what ethnicity means and are readily able to distinguish ethnicity from other forms of group identity such as age, class or gender. However, the nuances of what exactly ethnicity is are far less clear. What are the necessary characteristics of an ethnicity? Is belonging to an ethnic group a fact of one’s birth? Is it a choice? Is it a physical or psychological attribute? Who decides the ethnicity of an individual? These questions have long been considered by scholars and their findings have advanced our understanding of modern and pre-modern ethnicity. Ethnicity is no longer seen as a biologically inherited trait (Halsall 2007, 35). Rather, ethnicity is known to be psychological, a group affiliation that can have everything or nothing to do with an individual’s place of origin (Geary 1983, 16; Pohl 1998, 21; Halsall 2007, 36). Beyond this, creating a definition for ethnicity that both is accurate and encompasses our full understanding of the term has proven challenging for scholars of the subject. Here, I will outline the existing scholarly understanding of ethnicity and establish what it means for our study of the settlement of Iceland. The following draws together a range of scholarship from beyond

⁶ I do note, however, that this is a translation of Gísli Sigurðsson’s work.

Norse studies, but it is nevertheless instructive as to the formation of ethnic identity in medieval Iceland.

A number of academic fields have been involved in efforts to define ethnicity — including sociology, anthropology, history and archaeology — and a certain amount of consensus about what ethnicity is has been reached. The most basic feature of ethnicity is that it is a type of identity.⁷ The sociologist Richard Jenkins defines identity as ‘the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their relations with other individuals and collectivities’. This definition draws out certain important aspects of identity, particularly that identity is relational and can apply to both individuals and groups (Jenkins 2014, 18). The relational aspect of identity is widely acknowledged by scholars of the field (Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005, 1–2; Pohl 2013, 1–2; Hall 2011, 3; Gowland and Thompson 2013, 15). Identity, therefore, is characterised by the differences and similarities that a group or individual sees between itself and others. An individual can identify themselves as a member of a group because they see similarities between themselves and the group, while a group can also identify itself as distinct by demonstrating differences between itself and other groups. It is worth noting that defining identity as relational does not mean that it is solely about differentiation; it can also include the drawing together of individuals and groups through recognition of similarities (Jenkins 2014, 21). The claims to similarity and difference that constitute identity do not have any essential truth, but rather are a product of social processes that require acts of identification (Pohl 2015, 22; Hall 2011, 3; Jenkins 2014, 46). If, for example, a group identifies itself by the language it speaks, that language is not an essential for the existence of the group but rather becomes symbolic of the group through its use by group members and its association with the group. It is with this understanding of identity that a definition of ethnicity will be sought.

Ethnicity is an identity, but it is more specifically a group or collective identity in which individuals identify and are identified with a wider group

⁷ Walter Pohl has suggested a distinction between ‘ethnicity’ and ‘ethnic identity’ where ‘ethnicity’ is the principle of differentiating between large groups and ‘ethnic identity’ is identity generated by the group (Pohl 2013, 2). This distinction has not been taken up widely in scholarship on the subject and in general the two terms are used interchangeably. While Pohl’s suggestion is instructive as to the many levels on which ethnicity exists, distinguishing ethnicity and ethnic identity in this way is somewhat problematic as it artificially separates the overarching social organisation provided by ethnicities from the individual’s relationship with the ethnic group. I will therefore not be distinguishing between the two terms here.

(Jenkins 2014, 103). As identity is based on relational similarities and differences, group identity can be said to be based on similarity within the group and difference from other groups (Jenkins 2014, 103). This assertion raises the question: similarity according to whom? Are group identities judged from the outside, with individuals placed in categories according to some apparently observable qualities, or are they only experienced? The answer is of course both. Groups are identified from both without and within, and both are integral to identity (Jenkins 2014, 48; Gowland and Thompson 2013, 15; Pohl 2013, 3). This has specific relevance to pre-modern ethnicity as the early studies of ethnicity, the classical ethnographies, take a very different view of ethnicity from modern scholarship on ethnogenesis and pre-modern ethnicity. Classical ethnographies ascribed ethnicity to groups with which the Greeks and Romans came into contact, allowing the Greeks and Romans to categorise the peoples outside their own groups for their own purposes with little interest in how the people concerned characterised themselves (Halsall 2007, 48–53; Pohl 2013, 15). Modern scholars of ethnogenesis study ethnicity with the aim of understanding how these non-Roman or post-Roman groups understood themselves as well as were understood by outsiders. This research has not only suggested that some of the groups identified in classical texts were apparently categorised incorrectly, but has also problematised the concept of defining ethnic groups solely on externally observable characteristics. It is worth stating that the recent impulse to assign ethnicity based on DNA is in a similar vein to classical ethnographies, defining groups on the basis of characteristics of which the group members were probably unaware. At first sight it seems doubtful that these two models, ethnicity as internal and ethnicity as external, can even be described as the same concept. However, both internal and external recognition of identity are necessary for group identity because a group needs to be acknowledged by outsiders as well as recognised by members in order to be ‘real’ in the sociological sense (Jenkins 2014, 106). Ethnicity can therefore be said to be a group identity that is based on internally and externally acknowledged similarities and differences.

The question remains as to what these differences and similarities are. After all, many types of group identity could be described in this way; there must be something more specific that allows us to understand the concept of ethnicity. Ethnicity is widely understood to relate to geographical territory and ancestral origin, but it is not as simple as linking a person to the place where they or their ancestors were born or anchoring a group within a territory (Halsall 2007, 37; Pohl 2018, 200). There is also an

understanding that there is shared culture or behaviour within an ethnic group, perhaps generated by physical proximity or kinship (Barth 1969, 11; Pohl 2013, 9; Smith 1989, 344). However, these are vague assertions and scholars of late antique ethnogenesis have established that almost any characteristic that can define an ethnic group, such as origin, territory, material culture, language or religion, can also be shared by a number of ethnic groups or have plural forms within an ethnic group (Halsall 2007, 37–38; Pohl and Reimitz 1998, 20–21; Pohl 2013, 7; Barth 1969, 14). This makes sense, as we know today that many different ethnic groups share languages or religions and still see that feature as characteristic of their ethnicity. For example, if there is a modern British ethnicity, it encompasses people who speak many languages, not only English, Welsh, Irish, Gaelic and Scots, but also languages from outside Britain. While English is probably the language most readily associated with British identity by both members and outsiders, it is not unique to the British people. English is spoken across the world as a first or additional language and is also associated with the identity of many groups for whom it is the main language, such as Australians or New Zealanders. These groups in turn have their own internal language diversity. At the other extreme, a language such as Welsh is associated with a group in which some of the members cannot actually speak the associated language. It is clearly not as simple as one language for every ethnicity. As Guy Halsall has suggested, ethnicity appears to be defined not by a strict catalogue of shared attributes but by a belief among the members that shared attributes exist and make them a distinct group (Halsall 2007, 38; Pohl and Reimitz 1998, 20; Geary 1983, 25). It is therefore not specific similarities among members and differences between groups that define ethnicity but rather the belief in the group.

Many definitions that articulate this description of ethnicity have been proposed by scholars of ethnogenesis, but there seems to be a disparity between the scholarly definition of ethnicity and the usual understanding of ethnicity. For example, Halsall has proposed that, 'The only common factor in defining ethnicity is belief: in the reality of your group and the difference of others' (2007, 38; see also Daim 1998, 75–76). Given the above discussion, it is clear that this definition is accurate. However, it does not seem to define ethnicity satisfactorily in a way that encompasses all of our understanding of ethnicity. There is no mention of shared territory, history, language or dress. How is it that we can have a detailed enough notion of ethnicity to use the term in both scholarly and everyday discourse when the closest we can come to a definition is that ethnicity is

a group identity constructed through belief in similarity and difference? Pohl's work on ethnogenesis has shed light on this. Pohl asserts (2013, 2):

Ethnic identity denotes a reciprocal relationship between a person and a group that is reproduced through verbal or symbolic statements and acts of identification and complemented by ascriptions of alterity. Ethnic identity is thus created by serial and routinised identifications according to the pattern or discourse of ethnicity current in the respective society.

In defining ethnic identity, Pohl emphasises the role of identifications. It is these identifications that give ethnic identity the characteristics we believe it to have, such as shared language, religion, territory. As these identifications are only made significant by their context, different identifications can be seen as definitive of ethnicity in different contexts (Pohl 2013, 3). This goes some way to explain why these characteristics appear definitive of ethnic identity despite the fact that none of them appear in all ethnic groups. Some scholars have sought to define ethnicity by the identifications members of ethnic groups make, such as Patrick Geary, who describes ethnicity as 'the long term, discontinuous use of certain labels that have come to be seen as "ethnic"' (2002, 155). Anthony Smith (1989, 344–45) has created a more exhaustive list of identifications, defining the characteristics of ethnic groups, which he calls *ethnies*, as

1. a common name for the unit of population included;
2. a set of myths of common origins and descent for that population;
3. some common historical memories of things experienced together;
4. a common 'historic territory' or 'homeland', or an association with one;
5. one or more elements of common culture: language, customs, or religion;
6. a sense of solidarity among most members of the community.

These are not true definitions of ethnicity, however, because ethnic identification is not the same as ethnicity. Ethnicity is a type of identity, while ethnic identification is a process (Jenkins 2011, 111). Identification produces identity, and so ethnic identification produces ethnicity (Jenkins 2001, 9). Exactly what these identifications are varies according to context, although there are certain things, such as the use of an ethnonym, that seem to evoke ethnicity particularly (Pohl 2013, 3). When a characteristic such as language is used to denote ethnicity, it is not because language is essential for ethnicity but because the members of an ethnic group or observers of an ethnic group feel that the group is distinguished by their language and act accordingly. They feel this because of their own context-driven belief about what is definitive of ethnic groups in general and what is distinct about this group in particular. Ethnicity itself is therefore simultaneously made up of nothing more than

the belief in the existence of the group and also the characteristics that are emphasised through identifications by group members. Understanding this difference between ethnicity and ethnic identification allows us to understand the gap between our ability to define ethnicity and our understanding of ethnicity. It is not necessary to try to close this gap by adding characteristics used for identification to the definition of ethnicity. Rather, ethnicity can be defined as a group identity based on a belief in similarities and differences that is produced through identifications. These identifications make use of characteristics that are considered to be significant to the group owing to the circumstances, contemporary and historic, that the group experiences.

Understanding ethnicity as a product of ethnic identification allows us to develop ways of studying pre-modern ethnicity, such as that of the medieval Icelanders. It is difficult to study a group's belief in unspecified similarities and differences, real or imagined, when there is only patchy material and textual evidence from which to reconstruct it. Therefore, ethnicity in the abstract is extremely difficult to study in pre-modern groups. If, however, we study the process of identification, then we can look for these identifications in order to understand pre-modern ethnicity. This is still far from straightforward, as understanding the significance of potential instances of identification is still hampered by limited source material, but it does give us a starting point to develop a methodology by which to study ethnicity. In order to study identifications, we must establish who makes the identification and how. Identification is fundamentally a matter of what people do and think (Jenkins 2014, 138). It is found in symbolic acts that create an appearance of similarity within the group even in the presence of actual diversity (Pohl 2013, 2; Jenkins 2014, 143, 157). When we make an ethnic identification concerning either ourselves or others, we do so on the basis of certain characteristics that are seen as symbolic of collective identity. It is these characteristics, expressed verbally or through actions, that are seen as symbolic of both similarity within the group and difference from other groups (Pohl 2013, 2). The symbolic power of these acts of identification allows the fact that there may be diversity within the group or similarity between groups to be overlooked (Jenkins 2014, 157). There are, as Pohl has proposed, three types of identification: an individual's own identification of themselves, a group's collective self-representation and the identification of a group by outsiders (2013, 3, 46). Jenkins calls this latter type of identification 'categorisation' rather than group identification when it occurs in isolation (2014, 103–09). In order for ethnicity to exist, all three types of identification are necessary.

As discussed above, identity must be recognised from without as well as within. Additionally, it is impossible to imagine a group identity without both individual and collective self-identification (Jenkins 2014, 102). Characteristics that have symbolic significance as identifiers of an ethnicity can be identified in all three ways. In order to study pre-modern ethnicity, we must find evidence of the process of identification in at least some of its forms in our sources.

Evidence of identification is invariably evidence of symbolic acts that imbue the group's real or imagined characteristics with significance (Pohl 2013, 46, 51). As ethnicity requires belief, it is not enough for characteristics simply to exist, but rather they must be demonstrated to be significant, and this is done through acts of identification made in relation to these characteristics. This is part of the reason that it has been so difficult for scholars to identify characteristics of identity. How can we know what was significant to the Viking-Age Norse or medieval Icelanders? The prevalence of external sources means that it is fairly easy to tell what was seen as characteristic of ethnicity by certain outsiders and therefore to study identifications by outsiders, but this alone is not enough to study ethnicity. The challenge is to find evidence of group identifications made by individuals or the collective. There is a general consensus about what types of characteristics could be used for these identifications, but there is relatively little agreement about how to identify which ones actually were used by any given group. Pohl lists 'actual or notional common origin, a shared memory of the past, and common territory, language, outward appearance and dress, customs, myths, norms, beliefs, codes of honour' as potential symbolic characteristics of ethnicity, concluding 'in short, culture' (2013, 3). Halsall suggests belief in common descent, language, religion and law as commonly held characteristics of identity (2007, 37). Smith's characteristics of *ethnies* are listed above and similarly emphasise origin, history, territory and culture (1989, 344–45). Scholars of ethnogenesis such as Halsall (2007) and Pohl (2013) are quick to point out, upon listing these characteristics, that not all ethnic groups use any or all of them to symbolise their identity. In order to know which characteristics were symbolic of the ethnicity of a particular group, we must find evidence of symbolic acts of identification that give these characteristics ethnic significance (Pohl 2013, 51). The way each group makes identifications is due to the social context that members experience (Pohl 2013, 40; Geary 1983, 25). Therefore any attempt to identify significant characteristics within a pre-modern group requires an understanding of the experiences of the group.

In the context of the Icelandic settlement, the texts produced by the Icelanders in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that describe these experiences are not contemporary with the group we are trying to study. Rather, Norse texts produced in this later period reflect their own contemporary circumstances. Text production began in Iceland following the conversion to Christianity.⁸ We know of a few sparse texts produced in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, such as the *First Grammatical Treatise* and *Íslendingabók*, before momentum gathered in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, from which the main body of sources from the Icelandic Commonwealth derive, including *Landnámabók*, the Icelandic laws known as *Grágás* and the earlier Norse sagas (Quinn 2000). Some of these texts only exist in full versions in much later manuscripts, and many are imagined to have had a long oral tradition prior to being recorded, further complicating the texts as witnesses of contemporary ethnic identification (Quinn 2000, 30–31). Even over this relatively short period, it is clear that the identifications made about Icelandic identity in the texts produced by the Icelanders changed in response to circumstance. The developing imposition of Norwegian control and the destabilisation of Iceland's internal political balance meant that identifications began to express a more hostile tone towards the Norwegian origins of the Icelanders around the turn of the thirteenth century (Sverrir Jakobsson 2021, 572–86). Where the twelfth-century *Íslendingabók* (1968, 4) describes the migration to Iceland as driven by a spirit of exploration and a desire for land, thirteenth-century sagas such as *Egils saga* (2003, 34) and *Laxdæla saga* (1934, 4) describe it as a flight from a tyrannical king who refused to honour the basic social contracts of Norse society, such as payment for the killing of family members. The earliest extant fragment of *Laxdæla saga*, AM 162 D2 fol., dates from around 1250, and the earliest fragment of *Egils saga*, known as the θ -fragment, also dates from the mid-thirteenth century (Madelung 1972, 238; Bjarni Einarsson 2003, iv). The identity expressed by the Icelanders who wrote down these sagas in the thirteenth century is predicated on an origin that paints them as the descendants of Norwegians who resisted tyrannical kingship. This depiction is clearly a response to contemporary circumstance and has little to tell us about whether the actual settlers

⁸ Some skaldic verse is considered to predate the advent of writing and to have been preserved in oral tradition, but verifying this and dating the poetry with any accuracy is extremely challenging (Townend 2003, 51–54). Our inability to contextualise oral poetry makes it extremely difficult to use as evidence of ethnic identification.

considered themselves to be ‘Gaelic’ (Norman 2017, 105–06). There are numerous other examples of medieval Icelandic texts that can provide insight into the identity of those who created them, but thirteenth-century texts do not provide evidence of either the ethnicity of the settlers or their social structure (Marlow 2021, 52). The minimal ‘Gaelic’ influence on the identity expressed in later Icelandic texts is therefore not a reason to rule out settlers from Britain and Ireland, or to relegate them to lower positions in society. We will not find proof of whether ninth-century settlers were ‘Gaelic’, or whether they were enslaved, in texts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In the absence of contemporary written sources, contemporary material culture might shed light on the identity of the people who settled Iceland, but deciphering ethnicity from material culture is extremely difficult. Texts make explicit statements that can suggest what was important to the writer, such as the opening sentence of the first chapter of *Íslendingabók: Ísland byggðisk fyrst ýr Norvegi* ‘Iceland was settled first from Norway’ (1968, 4). Material culture makes no such statements, and any attempt to use material culture to understand ethnicity requires several layers of interpretation. Brather (2016) has made clear the difficulty of this interpretation in his consideration of the use of genetic data in archaeological research. Material culture may be geographically specific, but this does not link it unproblematically with an ethnic group (Brather 2016, 27–28). Even when other sources, such as texts, name a group and place it geographically, it is still problematic to assume the group’s existence and link it to a material culture if the name is assigned by those not in the group at the time (Brather 2016, 28). If the presence of a discernible ethnic group can be found, then determining the way in which material culture represented or symbolised membership of the group requires further interpretation as objects can have significance on many different levels, including gender, social status and religion (Brather 2016, 27). Ethnicity is defined by what individuals and groups believe about themselves, and so to suggest that a style of brooch or type of sword represents a belief in membership of the group stretches the interpretative limits of archaeology. The groups of the Scandinavian diaspora are somewhat less problematic in this regard than earlier groups, in that we have texts from groups that saw extensive interaction with settlements of the Scandinavian diaspora, and a large body of material evidence. There are types of material culture understood to be Scandinavian that are found in places outside Scandinavia, denoting the presence of these settlements (Gísli Sigurðsson 2008). However,

settlement does not mean ethnicity, and similarities of material culture do not mean a single ethnic group. It is likely, as Clare Downham has argued (2012), that the variety of places that the diasporic Scandinavian groups settled and the diversity of communities with which they interacted and to some extent assimilated gave rise to any number of different 'Viking' identities from Russia to Greenland. Determining the nature of identity in the Scandinavian diaspora in the years leading up to the settlement of Iceland is, at best, a work in progress. Therefore, the identity of the people who settled Iceland, drawn from this diaspora, is equally unclear.

DNA has little role to play in the above discussion of ethnicity and its study. It is clear that, as Kerstin Hofmann has put it, DNA was 'irrelevant for the constitution of identities in the past' (2016, 92). It is not a characteristic that could have had ethnic significance because people in the medieval period did not know what type of DNA they had. However, this does not mean that that genetic evidence is entirely irrelevant for our understanding of the men and women who settled Iceland. Genetic mixing denotes the mixing of groups, although not how or when, and this provides a basis for further investigation. The questions raised by the DNA results from Iceland and those of the other North Atlantic populations tested relate not only to Iceland but also the wider diaspora. To return to my previous hypothetical example, we might consider the identity of Auðr's family. How did the ethnicity experienced and expressed by Auðr's grandchildren differ from her own? And how did the ethnicity of her great-grandchildren born in Iceland differ from their cousins' born in Orkney and the Faroes? To understand better the identity of those who settled Iceland we need to know more about where they came from, and DNA does offer limited information. They came from a group or groups that experienced the interaction of people from Scandinavia and people from Britain and Ireland. Historical sources suggest that this interaction took place in Britain and Ireland and across the North Atlantic. The genetic evidence indicates that the result of this interaction was a significant population of children born to women from Britain and Ireland and men from Scandinavia, but where and when these children were born is unknown. In order to know more than this we must first better understand the ethnicity of those living in Scandinavia, Britain, Ireland and the other North Atlantic islands prior to the settlement of Iceland, as it is from these communities that the settlement population was drawn, and that will be an ongoing challenge owing to the limitations of the evidence.

Conclusion

Were the women who settled Iceland ‘Gaelic’? We cannot currently say so in any sense that can be meaningful to our understanding of their identity. Some most probably hailed directly from Gaelic-speaking communities in Britain and Ireland. Others probably came directly from Scandinavia and brought their local or ethnic identities with them. Still more, however, would have come from the diasporic communities across the North Atlantic, and would have experienced and expressed identities specific to these communities, which are unlikely to have been uniform across the diaspora (Downham 2012, 7). Nor can we identify the men who settled as unproblematically ‘Scandinavian’. While many were certainly the descendants of Scandinavians, they may have lived their entire lives outside Scandinavia. Finding sources that will tell us about identity in the diaspora continues to be problematic. Later texts told a stylised and sanitised version of the settlement that reflected later political and cultural concerns, not the reality of ninth-century events. It is still challenging to assign ethnic significance to material culture, so using this type of evidence can also create misleading generalisations. Nevertheless, it may be possible to use the concept of ethnic identification to develop new methods of understanding identity in the diaspora in the future by identifying characteristics that were actively used to generate ethnicity and had contextual significance. For now, it must be accepted that the communities of the Scandinavian diaspora, including Iceland, included identities that were diverse and varied in ways that cannot currently be fully categorised.

The role genetic evidence plays in our understanding of the settlement of Iceland is smaller than might first appear. However, genetic studies do suggest new approaches and raise new questions about the backgrounds of the settlers. We know that those who travelled to Iceland brought with them British Isles maternal DNA and paternal DNA from Scandinavia in high proportions. We are encouraged by the genetic data to look further at the diasporic Scandinavian communities in Britain and Ireland to answer questions about the events surrounding the settlement of Iceland. When did the genetic admixture of British Isles mtDNA and Scandinavian Y chromosomes occur and under what circumstances? What was the social structure of diasporic Scandinavian communities in Britain, Ireland and beyond? To what extent did they vary and how far should we see them as separate groups? And how did men and women interact in these settings? Some of these questions may never be fully answered owing to the limitations of available evidence, but others offer exciting possibilities for future research. It is clear that we must not make

broad generalisations about identity on the basis of superficial readings of genetic evidence, but rather dig further into the societal structures suggested by that evidence.

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THE *STRENGLEIKAR*: SOME REFLECTIONS

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THE *STRENGLEIKAR*, NORWEGIAN TRANSLATIONS of French *lais*, are preserved in two medieval manuscripts: codex De la Gardie (DG) 4–7 fol., held in Uppsala University Library, and dated to *c.*1270; and AM 666 b 4to, which contains fragments of four leaves which had originally been part of DG 4–7, but which had been cut out from that manuscript.¹ Copies of some of the *Strengleikar* are also found in four Icelandic manuscripts, dating from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, but there is no strong evidence that DG 4–7 was ever in Iceland: ‘briefly, then, it [DG 4–7] was written in Norway in about 1270, after which there are no records of its whereabouts until the early seventeenth century, when it was also in Norway’.²

DG 4–7 contains eleven of the *lais* attributed to Marie de France, and a number of anonymous *lais*, some of them incomplete. In addition to the *Strengleikar*, the manuscript contains Norwegian prose translations of a French *chanson de geste*, *Elie de Saint-Gille*, translated as *Elis saga ok Rósamundu*, and two Latin texts, the poem *Pamphilus de amore*, and a now fragmentary dialogue between Hope and Fear, translated as *Hugrekki ok æðra*.³

The translators of the *Strengleikar* and of *Elis saga ok Rósamundu* each state that their work was commissioned by King Hákon Hákonarson, who reigned 1217–63. Other translations of French texts which name Hákon as their commissioner are found in later Icelandic manuscripts: *Tristrams saga*, based on the *Tristan* of Thomas of Britain (AM 543 4to, late seventeenth century); *Ívens saga*, adapted from Chrétien de Troyes’s *Yvain* (Holm Perg 6 4to, *c.*1400); and *Mottuls saga*, a version of the poem *Le*

¹ Marianne Kalinke (1979) has shown DG 4–7 not to preserve the original Norwegian translation, but to be a copy of an older manuscript.

² Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2014, 124), in a discussion of the question of whether the *Strengleikar* were known in Iceland during the medieval period.

³ The contents of DG 4–7 are discussed by Cook and Tveitane (CT) (1979, IX–XI); see also references there.

Mantel mautaillié (AM 179 fol., a seventeenth-century transcript of Holm Perg 6 4to, c.1400) (Eriksen and Johansson 2012, 9–11).

These translations may be seen as examples of an attempt by Hákon to introduce stories concerning the *matière de Bretagne* into Norwegian literary culture, as part of a wider project to Europeanise the Norwegian court. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir sums up a widely held view: ‘these translations would give his [Hákon’s] subjects an insight into the magnificent world of chivalry and show them the proper way for knights to behave in the courts of kings’ (2014, 119). Carolyne Larrington, however, has suggested that ‘*gaman* or *skemtan* (entertainment) is the motive for the [*Strengleikar*] translation, and there is no explicit suggestion [of] *kurteis* or other improving behaviours [being] imparted’ (2015, 81).

The *Strengleikar* are unique among the translations of French courtly literature commissioned by Hákon Hákonarson in that the translator(s) added brief critical comments after some of their translations of individual *lais*. The collection is preceded by a prologue in which ‘the voice of this translator or group of translators emerges clearly, presenting the work as a didactic text that supports the king in his project of national self-improvement’ (Goeres 2015, 149). In fact, the prologue (*Forræða*), which immediately precedes the translation of Marie’s own *Prologue*, is the first of three interpolations into the text made by the translator or translators, the second occurring in the epilogue to *Equitan*, and the third, I will suggest, in *Strandar strengleikr* ‘the *Lai* of the Beach’. These three interventions will be the main focus of this paper, in an attempt to discover something of the purpose and methodology of the translator(s).

Apart from the information given in the *Strengleikar*, that the collection was commissioned by King Hákon, there is no indication as to where and by whom the translation was made, although the involvement of the king suggests that the translator(s) were clerics either attached to the royal court in Bergen, or at a centre close by, possibly the powerful Cistercian house of Lyse, south of Bergen.

Mattias Tveitane held it to be unlikely that the translations were made in a monastery, arguing that the inclusion in the collection of the crudely vulgar *Leikara lioð* — in fact, later deleted from the manuscript — suggested a secular place of origin (CT, XXVI). His view was that the translations were made by clerics working at the king’s court, under the direction of one man. Cook and Tveitane, in their edition of the *Strengleikar*, comment that most texts in manuscript DG 4–7 were copied from West Norwegian exemplars, while ‘East Norwegian influence is clearly visible in . . . no. 4 (*Equitan*) and very likely in the first part of the *Forræða*’, a fact explained by Tveitane’s suggestion that these court clerics came from different dialect areas, which

points to their serving ‘at the royal court of King Hákon rather than in a West Norwegian monastery, such as Lyse’ (CT, XXVII).

The *Strengleikar*, then, have been regarded as the work either of a single individual, or of a group, or (Tveitane’s view) a group directed by one man.⁴ Recently, Ingvil Brügger Budal (2014b, 34), has suggested that

within the *lais* and the *Strengleikar*, there is what must be considered a core vocabulary. Examination reveals a remarkable one-to-one correspondence for this core vocabulary between the Old French and the Old Norse, and this stability is a clear indication that the translation originates from one individual and not several.

She goes on to suggest that ‘a liaison must have existed between the translator and King Hákon Hákonarson, and the king was probably aware of the translator’s linguistic skills’ (Budal 2014b, 36).

She has also suggested that translations from Old French to Old Norwegian could just as well have been made in England as in Norway, and that if the *lais* were translated in England, two of the difficulties acknowledged in earlier studies of the *Strengleikar* may be answered. The first concerns the absence of any French manuscript in Norway, an absence easily explained if the translations were made in England. The second concerns the difficulties faced by Norwegian translators, working in Norway without dictionaries or other reference works, and faced with the task of translating the often syntactically complex, and sometimes lexically technical language of the *lais*. A Norwegian living in England would have had opportunities to perfect his knowledge of French.

The questions whether the *Strengleikar* are the work of one individual or of a group of translators, and whether the translations might have been made in England, will be discussed below. It may be stated here, however, that the absence of French manuscripts in Norway is not in itself strong evidence of these translations having an English provenance, given the vulnerability of manuscripts to loss through time. The survival of Marie’s *lais* illustrates the point. Denis Piramus, who had had ‘ample experience of [English] court life’, who was a contemporary of Marie de France, and who knew the name at least of ‘Dame Marie’, attested that her poetry ‘is much appreciated by counts and barons and knights who love to have her writings read out again and again’ (Burgess and Busby 1986, 11). Despite her popularity, however, only five manuscripts of her works now exist, and of these, only two contain several *lais*, one each in England and France:

⁴ ‘The number and skills of the(se) translator(s) have been a matter of debate for Norse scholars since Keyser and Unger’s introduction to the first edition of the *Strengleikar* in 1850’ (Budal 2014b, 34).

British Library Harley 978 (third quarter, thirteenth century: twelve *lais*); and Bibliothèque Nationale, nouv. acq. Fr. 1104 (end of thirteenth or beginning of fourteenth century: ten *lais*). Of the other three manuscripts, one contains only three *lais*, while two contain one each.⁵ In light of these facts, it would perhaps be more remarkable to find a French manuscript in Norway than for none to exist.

Immediately after the opening of her *Prologue*, Marie de France gives expression to what was a familiar theme: that the full meaning of ancient texts is accessed only through careful study and glossing (Ewert 1958, 1, ll. 9–16):

Custume fu as anciëns,
Ceo tes[ti] moine Preciëns,
Es livres ke jadis feseient
Assez oscurement diseient
Pur ceus ki a venir esteient
E ki aprendre les deveient,
K'i peüssent gloser la lettre
E de lur sen le surplus mettre.

It was customary among the ancients, in the books which they wrote (Priscian testifies to this), to express themselves very obscurely so that those in later generations, who had to learn them, could provide a gloss for the text and put the finishing touches to their meaning (Burgess and Busby 1986, 41, ll. 9–16).

The *Strengleikar* translation, which omits the reference to Priscian, reads (CT, 6–7):

Þa var siðr hygginna ok hæverskra manna i fyRnskonne at þæir mællto fræðe sin sua sem segi með myrkom orðom ok diupom skilnengom. saker þæirra sem ukommer varo, at þæir skylldo lysa með liosom umræðom þat sem hinir fyrro hofðu mællt. ok rannzaka⁶ af sinu viti þat sem til skyringar horfðe ok retrtrar skilnengar. af þæim kænningom er philosophi forner spekingar hofðu gort.

It was the custom of wise and well-mannered men in olden days that they should set forth their learning, so to speak, in dark words and deep meanings for the sake of those who had not yet come, that these should explicate in lucid discourse that which their forebears had said and probe with their intelligence whatever pertained to the elucidation and correct understanding of the teachings which philosophers, sages of long ago, had made.

I have quoted these words at length because I believe that Cook and Tveitane misinterpret them: their translation, cited above, ignores the

⁵ 'Only *Guigemar*, *Lanval* and *Yonec* occur in more than two manuscripts' (Burgess and Busby 1986, 7–8).

⁶ *rannzaka* renders Marie's *gloser*.

punctus after the word *skilnengar*, which presumably marks a syntactic break; inserts a definite article before ‘elucidation’; and renders *af þæim kænningom* by ‘of the teachings’. I would instead suggest as a translation: ‘whatever pertained to elucidation and correct understanding, (comma) from the teachings which *philosophi* . . . had made’. In this reading, ‘elucidation and correct understanding’ are not of ‘the teachings’, but of an approach to textual understanding that is informed by those teachings.

During this period, the critical analysis of literary texts was taught in the *trivium*, as part of the grammar curriculum. Martianus Capella, in an allegorical work which remained of central importance for academic education right down to the twelfth century, makes the personification of grammar say that her responsibility used to be for *docte scribere legereque* ‘writing and reading learnedly’; now it includes *erudite intelligere probareque* ‘understanding and judging skilfully’ — ‘the same work as the philosophers and critics do’.⁷ Expanded to include the phrase *erudite intelligere probareque*, the formula encouraged ‘in fact a critical study of literature’ (Atkins 1961, 54), while, since the nineteenth century, and the publication of Kate Norgate’s *England under the Angevin Kings*, it has been recognised as having been a constant in grammar teaching during the period in which the *Strengleikar* translations were made (Norgate 2005, 465). It has been claimed that Alcuin of York, writing c.790–800, had reduced the study of grammar to a merely mechanistic exercise (Atkins 1961, 54), but the *Forræða* makes clear the intention on the part of the translator(s) to read their narratives using the teachings of ‘the philosophers and critics’.

The only other occurrence in *Strengleikar* of *rannzaka*, the word that translates Marie’s *gloser*, is in the opening of the *Forræða*, where the writer gives the reason for undertaking the task as the desire simultaneously to educate and entertain the reader by showing models of courtly behaviour (CT 4,5):

<A>T hæve þæirra er i fyrnskunni varo likaðe oss at forvitna ok rannzaka þui at þæir varo listugir i velom sinom glægsynir i skynsemdom. hygnir i raðagærðom vaskir i vapnom hæverskir i hirðsiðum milder i giofum ok <at> allz/konar drængscap. hinir frægiasto . . . þa syndizc oss at fræða verande ok viðrkomande þæim sogum er margfroðer menn gærðo . . . til ævenlægrar aminningar til skæmtanar.

It pleased us to inquire about and examine the deeds of those who lived in olden days, because they were skilled in their arts, discerning in their reason, clever in their counsels, valiant with weapons, well-mannered in the customs

⁷ Michael (2010, 27), quoting Martianus Capella, ‘Concerning the Marriage of Philology and Mercury’ (*De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*), Bk. III, sect. 230.

of the court, generous with gifts, and most famous for every kind of nobility . . . it occurred to us to teach men living and those to come these stories, which men of great learning made . . . as an everlasting reminder, as entertainment.

The phrase *forvitna ok rannzaka* ‘enquire and search’ anticipates *rannzaka af sinu viti*, the translation of Marie’s *gloser*. It closely renders the sense of *intelligere probareque* ‘understand and inspect’, indicating that the translation which follows will be informed by the teachings of the *philosophi*, and will include the glossing of texts. The *Strengleikar* translator(s) apparently intended their courtly audience to apply their critical skills to learn from, as well as be entertained by, these stories.⁸

Those seeking to learn about courtly behaviour from examples in literature are offered guidance in the closely contemporary *Speculum Regale*, or *King’s Mirror*.⁹ Like the *Strengleikar*, the *King’s Mirror* was produced by a cleric or clerics closely associated with the court of Hákon Hákonarson (Johansson and Kleivana 2018, 9):¹⁰

The dating of the earliest manuscripts of this latter text serves as a *terminus ante quem*. These are dated to the 1260s and 1270s . . . and are as such very close in time to the original composition of the work. The most widely accepted dating now is c.1240–1263.

For comparison, as noted above, the date of the *Strengleikar* manuscript, Uppsala De la Gardie 4–7, ‘according to common opinion, is c.1270’.

The Prologue to the *King’s Mirror* contains an invitation to anyone who wishes, like the writer of the *Strengleikar Forræða*, to enquire about (*forvitnast vm*) courtly conduct. It should be mentioned at the outset, however, that this Prologue is not found in any of the early manuscripts, but only in later, Icelandic copies. For this reason, there has been doubt about whether it was, in fact, part of the original text (Keyser 1848, 2):

En bókinni er gefit fagrt nafn, þviat hon heitir *Speculum regale*, eigi fyrir drambs sakir þess er ritaði, nema firir þá sök . . . at huerr er forvitnask vill vm góða siðu eða hævesku eða fõgr ok sannlig ordalõg. þá mun hann þar finna ok sjá í bókinni svá sem margar líkneskjur eða allskyns smiði í skirri skuggsjá.

The book has been given a handsome title: it is called *Speculum Regale*, not because of pride in him who wrote it, but for this reason . . . that if anyone

⁸ Goeres (2015, 163) notes that glossing by the translator(s) takes the reader into the narrative to share in the experience of ‘the romance protagonists’.

⁹ References in this paper to the *King’s Mirror* are by page number to Keyser 1848.

¹⁰ The composition of the *King’s Mirror* had earlier been dated to the reign of Sverrir (1177–1202), ‘but later scholarship sees the court of King Hákon Hákonarson . . . as a plausible environment’ (Johansson and Kleivana 2018, 9).

wishes to be informed as to proper conduct, courtesy, or comely and precise forms of speech, he will find and see these therein along with many illustrations and all manner of patterns, as in a bright mirror (Larson 1917, 74).

Proper courtly behaviour combines duty and responsibility. The duties, as well as some appropriate entertainments, are set out for king and retainer (Keyser 1848, 2–3):

En fyrir því heitir *konungs skuggsjá*, at þar er víst ritat um konunga siðu sem annarra manna, enda er hann hæstr at nafni, ok á hann at fylgja fegrstum siðum, ok hans hirð ok allir aðrir hans þjónustumenn, at allir þjóðir taki af þeim góð dæmi til ráðvendi ok góðrar meðferðar ok allra annarra hæveskra siða . . . En þóat þat nafn sé heldr á, at konungs skuggsjón sé kallat, þá er hon þó skipuð öllum at heimild svá sem almenningr, þvíat hverjum er kostur í at sjá, er vill, ok skygna . . .

And it is called *King's Mirror*, because in it one may read of the manners of kings as well as of other men. A king, moreover, holds the highest title and ought, with his court and all his servants, to observe the most proper customs, so that in them his subjects may see good examples of proper conduct, uprightness, and all other courtly virtues . . . Although the book is first and foremost a king's mirror, yet it is intended for everyone as a common possession; since whoever wishes is free to look into it and to seek information . . . (Larson 1917, 74–75).

The *King's Mirror* is written in the form of a dialogue in which a father gives instruction to his son. In the section that concerns the duties and responsibilities of a king, the father bases his teaching on *exempla* taken from Scripture. These *exempla* largely concern betrayal and rebellion, perhaps not surprising in a text associated with the court of Hákon Hákonarson, written shortly after the end of over a hundred years of civil war. The father explains that the ruler's first duty is to maintain peace in his kingdom, and he must therefore deal with all rebels, administering justice and / or mercy. The first two *exempla* he discusses concern the two archetypal rebellions against God: that of Lucifer, foremost among the angels, who is dealt with by justice; and that of Adam, the first human, who is given justice, then mercy.

Questions of justice and injustice, of proper and improper behaviour, of deceit and punishment, occur in several of the *Strengleikar*. Two pairs of juxtaposed *strengleikar*, and what these texts tell us about proper courtly values and behaviour, offer an opportunity to examine the purpose and technique of the translator. The first two narratives for discussion are Numbers 14 and 15, *Leikara lioð* 'the Player' and *Strandar strengleikr* 'the Beach'. Alone among the *Strengleikar*, these two lack an *atburð* or *aventure*, suggesting that they were deliberately placed together to form a complementary pair.

Leikara lioð (CT, 207–11)

Apart from the first few words, the text of *Leikara lioð* is missing, having been cut out of the manuscript at some point, presumably because this narrative was held to be too obscene or offensive to remain. Enough of the text remains, however, to show it to be a translation of the *fabliau*-like *Lai du Lecheor*, an English translation of which is helpfully included in CT, 210–11. The narrative may be summarised as follows:

Þá t hava sagt oss kornbretar ‘The Bretons have told us’ that at an annual festival where the participants told of the ‘deeds of love and noble chivalry’ they had accomplished that year, the custom was to compare those deeds and to compose a new *lai* based on the best of them. A group of ladies have been listening to the knights as they recount their deeds, ‘tourneying and jousting, adventures and love affairs and wooing their sweethearts’. The ladies then collectively and to their satisfaction decide that the *fons et origo* of all this courtly behaviour is the cunt, and they start to compose a new *lai* on this topic. They are joined in their deliberations by the other festival-goers (CT, 211):

All those who were at the festival gave up the *lais* which they were composing and turned their attention toward the ladies. They gave great praise to what they had done, and they joined with them in composing the *lai* when they heard the good subject matter.

At this point, the mock-seriousness of the *lai* has produced a further joke: the reader might think that, of all topics, celebration of this ‘good subject matter’ needs a personal touch, rather than a committee of poets.

Strandar strengleikr (CT, 201–05)

While the story of *Leikara lioð* involves a large gathering of people in which the focus of interest is the women, *Strandar strengleikr* is male-centred, and concerns a *mikit lið . . . ok fiolmennilegan her* ‘a large force and a numerous army’. This is the account of how *Viliamr konungr. er sotti ængland lét gera þenna strengleic* ‘King William, who invaded England, had this *lai* composed’.

The first action taken by King William shows him to be a good king, as defined by the father in the *King’s Mirror*. Faced with a rebellion in Normandy, he carries out his duty to protect the integrity of his realm, and *friðaðe vel allt ríki sitt. ok gaf þeim verðuga refsing er illir ok uruar menn varo* ‘restored peace to his whole kingdom and gave fitting punishment to those who were evil and unruly’. His intended subsequent return to England with his large fleet (*mikill skipa fiolde*) is delayed because of his reluctance

to ‘rush into uncertain weather’ (*rapa i uraðet veðr*), which might endanger the lives of his men. While waiting in Barfleur for a favourable wind, the king passes his time hunting with goshawks, and is content to remain in Normandy *sacar þeirrar skemtanar* ‘on account of this amusement’. The father in the *King’s Mirror* states that kingship was established to look after the needs of the whole realm and people rather than for sport and vain amusements (*heldr en til loklausu eða hégóm-ligrar skemtanar*), but a king must be allowed to seek diversion now and then, either with hawks, hounds, horses or weapons (ch. 45: Keyser 1848, 135; Larson 1917, 298). King William’s hunting with goshawks is an appropriate *skemtan*.

King William then sends messengers to Brittany, to the Red Lady, with a request that she compose a *lai* about his pleasant time in Barfleur, because she is an expert at composing *lais*, having always practised this form of entertainment (*þesskonar skemtan*). This *lai* will enable him always to remember his entertainment during this period (*þeirrar skemtanarsamlego seto*). The messengers soon return with the finished *lai*, and ‘there was no queen or duchess or earl’s lady or any other powerful lady who was not fond of this *lai*’. *Strandar strengleikr*, much concerned with types of *skemtan*, is itself called by many *hinn villdazta ok konunglegrar skemtanar strengleic* ‘the best *lai* and the one most worthy of entertaining a king’.

As just mentioned, ‘all those who were at the festival’ were involved as superfluous composers in producing a new *lai* in *Leikara lioð*. The resulting *lai* was a critical success, being ‘much loved and enjoyed’. The new *lai* composed by the Red Lady in *Strandar strengleikr* was so fine that all the women who were of the highest social status enjoyed it. There is an unspoken joke here, too, the basis for the joke again being the exaggerated preparations made for the composition of the new *lai*. In this case it is composed by a single individual, the Red Lady, a Breton whom the king commissions because she is well known as an expert poet. ‘Splendid gifts and royal munificence’ are sent to her, together with harpers who need to be ‘instructed’ by her. Having learned the new *lai*, the harpers return to the king ‘in great joy and pleasant merriment’ *þui at þeir höfðu vel ok skiott syst allt þat er þeim licaðe* ‘because they had well and swiftly accomplished everything’. The anti-climax following all these preparations is shown in the title of the new *lai*: the Red Lady taught the minstrels (*kenndi þeim*) *strandar strengleic* — that is to say, the narrative the reader already knows.

The reader might have expected that this male-centred *strengleikr* would have attracted a largely male, or at least a mixed group of admirers, but no males are mentioned. Instead, the approving audience is made up solely of

mature, socially powerful women, who enjoy a narrative about men acting cooperatively, responsibly performing their duty and, that done, enjoying *skemtan*. The narrative role of these women may be contrasted with that of the ladies of *Leikara liod*, who having watched individual young knights showing off their achievements in love and jousting, ironically suggest the reason for all this courtly behaviour.

Elsewhere, the *Strengleikar* suggest that ladies actually need as partners serious, socially responsible young men who have proved themselves in battle rather than just through tournaments and love affairs. The eponymous hero of the *lai* of *Gurun* is a king's nephew who seeks the love of a lady. She has a dwarf as adviser and protector who tells her that Gurun is not interested in jousting, 'and if he were willing to be a knight in battle, he would be famous for his chivalry. Better a valiant squire than a cowardly knight.'¹¹ Gurun learns the lesson, fights against an invading force of the king's enemies, and is twice wounded in battle. When recovered from his wounds he takes his lady away with him, to Cornwall, where they are given 'a warm reception' by the king. Gurun 'proved to be the best of knights, bold at arms, powerful and strong and valiant, so that in his time he had no equal'.

The need for a young man to prepare himself for military action by training with weapons is a message given at considerable length in the *King's Mirror*. The father advises the son about the uses of several sorts of weapons and equipment, whether for mounted warfare or fighting on foot, on land or on shipboard. The son is to 'let no day pass without practising at least once' (Larson 1917, 212), so that he may 'show courage and bravery in battle [and] fight with proper and effective blows, such as you have already learned' (Larson 1917, 214). The father describes this purposeful recreational training as *skemtan* (Keyser 1848, 84), whether on horseback (*til skemtanar*), or on foot in mock combat with a companion (*bessa skemtan*). The meaning of the term *skemtan* seems, therefore, to have been more complex than just as a synonym for *gaman*, and to have encompassed serious educational activities as well as amusements or entertainment.

Strandar strengleikr is unique among the *Strengleikar* in not being set in the Brittany of long ago (*i fyrnskonne*), but in the real world of eleventh-century France and England; it lacks an *atburð* or *aventure* and is about a king who historically had to deal with rebellion in Normandy. It therefore has no proper place among a collection of tales based on apparently ancient,

¹¹ And Desiré's lady 'demands that he balance his obligations to the court with his love for her' (Goeres 2015, 158).

and certainly fictional, Breton or French sources, and therefore cannot be seen as a true *strengleikr*. This may seem ironic, given that this is the only text in the collection which has *strengleikr* in its title.

In two other ways, also, *Strandar strengleikr* is unusual. First, the question of sources: no French original has been found for four of the narratives included in the collection. In the order in which they appear in the manuscript they are *Gurun*, *Strandar strengleikr*, *Ricar hinn gamli*, and the narrative given the title *Second Lai of Two Lovers* by Cook and Tveitane.

(a) *Gurun* has no known direct source, but the existence of *lais* with similar titles shows that a French source must have existed. Cook and Tveitane conclude that ‘the existing *lai* of *Gurun*’, found in the *Strengleikar* collection, ‘tells the story in its one true and original form’ (CT, 168).

b) *Ricar hinn gamli* certainly had a French source, but because there are a number of French *lais* with similar titles, postulating the likely existence of a direct French source is more problematic than for *Gurun*. Cook and Tveitane suggest that *Le rey richard*, which appears among the titles in the Shrewsbury list, ‘may be identified with its lost French source’ (CT, 253).

c) The title *Second Lai of Two Lovers* was given to the *lai* by Cook and Tveitane because of its being ‘strikingly similar in motif and tone’ to the *lai* entitled *Tveggia elscandi* in the *Strengleikar* collection (CT, 260). The basic plot of this *lai*, as they point out, is familiar from other narratives, and suggests a French source.

d) This leaves the question of *Strandar strengleikr*, which has neither a known French source nor any French text with a related motif.

Second, the status of *Strandar strengleikr* as a translation: it is one of a number of *strengleikar* which are closed by a statement in which the translator refers to his own task. He uses two verbs without further comment to describe this work: forms of *norræna* are found in the *Forræða*, *Equitan*, *Bisclaret* and *Jonet*, while forms of *snua* occur in the *Forræða* and *Equitan*.

The verb *rita* occurs twice. The first occurrence is at the end of *Milun*, in a sentence which takes up from the opening of the *Forræða* the theme of glossing ancient texts: *er nv þesse saga ritað sva sem ec gat giorst skyniat ok skilt* ‘and now this story is written as I best could search into and understand’. This marks a significant change from the French, which reads in English translation: ‘I who have set it down in writing have had much pleasure in relating it’. The French makes no mention of a process of glossing. *Rita* is here used in the passive voice, *er nv þesse saga ritað*, which Cook and Tveitane preserve in their translation: ‘and now this story is written’. The other occurrence of this verb is at the end of *Strandar*

strengleikr, where the verb is in the active: *guð . . . miskunni þeim er þetta ritaðe* ‘may God . . . have mercy on the one who wrote this’.

The De la Gardie 4–7 text of *Elis saga ok Rósamundu* ends with a similar prayer, which immediately follows words that distinguish between writing (*rita*) and translating (*snuá*) (Kölbing 1881, 116):

Huessu hann (viz, Elis) kom hæim til Frannz með Rosamundam, þa er æigi a bok þessi skrifat. en Roðbert aboti sneri, oc Hakon konungr, son Hakons konungs, lét snua þessi norrœnu bok yðr til skemtanar. Nu gefi guð þeim, er þessa bok sneri ok þessa ritaði, þessa hæims gratiam, en i sinu riki sanctorum gloriam. AMEN

How he (Elis) came home to France with Rosamunda is not written in this book. But Abbot Robert translated it, and King Hakon, son of King Hakon, had this Norse book translated for your entertainment. Now may God give him who translated this book, and wrote it, grace in this world, and in his kingdom the glory of the saints. AMEN

The individual who produced the text of *Strandar strengleikr* considered it to have been the product of a process of writing, rather than translating, and makes what may be thought to be the disingenuous comment: ‘I have read no more in French about this *lai*’. The view put forward here is that no one else ever will: the peculiarities of *Strandar strengleikr*, compared with the other texts in the collection, lead to the conclusion that there never was a French original of this *strengleikr*, and that it was composed by the ‘translator’. In which case, the question is: why was *Strandar strengleikr* included within the collection?

Appended at the end of several *strengleikar* are comments made by the translator on how these texts had been received by their original Breton audience. But only after *Leikara lioð* and *Strandar strengleikr* does he comment on their reception among his Norwegian contemporaries. Their reaction to *Leikara lioð* is at best lukewarm — ‘it is still not hated’ — which may reveal thirteenth-century clerical attitudes rather than the possibly very different response of the sophisticated supposed courtly audience in ancient Brittany.¹²

By contrast, *Strandar strengleikr* is fit to be enjoyed in the highest social circles: *oc enn um vara daga ero þeir margir er þenna kalla hinn villdazta. ok konunglegrar skemtanar strengleic* ‘and still in our time there are many who call this the best *lai*’. *Leikara lioð* and *Strandar strengleikr* are a complementary pair of narratives, and together are a guide to the reader

¹² ‘Could any response other than laughter be expected if the story of *Leikara lioð* were narrated at a reception?’ (Budal 2014a, 144).

to follow the example of the first audience, scrutinising the content of each *lai* according to the moral and social values of thirteenth-century Norway.

The second pair of juxtaposed *strengleikar* to be discussed here, *Eskia* and *Equitan*, shows the translator's concern to do just this: to read apparently ancient fictional texts according to thirteenth-century values. Irregular sexual relationships are central to both narratives. The eponymous protagonist of *Eskia* is a guiltless young woman in a relationship with a naïve young man, while that of *Equitan* is a sinful older man in an adulterous relationship with a married woman. It is possible that medieval readers in fact perceived a thematic connection between these two *lais*: in MS Harley 978 (third quarter of the thirteenth century), *Le Fresne* 'the Ash tree' comes directly after *Equitan*; this ordering is reversed in De La Gardie 4–7 (c.1270).

In both stories, an unmarried man of high social status is engaged in an irregular sexual relationship with a woman of lower rank. *Equitan*'s mistress visits him secretly at night; *Eskia* lives openly with *Gurun* as his concubine. *Equitan* cannot marry his mistress, since she is already married; *Gurun* will not marry *Eskia*, since she apparently has no social status or pedigree, having been discovered as an abandoned baby. *Gurun*'s problem is apparently solved when he passively agrees to what his advisers suggest: he simply asks them to find an appropriate wife for him. *Equitan* and his mistress pursue an active course: they would be free to marry if the woman's husband were to die, so they plot to murder him by putting him in a tub of boiling water — of course, the tub in which *Equitan* himself will die.

Eskia (CT, 42–63)

In its dénouement, *Marie*'s story *Le Fresne* must have presented the clerical translator with a problem. In very brief summary, the *lai* tells how a rich lady gives birth to twin girls, and fearing that this means she will be suspected of having had sex with two men, she has one twin, *Eskia*, abandoned, and brings up the other at home in her castle. *Eskia* is left outside an abbey, the only clues as to her identity being an extremely expensive ring of pure gold, and a rich coverlet brought from Byzantium. *Eskia* is fostered by the abbess as if she were her own daughter.

Years later *Gurun*, 'a powerful lord and strong knight', visits the abbey, falls in love with *Eskia*, and takes her to live with him as his concubine. He is happy, until his advisers tell him he must put away the concubine and marry a woman of his own social rank, with whom he may have legitimate offspring. He is then betrothed to the daughter of the neighbouring lord, who is in fact *Eskia*'s twin, and they are married by the Archbishop of *Dol*, in a splendid ceremony. That evening the bridal bed is prepared by *Eskia*,

who spreads on it her rich coverlet. Seeing this, the bride's mother guesses Eskia's identity and informs the archbishop, who divorces the couple the following morning. Eskia and her lover are then married.

The difficulty for the translator lies in the marriage and almost immediate divorce of Eskia's sister, to allow Eskia and Gurun to marry promptly. This seems perfectly acceptable in the fictional world of Brittany *i fyrnskonne*, and the archbishop's actions are not questioned in Marie's *lai*. But the medieval church could not sanction such casual treatment of marriage: 'those whom God hath joined together, let not man put asunder' (Matthew 19:6).

The plot of *Eskia* involves the loss and subsequent rediscovery of the heroine's identity, and with it her social position. It might be expected that the translator would give the reader strong hints throughout as to the reality of her social rank, but the strategy he adopts is more complex. He emphasises her possession of all the inner qualities of true courtliness, most notably when her emotions are put under the severest pressure, when she has to prepare the bedchamber for the bridal couple. At this point Marie's heroine simply serves 'willingly and properly', but Eskia shows the virtues of courtliness, serving with humility, courtesy and good will (*jamnan glöð ok bliðlát þionaði . . . sua kurtæislega ok myklo goðlyndi ok litillæti*). The father in the *King's Mirror* gives his son a similar list: 'It is courtesy to be friendly, humble, and ready to serve' (*En þat er hæveska at vera bliðr ok léttlát ok þjónostufullr*, Keyser 1848, 91; Larson 1917, 227).

While the world can respect her inner qualities, her social position is still that of a low-status concubine, a fact that is far more emphasised in the *Strengleikar* translation than in Marie's *lai*. Marie uses the word *suinant* 'concubine' just once, at the point where she is reporting the words of Gurun's advisers (Ewert 1958, 43; *Le Fresne* ll. 316–24):

Soventefeiz a lui parlerent
 Qu'une gentil femme espusast . . .
 Trop i avreient grant damage,
 Si il laissast pur sa suinant
 Que d'espuse n'eüst enfant.

They often spoke to him, [saying] that he should take a noble wife . . . they would have a great loss if he were to forsake having a child by a wife on account of his concubine.¹³

In the *Strengleikar* translation the advisers' concern for their own *grant damage* 'great loss' is replaced by grief, and concern for Gurun's honour:

¹³ This is in fact the only occurrence of this word in the whole of the Harley MS *lais*.

En þat verðr þæim harmr ok honom skomm ok skaðe. ef hann fyrer lætr saker frillu sinnar at æiga rettan arva. afloglegri spuso ‘But it will be their grief and his disgrace and detriment if he, for the sake of his concubine, neglects to have a proper heir by a legitimate spouse’.

Marie’s one reference to Le Fresne as *suinant* compares with four references to Eskia as *frilla*. The final occurrence of the term is at the point where Eskia is placed as one of the bedroom servants on the wedding night, *frilla* here translating *dameisele* ‘young woman, damsel’. The other occurrences are when the bride’s mother, still unaware that Le Fresne / Eskia is her daughter, first sees the young woman, and fears for the bride’s happiness. The term Marie uses for Le Fresne here is *la meschine* ‘the girl’; the *Strengleikar* text reads *frilla hans*. The word *meschine* is neutral as far as social status is concerned, and Marie has the mother planning to be rid of Le Fresne by suggesting that the girl be married off *a un produme* ‘to a worthy man’. By contrast, a *frilla* has low social status, and the mother in *Eskia* plans to advise her husband *at . . . gifta hana nokkorom manni sem fyrst ma hann ok með þæssom hætti . . . koma frillu hans sua i fiarska* ‘to marry her to some man as soon as he can, and in this way . . . to remove his [Gurun’s] concubine far away’.

But by the time that the original audience of *Strengleikar* heard these references, they would already have felt that Eskia was a wife, and not a concubine. From the moment when Gurun takes her away from the abbey to live with him, their new relationship is placed on a different footing by the translator.

In the French text, Gurun asks Le Fresne to accept his advice and come away with him, promising her always his loyalty and financial security: ‘*Certes jamés ne vus faudrai, / Richement vus cunseilleraï*’ . . . *Ensemble od lui en est alee* (Ewert 1958, 42; ll. 287–91) ‘“Certainly, I shall never fail you and will richly provide for you” . . . she went away with him’.

In the Norwegian text, Gurun makes radically different promises: *vittu at visu at alldregi scal ec bila þer. Ec scal hallda þec ok varðvæita. ok virða rikulega ok soemelega* ‘You can be sure that I will never fail you. I shall keep you and take care of you and respect you grandly and fittingly’. (This is Cook and Tveitane’s translation; a more literal translation of *Ec scal hallda þec ok varðvæita* would be: ‘I shall hold you and guard you’.)

In place of Marie’s third-person reporting at this point how Le Fresne had been found as a baby, and how the abbess had raised her as her niece, the Norwegian translator gives the abbess a speech not found in the French. This speech contains a near echo of Gurun’s words. Since the baby Eskia had been found, she says, *Nu hævi ec siðan varðvæitt ok virðt ok soemt*

þec ‘Since then I have raised you and respected you and honoured you’ (Cook and Tveitane’s translation: a more literal translation of *varðvæitt* would be: ‘guarded’.)

Eskia’s removal from abbey to castle takes her out of the care and guardianship of her fosterer, the abbess, and into that of Gurun. She does what all brides did: willingly leave the care and protection of their parents’ house to enter that of their husband; in the marriage service the bride enters the church on her father’s arm and leaves it on her husband’s. And the moment after the bridegroom and bride have made their vows is when the bride is formally moved into her husband’s care.

The following vows are from the Sarum liturgy, quoted because it formed the basis for the Nidaros usage (Renwick 2020, 310):

Post hec dicat Sacerdos ad virum cunctis audientibus in lingua materna sic. ‘N. vis habere hanc mulierem in sponsam, & eam diligere, honorare, tenere, & custodire sanam & infirmam, sicut sponsus debet sponsam, & omnes alias propter eam dimittere, & illi soli adhærere quamdiu vita vtriusque vestrum durauerit?’ Respondeat vir. ‘Volo’.

[Repeated for the woman.] Respondeat mulier. ‘Volo’. Deinde detur femina a patre suo, vel ab amico.

Afterwards, the priest shall say to the man in the hearing of everyone, in the mother tongue: ‘N., do you wish to have this woman as a wife, and to esteem her, to honour, hold, and protect her, healthy and sick, just as a husband ought to do for a wife, and to forsake all other women, and to cling to her so long as your life and hers will endure?’ The man shall respond: ‘I so wish’.

[Repeated for the woman.] The woman shall respond: ‘I so wish’. And then the woman is to be given away by her father or by his friend.

Eam diligere, honorare, tenere, & custodire ‘esteem, honour, hold, guard’; Gurun promises: *Ec skal hallda þec ok varðvæita. ok virða* ‘hold, guard, honour’. The liturgy stipulated that the priest should list these vows *in lingua materna* ‘in the mother tongue’, so the Norwegian audience of *Strengleikar* would have been very familiar with Gurun’s words or their close synonyms, and would have known therefore that he had morally committed himself to marriage with Eskia. Had his marriage with Eskia’s twin been consummated, he would have been committing bigamy in the eyes of God.

All that is needed for the translator to have solved the moral problem in the story of Eskia and Gurun is that the Church recognise that its requirements for celebrating a wedding have been satisfied. Marie’s *lai* tells that when the Archbishop learns of the discovery of Le Fresne’s identity, he ‘recommended that things be left as they were that night; the next day he would unjoin those he had married’. The *Strengleikar* text reads, *En ærkibyscop sagði at honom samði at skilia þau um morgonenn. ok siðan*

pusa honom unasto sina ‘the Archbishop said that it was proper for him to divorce them on the morrow and then marry his sweetheart to him’. Proper procedures are followed, and the Church is satisfied.

Equitan (CT 65–83)

The translator added an epilogue of explicit moralising to his version of *Equitan*:

He who put this book into Norwegian advises all who hear and have heard this story that they never covet that which others own by right, whether property or partner in marriage, and that they never envy another man’s lot or luck . . . For God deals out his loans as he wishes; he gives to those to whom he wants to give, and he takes away from those who use them badly (*bui at guð skipar lanom sinom sem hanum synizc. Gæfr þæim er hann vill gævet hava. fra tekr þæim er illa nytta.*)

Those things which we consider our gifts, whether material or spiritual, are in fact held on loan. The translator’s first statement of this truth comes in the *Forræða*, at the very start of his translation of Marie’s French *Prologue*, which reads (Ewert 1958, 1; ll. 1–4):

Ki Deus a dunè esciènce
E de parler bon eloquence
Ne s’en deit taisir ne celer,
Ainz se deit volunters mustrer.

Anyone who has received from God the gift of knowledge and true eloquence has a duty not to remain silent [or hide it]: rather should one be happy to reveal such talents (Burgess and Busby 1986, 41).

For Marie’s words *a dunè* ‘has given’ the Norwegian translation has *hævir let* ‘has lent’ (CT, 6 and 7):

<O>llum þæim er guð hævir let vizsku ok kunnasto ok snilld at birta þa samer æigi at fela ne læyna lan guðs i ser. hælldr feller þæim at syna oðrom með goð/vilia þat sem guði likaðe þæim at lia.

It is not fitting that all those to whom God has lent (CT ‘given’)¹⁴ wisdom and knowledge and the eloquence to make these known should hide and conceal God’s loan within themselves; rather, it is proper that they reveal to others with good will that which it pleased God to lend them.

The change from ‘gift’ to ‘loan’ is deliberate. In all, the *Strengleikar* translation makes three mentions here of a loan: *Ollum þæim er guð hævir let . . . ; lan guðs i ser; . . . fellr þæim at syna oðrom með goðvilia*

¹⁴ The translation ‘given’ in CT, 7 is presumably influenced by the French.

þat sem guði líkaðe þeim at lía. The fact that we have our abilities on loan from God, and not as gifts, makes it all the more urgent that we use those abilities, since the day will come when we have to render account of how we have used those loans. A few lines earlier in the *Forræða* the translator gives a moralising message in which he reminds the reader to ‘prepare and improve himself for the kingdom of God by means of fitting behaviour and good deeds and a holy life’s end’.

The commonplace that life is a loan and not a gift is found in the dialogue between Courage and Fear (*Hugrekki ok æðra*), now only a fragment of the text originally included in the main *Strengleikar* manuscript, De la Gardie 4–7. Courage’s matter-of-fact responses to Fear’s repeated warning, *Deiða skaltv!* ‘You must die!’ include (Unger 1877, 447):

Hvgrecki svarar: Þat erv allra landa log, at lan se golldit; með lani er mer þersi heimr en eigi með gíof.

Courage replies: ‘It is a universal law that a loan must be repaid; this world is as a loan for me, and not a gift.’

The need for all Christians to use their loans from God wisely recurs as a theme in an undated letter sent from the court of Hákon Hákonarson.¹⁵

H[akon] konongr son H[akonar] konongs sendir herra A[skatle] biskuþe í Stavangre. N. ærkidíacne oc ollum guðs vinum oc sinum. þeim er þetta bref sia eða hoeyra. Q. G. oc sina. Margfálleg scylda. kræfr bæðe ríka oc oríka þa sem við crístni hava tekit. at soema guð oc hans hælgu kirkíu með allum þeim lutum er guð hevir þeim lett. En allra hællzt ber þeim allum er guð hevir með ríki oc með hofðingia namne gofgat. at styðia hana oc styrkia til allra rettra luta.

King H[ákon] son of King H[ákon] sends to Askell, lord bishop in Stavanger, to the archdeacon N, and . . . to all God’s friends and his own who see or read this letter, God’s greeting and his own. Many duties are demanded of all those who have received Christianity, both the powerful and those lacking power, to venerate God and his holy Church with all those things that God has lent them. And it particularly behoves all those whom God has honoured with power and with the title of nobility to support and strengthen her to every just thing.

This letter places additional obligations on those to whom God has lent power and social status. In the epilogue to *Equitan*, the translator spells out laboriously that the innocent seneschal, the duped husband of Equitan’s mistress, had to fulfil his lord’s civic duties as well as his own (CT, 66):

¹⁵ *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, https://www.dokpro.uio.no/cgi-bin/middelalder/diplom_vise_tekst.cgi?b=51&s=e&str=: the letter is undated, but assigned to the period 1226–54.

Bessom hafðe herra hans fengit gaumgæfð ok gæzlo allz ríkis sins. með rettyndom ok ræfsingom . . . for hann [Equitan] jafnan at skemtan sinni. með hundum ok haukom at væiða dyr ok fugla ok riddara hans ok hirðsvæinar . . .

His lord had given to this man the care and keeping of all his realm, with authority to carry out justice and punishment . . . [Equitan] was always going out for his pleasure with hounds and hawks to hunt game and fowl together with his knights and courtiers . . .

To the translator, Equitan is guilty of a double sin. First, as a *rikr herra ok agætr hofðingi*, he is one of those identified in Hákon Hákonarson's letter, *er guð hevir með ríki oc með hofðingia namne gofgat*, and who therefore has extra obligations. His case provides a counterexample to that of King William in *Strandar strengleikr*, who administers justice and punishment of the rebels, and only later enjoys the permitted *skemtan* of hawking. The Norwegian translator clearly felt that Equitan, however, does not deserve the title of king. Whereas Marie's *lai* regularly refers to him as 'king', he is only given this title once in the *Strengleikar*, and that, significantly, in Latin.

Equitan's other sin is lechery. When he is first introduced into the narrative, we are told that *allan hug ohofsamlega lagðe hann a aster ok kuenna þokka*, which Cook and Tveitane translate as 'he immoderately gave all his attention to love and feminine charms'. Cook and Tveitane's translation of *kuenna þokka* is perhaps influenced by the concept of 'courtly love', although a more literal translation would be 'mistresses, paramours'.¹⁶ If the phrase is understood in this way, then Equitan's adulterous relationship with the wife of his seneschal becomes the final episode in a life given over to lechery. This relationship means that she 'broke her agreement with God and with [her husband]'.¹⁷

The translator concludes his moral epilogue with a damning verdict on Equitan's behaviour. This comes in Latin, the language of church and law, and contains the one description of Equitan as 'king': *Equitanus rex fuit sed silenda est dignitas ubi nulla bonitas sed finis iniquitas*. 'Equitan has been a king; but dignity demands silence where there is no good, and the end is evil.' The reader might have expected *Equitanus rex erat* 'was a king', which would have described a life over and done with, in the past. But the translator's deliberate choice of the perfect tense form *fuit* 'has been' a king marks a past state still with present relevance. Equitan has been taken out of the Breton world of long ago for his actions to be examined in the real world, according to thirteenth-century values. The use

¹⁶ See Cleasby-Vigfusson, s.v. *þokka-kona*.

¹⁷ *Equitan* is viewed as a strongly moralising *strengleikr* by Tetrel 2003, and Cook 2012, 61–68.

of the perfect tense prompts the question: 'If he has been a king, what is he now?' His life and deeds show him to have rejected the responsibilities of his position, and therefore not to have been a king in any real sense of that word; there can be no words for what he is now.

The early Middle English text *Hali Meidhad* 'Holy Virginity' was written in the West Midlands, probably in Herefordshire, c.1200. Although probably written specifically for a group of women in a religious house, it provides an example of the clerical attitude towards both those who at the end of their lives can give a good account of how they have used their positions and responsibilities, whether as virgins, married women, widows or those who have lived in 'fleshy filth' (*fleschliche fulthen*) (Blake 1972, 46, 47). Wedlock yields fruit in Heaven, thirty-fold; maidenhood yields hundred-fold, and widowhood sixty-fold. Those who live without restraint, however 'fall down headlong into hell':

Of theos nis nawt to speokene for ha beoth iscrippet ut of lives writ in hevene
there is nothing to say about these, for they are written out of the book of life
in heaven.¹⁸

The translator appends a curious brief autobiographical note to *Bisclaret*, the story of the unwilling werewolf. This tale follows directly after *Equitan*, and is another story of deceit and adultery, but in this case the eponymous protagonist is the duped husband. The *Strengleikar* text concludes (CT, 98–99):

many strange things happened in olden times (*i fyrnskonne*) that no one hears mentioned now (*þat er ængi hæyrir nu gætet*). But he who translated this book into Norse saw in his childhood a wealthy farmer who changed his shape (*hamskiftisk*). At times he was a man, at other times in wolf's shape, and he told everything that wolves did in the meantime. But there is no more to be said about him (*er fra honom ækki længra sægiande*).

This brief coda has the same function as the use of the perfect tense, *fruit*, in the Latin words that close *Equitan*. In each case the narrative of the *strengleikr* is brought out of the past to be examined according to thirteenth-century values. The dismissal of this Norwegian farmer reveals the translator's view that in the real world, unlike *i fyrnskonne*, monstrous behaviour, *þat er ængi hæyrir nu gætet*, can have no narrative.

Equitan's story starts in an ancient Breton fiction, but his behaviour is scrutinised and glossed according to the values of the real world. He is

¹⁸ Apocalypse ch. 20, v. 15: *et qui non est inventus in libro vitae scriptus missus est in stagnum ignis* 'and whoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the pool of fire'.

damned, is written out of the narrative, and ends in silence and oblivion. The trajectory of his life is in contrast with the story of the historical King William as narrated in *Strandar strengleikr*, which starts from no written source. The king's actions are scrutinised according to the same thirteenth-century values, he is found to be a model of good courtly kingship, and his story is written into the *Strengleikar*.

Conclusions

Translator or translators?

At several points, there are significant interpolations into the translation: the addresses to the reader in the *Forræða* and the epilogue to *Equitan*, the closing remarks to *Milun* and *Bisclaret*. These interventions, where the translator reveals his own strongly held ideology, have a consistency of theme and approach, showing these passages to be the work of one creative individual, and not of a group of clerics. But this translator-commentator probably did not work in England. These interventions share with other texts associated with Hákon Hákonarson's cultural milieu an emphasis on the urgent need, in the words of the *Forræða*, 'to prepare and improve himself for the kingdom of God with . . . a holy life's end', in particular by not abusing advantages of talents and social rank which come as loans from God. This commonality of theme and concern strongly suggests that the translator did not work in isolation, but within the group of clerics who were connected with the court.

To claim that the translation was made in Norway is not necessarily, however, to support an older view that a visiting *jongleur* who visited Hákon's court collaborated there with a cleric to produce the *strengleikar*. It is certainly possible that the Norwegian translator had spent time in England, for example at Reading or Oxford, as Ingvil Brügger Budal suggests (2014b, 35–36), or at the wealthy abbey of Fountains in Yorkshire, of which Lyse was a daughter house.¹⁹

As mentioned above, *Strandar strengleikr* seems to be an original Norwegian composition, with no literary source. However, it seems quite possible that, whether consciously or unconsciously, the translator based the character of King William on that of Hákon Hákonarson, another king who protected the integrity of his realm by putting down a rebellion, who had concern for the wellbeing of his people, and who commissioned the production of new literature. Such flattery does not imply, however,

¹⁹ Budal states that the evidence 'strongly suggest[s] a center of learning or a monastery in England as a possible location for the translation' (2014b, 42).

that ‘a liaison must have existed between the translator and King Hákon Hákonarson’ (Budal 2014b, 36).

Strengleikar and Speculum Regale

The similarities of ideas and language shared by the opening of the *Strengleikar* prologue and that of the *King’s Mirror* suggest that these prologues were composed at very much the same time, and within the same clerical circle. This in turn suggests that, despite the *King’s Mirror* prologue being only found in later Icelandic copies, it was part of that text from the outset; I have also argued this elsewhere, on separate grounds (Hamer 2000).

Before the father of the *King’s Mirror* starts to analyse for his son the Scriptural passages he has chosen, using the Psalms of David as an example, he explains why there is a need to gloss these ancient texts: ‘David did not himself gloss the Psalter for the reason that he wished to leave to others the task of expressing all those thoughts which came up in his mind’ (*En því glósaði eigi David sjálf psaltarann, at hann vildi þórum þat starf ætla, at skýra með orðum alla þá hluti, er hann hugði með sjálfum sér skýringina*). The father continues: ‘It is the grace of the spirit of insight which guides [those who in times past have written glosses to the psalms] to examine the foundations of the sermons that they hear’ (*at rannsaka grundvöllu ræðnanna*) (Keyser 1848, 120; Larson 1917, 275–76).

There is a need to gloss (*at rannsaka*) because ancient writers were deliberately obscure, the same thought that opens the *Strengleikar*: *líkaðe oss at forvitna ok rannzaka*. *Speculum Regale* and *Strengleikar* may be seen as complementary speculum texts: the *King’s Mirror* provides glosses to ancient narratives of Biblical truth, while *Strengleikar* encourages its readers to take a moral lesson from ancient fictional narratives that were enjoyed in English and French courtly circles. Taken together, the two provide models of Christian judgement and proper courtly behaviour.

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NOTE

PSEUDO-PROCREATION IN OLD NORSE MYTH: A RESPONSE TO KATHERINE MARIE OLLEY

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IN THE MOST RECENT VOLUME of *Saga-Book* Katherine Marie Olley (2022) has written a substantial critique of my use of the term ‘pseudo-procreation’ in my book *Prolonged Echoes I* (Clunies Ross 1994) and of the pseudo-procreative ideology I claim to have found in Old Norse creation myths. I feel it is incumbent upon me to offer a refutation of some of her arguments, which I consider misrepresent the analytical position I adopted in that book.

As she notes, and as I made clear in the book, the concept of pseudo-procreation is indebted to the field research and subsequent interpretations of nineteenth- and twentieth-century anthropologists, who were struck by the nature of certain myths and their accompanying rituals performed by societies in various parts of the world. These are mostly initiatory or fertility cults. In particular, these rituals and their underlying myths express both through imagery and in performance the symbolic appropriation by male actors of the conventional roles of women in human gestation and parturition. These roles, in nature performed by females, are symbolically appropriated by males in myth and ritual performance for the purpose of bringing about society’s spiritual rebirth. Pseudo-procreation is not normally a paradigm that exists on its own, however, but is part of a more general social understanding of the relationship between men, women and spiritual powers. As the anthropologist Kenneth Maddock (1973, 156) put it of traditional Australian Aboriginal culture, in which the ideology is prominent: ‘Women belong to society, but matters of vital concern to society do not belong to women; the paradox so created calls for rationalization and this is given dramatically in rites and . . . myths . . .’.

We do not know what rites, if any, underlay most of the Old Norse myths that have come down to us. I argued in 1994, and I still maintain, that pseudo-procreative ideology is clearly apparent in the major myths of creation in Old Norse—of the cosmos itself, of humans, of dwarfs—as well as in those myths that deal with the Norse gods’ acquisition of culturally desired resources,

such as the poetic mead and the cauldron needed by the gods to brew ale. In presenting my analysis, I did not comment in detail on whether or how this ideology would have translated into early Scandinavian social life, assuming then, as I still do, that myth may not translate directly into social or cultural practice. However, I did suggest (1994, 102) that ‘something of what we find expressed in Old Norse myth probably stands in a hyperbolic relationship to social reality’. Nor did I assume, as Olley states (2022, 96), quoting me, that ‘mere physiological reproduction . . . coded exclusively female . . . is not culturally or spiritually meaningful’. The full sentence I wrote, of which she quotes only a part, reads (Clunies Ross 1994, 186): ‘At the same time, these myths’ pseudo-procreative ideology asserts the superiority of male creativity on a spiritual or cultural level above mere physiological reproduction, which brings death as its final outcome’. My argument was not intended to disparage the roles of either women or men in human reproduction generally or in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, but to explain how we could understand what the Old Norse myths in question mean in symbolic terms.

It is irrelevant, if my argument holds, as I think it does, that pseudo-procreative ideology should be criticised by modern scholars as ‘profoundly gendered’ and ‘anachronistic’ (Olley 2022, 99, 97), if it can be detected in numerous Old Norse myths as well as in many well documented but culturally unrelated myths and rites recorded in other parts of the world. It is the role of the mythographer to offer interpretations of a mythological system with minimal influence from current attitudes and cultural values and it is in that spirit that I have proposed that pseudo-procreative ideology, couched in terms of the male appropriation of female reproductive powers, is a central concept in Old Norse myth.

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REVIEWS

THE ETIQUETTE OF EARLY NORTHERN VERSE. By ROBERTA FRANK. *University of Notre Dame Press*. Notre Dame, 2022. xxx + 265 pp. ISBN 978-0-268-20252-1.

The epigraph to the first part ('Three Etymologies and a Plan') of the introductory section ('Making an Entrance') of *The Etiquette of Early Northern Verse* is Seamus Heaney's celebrated line 'Walk on air against your better judgement'. Roberta Frank then introduces her subject with an allusion to Nicholas Howe's observation that a lifetime of reading Old English poetry creates ears 'finely attuned to the blue note'. In these opening half dozen lines, pretty well all the significant features of this remarkable book are heralded: the astonishing breadth of both explicit and playfully implicit cultural reference; the foregrounding of audience experience; the wise but melancholy understanding of the fragmentary and tantalisingly insubstantial condition of the literature which has survived, with so little evidence of its human contexts; and most illuminatingly, the powerful articulation of what is not said by its poets. However, only a more extended reading of the book reveals its greatest strength: Frank's incomparable mastery of her joint subject, Old English poetry and Old Norse skaldic verse.

The 'blue note' Howe is referring to is the dominant elegiac mode of Old English verse. But Frank extends this to cover that persistent sense that Old English and Old Norse are always somehow on the wrong side of the tracks: that the history of English literature only really begins after the Norman Conquest, that Old English was already a 'belated aesthetic', that Vikings are 'ruffians, not . . . aesthetes'. Frank's repeated recourse to post-medieval — and often contemporary — allusions persuasively situates early Northern poetry amongst other more celebrated élite cultural productions. For instance, on one representative page she cites Thelonious Monk, Billie Holiday, Italo Calvino, Victor Hugo and an editor of the *New Yorker* in a few introductory paragraphs about style.

The Etiquette of Early Northern Verse began life as the three Robert Conway lectures Frank gave in 2010 at the University of Notre Dame, although it is clear that the resulting monograph is the fruit of many years of ground-breaking and sometimes controversial scholarship. But unlike many monographs which started off as separate pieces, there is no sense here of a cobbling together. Partly this is to do with Frank's own unifying style of scholarship. Her critical practice often makes its points through well-chosen metaphors from architecture, music or the visual arts — even from social conventions, as with the term 'etiquette' itself. There is also the wit and the sharp eye for what most do not notice (to take just one example, the fact that of the many accounts of the many transformations of the mead of poetry, all ingested, no one ever remarks on what they might taste like). Most of all, though, there is the sheer volume of examples taken from the poetry itself.

The first chapter, 'The Rules of the Game', is all about the distinctively tricky and allusive style of the poetry itself. Here, the term 'etiquette' refers to the verbal variety, and Frank quotes, although much later on in the book,

Jonathan Swift's 'brisk' definition of it: 'proper words in proper places'. Frank specifies 'broken structures, chipped sentences, lonesome roads' and all the qualities which seemed to justify the charge of a belated aesthetic. The second chapter considers 'the architecture of this poetry, the tools and material used by its makers'. This is essentially metre, alliteration and rhyme (or half-rhyme) and the sonic and/or associative effects of consonantal and vocalic repetition. It is here that Frank's ability to freight her criticism with a wealth of illustration from the texts themselves is used to most effect. The third chapter is perhaps the most illuminating of all, best summarised in Frank's own words as surveying 'the codes of reticence held in common by both skald and Old English poet, a shared etiquette of negation, indirection, and understatement, a laconic insouciance that encouraged audiences to read between half-lines, to hear what was not said'.

The most appealing features of this chapter are Frank's own entertaining interpretations of poetic statements with litotes, indirection and assertion by negation. There are far too many instances to cite, but I particularly enjoyed some of the simplest of them, as from the Norse poet Sigvatr, "'and next I shall recount not the smallest storm of barbs" = now folks, let me tell you about a really impressive battle' and, of *Beowulf*, "'the king's men did not at all find fault with him" = they praised him to the skies'. But this is more than just a jokey take on a shared feature of Old Norse and Old English poetry. As Frank notes, when Hrothgar declares of Grendel's mere *Nis þæt heoru stow*, it is a verdict 'encompassing a spectrum of possibilities from "a trifle shabby" to "utterly hellish" (cf. English "not pretty"). Hrothgar reveals the truth whilst hiding it'. When those facing death in the battle at Maldon boast that no one will be able to reproach them for retreating, a curious dualism is activated in the audience's imagination: the vision of a shameful return flickers against the promise of lasting glory (even if only in verse). And what exactly does Frank's calculation that although *Beowulf* represents only about one tenth of the Old English verse corpus it contains almost a third of its negative adverbs, and sixty-four verbs in the negative, tell us about the poem?

All three chapters (not to mention the front and end matter, and the footnotes) are crammed with *aperçus* about things you thought you knew about, as well as those you knew you did not. And the book is a gift to students, who will never again forget Grimm's Law, or dismiss it as an old philological chestnut, once they have read Frank's bravura demonstration of its legacy in modern English — in phrases such as 'paternal grandfather' or 'first principles' — and her account of the beginnings of alliteration on 'p' in Old Norse, a consonant originally foreign to it. Perhaps they will even be fired to do some work on the monumental task of dating skaldic verse. *The Etiquette of Early Northern Verse* is both a classic and a *tour de force*, with all the virtues of both; it is an important and thrilling read.

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POETRY IN SAGAS OF ICELANDERS. By MARGARET CLUNIES ROSS. *D. S. Brewer*. Cambridge, 2022. ISBN 978-1-843-84639-0 (hardback); 978-1-800-10612-3 (ePUB). Research on the poetry in the Sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*) has for a long time been restricted to case studies or specific questions regarding the *prosimetrum*. It has been only recently that scholars have aimed to look at the whole corpus through more comprehensive projects. Margaret Clunies Ross's book is therefore a very welcome and much needed introduction to the complex and multifaceted phenomenon of the *prosimetrum*. Drawing on data gained during her work on the Skaldic Project, she demonstrates the huge impact skaldic poetry has on the sagas that until today have mainly been considered as prose narratives. With its wide range of different aspects and the enormous amount of information it offers, this book will be important to literary and cultural scholars — and not only within Old Norse-Icelandic studies.

The book is clearly structured and consists of eight thematic chapters which build on and refer to each other, presenting a very clear outline of an overarching argument for the generic development of the prosimetric *Íslendingasögur*. Fundamental for Clunies Ross's analysis is the presupposition that the written Sagas of Icelanders represent a new model of *prosimetrum* that was different from Kings' Sagas and *fornaldarsögur* because there was no previously authorised body of poetry, despite a corpus of stanzas transmitted orally. From the existing poetry were selected those stanzas that fitted the taste for interiority and individual characterisation which is typical for sagas of Icelanders from the beginning. In contrast to the Kings' Sagas the *Íslendingasögur* prefer the 'situational' mode, i.e. stanzas presented as the direct speech of the characters, and make less use of the 'authenticating' mode of quoting stanzas as a corroboration of what is told in the prose. It is the aim of the book to present evidence for how 'the character of the prose text evolved in close accord with the nature of the poetry selected for the saga *prosimetrum*' (p. 9).

In her first chapter Clunies Ross presents the poetic corpus by providing six tables giving empirical data about the different aspects that are the basis for the discussion in the following chapters. Table 1 divides the *Íslendingasögur* into four groups based on the number of stanzas contained in each saga. Table 2 lists the sagas according to their overall length compared with the number of stanzas they contain. Tables 3–5 group the sagas according to their presumed dating: 1200–50; 1250–80; 1280–1400; or later. These five tables indicate a correlation between the number of stanzas and the age of a saga, with the earliest sagas being likely to contain more stanzas. Table 6 lists poets who are characters in Sagas of Icelanders and whose stanzas are quoted in other Icelandic sources, such as *Landnámabók*, the *Prose Edda* or the Grammatical Treatises.

Chapter 2 elaborates on the social position of the poets and their qualifications. Three tables (7a–c) listing the long poems quoted or mentioned in *Íslendingasögur* indicate that praise-poetry was a lively genre regarded as an elite art in Iceland in the tenth and early eleventh centuries. Very little of this encomiastic poetry has been preserved, which Clunies Ross interprets as a sign that the *prosimetrum* of the *Íslendingasögur* represents the democratisation of skaldic poetry with a multitude of speakers, voices and viewpoints. Chapter 3 discusses the question of the stanzas' authenticity. Were they composed by their speakers or were they later products inserted during the time of saga writing and transmission? The criteria

for the dating of stanzas suggest that most of the stanzas in the earliest sagas are probably authentic, while in the later sagas stanzas from oral transmission might have been supplemented by newly composed ones.

The following chapter investigates the strategies of poetic communication using poetry as the voice or voices of people of the past. From the patterns for distributing stanzas in the narrative, their situational mode, and frequent discrepancies between prose and poetry, Clunies Ross concludes that stanzas were most likely inserted more for aesthetic reasons than for authenticating the reports of the past. This notion is supported in Chapter 5, which lists the subjects dealt with in the stanzas. Clunies Ross identifies twelve categories, predominantly related to male topics, often connected to violence, but also to human relationships. The focus on subjective experiences corresponds to the literary style of the stanzas that is explored in the following chapter. Poetry in the *Íslendingasögur* represents the inner world of their male, and increasingly also female, protagonists. As is shown in Chapter 7, this result helps to explain why later sagas, with their heightened interest in the inner life of their characters and an increasing number of female characters, quite often contain more stanzas than sagas of the ‘classical’ period.

In the last chapter Clunies Ross finally looks at sagas that do not contain any stanzas and thus contradict the idea of the *Íslendingasögur* as a prosimetric genre. She suggests a number of different reasons for not including poetry in the prose narrative and concludes that these twelve sagas represent a deliberate choice not to use poetry and reveal ‘roads that led to several different ways of composing sagas about Icelanders’ (p. 194).

In this book Margaret Clunies Ross gives a greatly needed introduction to the main problems related to the *prosimetrum* of the *Íslendingasögur*. Covering so many aspects of the topic she necessarily sometimes can only touch upon a question which might leave the reader with the desire for more detail or depth. Although her outlines of the historical development seem quite convincing, she heavily relies on assumptions — not always undisputed — about the dating of sagas and has to neglect the different versions of individual texts. Clunies Ross provides a perfect starting point for more detailed research on *prosimetrum*: for example, the comparison between the different prosimetric genres, the variance of voice in prose and poetry, the variety of speakers, the aesthetics of the *prosimetrum* and the variance within the transmission of one saga. This is a book that truly teaches us a lot about *prosimetrum* and opens up a huge field for further research.

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OLD NORSE POETRY IN PERFORMANCE. Edited by BRIAN MCMAHON and ANNEMARI FERREIRA. *Routledge*. Abingdon, 2022. 314 pp. ISBN 978-0-36-740830-5.

Old Norse Poetry in Performance presents a collection of essays investigating Old Norse poetry with a focus on its presumed background as oral literature. Eddic, skaldic and *rimur* traditions are examined within a range of methodological frames, including consideration of their original modes of delivery in the medieval period,

their contexts of transmission and preservation in manuscripts, their relationships with material culture and their representation in modern performance practices. Following its introduction, the volume is set out in five parts, comprising eleven academic essays and two interviews. *Old Norse Poetry in Performance* has its origin in two academic conferences of the same title, organised by the editors Brian McMahon and Annemari Ferreira and held in Oxford in the summers of 2016 and 2019.

Terry Gunnell introduces the book by advocating for the kind of performance-centric analysis that it aims to deliver. ‘We need,’ he writes, ‘to put reading and writing to one side, and to start considering these works more in terms of theatre, slam poetry and jazz improvisation; in other words, in terms of sound, vision and momentary *experience*’ (p. 1; Gunnell’s emphasis). Readers of Gunnell’s previous body of publications will be familiar with this perspective, which, here, is usefully supplemented with a survey of the scholarly tradition that centres on Old Norse poetic performance. This encompasses its eighteenth-century origins; the temporary zenith of Bertha Phillpotts’s contributions in the 1920s; the subsequent revival instigated by Alfred Lord and Milman Parry’s oral-formulaic theory in the mid-twentieth century, which eventuated in research by Lars Lönnroth, Joseph Harris, Gunnell and others; and more recent work by scholars working in the wake of Gunnell’s own contributions, including Simon Nygaard and McMahon (both contributors to the collection). Before summarising each of the subsequent essays, Gunnell attempts to lay the foundations for the volume by defining ‘performance’ as a conceptual frame. Such a foundation is, inevitably, a little shaky — ‘as [Richard] Schechner underlines, *anything* can be considered a performance’ (p. 5; Gunnell’s emphasis) — leaving the terms for the investigation somewhat vague, and without support from performance theorists other than the limited number Gunnell cites (primarily Schechner and John Miles Foley).

The first of the volume’s five parts considers ‘The Social Dynamics of Performance’ and comprises an essay by Stephen A. Mitchell entitled ‘Framing Old Norse Performance Contexts: The Wedding at Reykjahólar (1119) Revisited’. A much-discussed scene, the description of the wedding at Reykjahólar in *Sturlunga saga* nonetheless provides ample footing for Mitchell’s analysis of the communicative and cultural codes that frame the episode’s account of the performance of prosimetrical sagas. In analysing these codes, which relate primarily to the power dynamics involved in guest-host and kinship relations, Mitchell draws on a substantial body of work from the field of performance studies, including work on ethnolinguistics, ethnobotany, folkloristics, social performance and oral theory. Whilst this diverse selection of secondary sources will be helpful for readers looking to strengthen their understanding of the scholarly legacies that underpin modern studies of performance, they also dilute the terms of the present analysis. Mitchell’s aim to examine the ‘framing’ of Old Norse performance contexts, correspondingly, leaves the account’s actual description of saga performances under-examined, although this has, as Mitchell notes, been covered regularly by previous scholars.

In Part II the volume moves on to the topic of ‘Voice and Performance’, opening with an essay by Inés García López on ‘Zumthorian Vocality’. López’s overview of Paul Zumthor’s work on voice in medieval literature is impressively detailed,

taking in its background in French poststructuralist debates between ‘logocentrism’ and ‘phonocentrism’, as well as its appraisal by Old Norse scholars. She affords, however, less space to her stated aim of evaluating Zumthor’s ‘potential application to the study of Old Norse poetry’ (p. 49), which is only covered briefly at the end of the chapter, and mostly in hypothetical terms. Broader consideration could, furthermore, have been given to research already conducted on the subject of voice in Old Norse poetry, as exemplified in Judy Quinn’s article ‘Verseform and Voice in Eddic Poems: the discourses of *Fáfnismál*’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 107 (1992), 100–30. López is followed by Simon Nygaard, whose analysis focuses on what he terms ‘aural sense impressions’ in Old Norse poetry. These are, in essence, soundscapes that relate to the narrative content of the poetry in which they feature. Nygaard takes *Hákonarmál* 5 as an example, wherein ‘we encounter the sound of swooshing swords echoed in the *s*- alliterations, and . . . the clangour of battle is echoed in the alliterating *gs* and the *br*- consonant clusters’ (p. 67). Whilst Nygaard’s detection of onomatopoeic qualities is occasionally strained or, arguably, subjective, the comparative approach he takes to the distribution of the technique across the major Eddic metres is insightful, suggesting different ways in which these poetic styles may have constructed meaning in oral performance. Given Nygaard’s explicit focus on the poetry’s sound qualities, some acknowledgement of the ways in which Old Norse is thought to have been pronounced would have helped to substantiate this analysis. The last essay in this part is by Harriet Soper, who focuses on ‘Dramatic Implications of Echoed Speech in *Skírnismál*’. Informed by a mixture of Old Norse scholarship and studies of modern speech practice, Soper reads *Skírnismál*’s many echoed replies (in which a character repeats another’s utterance) in relation to the poem’s ‘broader interest in power dynamics’, with the utterance-type modulating according to the various personal and social agendas within the narrative. Whilst modern frames of reference can feel anachronistic when applied to medieval texts, Soper’s use of speech theory serves her well here, producing a perceptive analysis of *Skírnismál*’s dextrous conversational structures, supported by close attention to its manuscript contexts, albeit with only brief references to the poem’s potential performance contexts in the conclusion.

Part III, on ‘Collocation and Quotation’, comprises papers by John McKinnell and Helen F. Leslie-Jacobsen. McKinnell’s analysis, in which he discusses the anonymity of Eddic composers in relation to its function in the poetry’s oral tradition, produces meaningful insights into both the operation of the Eddic tradition in the medieval period and how the surviving texts are perceived today. Based on their anonymity, McKinnell suggests, ‘no eddic poet could significantly *contradict* existing tradition, and no one could “own” an eddic poem’ (p. 113; McKinnell’s emphasis), and this prompts reconsideration of scholarly references to ‘original’ texts for Eddic poems, and further caution regarding dates of composition and material deemed to be interpolated. To elucidate further the terms of the tradition by which Eddic poets had to abide, McKinnell concludes his study by examining collocations of alliterating words in *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*, some of which are shown to preserve pre-Christian beliefs and ethics. Leslie-Jacobsen’s examination of *Fagrskinna* moves the discussion on to the use of verse in saga *prosimetrum*. Her

analysis centres on the long-standing distinction between verses that are quoted by saga authors either intradiegetically (as so-called ‘situational’ or ‘story’ verses) or extradiegetically (as ‘authenticating’ or ‘evidence’ verses). Although the simplicity of this binary has been acknowledged for some time, Leslie-Jacobsen’s case studies from *Fagrskinna* effectively complement other studies that have problematised it, focusing particularly on the potential for evidence verses to influence narrative events in the same way as story verses. On the volume’s central theme of oral performance, however, Leslie-Jacobsen is relatively reticent, stating without much supporting detail that such uses of evidence verses ‘are most likely to reflect the prose-verse constructions used in the oral performance of skaldic poetry’ (p. 143).

Part IV focuses on ‘Material Culture’ and features two essays. In the first, Rebeca Franco Valle examines connections between Viking-Age Scandinavia and the Islamic world, focusing on how Old Norse poetry and medieval Iberian art invite the mental and physical engagement of their recipients in similar ways. Franco Valle’s analysis is rich in detail and eventuates primarily in a case study of the Scandinavian casket preserved at San Isidoro de León (North-west Spain). The complexity of the animal imagery on this artefact, Franco Valle contends, represents a kind of ‘visual performance’ comparable in nature to how skaldic poetry solicits cognitive interpretation on the part of its audience. Whilst Franco Valle’s comparative perspective is, at times, necessarily speculative, the dialogue it produces between poetic and visual media is creative, perceptive, and especially significant by virtue of the relationships it establishes between the fields of performance studies and archaeology. In the next essay, Frog brings the much-discussed issue of ‘manuscript performance’ to bear on the Eddic tradition, focusing on how manuscripts like GKS 2365 4to (the Codex Regius of the *Poetic Edda*) may have been read aloud. The frequent practice of abbreviation in such manuscripts, he suggests, encourages readers to memorise the poetic material to maintain fluency in performances. Frog’s primary argument, that ‘manuscripts supported rather than spontaneously replaced people learning the poems for oral delivery’ (p. 193), is compelling and well-evidenced, leading also to useful insights regarding textual variants and the pedagogical potential of Eddic manuscripts.

Part V, lastly, gives due thought to ‘Modern Approaches to Performing Old Norse Poetry’. In his essay on the ‘Perils, Pitfalls and Possibilities’ of the subject, Brian McMahon describes the difference between two methodological frames: the ‘Performance Archaeology’ approach, a term coined by Gunnell (2020), which seeks to recover and recreate the medieval contexts in which Old Norse poetry was performed, and the ‘Practice-as-Research’ approach, in which Old Norse poetry is performed without making any claim to historical accuracy. Supported by thought-experiments on how each approach would inform a modern performance of *Hárbarðsljóð*, McMahon’s essay represents a helpful evaluation of the field as it stands and how it may develop in future. The two following chapters comprise interviews conducted by McMahon. The first is with Leif Stinnerbom (Artistic Director of Västanå Teater, in Sunne, Sweden), focusing primarily on the theatrical techniques, practices and theories that influenced his 2019 production of John Fosse’s *Eddan*, and the second is with Einar Selvik (musician in the Nordic

folk project Wardruna), addressing various dimensions of his practice, including comments on ‘method composing’ (p. 255), the influence of academic research and the roles Old Norse material is being made to play in popular culture. The perspective of the modern performer is maintained in the two essays that round out the volume. The first, Benjamin Bagby’s ‘Notes from the Workshop of a Reconstructed “Singer of Tales”’, is reprinted from *Performing Medieval Narrative*, a collection of essays published in 2005. As his title suggests, and as in the preceding interviews, the material in Bagby’s essay is less academic and more anecdotal, covering his performance practices, including the technical training and artistic choices that influence his renditions of medieval poetry, and ways in which these may, or may not, have a semblance of medieval practices. The concluding paper, by Pétur Húni Björnsson, ably discusses medieval evidence for oral performances of skaldic poetry and *rimur*, focusing on the terms used for the delivery of these poetic styles. Pétur’s examination here of the noun *kveðandi* is helpful, placing weight, albeit somewhat inconclusively, on the special vocal qualities prompted by poetic performance, some of which may have been musical. Following discussion of these aspects, Pétur moves on to the performance of *rimur*, encompassing both the medieval and modern histories of this practice in Iceland, and his own anecdotal evidence as a *kvæðamaður*.

This volume is, on the whole, a valuable contribution to the growing field of study centred on Old Norse poetic performance. It is possible, as with many edited collections, to determine that the subjects of the essays are too diverse to generate many meaningful interrelationships between them, and this is compounded by the inherent polysemy of ‘performance’ as a conceptual frame (see Schechner’s point quoted above). Some of the essays, relatedly, treat ‘performance’ rather loosely, and with occasional apathy towards the actual modes of oral delivery that would seem to be the volume’s central concern. Whilst this highlights a need to clarify the parameters of Old Norse performance studies as an academic discipline, this volume makes strides in producing an opening dialogue between academics and practitioners of Old Norse poetic performance, which is a fundamental principle of the editors’ project. There is much, overall, to gratify readers interested in the volume’s individual topics, or in the subject as a whole.

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‘HARD IT IS TO STIR MY TONGUE’. RAIDING THE OTHERWORLD FOR THE ELIXIR OF POETRY. By CLIVE TOLLEY. *Suomalainen Tiedekatemia*. Helsinki, 2019. xxiii + 272 pp. ISBN 978-9-514-11140-2.

Clive Tolley begins *Hard it is to Stir my Tongue* by specifying that the book is ‘an interpretative survey’ of various texts that deal with poetic inspiration and excursions to unearthly places (p. xiii). The author is not ‘setting out a thesis which [he] aim[s] to prove’ and the ‘investigation is not intended to be exhaustive’. The choice of the specific case studies of Norse, Welsh, Irish, English, Ancient Greek,

Finnish, and ‘Siberian’ (Khanty and Chukchi) poetry and narratives, topped off with a reading of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem *Kubla Khan*, is based primarily on the specific intersecting, connecting and correlating themes between those narratives. These analyses never fail to be illuminating and suggestive, yet the reader will often be left wondering what exactly the nature of the causal connections between these literatures might be, since the author ‘seeks primarily to compare and contrast . . . not to explain origins’ (p. xv). A general reader should probably approach *Hard it is to Stir my Tongue* as a stimulating compilation of readings of texts that deal with similar themes. Comparativists and folklorists will probably get more out of this book than the rest of us, however. It seems that for the various strains of scholarship descended from comparative Indo-European studies, it is now enough simply to hold up a set of formally similar motifs and leave it at that, as if their deep connectedness were a foregone conclusion. As much as this book will appeal to such comparativists in a way that is not particularly accessible to the rest of us, the author has done an excellent job of producing a study that is interesting for everyone and that will stir the imagination of anyone who reads it.

Of the motifs considered in this study, the central one appears to be the notion of ‘raiding’ an object representing poetic inspiration from an ‘Otherworld’. Each term in the title’s formula is defined rather broadly. Some ‘Otherworlds’ turn out to be more Other than others, and a wide variety of actions are interpreted as ‘raids’. The study opens with the example with which *Saga-Book* readers will be most familiar: Óðinn’s theft of the mead of poetry (pp. 5–20). The extent to which Jötunheimr is a different ‘world’ from Ásgarðr (itself, in any case, an ‘Otherworld’ from the point of view of us mortals) is not made particularly clear in any of the mythological texts, nor does the author dwell on it. The ‘Otherworld’ aspect is silently dropped here, though the argument that Óðinn’s quest takes the form of a ‘raid’ on a category of beings that are in some way ‘Other’ to the Æsir seems well-founded. The formula of ‘raiding the Otherworld for the elixir of poetry’ is, however, incomplete from the outset. In fact, none of the study’s sources demonstrate it in its ideal form. There are various expeditions, some of which are raids and some of which simply are not, to locations of varying Otherworldliness, some of which are Jötunheimr or Pohjola, some of which are Ireland or a barn in Northumbria. A few of the chosen texts mention supernatural drinks which bestow varying gifts on the drinker, often some form of wisdom — but the mead of poetry seems to be the only one that specifically confers poetic inspiration. There are, in the end, no ‘raids’ on ‘the Otherworld’ for ‘the elixir of poetry’ except Óðinn’s, which itself does not neatly fit the archetype the author has constructed.

What *Hard it is to Stir my Tongue* does not adequately prove, then, is an old Indo-Europeanist thesis from which it seems nonetheless unable to detach itself: that the majority of these narratives are descended from stories about raiding cattle, such as the purported Proto-Indo-European speakers presumably once did on the Pontic-Caspian steppe. The author’s many references to this notion seem to belie the opening claim that the book does not ‘aim to prove’ a ‘thesis’ (e.g. pp. 89, 131, 160, 173, 237). There is, furthermore, a corollary argument that the substantial differences between the texts in Indo-European languages and those

in other languages stem from a difference between Indo-European ‘herders’ and Finnic/Siberian ‘hunters’. Yet the round pegs of the source material often fit rather uncomfortably in this square Indo-Europeanist hole. The author tends to take narrative elements which do not fit their given formula as ‘transformations’ or, in some cases, even ‘inversions’, which apparently prove the formula by being in opposition to it. Thus, Cædmon’s retreat to the byre in Bede’s account of the making of *Cædmon’s Hymn* is ‘perhaps a faint echo of this tradition’ of the cattle raid simply by virtue of being thematically cattle-adjacent (p. 131). Hesiod being chosen by the Muses and endowed with the gift of poetry in the *Theogony* amounts to him being made ‘more the object than the subject of a “raid”’ (p. 173); poetic inspiration is ‘raided’ to the extent that this is not at all what is actually described. Many readers will find that these interpretations do not adequately dispel the simpler and more obvious alternative: that the texts that do not mention raids simply have nothing to do with raids, and that their dealing with similar themes in often similar ways does not necessarily entail that they stem from a common source.

If *Hard it is to Stir my Tongue* does not prove — nor, as the author protests, ‘aim to prove’ — this thesis, then what does it do? The best way to read the book seems to be as a collage of poetry and prose that shows a persistent convergence between representations of poetic ability and representations of the supernatural. Each case study is well-researched and discussed with a fully warranted confidence. The study’s eclecticism is welcome and exciting, and the lengthy quotations are greatly appreciated; few readers will be experts on every literature examined in this book. This study shows that sources from a wide variety of historical, cultural and linguistic contexts can be successfully brought together in a theoretical discussion. The reading of *Kubla Khan* is particularly noteworthy in this respect, detailing the poem’s influences and delving into a sophisticated if brief discussion of its relation to broader philosophical and theoretical themes. The author demonstrates convincingly that a discussion of Coleridge, Kant, Burke and Milton can sit comfortably in the same book as Hesiod and Egill Skallagrímsson.

Yet the chapter on *Kubla Khan* also demonstrates the way in which the aforementioned Indo-Europeanist interpretative baggage weighs down an otherwise interesting study. Coleridge’s poem has much to say about poetic inspiration and the conundrums of expression, conceptuality and language, but it simply does not contain a ‘raid’, either in the speaker’s vision or in the ‘ancestral voices, prophesying war’ heard by Kubla, as Tolley implies (p. 224). And if *Kubla Khan* did repeat the motif of the Indo-European cattle raid, then how has this hypothetical Bronze-Age trope come to be expressed in a work of eighteenth-century English poetry? By what causal mechanism, through what historical process or line of influence, is this possible? We get no answer, since these questions lie outside the study’s stated purview — and yet the study seems to rest on assumptions about these very things, which go unelaborated and unexamined. Perhaps this is the shape of an ostensibly instrumentalist post-comparativism to come: studies that declare to the laity that they are merely comparing for the sake of comparison, but in which the initiated find their own mystical certitude in the eternal connectedness of the things compared. The initiate understands the task of the study of mythology and

religion as being in itself a religious task, dealing with connections that take place in eternity rather than across history. For the uninitiated, such a study will remain somewhat perplexing in places, in spite of its obvious value and interesting qualities.

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MNEMONIC ECHOING IN OLD NORSE SAGAS AND EDDAS. By PERNILLE HERMANN. *De Gruyter*. Berlin and Boston, 2022. 262 pp. ISBN 978-3-110-67484-2.

Anyone interested in memory studies in the medieval North will be excited to see this new monograph by Pernille Hermann, who has been a key contributor to Old Norse-Icelandic memory studies for over a decade. This book nicely advances Hermann's previous efforts through a well-organised and carefully articulated argument about the mechanisms of memory in Old Norse and Icelandic sources. The book also makes a fitting inaugural volume for a new book series called 'Memory and the Medieval North' published by De Gruyter, with its second volume (on memory in Early Irish literature) forthcoming in 2023.

The broader value of Hermann's book even to those outside Old Norse-Icelandic studies may be its contribution to two important problems for pre-modern memory studies. First, Hermann addresses the relationship between, on the one hand, a collective (cultural) memory, such as has been theorised by Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann and, on the other hand, a bodily (or personal) memory like that postulated by Frances Yates and Mary Carruthers. While Hermann is primarily interested in the latter, points of contact with the former are never far from her analysis. Hermann, secondly, sheds light on the very difficult problem of the impact of the introduction of book culture on the place and usage of mnemonic mechanisms in the North. One of the great benefits of Old Norse-Icelandic materials, Hermann suggests, is that they demonstrate the mnemonic devices of a society still in the transitional period between orality and literacy (pp. 6–7). Hermann shows in Chapter 2 that medieval (primarily Icelandic) authors both employed and wrote about mnemonic devices throughout the production of their texts. These sources indicate that, rather than being seen as a threat to older ways of remembering, the new technology of writing was welcomed into existing, pre-literate mnemonic strategies as a new aid to memory.

Hermann goes on in Chapter 3 to draw out the metaphorical language that medieval authors use to talk about memory. By observing, among others, apian (relating to bees) and alimentary (relating to food) tropes in the sources, Hermann demonstrates that memory was not simply a conceptual storage space, like a hard drive, but was rather 'a place where knowledge could be made familiar and processed, even transformed and reproduced and in which invention could take place' (p. 83). The process of remembering is thus also a process of situating oneself or one's community in the context of the remembered phenomena.

Chapters 4 and 5 address the 'how' of memory in the medieval North. Hermann begins by looking at examples of memory techniques in Latin texts and follows by comparing those examples with Norse texts. While it might admittedly be dif-

difficult to demonstrate a conscious exchange of ideas between these two written traditions (p. 98), Hermann effectively argues that certain ‘mnemonic topoi’ are common to both Latin and Norse sources. Spaces described in the place-image method, for instance, as it is articulated in Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria* (IV, book 11, ch. 2) strongly resemble certain *loci* in Norse mythological texts. The description of the world tree, Yggdrasill, in *Gylfaginning*, for example, possesses a mnemonic structure that facilitates the recollection of important mythological and existential principles (p. 104). Hermann supplements these assessments by noting visual memory aids evident in several important manuscript illuminations. Chapter five then extends the importance of spatial conceptual aids to memory to include the role of the senses, specifically of the visual, in accessing and dwelling upon the knowledge housed in the spatially conceived mnemonic device. Old Norse-Icelandic texts suggest that memory is ‘not simply a matter of recollecting knowledge . . . and must be understood in connection with a striving for wisdom’, thus confirming the notion that memory is more than a mere storehouse for information (p. 167).

Chapter 6 turns to *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, *Brennu-Njáls saga* and *Loka-senna* to demonstrate that the descriptions of architecture and seating arrangements in medieval halls have a fundamentally mnemonic function. The approach might appear, at first glance, to conflict with the common view that seating arrangements — as in the case of *Njáls saga*, for example — possess a deeply status-driven function in Old Norse literary and cultural history, but there need be no conflict. Hermann rather points out that the relationship between the two functions only ‘reminds us that both the mnemonic devices and the cultural memory that the texts construct are likely to have been interrelated with issues of, and claims to, social power’ (p. 172). Constructed literary spaces thus work as mnemonic devices because of, not in spite of, their close connection to cultural phenomena such as social status (p. 199). This close relationship goes on to affirm the connection between bodily memory and cultural memory evident in the sagas.

Maps, Chapter 7 argues, serve a similar mnemonic function, as do the literary representations of building spaces discussed in the previous chapter. In addition to a limited number of colour images of maps that appear in Icelandic manuscripts, Hermann turns to ekphrastic representations of maps found in the prologue to the *Prose Edda*, *Ynglinga saga* and *Landnámabók* to show that these maps, either as images or via ekphrasis, enable authors and audiences to organise stories, world histories and cultural memories around the spatial constructions that maps afford. These literary representations of maps, especially world maps, enabled Icelanders to situate themselves and their country in the greater landscape of world history.

Hermann concludes the study by bringing readers back to the questions of orality, literacy, and the role of memory in both. On the basis of the work done in previous chapters, Hermann suggests that, at least in Iceland (from which most of her source material comes), the technology of writing was perceived as a benefit to memory (p. 225). Like mnemonic devices in oral societies, textual representations of historical and cultural phenomena mediated between bodily memory and cultural memory (pp. 226–27). As Old Norse-Icelandic authors became increasingly

reliant upon ‘mnemonic topoi’, writers may have been less invested in the skill of embodied memory, but the mnemonic function of the written texts continued to serve the cultivation of cultural memory.

There is little in the way of weakness or error in Hermann’s book, but there are what might be described as opportunities for further research. For one, as Hermann freely acknowledges (p. 230), there is more to be said about cultural memory in the Middle Ages (and, one might add, in Old Norse sources in particular). This might be especially true where cultural memory becomes increasingly reliant upon literary mnemonic devices like those observed in Hermann’s book. One way to go about such future work might be to examine Iceland’s copious late-medieval and post-medieval manuscript traditions and other written sources. It would be interesting to learn whether Iceland’s increasingly ‘bookish’ culture becomes correspondingly reliant upon the mnemonic devices observed by Hermann to cultivate Icelandic cultural memories.

It would be unreasonable to expect Hermann to include these other areas of study in a book already filled with such excellent analysis and observation. One can only do so much. For anyone aiming to take on these or other memory-related topics in the medieval North, Hermann’s book will no doubt provide a solid foundation upon which to build.

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יעקב שריג (הקדמה ותרגום) סאגות איסלנדייות אמונות, מנהגים וטקסים פגאניים באיסלנד בימי הביניים
ICELANDIC SAGAS. BELIEFS, CUSTOMS, AND PAGAN RITUALS IN MEDIEVAL ICELAND.
Translated by YA’ACOV SARIG. *Resling*. Tel Aviv, 2023. 412 pp. 585-1685 דאנאקוד

The translation of the sagas into a new language is, on all counts, a cause for celebration. Despite previous efforts by Itamar Even-Zohar and Arie Stav, no complete saga translation has been available for the Modern Hebrew reader. The publication of sagas in Hebrew is, therefore, a momentous occasion, one that has been sorely and inexplicably missing from the robust Hebrew translation corpus. Such a translation was never as timely as now. The world of the sagas finds terrifying echoes in Israel’s contemporary situation: a judicial reform bringing society to the brink of civil war; toxic masculinity clouding judgement in a militarised society; and ruthless rules of vengeance that often target a family’s most promising members rather than those most involved in the feud itself (as noted by TheMarker’s Sami Peretz). All of these give a sense of urgency for learning the lessons passed down to us by the late-medieval Icelanders; they are ones we cannot afford to ignore.

The book offers translations of *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, *Grœnlendinga saga*, *Eiríks saga rauða*, *Norna-Gests þátr* and *Þiðrandi þátr ok Þórhalls*. Preceding Ya’acov Sarig’s translations is an extensive introduction (209 pages). True to the book’s title, the introduction focuses heavily on the religious and folkloric background of the sagas. The reasonable Israeli reader is unlikely to distinguish between the different modes of storytelling, discussed here

without clear demarcation. Sarig also avoids offering his opinion on the historical tradition's reliability, with the Hebrew reader remaining unaware of doubts that have been voiced with regard to, for example, Haraldr hárfagri and his reign's historicity, the existence of the Celtic *papar* hermits before the coming of the Norse settlers, or the violent nature of pagan Icelanders versus their Christian successors.

Resling, a publishing house so respected in Israeli intellectual circles that its book titles are a Facebook meme, seems to have loosened its grip on this book's editorial process, both in terms of peer-review and the book's overall structure. Sarig's decision to make the book accessible to a wide readership results in the repeated introduction of historical characters already introduced, as well as the appearance of details in the main text that have already appeared in a footnote; this results in a somewhat labyrinthine read reminiscent of Danielewski's *House of Leaves*. In discussing saga texts, little reference is made to English translations; rather, it is Icelandic manuscripts or hard-to-obtain Old Norse editions that are cited. Resling's intervention, in the form of rigorous editing and peer-review, would have saved the book from awkward moments, such as that where Ármann Jakobsson's fiendishly titled 2003 article 'Snorri and His Death: Youth, Violence, and Autobiography in Medieval Iceland', which is about Snorri *Þorvaldsson*, is cited in the context of Snorri *Sturluson's* death (p. 222); or where Haraldr hárfagri is described as a Christian king (p. 89). More proofreading was clearly needed to avoid misspellings of scholars' names (like those of Slavica Ranković (p. 169), Kendra Willson (p. 122) and Merrill Kaplan (p. 89)). Some inconsistencies in spelling choices could also be noted, as well as a lack of use of upper-case 'P'. The Hebrew-speaking student venturing into the topic will benefit from the treasure trove of knowledge reflected in the book's references, but will be wise to double-check the citations before using them to bolster their future essays' bibliographies.

The translations themselves are written with great panache, opting for flair and fanfare over the laconic style usually characteristic of the Icelandic sagas' Old Norse (read: more Hermann Pálsson than Theodore Andersson). In some cases Sarig recreates idiosyncratic decisions made by other translators, such as Katrina C. Attwood's decision to translate *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu's* ch. 1 *eygr manna bezt* as 'with fine, piercing eyes' — 'מבטו החודר' — while adding a clause I have not been able to trace elsewhere: 'ששבה את ליבו של כל אדם שבה עימו במגע' ('which captivated the heart of every person who came into contact with him') (p. 227), or adding ominous words before Hrafnkell kills Einarr in *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, ch. 6: 'הרפנקל נעץ בו מבט נוקב ושאל בקול נוקשה ומאיים' ('Hrafnkell glared at him with a piercing look and asked him in a harsh, threatening voice') (p. 281). These innovations might remind readers of the differences between *Ljósvetninga saga's* relatively faithful-to-its-exemplum AM 485 4to and the innovative JS 624 4to. As a reader of the sagas who was initially struck by their stylistic and narrative similarities with the terse Old Testament (as far as it is possible to generalise on either group of texts), I find this is a noteworthy decision.

The Icelandic sagas have much to give the Hebrew-speaking general audience, and it is likely that Israeli scholars would benefit greatly from more interaction with these texts. Itamar Even-Zohar, for example, has made groundbreaking

contributions to saga research through his polysystem theory and its application by researchers such as Massimiliano Bampi and Jón Karl Helgason, and many other Israelis and expatriates have dabbled in or contributed to this field of study that is so foreign and yet so relevant to their own existence. It is my sincere hope that this book will open the door for more translation work into the ancient-turned-new Hebrew language, and that one day in the not-too-distant future a high-school teacher in Dimona will assign a translation of *Brennu-Njáls saga* as optional reading in their literature class.

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OLDTIDSSAGAERNES VERDEN. By ANNETTE LASSEN. *Gyldendal*. Copenhagen, 2021. 208 pp. ISBN 978-8-702-33969-7.

Book-length studies of Legendary Sagas (or sagas of ancient times, as *oldtidssagaer* — *fornaldarsögur* in Icelandic — are often called in English) were at one time hard to come by. This situation has been changing, thanks to works by Stephen Mitchell, Torfi Tulinius and most recently Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (in *Arfur aldanna*). Nevertheless, Annette Lassen's clear and accessible new work breaks fresh ground by presenting this material at length to non-adepts. The stated aim is 'at åbne oldtidssagaernes verden' (p. 8, 'to open up the world of the Legendary Sagas') and no previous knowledge is assumed, as is revealed by the explanations of the terms *saga* and *þáttir* that mark the first step on this journey of discovery.

Lassen's monograph is both a follow-up and a companion piece to her *Islændingesagaernes verden* (2017). Like *Islændingesagaernes verden*, *Oldtidssagaernes verden* is closely connected to a group of translations into Danish, the result of which was a series of eight volumes of *Oldtidssagaer* (2016–19), several of which had never previously been translated into Danish, and for which Lassen acted as main editor (as well as translator of a number of individual works). Thus, for Danes (and speakers of Danish) who are yet to master Old Norse, both the narratives and this accompanying guide are now conveniently available.

The structure of *Oldtidssagaernes verden* follows and mirrors that of its forerunner. Many of the chapters, moreover, have identical titles: 'Overlevering' ('Transmission'), 'Stil og litterære teknik' ('Style and Literary Technique'), or subtly adapted ones: 'Oldtidssagaernes samfund' echoing 'Islændingesagaernes samfund', a chapter on 'Eddadigte' taking the place of that on 'Skjaldekvad'. This parallelism has the useful side-effect that readers with access to both books will be able to get a quick and clear understanding of how these two genres differ. Nevertheless, *Oldtidssagaernes verden* does not require the reader to be familiar with the previous volume.

The earlier chapters cover a range of fundamental questions relating to the genre. Its origins are approached from various angles, for example in the third chapter on 'Oldtidssagaernes litterære baggrund' ('The Legendary Sagas' literary

background'), in the sixth chapter on 'Oldtidssagaernes tilblivelse' ('How the legendary sagas came into being') and the seventh chapter on 'Oldtidssagaernes historicitet' ('The historicity of the Legendary Sagas'). Germanic traditions, some based in vaguely remembered historical events, mixed with continental chivalric literature and Latinate learning, all played their part. The age, preservation and transmission of these stories is covered in the fourth and fifth chapters. The eighth chapter takes a more literary focus, considering how readers would have perceived the subject matter in relation to 'løgn og virkelighed' ('lies and reality'), a subject raised by Torfi Tulinius through his deployment of literary fiction in relation to the *fornaldarsögur* in *The Matter of the North* (2002) and frequently discussed ever since. The ninth chapter continues in this vein with a focus on style and literary technique, the tenth chapter extending this to the predominantly Eddic verse associated with and interpolated into these sagas. The eleventh chapter is the longest by far and covers 'Oldtidssagaernes samfund' ('The society of the Legendary Sagas'), ranging across various topics such as family, gender roles, love, honour, social outsiders and religion. The twelfth chapter, on the afterlife of these narratives, is an important inclusion, considering the outsized influence these stories have had on earlier romantic as well as contemporary popular literature. The final sixty pages provide useful summaries of the thirty-plus sagas making up the corpus as well as some additional comments on influences, themes and translations into Danish.

It is as a book presumably aimed at a wider audience that the decision has been taken not to include footnotes or page-references to secondary literature. To some extent this is understandable, as footnotes or even in-line referencing can weigh a text down and make it less appealing to certain types of reader. A short bibliography of secondary material (or *faglitteratur* 'scholarly literature') does, moreover, appear on pp. 203–06, preceded by the comment that 'bogen er baseret på artikler og værker om oldtidssagaerne generelt og om enkelte sagaer og temaer' ('the book is based on articles and works on Legendary Sagas in general and on individual sagas and themes'), with a recommendation to read these works.

Nevertheless, for readers with some experience of Old Norse scholarship, glimpses of research by identifiable individuals can be caught on certain pages throughout this volume, even if they are not named on those occasions. An example is an allusion to the popularity of a reading from a translation of *Friðþjófs saga* in Liverpool in 1894 which drew in such a large audience that only a discussion of Darwin's theory of evolution attracted more people (p. 128). This is clearly taken from the opening lines of Chapter 5 of Andrew Wawn's *The Vikings and the Victorians* (2000). It seems to me that on such occasions an opportunity has been missed to provide more concrete directions for the reader interested in delving deeper into such subject matter. This need not be in the form of footnotes which interrupt the flow of reading, but could rather be a short section at the end of the volume — 'Notes for Further Reading' or some such — where a brief explanation of where material was sourced could be presented. Such a section could then be used or ignored by the reader as they see fit.

I mention this not as a criticism but rather as a suggestion for improvement. Kirsten Wolf, in her review of *Islændingasagaernes verden* in *Speculum* 95/3 (July 2020) (p. 850), said that a translation into English would be a wonderful thing and I fully concur in the case of *Oldtidssagaernes verden*. Back in 1985 Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards published an introduction to the popular Penguin paperback, *Seven Viking Romances*, which served as a brief yet accessible introduction to this fascinating genre for a broader English-speaking audience. Lassen's work would be a fitting choice to build upon this and carry the torch forward into the twenty-first century. In the meantime, that privilege will be reserved for those who read Danish.

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WEREWOLVES IN OLD NORSE-ICELANDIC LITERATURE. BETWEEN THE MONSTER AND THE MAN. By MINJIE SU. *Borders, Boundaries, Landscapes 3. Brepols*. Turnhout, 2022. 225 pp. ISBN 978-2-503-59600-6.

The werewolf is a fascinating figure with a long history within medieval literature in general, and medieval Old Norse-Icelandic literature is no exception. *Werewolves in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature* is a sophisticated and comprehensive yet highly readable study of not only the tropes and component features of the werewolf in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, but also the reasons why transformation narratives were deployed.

The book shows how the werewolf experience offers a general commentary on what it means to have, lose and regain control of your body and/or mind. The 'werewolves' under discussion include any character that is transformed or is able to transform into a wolf, as well as characters that exhibit wolfish traits, or do not transform but endure a trial akin to the werewolf experience. The attention paid to this latter category of characters is a novel feature of the book and raises questions of how to define a 'werewolf' character, and whether the wolf aspect is necessary to an understanding of the trope, which is primarily concerned with the process of unbecoming and re-becoming human.

Werewolves in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature conscientiously sets its sources (*Völsunga saga*, *Gibbons saga*, *Sigrarðs saga frækna*, *Sigrarðs saga ok Valbrands*, *Ála flekks saga*, *Úlfhams rimur*, *Bisclaretz ljóð*, *Tiodielis saga*, *Jóns saga leikara* and *Konungs skuggsjá*) in the context of Franco-Latin werewolf traditions. Each chapter contains an intensely detailed and careful contextualisation of the topic within medieval European thought, seeing these Old Norse-Icelandic narratives very much as products of a wider European culture, with little discussion of more traditional studies on wolves in earlier Old Norse-Icelandic culture. In some places the extensive devotion to context is distracting, and the book would benefit from slightly more signposting to highlight the relevance of certain contextual digressions to the main point being argued (for example, the discussion of the woman/she-wolf on pp. 83–89, horses on pp. 116–18). The study of some texts that are perhaps less well-known is a real strength of the book, but while the texts

are introduced with comprehensive details on their manuscripts and dating (pp. 23–28), it might have also been helpful to include summaries of the wider narratives more consistently before focusing on the transformation-related episodes.

The first four chapters move outwards from the body of the werewolf, but also inwards into discussion of the relationships between landscape and place within the emotional mindscape of the characters. The fifth chapter separates the werewolf or wolfish figures into *monstratus* (wolf as learner) or *monstrare* (wolf as teacher), considering the value of these narratives both within and beyond the texts. Chapters 1 and 2 act as a pair that deal with the role of skin and dress as, respectively, making manifest internal changes to identity and enable the visible recuperation of humanity post-transformation. The shedding of the *úlþhamr* ‘wolf-skin’ is seen as a pivotal moment in which the wolfish ego can be shed and a new, improved human can emerge. In addition to the *úlþhamr*, the analysis of *Ála flekks saga* incorporates a discussion of leprosy and the parallels between this disease and other skin conditions on the one hand and the werewolf experience, raising questions about the effect of the wolf on those other than the central individual in a text and about notions of medical and social infection and cure.

The idea of infection and contamination continues in the examination in Chapter 3 of what the werewolf might be expected to eat. The chapter examines the anxieties around food and the permeability of the body in medieval discourse, and positive and negative effects of consumption of certain foods in Old Norse texts — although the discussion of food taboos might have drawn more explicitly on medieval laws on the subject. While the werewolf’s diet is often not mentioned in these narratives, the consumption of dangerous foods, or perilous eating habits (such as cannibalism, eating of horseflesh, etc., pp. 108–10) can be extrapolated from other Old Norse and medieval sources. By not showing the werewolf diet, in a world where food is so charged with identity implications, the authors or compilers of these texts made important decisions to hide this aspect of their characters, recognising that food and eating, unlike the binary of possessing either human or wolf skin, or being clothed or naked, acknowledges a spectrum of wolfishness.

Chapter 4 is the final chapter on the characteristics of the werewolf and analyses the role of landscape and seasonality in reinforcing and reflecting the mindscape of the characters. In this chapter we move beyond the body into ideas of the werewolf experience involving the wilderness and/or darkness, and experiences of emotional disturbance, social death and not-being (before the inevitable overcoming of such situations and restoration of order to both body and kingdom). The discussion of *Úlþhams rimur* is particularly convincing (pp. 133–50) and presents a clear argument for interpreting the werewolf narrative as part of a wider collection of devices entangled in these stories of social maturation.

Chapter 5 moves on from analysing the constituent features of the werewolf and the werewolf experience to showing why these narratives were included in stories: to teach both the protagonists and the audience. The author classifies each main figure discussed in the preceding chapters in terms of *monstratus* (wolf as learner) or *monstrare* (wolf as teacher), and then places these narratives alongside the thirteenth-century didactic text, *Konungs skuggsjá*, and its description of the

Irish clansmen cursed to be transformed into wolves for howling against the preaching of St Patrick. Chapter 5 in particular, and the whole book in general, highlight the apparent link between werewolf narratives and authoritative characters, and the vital need for such wolfish experiences or wolfish helpers in achieving social maturation or an expansion of knowledge in these roles. Nonetheless, stability is the goal within the narrative, and characters whose fluidity of form or nature persists remain on the fringes of society.

This book is essential reading for any student or scholar interested in wolf transformations in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, but also for those more generally interested in romances, the permeability and insecurity of the body and its humanity, and the roles of stories in communities and intergenerational knowledge exchange. It demonstrates the value of exploring into, around and beyond the wolf in transformation narratives. The central question, as identified by the author, may ultimately be ‘What does it mean to be human?’ (p. 197), but the book also raises questions about what it means to be social, to belong, to be and not be Wolf. The value of this work lies in its open-mindedness: both in its willingness to approach the werewolf figure with a range of theoretical models, and to consider both the body and the place of the body in its discussions of identity, becoming and belonging.

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STURLUNGA SAGA EDA ÍSLENDINGA SAGAN MIKLA. Edited by GUÐRÚN ÁSA GRÍMSDÓTTIR. *Íslenzk fornrit XX–XXII. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag*. Reykjavík, 2021. ISBN 978-9-979-89342-4.

This new addition to the *Íslenzk fornrit* series is a most welcome resource for the study of the contemporary sagas. It contains *Sturlunga saga*, known in some early sources as *Íslendinga sagan mikla*, as well as four additional texts related to *Sturlunga saga* either through manuscript connections or subject matter. As do all *Íslenzk fornrit* editions, it also offers a substantial introduction and aids to interpretation of the text.

Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir presents *Sturlunga saga* as a single entity, preserved in two distinct versions in fourteenth-century manuscripts—unlike some previous editions, notably the 1946 edition published by Sturlunguútgáfan, which present the constituent texts within *Sturlunga saga* as separate sagas. This emphasis on a single continuous compilation is similar to that of Kristian Kálund in his 1906–11 edition and of the *Svart á hvítu* edition (based on Kálund), with modern Icelandic spelling, from 1988. In the present edition the different sagas or texts within the whole are identified and discussed in detail in the introduction, including analysis of the major differences between the two manuscript traditions (xli–cxxix), but the editorial emphasis is on presenting the work as it appears in its earliest manuscript versions.

Guðrún Ása bases her text on Kálund’s edition. The base text is AM 122 a fol. (Króksfjarðarbók) (1350–70), supplemented and corrected by AM 122 b fol. (Reykjafjarðarbók) (1375–1400), which survives in only thirty leaves in various

states of legibility, and later paper copies as necessary. Guðrún Ása compares and amends Kálund's text with the 1958 facsimile edition of Króksfjarðarbók and with photographs of Reykjafjarðarbók and the later paper manuscripts. It should be noted that each of the paper manuscripts contains material from both Króksfjarðarbók and Reykjafjarðarbók although some are clearly primarily copies of one or the other manuscript. Guðrún Ása uses a more standardised orthography than that seen in Kálund's edition, normalised to the fourteenth century when the earliest manuscripts were copied, but variant spellings are often retained, reflecting the different manuscripts as well as scribal variation (clxiv–clxv). This edition also presents more material from Reykjafjarðarbók, and seventeenth-century copies derived primarily from Reykjafjarðarbók when it was better preserved, than previous editions (clxiv). Where the two main manuscripts differ materially in content or style, Guðrún Ása presents the text from both traditions in parallel, with Króksfjarðarbók above and Reykjafjarðarbók below the line on the same page (less significant variation in the versions is presented in footnotes).

This edition has been made useful to readers in a variety of ways. Chapter divisions follow as closely as possible manuscript signals such as initials, and chapters are numbered continuously throughout the text. There are a number of aids to interpretation including genealogies, maps, an index of names, explanatory notes to the text and verses, and a smattering of dates for events supplied in the margins of the text. There is also an account of all previous editions and translations of the compilation.

The introduction itself presents a thorough and precise account of the preservation of the two medieval manuscripts of *Sturlunga saga* and the paper copies derived from them. This is followed by the above-mentioned analysis of the composite parts of the compilation. Guðrún Ása also includes a discussion of the major differences between the textual traditions of Króksfjarðarbók and Reykjafjarðarbók, making it clear, for example, that *Þorgils saga skarða* and *Sturlu þáttur* only appear in the Reykjafjarðarbók tradition. The introduction ends with a discussion of the person or persons behind the composition of *Sturlunga saga* as a whole, asking who we might identify as the compiler, editor or writer of *Sturlunga saga*. Guðrún Ása gives particular attention to the oft-repeated idea that the compiler of *Sturlunga saga* was Þórðr Narfason (d. 1308). After a discussion of ideas about who composed or compiled *Sturlunga saga*, beginning with scholars in the nineteenth century, she argues that the attribution of the compilation to Þórðr is based on a particular interpretation of a few passages in the Oddabók copy of *Sturlunga saga* (B.L. Add. 11.127) from the seventeenth century and is hard to defend. She makes an alternative suggestion: that the main work of compiling *Sturlunga saga* was carried out by Sturla Þórðarson himself. Her arguments centre around stylistic consistencies across the work, her interpretation of the 'prologue' to *Íslendinga saga*, Sturla's undoubted connections with Snorri Sturluson and Sturla's own status as a recognised historian. The argument for Sturla as the author/compiler/editor of *Sturlunga saga* is by nature unprovable, and one is left wondering if authorship is the most important or most interesting question in connection with *Sturlunga saga*. Guðrún Ása briefly touches on many other issues that might also have been suitable

for the introduction such as the value of *Sturlunga saga* as a historical source and its relationship to a wider medieval context, but, of course, no introduction can cover every aspect of such a long and complex work.

The four additional texts in this edition include a fragment of miracle stories concerning Bishop Guðmundr Arason, which appears in Reykjavíjarðarbók, a fragment of *Þorgils saga skarða* from about 1300 (which preserves a text at variance with the version used within *Sturlunga saga*), the longer version of *Hrafnis saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* (here printed after Guðrún P. Helgadóttir's 1987 edition) and *Árons saga Hjörleifssonar*.

This new edition of *Árons saga Hjörleifssonar*, an imperfectly preserved text that has been imperfectly served by previous editors, is most welcome. Guðrún Ása bases her edition on the only surviving medieval manuscript of the saga, AM 551 d β 4to (working with Hanna Óladóttir's edition of this manuscript), which is a fragment. Seventeenth-century copies of this manuscript are themselves also incomplete, leaving editors with no easy solutions for reconstructing *Árons saga*. Rather than complete *Árons saga* with text from *Guðmundar saga A* as previous editors have done, Guðrún Ása chooses to follow the text supplied (from *Sturlunga saga*) by Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík (1705–79), who made additions to the copy of *Árons saga* in AM 426 fol. All of the seams of this careful reconstruction are visible in the edition, but it seems equally, if not more, defensible to supply missing text from *Guðmundar saga A*, if it indeed used a version of *Árons saga* as a source, as has been argued by Stefán Karlsson (clxxvi). This is a minor comment about what should become the standard edition of *Árons saga*.

These volumes are the product of meticulous and thorough research and cannot be more highly recommended.

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REYKJAHOLT REVISITED. REPRESENTING SNORRI IN STURLA ÞÓRÐARSON'S *ÍSLENDINGA SAGA*. By ÚLFAR BRAGASON. Translated by ANDREW WAWN (assisted by ÞÓRUNN SIGURÐARDÓTTIR and ALISON FINLAY). *Rit* 106. *Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum*. Reykjavík, 2021. 244 pp. ISBN 978-9-979-65459-9.

Few contemporary scholars have devoted as much persistent attention to *Sturlunga saga* as Úlfar Bragason. A committed narratologist, Úlfar champions handling this under-appreciated mega-saga with the same exacting literary care that Sagas of Icelanders have warranted. *Sturlunga* is not a windowpane offering unobstructed views of the thirteenth century, he says, but a kaleidoscope refracting it in complicated and creative distortions. 'The present study . . . takes no position as to the truthfulness of the narrative', Úlfar pledges (p. 36; cf. p. 37) and mostly fulfills, even if he sometimes evinces less equanimity towards extra-textual realities ('[archaeological] findings have to some extent confirmed the authenticity of the descriptions of Reykjaholt in *Íslendinga saga*', p. 39; cf. pp. 52–54, 196).

Íslendinga saga, the backbone of *Sturlunga*, is generally attributed to the last two decades of Sturla Þórðarson's life (1214–84). Taking his cue from Evelyn Waugh, Úlfar envisions the aged Sturla as a heavily made-up Jeremy Irons, returning in memory to the site of epiphany and trauma: Reykjaholt, where his influential uncle Snorri Sturluson had lived, politicked, written, mentored his young nephew and met a grisly end. Úlfar's book is thus ostensibly about the refraction of Snorri and his evocative home through Sturla's prism; his stated intent is to show that the (often critical) 'ethical judgements' passed on Snorri 'are made with due sensitivity and filial affection' (p. 13). This goal is only intermittently realised, however, as both tangents in *Sturlunga* and wrinkles in the technique send Úlfar on extended jogs down byways and *culs-de-sac*.

The first half of the book revs its theoretical engines, exploring topics like memory and memorialisation (especially as tethered to place) or the relations of author, narrator, informant and character — all roles Sturla plays simultaneously. Úlfar occasionally invokes Snorri and *Sturlunga* illustratively, but hardly centres them. The final chapters mostly outline particular character sets in Snorri's social and narrative vicinity: women, children, siblings, in-laws. A consistent strength are the wells this book drills into bibliographic groundwaters. Readers thirsting for scholarship on *Sturlunga* (including works nowadays often overlooked, such as those of Björn M. Ólsen and W. P. Ker, to whom Úlfar dedicates his study), as well as for narratology and literary method more generally (Seymour Chatman, Meir Sternberg, Frank Kermode and others), may drink deeply.

Yet copious references, quotations and summaries are slow to produce meaningful conversation. Part of the problem stems from how Úlfar has compiled his text, cribbing liberally from his previous monograph *Ætt og saga* (Háskólaútgáfan, 2010) and expanding on a pilot essay ('Reykholt Revisited', in *Sturla Þórðarson: Skald, Chieftain and Lawman*, ed. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (Brill, 2017), 168–79). In stretching and sewing these texts together, repetitions and non-sequuntur unravel. Extensive inset quotations, which receive little if any glossing, further abrade the analytic fabric. To give a single example, the short section on 'Sturla as moral witness' (pp. 104–07), ninety-six lines of text, contains five block quotations, totalling thirty-eight lines — two 'theoretical' paragraphs from present-day scholars, and three 'empirical' excerpts from *Sturlunga* — as well as Úlfar's thumbnail summary of a third scholar's contribution (five lines). This scarcely leaves room for developing his own ideas; potentially interesting concepts are often applied — *appliqué*-ed, really — onto the saga rather than brought into dialogue with it. Finally, Úlfar's prose quilt does nothing to mitigate the bewilderment that scares so many readers off *Sturlunga* in the first place (cf. p. 195): its overabundant plotlines, dizzying political realignments, and every other character's infuriating tendency to go by the name of Snorri, Sturla or Þórðr, are replicated rather than resolved. (Genealogical and other charts could have been a great help.)

Úlfar wields narratological concepts with the same exuberance that Þórr swings a hammer. Such gusto can lead to flashes of insight and thunderclaps of understanding, as when he brings out the consonance between Ker's views on emplotment and 'the conclusions of Mary Carruthers as to how medieval people remembered events' (p. 83), or when he identifies the sagas' attitude towards women as a kind

of misogyny by omission, not commission (p. 128). But, like Þórr's approach to problem-solving, methodological single-mindedness can create difficulties: when Mjöllnir is the only tool to hand, everything looks like a giant's brainpan. Since he cannot be bothered with anthropological methods, Úlfar misconstrues feuding manoeuvres as emotional spats rather than political jockeying ('Magnús was hurt . . . There was much anger between the two factions', p. 48; cf. pp. 58–59). Correctly highlighting names as a characterisation shorthand (pp. 86–89), he fails to grasp how naming actually works ('From the very fact that the [nick]name stuck with him, we may suppose that the young man was always a diminutive figure' (p. 144); contrast Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Harvard, 2002), 24–25). Insisting on Snorri's slaying as a pivotal, narrative-organising trauma (p. 40), Úlfar sees allusions to it everywhere; but sometimes an axe is just an axe (p. 95).

Outright inaccuracies, while less frequent, may be no less damaging. *Pace* Úlfar, Guðrún Nordal has not 'shown how the verses attributed to Sturla are deployed in *Íslendinga saga* to present other perspectives than those found in the prose' (p. 183); this, she says, happens in *Hákonar saga*, whereas of *Íslendinga saga* she says almost precisely the opposite ('Sturla: The Poet and the Creator of *Prosimetrum*', in *Sturla Þórðarson* (2017), 120–32, esp. p. 121). The Norwegian merchants who slew Ormr Jónsson had not been 'harrying in the Vestmannaeyjar', nor did Snorri make peace with them (p. 124). Úlfar interprets old Sighvatr — charging ahead to his doom at Örlygsstaðir — as heroic rather than doddering, possibly hard of hearing or even senile ('*Gakktu eigi þar fram, Sighvatr; þar eru óvinir fyrir*'. *Hann svarar öngu ok gekk sem áðr . . . hann var þrotinn af mæði, en lítt sár eða ekki* (pp. 113–16)). I find this reading wrong but defensible. Indefensible, however, is the choice to edit out the degradation of Sighvatr's corpse (*Peir flettu Sighvat öllum klæðum nema stuttbrókum* (*Sturlunga saga* ch. 294; *Íslenzk fornrit XXI* (2021), pp. 340–41). No matter how one understands this detail, surely it must inflect our view of the dying magnate's narrative arc. To suppress it is to misrepresent the data.

Andrew Wawn's translation generally reads well, even if one might contest it here and there. I would have translated *brá henni nökkut* (*Sturlunga saga* ch. 206 (*Íslenzk fornrit XXI*, p. 188)) rather more forcefully than 'she reacted somewhat' (p. 109); 'she was somewhat shaken'? In one place, two characters are transposed: 'nephew-in-law', *recte* 'uncle-in-law'; 'asked Kolbeinn's supporters to provide him', *recte* 'asked his supporters to provide [Kolbeinn]' (p. 114). Typos are rare and minor, aside from a few phantom references (Meulengracht Sørensen 1998/1999 (p. 142); Úlfar Bragason 2004 (p. 184)). One stylistic tic is worth noting; Úlfar frequently introduces Latin tags: 'full-grown (young) man (L. *juvenis*)' (p. 144). Similar orthography presents technical vocabulary (*höfðingi*, *ójafnaðarmaður*) and snippets of the Old Norse original ('Jón the tiny (*murtr*)' (p. 67)), so readers may be misled into believing that the Latin shows up in manuscripts or that it represents the medieval sources' own conceptual jargon, when in fact it is the modern commentator's — perfectly legitimate — interpretative gloss.

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THE PAGAN EARL. HÁKON SIGURÐARSON AND THE MEDIEVAL CONSTRUCTION OF OLD NORSE RELIGION. By NICOLAS MEYLAN. *The Viking Collection 26*. University Press of Southern Denmark. Odense, 2022. 264 pp. ISBN 978-8-740-83424-6.

The Pagan Earl asks at the outset: What is paganism? The book unearths how elements of paganism were depicted variably by royal biographers during the late-twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, specifically in relation to Earl Hákon Sigurðarson (c.937–95) and how such depictions were based on textual ideology. Chapter 1, ‘Divine Kingship’, treats Hákon’s status as an earl rather than a king, for Hákon was descended from Harald Fairhair, but matrilineally. Unfavourable sources reinforce his earl status (*Historia Norwegie*, for example, casts Hákon as usurper). Contrarily, Eyvind skáldaspillir’s *Háleygjatal* lists Hákon’s ancestors, going back twenty-seven generations to Odin. *Heimskringla* cites stanzas from *Háleygjatal* that provide a genealogy for Hákon preceding Harald Fairhair, thus supporting Hákon’s claim to rule Norway, but Flateyjarbók’s *Greater Saga of Olaf Tryggvason* (as Meylan styles *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, literally ‘the greatest’) presents Hákon as villainous, and even though it includes quotation from *Háleygjatal*, it omits the genealogical stanzas. Flateyjarbók even includes a text, *Hversu Nóregr byggðisk*, that omits Hákon’s genealogy as presented in *Háleygjatal* beyond five generations, instead listing an alternative, non-royal and non-divine lineage.

Chapter 2, ‘Sacrifice’, focuses on the death of Hákon’s father, Sigurð. The sympathetic *Heimskringla* depicts Sigurð’s death as the deed of Harald Fairhair’s grandsons, sons of Eirík Bloodaxe and Queen Gunnhild. Led by Harald Greycloak but guided by Gunnhild, the brothers recruit Hákon’s brother Grjótgarð to help kill Sigurð. Hákon naturally seeks vengeance for the death of his father. *Heimskringla* further depicts Sigurð as supportive of Eirík’s brother and rival, Hákon the Good. Sigurð hosted a *blót* ‘sacrificial pagan feast’ to gather farmers in Trondelag together with the Christian Hákon the Good. Meylan contends the *blót* episode in *Heimskringla* provides a lesson in socio-political intelligence (rather than comparative religion), with Sigurð mediating between the pagan farmers and a Christian king. Chapter 3, ‘Sacred Kingship’, employs James George Frazer’s concept of sacred kingship, whereby a king is essentially linked to the natural world. *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla* both portray Norway as destitute under Harald Greycloak and his brothers. Subsequently, under the pagan Hákon, the compendia tell of improved harvests. Meylan’s analysis, again, is not religious but socio-political: how a ruler interacts with his subjects, who in this case are pagans who perform pagan ritual and aristocrats with much to gain from sacrifice and traditions associated with the temple. While *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna* promote Hákon, *Historia Norwegie* and *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum* omit the positive change in conditions when he controls Norway, as does Odd Snorrason’s *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, which reserves improved conditions for the ascent of Olaf Tryggvason.

Chapter 4, ‘Temple’, treats the reconstruction of pagan temples after Harald Greycloak’s death and Hákon’s return to Norway. *Heimskringla* describes Hákon initiating reconstruction by assigning intermediaries to maintain temples, an action illustrative of decentralised power *vis-à-vis* temple association. Thus,

Hákon breaks with the centralisation initiated by Harald Fairhair and revitalised by his grandsons. Odd's saga presents temple construction as occurring later in Hákon's rule and as responsive to the arrival of Christianity. The temple is thus not primarily a religious element in the sources but an ideological one. Chapter 5, 'Gods and Goddesses', focuses on poetry. Eyvind skáldaspillir's *Háleygjatal* depicts Hákon descending from Odin; Einar skálaglamm's *Vellekla* presents him on a mission from Odin; and Hallfreð Óttarson's stanzas in *Snorra Edda* posit his contact with the Norse pantheon. Hákon's Odinic association reinforces his sovereignty; here Meylan draws on Dumézil's tripartite division. *Ágrip* is the earliest source to refer directly to Hákon's poets, specifically via *Háleygjatal*, though it omits Hákon's descent from Odin. Odd's saga refers to Hákon's connection with Hallfreð Óttarson, but only by stating that Hallfreð praised him, though Odd does include Hallfreð's stanzas praising Olaf Tryggvason, to whom Hallfreð pledged allegiance after Hákon's death. Meylan details Odd's reference to Hákon's worship of Þorgerð Hörðabrúð instead of Æsir worship, a switch which might have served to cast Hákon as negatively as possible, for Þorgerð exacts the sacrifice of Hákon's nine-year-old son. *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna* quote the poets to present Hákon favourably, both omitting any reference to Þorgerð Hörðabrúð. Flateyjarbók's *Greater Saga of Olaf Tryggvason* portrays Hákon negatively: four stanzas of *Vellekla* are quoted with all positive references to Hákon omitted, a mere two stanzas of *Háleygjatal* are quoted, and Þorgerð is portrayed as Hákon's patron goddess, echoing Odd's vehemently negative portrayal of Hákon's paganism. The sources eschew consistent definitions of paganism: it is, variously, worship of the Æsir (*Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*), worship of Þorgerðr Hörðabrúð (Odd), or worship of the devil (Flateyjarbók).

Chapter 6, 'Conversion', evaluates Hákon's interactions with King Harald Gormsson and Emperor Otto II. Hákon paid tribute to Harald Gormsson, and the sources (other than Theodoricus Monk and Saxo) agree that he defended Denmark against Otto. *Vellekla*, with *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna* following it, present Hákon and his retinue defending the Danevirke against Otto, who, according to *Fagrskinna*, then defeated Harald Gormsson. Harald, obliged to convert the Danes to Christianity, forces baptism on Hákon and his men, though subsequently Hákon discards Christianity. Odd's saga (AM 310 4to) differs, presenting Otto defeating Hákon and Hákon witnessing Bishop Poppo's miracle of carrying hot iron. Hákon still resists conversion, though he eventually receives baptism. Odd thus presents Hákon as not fully coerced to convert, for he witnessed the miracle, so his later rejection of Christianity is flagrantly unrighteous. Meylan uses these and other examples to argue for a dichotomy figurative of royal ideology, wherein 'On the one hand, Christianity stands for centralizing kingship marked by coercion and oppression' whereas 'Paganism, on the other, is associated with a more autochthonous and more limited form thereof' (p. 141). Hákon and Olaf Tryggvason occupy neatly demarcated positions within this structure. Chapter 7, 'Myth', portrays Hákon's deeds as he and his army approach Gautland, sacrifice to Odin (in *Heimskringla*), attack Earl Óttar, and destroy a pagan temple. After the temple destruction, Odd's saga and *Jómsvikinga saga* (AM 291 4to) describe Hákon as

vargr í véum ‘a wolf in the sanctuaries’. To judge the intent of this reference, Meylan cites the myth of Fenrir’s binding in *Gylfaginning*, when the gods spare Fenrir but bind him even though prophecy foretells that Fenrir will slay Odin. The sparing of Fenrir, Meylan maintains, is so as not to defile the sanctuary (Ásgarð) with wolf’s blood. Dumézil’s tripartite structure suggests that Fenrir, the wolf in the sanctuaries, represents the third function, the lowest class — those who produce goods — in the vertical hierarchy. Odd’s saga and *Jómsvíkinga saga* use the allusion to ‘define [Hákon’s] successful bid for power as a usurpation’ (p. 157), which thus served to legitimate the future rule of Olaf Tryggvason, a king representative of the first function, the sovereign descending patrilineally from Harald Fairhair. *Heimskringla*’s inclusion of Odinic sacrifice presents Hákon as rightful ruler of Norway, representative of Dumézil’s sovereign function.

Chapter 8, ‘Human Sacrifice’, examines the origin of the hailstorm at the Battle at Hjørung Bay (Hjørungavágr) that helped Hákon to victory, or at least complicated affairs for his enemies. Odd’s saga depicts the hailstorm resulting from Hákon’s sacrifice of his son to Þorgerð Hörðabrúð; *Fagrskinna* and *Jómsvíkinga saga* omit any sacrifice in relation to the storm; and *Heimskringla* does not determine the storm to benefit either side. Meylan argues that Odd’s version effectively removes credit for the military victory from Hákon, again utilising religion for ideological purposes. Chapter 9, ‘Fate’, deals with Hákon’s death. Hákon, presented as a rapist by all the sources, became unpopular and was killed by his slave Kark on a farm while hiding from Olaf Tryggvason and his men. According to *Ágrip*, Hákon, about to be found, orders Kark to cut his throat. Odd’s saga and *Heimskringla* depict Olaf Tryggvason and his party searching the farm, before Olaf announces he will reward whoever kills Hákon, and Kark then cuts Hákon’s throat. *Heimskringla* frames Hákon’s death in terms of bad luck (*óhamingja*). The *Greater Saga of Olaf Tryggvason* restates *Heimskringla*’s details about Hákon’s death but adds the negative evaluation of Hákon’s behaviour as ultimately responsible for his demise. Hákon’s sons, Eirík and Svein, defeat Olaf Tryggvason at the battle of Svolder, and even though they are Christians they allow for decentralised political organisation, or, as Meylan argues, pagan kingship under Christian rule.

Chapter 10, ‘Religion’, closes the book by concluding that the biographies of Earl Hákon Sigurðarson demonstrate ‘there are evident, and indeed systematic variations — i.e. biases — in the representations of paganism and its subcategories, variations that correlate neatly with the texts’ respective positions on kingship’ (p. 201). The sources exemplify three ideological positions: clerical, characterised by bias for centralised kingship associated with the Church (e.g. *Ágrip*, Theodoricus, *Historia Norwegie*, Odd and the *Greater Saga of Olaf Tryggvason*); *Fagrskinna*’s secular support of Norwegian kings; and the more complicated *Heimskringla*. Meylan determines that *Heimskringla* is ideologically supportive of decentralised kingship, a reaction to increasingly centralised power in Norway’s sphere of influence in the thirteenth century. Meylan’s masterfully composed biography of Earl Hákon Sigurðarson reminds us that politics and religion are not separate but essentially interlinked spheres: ‘paganism functions as a means to confer extra illegitimacy or, as the case may be, illegitimacy to particular human, historical,

contingent arrangements — in the corpus at hand, mainly sociopolitical ones' (p. 206). One notable comment to add about the book is its style, which the present reviewer has adopted for this review: proper nouns are presented in a mix of Old Norse and anglicised forms — hence *Historia Norwegie* but also *Greater Saga of Olaf Tryggvason*, and also, for instance, the truncated forms of the names Sigurð and Svein appear alongside anglicised forms for Odin and Olaf, among others. This choice does not impede the book's presentation, however, which remains readable and thought-provoking from cover to cover. *The Pagan Earl* is a valuable contribution to the field of Old Norse-Icelandic studies and will endure as essential reading for any scholar of Nordic paganism.

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ODIN'S WAYS. A GUIDE TO THE PAGAN GOD IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE. By ANNETTE LASSEN. Translated by HELEN F. LESLIE-JACOBSEN and MARGARET CORMACK. *Routledge*. New York and London, 2022. xi + 296 pp. ISBN 978-1-032-03571-0.

The Old Norse god Odin is an important figure in contemporary culture and has been so for several centuries, even though his original role in the religious life of pre-Christian Nordic peoples belongs to a distant past without written records and is therefore difficult — if not impossible — to know. Like all cultural figures, he is an intellectual construct, to a large extent based on what medieval sources tell us about him. The publication of this excellent revised English translation of Annette Lassen's book *Odin på kristent pergament: En teksthistorisk studie* (2011) is therefore to be welcomed, as the number of people in the world interested in the pagan god Odin far exceeds those capable of reading Danish.

A great deal of thought has been put into this important book, which should be on the reading list of any taught course on the pre-Christian religions of the North. Its usefulness lies primarily in the care and thoroughness with which the different sources are analysed and contextualised. These sources are Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*, composed in Latin in the early thirteenth century, and a variety of Old Norse-Icelandic sources: Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* in prose, King's Sagas (not least Snorri's *Ynglinga saga*), and also Legendary Sagas and saints' sagas, as well as Eddic and skaldic poetry. Very few of these texts existed in written form before the year 1200, though it must be assumed that they have a basis in oral culture. This is especially true of the mythological Eddic poems. Many of them are believed to be of pre-Christian origin, and Odin appears in some of the most memorable of them.

Throughout the history of scholarship, a great deal of intellectual energy has been spent on the study of Old Norse religion. Important new contributions have been made in recent years by Neil Price, Jens Peter Schjødt and Brit Solli, among others. Though all these scholars, as well as others not mentioned here, treat their sources, especially the medieval ones, with necessary caution, this book will nevertheless serve as a warning to be very careful when using them.

The structure of Annette Lassen's book is clear and consistent with its subtitle. Indeed, the author guides the reader through the intricacies of the image of Odin in the great number of medieval sources that have been preserved. A short introduction, stating the purpose of the study, is followed by an overview of the reception of the god in past research. This precise and clear presentation of over forty pages bodes well for the rest of the book, ending with a statement of the author's 'contextual method'. To steer clear of the dangers of viewing the source material through a modern lens, she insists that each text representing Odin should be understood in its medieval context. This calls for an in-depth understanding of the literate culture of the times in which Saxo and the Icelandic saga-authors were writing. In addition, she warns against attempts to use disparate elements from the different sources to draw up a synthetic image of the god, preferring to try to understand him in the context of each given work. However, she is not saying that any knowledge of the Old Norse god is unattainable. On the contrary, her 'presumption is that an understanding of the pre-Christian god can, paradoxically enough, be reached when one disregards the syntheses about Odin and instead heeds the diversity of the medieval texts' (p. 39).

In addition, her approach is partly inspired by New Philology's emphasis on the material preservation and presentation of texts. Indeed, it is important to understand the manuscript transmission to sort out the different versions of Odin; this is the case even in texts such as *Heimskringla*, all three parts of which are considered to have been composed as a single work by Snorri Sturluson, though manuscript evidence challenges this assumption (p. 149). The chapter on method is followed by an 'excursus' in which the author explains and justifies her reluctance to use the word 'myth' in her work. This is not a medieval concept and should therefore not be used when examining the appearances of Odin in texts from this period.

True to its vocation of guiding the reader through the intricacies of the various sources portraying Odin, the book is organised around their different types and origins. The study of the sources begins with what are probably the oldest written ones: Latin texts and Old Norse-Icelandic translations of such texts. This chapter discusses how and why the authors of these texts often equated or saw parallels between Old Norse and Roman gods. Odin is often thought to be the same as Mercury but also Mars, depending on the sources, and even Hercules, Jove and Saturn (p. 61). The chapter also explains why medieval writers were inclined to identify Old Norse gods in this manner, informed as they were by the story of the division of tongues (pp. 53–54). In the author's words: 'The use of Odin and other Nordic gods as translations of the names of Roman ones reveals more about the Christian culture and environment in the medieval North than it does about Odin's mythological role' (p. 61). This chapter leads logically into a presentation of ecclesiastical explanations of paganism, well-known to medieval authors, and 'provides a contemporary context for the understanding of the descriptions of Odin in the Old Norse/Icelandic texts' (p. 65).

This is followed by a series of very short chapters presenting the image of Odin in saints' sagas, Sagas of Icelanders, Contemporary Sagas and courtly romances. His presence in these sagas is limited and mostly dependent on medieval Christian

conceptions of pagan deities. In Chapter 9 the author begins to examine the types of texts in which Odin has a prominent role. They are the Kings' Sagas, the Legendary Sagas, skaldic poetry, Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* and, finally, the Eddic poems. This order might seem strange. Why treat *Ynglinga saga* separately from other sagas belonging to the same genre, the Kings' Sagas? Though not stated explicitly, the answer is given implicitly in the beginning of the chapter on *Ynglinga saga*. Manuscript evidence suggests that it was written down in the same period as *Gesta Danorum* and the Codex Regius of the Eddic poems (p. 149). Space does not allow for a presentation of each of the chapters. In what follows, I will concentrate on the image of Odin in the Legendary Sagas, *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri's *Edda* and, finally, the Eddic poems.

Odin appears more frequently in the Legendary Sagas (*fornaldarsögur Norðrlanda*) than in any other saga genre. Annette Lassen believes that the generally sympathetic attitude towards paganism evidenced in these texts is due to their roots in the medieval historiographical tradition of *origines gentium* (p. 108). This seems very likely. As she shows, the image of Odin in these sagas is quite varied. Nevertheless, there is a 'kernel in the descriptions of Odin', who 'appears in an unidentifiable guise and gives a human hero help or opposes them' (p. 109). On this basis, Lassen dismisses the identification made by several scholars, among them the present reviewer, of Gizurr Grýtingaliði in *Hervarar saga* as a figure of Odin (p. 109, n. 4). She acknowledges that Gizurr is a *heiti* of Odin but says that the Gizurr of *Hervarar saga* does not have the characteristics of the pagan god she has pointed out: an identity shrouded in mystery, great age and a missing eye. Though Gizurr is not one-eyed, as most Odin-like figures are, there is a mystery surrounding his identity and he is portrayed as very old (*ofrigamall*) in Chapter 12 of the saga, contrary to what Lassen states in her book.

In another reference to my 2002 book on the Legendary Sagas, she points out what she labels an inconsistency between my two interpretations of Odin, in *Hervarar saga* on the one hand and on the other in *Völsunga saga* (p. 109, n. 11). I agree that Odin's role in the two sagas is different. That should, however, be considered an argument in favour of Lassen's thesis, that the figure of the god must be studied in the context in which it appears. This means that the author(s) of one saga can use Odin in a different way from the author of another, even if both sagas belong to the same genre, as *Hervarar saga* and *Völsunga saga* most certainly do. In general, I find that the interpretations of the figure of Odin in my 2002 book are either overlooked or presented superficially (e.g. in note 5, p. 109).

In *Ynglinga saga* Odin comes from Asia, is a warrior king and magician, and settles down in Sweden, where he dies and is worshipped as a divinity. Of all writings, this saga gives by far the most detailed description of the god (p. 149). He is also a prominent and central figure in Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, though the picture there is more fragmented owing to the nature of that text (p. 169). That is why the chapters devoted to these two texts are of great importance in Lassen's book. In both cases she is to be commended, as each chapter is detailed and illuminating. The chapter on *Ynglinga saga* begins with a study of its manuscript transmission followed by an analysis of the sources of its prologue. The conclusion is that

the Odin of the saga is principally euhemeristic. He is an exceptional man who contemporaries and/or later people believed was a god (pp. 161–63). The author fits into this general framework observations found in other Nordic texts about shamanistic rituals (pp. 157–58) as well as elements from medieval learned writings on devilish necromancers. Mention must be made here of what seems to be the author's discovery of a striking parallel between the account of Mímir's head and stories circulating about Gerbert of Aurillac (p. 160). The conclusion is therefore that Odin is a composite figure, the saga author drawing elements from different sources, some learned and others not, to build her or his image of the pagan deity.

Ynglinga saga's attitude towards Odin is generally positive, which is in accordance with the way Odin is represented in other parts of *Heimskringla* compared to the sources used by the author and discussed in an earlier chapter of the book (p. 85). This would support the idea that Snorri Sturluson's milieu had an antiquarian interest in ancient paganism and did not feel the need to portray it in terms as negative as those used by earlier ecclesiastical writers whose attitude towards paganism was more disapproving.

There is a strong indication that the author of *Ynglinga saga* knew and used Snorri's *Edda* (p. 151). There are however significant differences between the two, for example in the way they treat the war between the Æsir and the Vanir (p. 251). This does not mean that the two texts originated in different milieus. The discrepancies can be explained by the fact that the two texts serve different purposes, the former being dynastic history whereas the second is a handbook for skalds. However, both texts are consistent with the general opinion that they were composed by, or at the behest of, Snorri Sturluson. Here mention must be made of an important section on the learned milieu responsible for the composition of the *Edda* (pp. 176–77). It is one that is familiar with Latin writings, has antiquarian leanings and a special interest in poetry. The case for this is made in a convincing manner. In the interest of contextual studies, it might have been useful for the author to have shown an awareness of Kevin Wanner's 2008 book on the social motivations of Snorri's *Edda* (*Snorri Sturluson and the Edda. The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval Scandinavia*, reviewed in *Saga-Book XXXIII* (2009), 117–19). In this important work, Snorri's cultural entrepreneurship is associated with his activities in the political sphere and seen through the lens of social theory. This approach should have some relevance for understanding Snorri's choices in presenting the pagan god.

Lassen's final chapter is devoted to the image of Odin in Eddic poetry. As at least some of the poems are older than any other of the sources studied in the book, one might have expected them to be treated earlier. There is however a reason for this, as up to this point the work has presented evidence showing that the image of the god in prose works is in part or mostly influenced by medieval cultural representations. By deconstructing the picture of Odin given by these later works, a study of how he appears in the mythological poems might give the possibility of a reconstruction of the pre-Christian deity referred to by this name. As a result, this chapter is arguably the most valuable one for students of pre-Christian Nordic beliefs.

In accordance with the importance of the Eddic poetry, this final chapter is the longest in the book (50 pages). It proceeds in three movements, beginning with an analysis of the way the corpus of poetry is organised in its main manuscript, the Codex Regius. This is followed by a discussion of each of the mythological poems in which Odin plays the main or a major role, as well as more synthetic presentations of his image in other mythological poems and his appearances in the heroic poetry. A final section is devoted to the reception of the pagan poetry by medieval Christian authors. Though the presence of the pre-Christian Odin is felt to a greater degree in some of these poems, the analysis nevertheless also shows that the Odin of some of the poems has features originating in medieval Christian culture, e.g. as he appears in *Hávamál* (p. 219) and, more surprisingly, in *Lokasenna* (p. 231). Nevertheless, Odin has characteristics in these poems which are not found elsewhere, supporting the idea that they are those attributed to him by pre-Christian people (p. 235).

The final chapter summarises Annette Lassen's main findings in which she concludes that ecclesiastical theories of paganism shape to a greater or lesser degree the image of Odin as it appears in the different texts. Nevertheless, there are shared elements, and this confirms knowledge of the pre-Christian Odin among medieval authors. However, each text treats him differently. Therefore, they must be studied individually using the author's contextual method (p. 253).

The author deserves praise for her innovative and important work, as do the translators for the care with which they have made it accessible to a wider English-speaking readership. Those wanting to know the characteristics of the deity worshipped by pre-Christian Scandinavians will find in *Odin's Ways* a critical analysis of the most important sources. For those who are interested in the workings of the intellectual culture of the medieval North, the book opens up fascinating perspectives on how Christian authors made sense of and exploited what they remembered, or believed they remembered, of their pagan past.

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MAKING THE PROFANE SACRED IN THE VIKING AGE. ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF STEFAN BRINK. Edited by IRENE GARCÍA LOSQUIÑO, OLOF SUNDQVIST and DECLAN TAGGART. *Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe* 32. Brepols. Turnhout, 2020. xii + 336 pp. ISBN 978-2-503-58604-5. E-ISBN 978-2-503-58604-2.

This collection of essays addresses the concept of the sacred in the Viking Age from various perspectives. The purpose of the volume is to pay tribute to the Swedish scholar of early Scandinavian society and culture Stefan Brink, particularly to his contribution to the study of Viking-Age religion and early Christianity in Scandinavia. With a background in linguistics and particularly in onomastics, Stefan Brink is a multi-faceted scholar who has worked in several fields such as settlement history, memory studies, early law, administration history and social organisation. As is stated in the introduction, the editors have chosen to focus this

Festschrift on Viking-Age religion, one of Brink's key fields of study — and, we must assume, a main area of scholarly exchange between Brink and the editors.

The introduction and the description on the back cover of the book emphasise that the collection brings together contributions from 'pre-eminent scholars of Old Norse'. In fact, the authors are a much more diverse group of scholars of history of religions, name studies, archaeology, cultural geography and linguistics, reflecting the many aspects of Brink's scholarly life.

Generally seeing the relation between sacred and profane as a spectrum, the anthology approaches the theme of sacredness through a range of questions such as 'how was something or someone made sacred?' and 'what role did the sacred play in society?' Given the different backgrounds of the contributors, the papers in the collection represent very different approaches to answering such questions, which is an interesting demonstration of the complexity of the study of Old Norse religion. All essays seek to discuss or contextualise key research areas or selected papers by Brink, with whom the authors all have scholarly relations. Many make efforts to include onomastics, although the only contributor who is primarily a name scholar is Brink's Swedish colleague Per Vikstrand.

The book consists of an introduction by the editors followed by nineteen essays, and is completed by a bibliography of Brink's works and a *tabula gratulatoria*. The essays are organised in five main thematic sections: I. Understanding Sacredness, II. Sacredness and Space, III. The Sacred and the Text, IV. Sacredness Across Contexts, V. Afterlives of Sacredness.

The introduction offers an overview of the theme and the structure of the volume, and also provides a portrait of Stefan Brink and his scholarly life, beginning with his childhood and describing his early beginnings in Swedish onomastic studies which has formed a thread through his later research. This gives a good starting point for understanding the book's structure. The description of Brink's career is well supported by the bibliography at the end of the book.

The first section on 'Understanding Sacredness' contains three papers with mainly theoretical and semantic angles. The first, by Margaret Clunies Ross, offers a general discussion of the meaning of the term *heilagr* 'holy' in Old Norse. Next, Jens Peter Schjødt discusses the wider theoretical scope of one of Brink's own papers from 2001, on pre-Christian sacral geography. He disagrees with Brink's statement that there was no clear dichotomy between sacred and profane in Viking-Age landscape perception. Schjødt is of the opinion that one cannot exist without the other, but his discussion is more of a theoretical nature than of specific landscapes. In the third paper, Mats Widgren further addresses sacred geography from a landscape perspective, touching on the relation between emic and etic understandings, which is also important in place-name research. Widgren asks whether landscape should be understood as scenery or as a lived-in social landscape organised in territorial domains. The landscape theme is elaborated more deeply and with concrete examples in section II on 'Sacredness and Space', which consists of five papers. In the first two, the archaeologists Jan-Henrik Fallgren and Torun Zachrisson both consider the themes of wetland depositions in a wider landscape context. Both papers discuss boundaries and performativity in relation

to sacred space, focussing on sites on the island of Öland and at Alken Enge in Jutland respectively. The onomastic scholar Per Vikstrand also focuses on Öland, discussing the place name *Karlevi* and its possible meaning, 'sanctuary of all free men'. The archaeologist Anders Andrén unpicks some preconceptions about the term *stafgardr* and the *Stafgard* place names on the island of Gotland, arguing that they may indeed represent the same kind of sacred places that are indicated in the early law codes from the island. The last paper in section II, by Bertil Nilsson, uses law codes to explore how churches could lose their sacral status and have it restored, thus elucidating how sacredness could be variable and depicted as a spectrum. Section II is very cohesive, with detailed case studies of archaeology and place names in a landscape context that feed into each other in different ways. The section is structured chronologically, beginning with papers that deal with pre-Viking landscapes and ending with a paper on medieval Christian phenomena.

Section III on 'sacredness and text' is comparatively short, containing three essays by scholars of Old Norse. The first, by John McKinnell, identifies some alliterative collocations as possible fundamental building blocks of Eddic poetry. I found the paper very interesting, but perhaps a bit technical for the non-literary scholar. Carolyne Larrington's contribution also looks at collocations, here used as instruments to underscore relations between landscapes, characters and main themes in the Helgi tradition. The examples are a good illustration of the importance that could be ascribed to names in poetic traditions. Judy Quinn's paper explores the variations in the tradition about the god Týr's parentage. Inspired by Brink's 2007 paper about geographical variations in Old Norse religion, she asks if the differing traditions reflect similar regional variations between traditions of mythological characters.

Section IV, treating 'Sacredness across Contexts', appears as a conglomeration of five papers with different types of focus. The section is not arranged chronologically or in any other apparent order. First, John Lindow deals with spheres of communication, and differences and influences between myths and legends, engaging with the theme of oral transmission that has been of great interest to Stefan Brink. Next, Tarrin Wills presents a study of Thor worship in Sweden, arguing that there are relations between occurrences of the deity's name in place names, personal names on rune stones and bridge building. Wills implies that these groups of evidence point towards preferences for Thor in some areas, but the author himself points to a problem of chronology. In my opinion, the paper would have benefitted from a deeper discussion of the mechanisms of naming behaviour, both of places and people. Anne Sofie Gräslund contributes some thoughts on popular religion in the context of conversion to Christianity. She reflects on Karen Louise Jolly's book, *Popular Religion in Anglo Saxon England: Elf charms in Context* (1996), asking whether its conclusions can be transferred to Scandinavia and touching on its connections to the concept of Lived Religion. Whereas Anne Sofie Gräslund's paper investigates the transition between the Viking Age and the medieval period, the following paper by Bo Gräslund gazes far into the pre-Christian past, looking into the symbolism of pigs and swine in the mythology and archaeology of the Bronze and Iron Ages. Covering a wide chronological span and an array of complex

problems, Gräslund argues that the importance of swine in warrior ideology is tied to the identity of the Swedes as a tribe. The final paper in section IV, by Terry Gunnell, is a very intriguing study of the connections between goddesses and wetlands. This important theme is underexplored from an archaeological perspective, and the paper weaves together various threads running through the book as a whole.

In Section V, on ‘Afterlives of Sacredness’, the papers by Andreas Nordberg and Stephen A. Mitchell both explore the role of toponymy in later folk traditions and inquire into the role of landscapes in reimagining the past. In their own ways, the papers question whether names and perceptions of places from medieval and modern times could be relics of pre-Christian beliefs or if they are innovations, perhaps inspired by knowledge of pre-Christian concepts.

The final paper, by the archaeologists Charlotte Fabech and Ulf Näsman, is a narrative about the instances and research themes through which the authors have crossed paths with Stefan Brink throughout their careers. This paper works as a supplement to the introduction, giving a first-hand account of the development of research into sacred landscapes in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries and the vital collaboration between onomastics and archaeology.

The concluding complete bibliography of Brink’s works is a very useful feature, especially regarding his early writings. As an archaeologist specialising in onomastic research and a researcher of early Scandinavian landscapes, society and religion, I find a great deal of useful information and valuable interpretations in Stefan Brink’s early works.

All images in the book are printed in grayscale and are quite small. Unfortunately, some of the maps do not come out well and in a couple of places the captions do not provide sufficient information.

Stefan Brink as a scholar is one of a kind, and the aim of the book seems to be to create a volume that reflects this. Through the theme of sacrality, the collection intersects with most of Stefan Brink’s main research interests, with the exception perhaps of settlement history. The great variation in the papers reflects the wide-ranging scope of Brink’s activity and they sustain the refreshing quality of a Festschrift where many of the papers explore more loosely defined reflections or ideas than those found in journals. Not all sections work equally well but, arranged around Brink as a scholar, the volume makes sense.

Many of the authors take pains to mention names in their essays, since they are honouring a scholar who had his initial training in this discipline. However, I was struck by the limited or superficial references to onomastic studies in many papers where deeper engagement would have strengthened or given nuance to arguments. In this respect the volume could have benefited from a name researcher as one of the editors. For example, neither Clunies Ross in her study of *heilagr* or Widgren in his reflections on *land* seems aware that these words have research histories as onomastic elements. Although Clunies Ross mentions place names in a footnote, she does not refer to the chapter on the term *helig* in Per Vikstrand’s 2001 dissertation on sacral place names.

Overall, I found the collection both enjoyable and inspiring to read, with a wide range of approaches offering various types of scholars of Viking-Age religious life

something familiar as well as something that might be different from their usual foci. The volume is especially interesting and valuable in its attempts to bridge the gap between written and material evidence. The multifaceted and multi-disciplinary approach is difficult, but important for progression in this field.

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SAINTHOOD, SCRIPTORIA, AND SECULAR ERUDITION IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN SCANDINAVIA. ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF KIRSTEN WOLF. Edited by DARIO BULLITTA and NATALIE M. VAN DEUSEN. *Acta Scandinavica* 13. *Brepols*. Turnhout, 2022. 466 pp. ISBN 978-2-503-59548-1, eISBN 978-2-503-59549-8.

Kirsten Wolf's immense contribution to Old Norse scholarship, particularly that of Christian literature, is honoured through this collection of essays for her sixtieth birthday in 2019. Much like Wolf's scholarship, this Festschrift approaches a wide variety of subjects spanning two different time periods: the medieval and the early modern. The title of the collection, while lengthy, does not do justice to the range of subjects presented in the volume. There are, for example, three essays analysing skaldic poetry and its kennings, which one might not expect. The vast scope of the volume is, however, testament to the many areas of Old Norse study which Wolf has shaped through her work.

The collection comprises eighteen essays of varying lengths, written by Wolf's colleagues and former students. They are divided into sections based on their theme or period. The introduction outlines Kirsten Wolf's life and works before summarising the content of each of the essays in the volume. The first section analyses 'Pictorial and Sculptural Sainthood'; it comprises two essays exploring visual elements of sainthood. In the first essay, entitled 'In Hand and Underfoot: Reading Medieval Scandinavian Wooden Sculptures', Thomas A. Dubois argues that the lower half of wooden sculptures would have been the most important in conveying meaning. Unlike modern viewers examining a sculpture in a gallery, medieval observers would have paid more attention to the bottom half of the statues owing to their raised placement and the deference of the onlookers. Dubois thus analyses the hands, feet and console figures of Scandinavian wooden sculptures. The next essay, entitled 'Pictorial Hagiography: The Gotlandic Death of a German Emperor' by Marianne Kalinke, analyses a mid-thirteenth-century fresco in Vamlingbo Church in Gotland, depicting the death of Emperor Henry II. The fresco depicts a scene of *psychostasia*: the weighing of souls in the Last Judgement. There are no written sources for this story in Gotland before the end of the century; the fresco is thus the earliest 'text' of Henry's *vita*, which is likely to have reached the church through oral transmission.

The collection then moves on to the three essays in the section exploring 'Medieval Sainthood'. The first, 'Miracles and Emotions in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature' by Ásdís Egilsdóttir, describes the emotions depicted in *Þorláks saga helga*, *Jóns saga helga* and the collections of miracles ascribed to these two saints.

Ásdís describes the emotional restraint, love (in all its forms), kindness and weeping of the saints as well as the emotions evoked by their posthumous miracles. The second essay, ‘St Cecilia’s Icelandic Miracles in Holm perg 2 fol.’ by Margaret Cormack, presents two episodes from the end of *Cecillu saga* in one of its extant manuscripts, which provide important evidence for the cult of St Cecilia in Iceland. The Old Norse text is from Unger’s 1877 edition, with Cormack’s own translations. Cormack analyses the passages, commenting on the depictions of piety and medical practice in the text, whilst reaching outwards to examine relevant art and literature in dialogue with these scenes. The third essay in this section, by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, is called ‘St Michael: God’s *þjónustumaðr*’. This essay analyses the works of Bergr Sökkason, *Mikjál’s saga* and *Nikuláss saga erkibyskups*: the lives of the two most important saints after the Virgin Mary. Jón Viðar analyses the extent to which Bergr adapted the Latin *vitae* to appeal to his Norse audience by examining the depictions of service and friendship in these saints’ lives.

Following this are two long essays devoted to ‘The Sagas of Guðmundr the Good’. The first, ‘The Evidence for the Lost **Vita et miracula Godemundi boni* of Brother Arngrímur’ by Gottskálf Jensson, argues for the existence of a Latin intermediary between the C and D redactions of *Guðmundar sögur*. This Latin text would probably have been taken abroad to the Pope in Avignon with the (ultimately unsuccessful) goal of having Bishop Guðmundr canonised. Gottskálf analyses in detail the historical and literary evidence for the existence of such a work. This essay is the longest in the collection, spanning thirty-seven pages. The second essay in this section, by Shaun F. Hughes, is entitled ‘Who is Selkolla and What is She? Disentangling Traditions in *Guðmundar sögur byskups*’. Hughes distinguishes between the Selkolla of the *Guðmundar sögur* and the Selkolla of later folklore, arguing that the Selkolla episode in the former is built around continental *exemplar* warning against the dangers of outdoor sex. He reaches this conclusion through detailed analysis of the episode, dividing it into five sections. There is some overlap between these two essays, particularly in their introductory material, but their arguments ultimately complement each other.

The title of the next section, ‘Spiritual Readings’, loosely ties together two quite different essays. The first, by Siân E. Grønlie, is entitled ‘*Frá því er Guð freistaði Abraham*: Genesis 22 in Old Norse-Icelandic Tradition’. Grønlie examines the extent to which allegorical interpretations are mixed into the primarily literal readings in the Old Norse biblical translation *Stjórn*. The essay focuses specifically on the scene of Abraham’s near-sacrifice of his son in *Stjórn* I. Through analysis of both the text of *Stjórn* I and its manuscript contexts, Grønlie concludes that allegorical interpretations are understood within the text, though they are not explicit. The other essay in this section is ‘A Þingeyrar Book for Spiritual Ascent: Scribes and Items of AM 624 4to’ by Dario Bullitta. The manuscript AM 624 4to contains several Old Norse translations of Latin theological works; Bullitta concludes its ultimate purpose is use as a spiritual instruction manual for the novices at the school in Þingeyrar. Bullitta presents an in-depth analysis of the manuscript’s codicology, palaeography, provenance and circulation, and the first exhaustive catalogue of its contents, using several tables to present his findings.

The collection then turns to the examination of kennings and skaldic poetry. Russell Poole's essay, 'The Danish Tongue on Skaldic Lips', analyses the potential for skaldic poetry to have been composed in *dönsk tunga*. He looks first at the works of specific skalds (Sigvatr Þórðarson and Óttarr svarti), and then turns to non-Icelandic linguistic features within the skaldic corpus more generally. Poole's analysis is detailed and heavily focused on phonology. The next essay, by Margaret Clunies Ross, examines 'Post-Classical Kennings', inspecting ostensibly defective kennings in later skaldic poetry, which are sometimes 'corrected' by editors. Clunies Ross argues that, rather than being viewed as mistakes, these almost-kennings should be seen as a trend of skaldic poetry in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Clunies Ross's inspiration for the essay emerged through her work alongside Kirsten Wolf on the edition of Christian skaldic poetry for the series *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*. The final essay in this section is Martin Chase's 'Kennings for Poetry in Late-Medieval Icelandic *Trúarkvæði*'. Chase analyses devotional poetry, which has thus far received very little scholarly attention. He examines the kennings for poetry found within devotional poems to draw conclusions about shifting attitudes towards poetry over time. He lists the kennings for poetry in an appendix, first by theme and then alphabetically.

The penultimate section possesses another ambiguous title: 'Secular Erudition'. The first essay, 'Sturla Þórðarson: A Moral Witness' by Úlfar Bragason (translated from Icelandic by Anna H. Yates), examines how memory and history are presented in *Íslendinga saga* by analysing Sturla Þórðarson's role as narrator. The essay examines Sturla's life, sources and the role he plays in the text, arguing that Sturla survives to be a moral witness of the events he experiences. In his essay, 'Guðrún's Mysteriously Missing Husband', Todd Michelson-Ambelang argues that the answer to the infamous question in *Laxdæla saga* of who Guðrún loved (and harmed) the most is Christ, as Guðrún becomes a *Sponsa Christi* following her conversion. The essay argues for an allegorical interpretation of *Laxdæla saga*, with Kjartan representing Christ, Bolli as Judas, and Guðrún as *Sponsa Christi*. These two contrasting essays are connected by the overarching idea of the sagas as moral education.

The collection concludes with four essays exploring 'Postmedieval Sainthood', analysing hagiographies and hagiographic texts adapted or written after the Reformation. In 'Helga Aradóttir in Ögur: A Lutheran Saint?' Þórunn Sigurðardóttir explores a poem about Helga Aradóttir, who remained a virgin until she died from sickness. Þórunn presents the first-ever critical edition of the poem (which she entitles *Dyggðaspegill Helgu Aradóttir*) in the appendix. The essay outlines the life of Helga Aradóttir, explores her likely relationship with the poet, and connects the saint to the Lutheran tradition. The next essay is 'The Once-Popular and Now-Forgotten *Verónikukvæði*' by Margrét Eggertsdóttir (translated from Icelandic by Margaret Cormack). A semi-diplomatic edition of the poem *Verónikukvæði*, with an English translation by Margaret Cormack, is styled an 'appendix' and presented in the middle of the essay. The essay itself explores the history, context, manuscripts and reception of the poem, with some literary analysis. Another 'appendix' at the end of the essay lists the locations throughout Iceland

in which all the manuscripts containing the poem were written. The third essay in this section is ‘*Í ástarbing*: Marian Sentiments in Lbs 3013 8vo’ by Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, who examines three texts about the Virgin Mary found within the second section of the manuscript Lbs 3013 8vo as examples of the veneration of Mary after the Reformation in Iceland. Though Mary is never considered a saint, the texts in this manuscript do raise her status and demonstrate her importance. A diplomatic transcription of *Mariudilla* is presented in the middle of the essay. Finally, ‘A Tale of Model Women: An Edition of *Kvendæmapáttur*’ by Natalie M. Van Deusen, offers an introduction to the poem *Kvendæmapáttur*, which presents the stories of biblical women, female saints and women in the sagas as exemplars of female behaviour. A diplomatic edition of the poem is presented as an appendix. Here, as elsewhere, the volume’s use of appendices could be more intuitive for the reader, as the edition of *Kvendæmapáttur* is the *raison d’être* for Deusen’s essay; it is not supplementary. The collection closes with a list of Kirsten Wolf’s published and forthcoming works.

Overall, this volume presents a large collection of excellent essays which clearly advance scholarship in some of the more neglected areas of Old Norse studies, honouring and building upon the acclaimed research of Kirsten Wolf. There are, however, some structural problems with the collection, particularly with the use of appendices and the location of the figures; the images used in the entire collection are placed in a section before the introduction. While this allows the printing of the images on higher-quality paper than the text, the reader must flick back to the front of the volume each time a figure is referred to. The impact of this on the reader is minimised, however, by the placing of the essays which rely most heavily on visual evidence at the front of the volume. Another inconsistency surrounds the English translations. Sometimes unhelpful word-for-word translations are presented (such as ‘Guidance’ for *Stjórn* (p. 37) and ‘rhymes’ for *rimur* (p. 39)), while some long Latin quotations are left untranslated (e.g. p. 140). These features do not, however, take away from the excellent research presented in the collection, which casts light upon new approaches and new texts within the Norse corpus. Several of the essays pay homage to Kirsten Wolf’s teaching and her many great works. Like Wolf’s scholarship, this collection advances many areas of Old Norse research, and will certainly influence the future of Old Norse studies.

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THE SAGA OF ST. JÓN OF HÓLAR. By MARGARET CORMACK with an Introduction by PETER FOOTE†. *ACMRS*. Tempe, 2021. xi + 218 pp. ISBN 978-0-866-98637-3.

The Saga of St. Jón of Hólar presents the first translation into English of the H version of *Jóns saga Hólabyskups*. The beautiful quarto-sized illumination of Jón helgi that appears on the cover comes from folio 108v of an early-nineteenth-century Icelandic manuscript now held in the Icelandic National Library with the shelf mark JS 629 4to. The text on the book cover, which states that the

saga is translated by Margaret Cormack with an introduction by Peter Foote, is somewhat misleading. The book is separated into two parts: the first part includes an introduction by Cormack, followed by her translation. The second part contains the English version of the introduction by Peter Foote to the edition of the saga in *Íslenzk fornrit XV*, where it appears translated into Icelandic by Ólafur Halldórsson.

The volume reviewed here was prepared by Margaret Cormack, incorporating material from the late Peter Foote. Cormack had finished a translation of the saga in 2000, but decided to wait for the two then-forthcoming editions by Foote, the diplomatic edition in *Editiones Arnarnagnaena Series A 14* (the basis for her translation of H) and the normalised edition in *Íslenzk fornrit XV*, both published in 2003, in order to take them both into consideration. Cormack's volume is intended to fill a gap for English-speaking readers by providing a more general background to the saga that is only elsewhere extant in Icelandic. Her own introduction (pp. 1–28) offers a historical background to the life of Jón and the time in which his saga was composed, aimed at an audience who 'may know more about the Middle Ages than they do about medieval Iceland, or more about other genres of medieval Icelandic literature than they do about saints' lives' (p. 1). Indeed, the six-page section 'The Church in Medieval Iceland' will satisfy the specialist as much as the non-specialist for its succinct yet comprehensive overview. Cormack additionally provides information on dating and chronology (the saga uses the Gerlandus dating system), weights and currency, and illuminating sections on folklore and the historicity of the saga.

Peter Foote's introduction, which oddly appears *after* the translation ('Part II', pp. 105–92), provides the reader with the material expected in an *Íslenzk fornrit* introduction: a detailed account of the various recensions of the sagas and their individual paleographic features, information on sources and a short history of Jón's life. This introduction was approved for publication by Foote himself shortly before his death in 2009. There are three recensions of *Jóns saga*, which have been named by Foote as the S or 'Skálholt' recension (c.1250), the L or 'Latiniate' recension (c.1320) and the H or 'Hólar' recension (c.1500). A guide to the different labels for the three recensions used in previous scholarship is found on p. 104.

Cormack published her translation of the S recension in 2000, as *Saga of Bishop Jón of Hólar*, in *Medieval Hagiography: an Anthology*, ed. Thomas Head (New York: Garland, 2000), 595–626. The translation in the volume reviewed here is based on the H recension, but because H is incomplete, missing parts are filled in using the already translated S recension. Additionally, when S includes material not found in H, this is added to the translation in italics. Furthermore, when a section of H is unclear, S and/or L is used for clarity, which is discussed in a footnote. The translation, as such, cannot be considered a straightforward translation of the somewhat defective H redaction, for the interpolations from S (in places as long as four pages, e.g. pp. 45–48), the footnotes comparing L and S to H, and the appendices with texts from L ultimately lean towards the recreation of a hypothetical *Ur-text*, a practice which Cormack seems to want to avoid (p. ix) in Foote's *Íslenzk fornrit* edition. To take this point further, the reason that

the four texts from L are included as appendices, in what is otherwise positioned as a translation of the H redaction, is not addressed beyond a short comment that the texts are included ‘because they were a part of Jón’s legend in some circles’ (p. 83). The volume should thus be considered a collection of material related to the life of Jón of Hólar rather than simply a translation of the H recension of *Jóns saga Hólabýskups*.

Nevertheless, making available the H, and significant parts of the S and L, versions of *Jóns saga* to an English reading audience is an important step in making Old Icelandic hagiography more accessible to scholars and students alike, both in the field of Old Norse-Icelandic studies and the wider medieval studies community. An easily accessible translation of Old Icelandic hagiography, with information useful to both non-specialists and scholars, is a rarity, and one can only hope to see more such volumes appear in the near future.

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DOMINICAN RESONANCES IN MEDIEVAL ICELAND. THE LEGACY OF BISHOP JÓN HALLDÓRSSON OF SKÁLHOLT. Edited by GUNNAR HARÐARSON and KARL G. JOHANSSON. *The Northern World* 91. Brill, Leiden, 2021. ix + 337 pp. ISBN 978-9-004-44879-7.

This collection of articles has its origin in a small conference held at Skálholt in 2016 on the legacy of medieval bishops who served there from 1323 to 1339. The conference was organised by the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Iceland. In their brief introduction, the two editors point out that while at first the intention of the volume was to compare Franciscan and Dominican influences in Scandinavia through an examination of literary works composed by Swedish and Norwegian friars who had studied in Paris, the project came to focus on the Dominican Bishop Jón Halldórsson, his milieu and his influence. Jón Halldórsson served as bishop of Skálholt from 1322 until his death in 1339.

The book consists of eleven articles written by an international group of scholars residing in Denmark, Iceland and Norway. It is divided into five parts. The first part, ‘Educational and Cultural Context’, comprises two articles. One, by Christian Etheridge, focuses on the time spent by Jón Halldórsson in Bergen. Based on the available medieval sources, he gives an account of Jón’s life in the city as a Dominican friar and situates him in the city’s literary and learned milieu. He concludes that it was in Bergen, a multinational centre, that ‘Jón matured intellectually on his way to becoming the learned and influential scholar he was to become later in life’ (p. 36). The other, by Viðar Pálsson, examines the Continental background for studies in canon law in Bologna. He describes the political and legal environment in which Jón Halldórsson worked, gives an account of his episcopal administration and considers his legal administration. He concludes that, in comparison with other late-medieval bishops in Iceland, ‘there is hardly anyone to match his training in Paris and Bologna’ (p. 52). In Viðar’s view, Jón Halldórsson was ‘both a product of his times and exceptional for his place’ (p. 52).

The second part of the book, 'Dominican Exempla and Saga Literature', consists of three articles. Gottskálk Jensson discusses fourteenth-century innovations in saga narrative. He points out that 'only in rare cases do we have testimony about the individuals who functioned as agents of transmission between Continental and Icelandic literary culture' (p. 61) and then explores the role of one such mediator, Jón Halldórsson, in relation to the frame narrative of the legendary saga *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*. Hjalti Snær Ægisson focuses on the *ævintýri* that have been attributed to Jón Halldórsson with a view to exploring how holy ministry is presented in these works. He divides the material into three categories on the basis of the protagonists' vocation: monks, bishops and popes. The chivalric *Clári saga* is the topic of Védís Ragnheiðardóttir's contribution. She compares the saga with two of the earliest variants of the ATU 900 tale type, the thirteenth-century *Die halbe Birne* and the sixteenth-century *Bianca di Tolosa* and demonstrates that they share many motifs and details. Her conclusion is that *Clari saga* is not an original, indigenous work but is based on a foreign source.

Part three, 'Manuscripts and Illuminations', comprises articles by Stefan Drechsler and Karl G. Johansson and treats manuscript production during Jón Halldórsson's years as bishop in Skálholt and beyond. Drechsler considers the possibility of associating selected manuscripts with Jón. He argues that 'textual evidence in the theological handbook AM 671 4to, the law codex AM 343 fol. (Svalbarðsbók), as well as administrative literacy through the production of *máldagar* (Church charters), provide potential references for Bishop Jón's influence on the western Icelandic book production of his time' (p. 125). Johansson provides a detailed examination of AM 657 a-b 4to, which contains a large number of tales and *ævintýri* and also the life of Jón Halldórsson, from the point of view of material philology.

The fourth part is entitled 'Music and Liturgy' and consists of two articles. Through an examination of the manuscript tradition of the *Ordo Nidrosiensis ecclesiae*, mechanisms of liturgical development, evidence for liturgical plurality in the province of Nidaros and samples of service books from Nidaros, Astrid Marnar demonstrates that 'the *Ordo Nidrosiensis ecclesiae* in its present form cannot be taken as a compulsory liturgy for the whole province of Nidaros. Instead, the preserved manuscripts and fragments are considered as various representatives of locally grown liturgies, which share a common core' (p. 184). Gisela Attinger offers some reflections on the liturgy for Saint Þorlákr. She shows that the extant manuscripts containing liturgical texts pertaining to the saint do not transmit a unified tradition. Rather, she argues, different texts and melodies were used for his veneration.

The last part, 'Manuscript Practice and Multiple Careers', also comprises two articles. Embla Aae examines four texts (*Laurentius saga byskups*, *Lögmanns-annáll*, *Atburðr á Finnörk* and a charter issued at Hólar in 1341) that have been attributed to the Icelandic priest Einarr Hafliðason with the intention of placing products of administrative literacy side by side with narrative sources in order to shed light on epistolary culture and charter production in the northern Icelandic

ecclesiastical environment in the fourteenth century. She demonstrates that the four texts ‘refer to each other and employ each other as sources despite being of such different categories that they are today examined by scholars in different fields’ (p. 254) and argues that ‘Einarr is thus following an established tradition in Icelandic ecclesiastical writing, although he seems to be consistently preoccupied with aspects of administrative literacy and epistolary practice’ (p. 255). Gunnar Harðarson focuses on another prominent priest, Arngrímr Brandsson, who was in the service of Jón Halldórsson for a while. He surveys the career of Arngrímr based on the available sources. He argues that while in Norway, Arngrímr managed to build and procure an organ for the Skálholt cathedral, as ‘Bishop Jón wanted an organ . . . for a modern and up to date performance of the Mass and the Office and, of course, for the performance of the Office of Saint Þorlákr, in particular’ (p. 261), and that ‘the organ-building of Síra Arngrímr Brandsson in Norway in 1327–29, implies that he was a musician and, possibly, a composer and a Latin poet as well as an illustrator’ (p. 284). He then looks at Arngrímr’s potential connection with texts and manuscripts associated with Skálholt and Þingeyrar. He points to the *Second Grammatical Treatise* in *Codex Wormianus*, the language of which hints at a certain enthusiasm for organ music and church song. He proposes that Arngrímr may, in fact, have been a redactor of some of the texts conserved in *Codex Wormianus*. In his view, ‘Brother Arngrímr clearly functions as a possible link between the texts associated with Skálholt in the South, and manuscripts produced at Þingeyrar in the North, between Jón Halldórsson in Skálholt and *Clári saga* in Bólstaðarhlíð, between the poetic background of *Guðmundar drápa* and the *Codex Wormianus* emerging at Hólar’ (p. 284).

The eleven articles are followed by four appendices: an English translation by Marteinn H. Sigurðsson of the life of Jón Halldórsson (*Jóns þáttur*), an English translation by Gunnar Harðarson and Mikael M. Karlsson of Bishop Hákon of Bergen’s letter to Bishop Jón of Skálholt, the booklist of Bishop Árni Sigurðsson translated and annotated by Christian Etheridge and a detailed description of the contents of AM 671 4to by Stefan Drechsler. An index of personal names, place names and literary works concludes the volume.

Dominican Resonances in Medieval Iceland is a wonderful tribute to a truly remarkable man (though it should be noted that some of the articles have little or nothing to do with Jón Halldórsson specifically and concentrate more on his contemporaries and literary environment). This brief summary of the contents of the book does not do it proper justice. There is so much to be learned from the many details in the various articles, which are all well written, original, authoritative and immensely informative. I highly recommend the book to students and scholars of late medieval Icelandic/Norwegian history, literary history and religious studies. Kudos not only to the contributors and the editors but also to Brill for having produced and published a very fine book.

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MONASTIC ICELAND. By STEINUNN KRISTJÁNSDÓTTIR. *Routledge*. London and New York, 2023. xii + 247 pp. ISBN 978-1-032-42072-1.

Monastic Iceland is Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir's third monograph, following 2012's *Sagan af klaustrinu á Skriðu* ('The history of the monastery at Skriða') (2012) and *Leitin að klaustrunum: klausturhald á Íslandi í fimm aldir* ('The search for the monasteries: Monasticism in Iceland through five centuries') (2017). *Monastic Iceland* is the author's first monograph in English, and functions in part as a summary of her earlier work, aimed at a wider international audience. As such, many of the comments and critiques made in reviews of *Leitin að klaustrunum* are also applicable to *Monastic Iceland*, notably Helgi Skúli Kjartansson's review in *Saga* (2018), and Haki Antonsson and Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir's review article in *Árbók hins íslenska fornleifafélags* 108 (2019), 199–212.

Monastic Iceland seeks to provide a complete reappraisal of Icelandic monasticism and to show the active, important role monasteries had in Icelandic culture and society, as well as their interconnectedness with the European monastic tradition. It is divided into nine chapters, organised thematically with some chronological components. In principle, this structuring makes sense, and adds to overall readability; the end result, however, can feel a little messy, and the book is likely to be difficult to use as a research tool. Arguments are presented briefly and core ideas are sometimes vague, though the overall focus on the importance and orthodoxy of Icelandic monasteries remains clear throughout. This issue is compounded by the incompleteness of the index: many of the names discussed in the book are not included. For example, two fifteenth-century Reynistaður nuns, Þuríður Halldórsdóttir and Þóra Illugadóttir, were involved in controversies because of their pregnancies, and are discussed in a sub-section of Chapter 7 entitled 'Scandals' (pp. 142–44). Yet neither woman is mentioned in the index, nor is there an entry for 'pregnancy', so a researcher aware of these important women and interested in the interpretations of *Monastic Iceland* would have no way to find them without a lucky guess from the table of contents, or reading the whole book.

After a brief introduction in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 summarises the historiography of Icelandic monasticism. The overall evaluation of early scholarship, especially Magnús Jónsson's 'Áhrif klaustranna á Íslandi' (1914), is justifiably quite critical. However, the degree of criticism is excessive in places and some scholarship is characterised in a misleading way. Several more recent scholars, including Erika Sigurdson (p. 23), are criticised for maintaining the view that 'the monastic houses were tiny and uninfluential institutions'. But this criticism does not hold up to scrutiny: in her *The Church in Fourteenth-Century Iceland* (2016) Sigurdson points out that Icelandic monasteries were relatively small — as they indisputably were — but she also emphasises their wealth and significance, and the need for further study. She in no way suggests that the monasteries were 'uninfluential' and functionally argues the opposite. This passage also highlights the need for more proofreading in *Monastic Iceland*, as small typographic errors are frequent throughout the volume in places that can cause problems and misunderstandings: p. 17 of Sigurdson's monograph, rather than the correct p. 71, is cited.

Chapters 3 and 4, ‘The Making of Icelandic Society’ and ‘The Christianization’, focus on the settlement, Christianisation and the early development of the Icelandic church. There is a strong and convincing argument that the existence of hermits and anchorites in medieval Iceland has been neglected by scholars. Unfortunately, this topic also highlights two major issues that appear throughout *Monastic Iceland*: a general lack of primary-source criticism, and a tendency towards broad generalisations. There is very little acknowledgement of the fact that accounts of eremitic Icelanders come from literary texts whose values as historical sources has been questioned. The saga heroines Guðrún Ósvífursdóttir and Guðríður Þorbjarnardóttir are presented simply and without qualification as ending their lives as anchorites, and while there is some allowance that they could be literary constructs, their lives are said to be ‘identical to what is known about most other Icelandic upper class women during the settlement, the Commonwealth period, and Middle Ages’ (p. 60). This particular attempt to circumvent source criticism is still less problematic than the discussion of Melkorka in *Laxdæla saga*, which argues that ‘the story of Melkorka may be based on historical fact, as many other Icelandic sagas may also be’ (p. 47). In a focused study such a controversial statement could be interesting and provocative, but no space is given in *Monastic Iceland* for a detailed argument about the historicity of such a saga character.

Chapter 5, ‘The Monastic Landscape’, deals with the foundation stories of most of the monasteries, as well as many aspects of their role in society. Here and elsewhere the book argues that the two convents brought significant benefits to the well-being of women in Iceland, in light of the risks and oppression involved in marriage, and Kirkjubær in particular is characterised as a shelter for battered women. This is a compelling line of inquiry, but the conclusions are presented in a way that often feels simplistic, and even at times romanticised.

Chapter 6, ‘Visiting the Monastic Houses’, focuses on the surviving monastic inventories. It continues the approach of the previous chapter in attempting to sketch the shape and physical structure of the monasteries based on the information in the inventories, while immersing the reader in their material characteristics. The chapter is very detailed, and is one of the more useful and interesting parts of the book.

Chapter 7, ‘Disruptive Events’, explores a variety of disruptions to regular monastic life, including fires, political disputes with episcopal authorities, plague and other diseases, and controversies — including the pregnancies noted earlier. This is certainly the most entertaining chapter of *Monastic Iceland*, and emphasises how much monasteries were affected by every aspect of Icelandic nature, society and politics. The issue with critical primary-source use, however, remains. Here, as in many places throughout the book, Möðruvallaklaustur is presented as having functioned primarily as a school, and many aspects of its history are interpreted through this lens. There is no argument in *Monastic Iceland*, however, for why Möðruvallaklaustur was more of a school than any other monastery, a problem repeated from *Leitin að klaustrunum*, which simply provided an unelaborated citation of Ágúst Sigurðsson’s 1965 dissertation ‘Drög að sögu Möðruvallaklausturs’ — a citation not included in *Monastic Iceland*. There is, in fact, much less evidence for education at Möðruvellir than at any of the other northern monasteries. This

assertion becomes particularly problematic when it colours how other events are understood: the fourteenth-century disputes of Bishop Auðun and Bishop Lárentíus with the canons of Möðruvallaklaustur are framed here as a desire to move the 'canon school' from Möðruvellir to the cathedral at Hólar (pp. 129–30).

Indeed, there appears to be an unfortunate number of misreadings of primary sources in *Monastic Iceland*. Bishop Lárentíus is said to have made an unwelcome visit to Þingeyrar in 1328; but Lárentíus in fact maintained a good relationship with Þingeyrar throughout his episcopate, and the episode described actually took place at Möðruvellir. This seems to be a mix-up with Bishop Auðun's visit to Þingeyrar in 1318, which is discussed later in the book (pp. 109, 131). In an error that also appeared in *Leitin að klaustrunum*, Logi Stígsson is said to have become the steward of Reynistaður in 1408 (p. 139); Logi, however, was the *officialis* of Hólar diocese with no position at Reynistaður, and was simply overseeing a legal contract in 1408. The error appears to be the result of a misreading of the editor's summary of the document in *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, III 717, since the 1408 document itself is unambiguous about Logi's role in the matter.

Chapter 8, 'The Monastic Communities', explores several aspects of monastic life and culture: the cult of saints, textile production, livestock, corrodians and laypeople living at the monastery, students and education, and numbers of inhabitants at monastic estates. This chapter succeeds in showing the breadth of potential material available for future research, and the importance of monasteries in Icelandic society, but flounders in questionable interpretations and simple errors. For example, both Bishop Lárentíus and Bishop Guðmundur Arason are said to have been novice monks at Munkaþverá (p. 181). In Lárentíus's case this appears to be a speculation based on his short tenure as a teacher at Munkaþverá, before moving to Þingeyrar, where he actually took his vows. For Guðmundur, however, there is no evidence that he became a novice at Munkaþverá, and the citation given is to a passage about his rebuilding of the monastery, which neither states nor implies anything about a novitiate. The final chapter is Chapter 9, 'Iceland's Five Hundred Years of Monasticism: The End', which deals with the fate of monasteries during and after the Reformation. This chapter highlights above all what was lost with the monasteries, particularly the care they provided for the poor and the sick, and argues that Iceland may have had a brief but notable relationship to wider anti-Reformation movements.

In a certain sense *Monastic Iceland* is successful: it shows the importance of monasteries to medieval Icelandic society and culture, and highlights a wealth of sources, stories and ideas that will hopefully encourage more scholarship and interest in the topic. The author's enthusiasm for the subject shines through, and the book seeks to emphasise Iceland's general success in living up to the norms and orthodox ideas of medieval Latin Christendom and western monasticism. However, this relies on an often simplistic, monolithic picture of medieval Christianity. In places, this idea of uniformity is surprisingly explicit, as in this statement: 'Indeed, the standardized contracts, the job titles, and the principles of the monastic orders underline the uniformity in the operation of monastic institutions throughout Europe' (p. 179). In the end, while not without useful and

interesting components, *Monastic Iceland* would have benefited from greater scholarly rigor, as the number of errors and questionable interpretations have the potential to mislead or misinform readers who are not carefully checking citations.

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ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPT PRODUCTION IN MEDIEVAL ICELAND. LITERARY AND ARTISTIC ACTIVITIES OF THE MONASTERY AT HELGAFELL IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY. By STEFAN DRECHSLER. *Brepols*. Turnhout, 2021. 275 pp. ISBN 978-2-503-58902-2.

Researching illuminations in Icelandic medieval manuscripts in the way that Stefan Drechsler does in his extensive book *Illuminated Manuscript Production in Medieval Iceland* is not an easy task. The challenge of such studies is that they are largely interdisciplinary. In the book, Drechsler places illuminations from a group of Icelandic manuscripts from the fourteenth century in the context of art history, manuscript production, the historical environment and the literature the manuscripts contain. This is a major undertaking that requires very broad knowledge, in a number of fields, about the Icelandic Middle Ages. Consequently, it is difficult to review all aspects of such a book. This review will thus mainly focus on manuscript production, philology and the previous research this book is based on.

The book is focused on a group of fourteenth-century manuscripts that have been connected to book-making in the monastery at Helgafell in West Iceland. Its aim is to contribute to previous research on the Helgafell manuscripts by examining their illuminations more closely than has been done before. It begins by outlining the previous research and introducing the manuscripts in question, followed by chapters that contextualise the manuscript culture and provide a historical background to the monastery at Helgafell. The third chapter is the core of the book, where each manuscript is discussed in detail with several images of illuminations supporting the discussion. The last part of the book puts the previous discussion in the context of European tradition and provides speculations on how influences and innovation were brought together in the Icelandic tradition. The book is visually appealing, with text printed in two columns on each page and numerous beautiful pictures accompany the text throughout.

Drechsler provides descriptions of illuminations in the manuscripts discussed and has managed to trace relationships between different manuscripts by combining observations on illuminations and scholarship on scribal hands. Unfortunately, when the book is read in detail, a significant number of inaccuracies in various aspects becomes evident. These are found both in the general approach to the material and also in specific errors. The Icelandic Middle Ages are shrouded in mystery, as the source material is fragmentary and speculation is sometimes the only approach available, but in this book a suspiciously clear picture is often painted. For instance, Drechsler never mentions that the preserved manuscripts represent only a fraction of what was originally produced. Examples of this are found on pp. 105 and 108 where he claims that a certain motif is likely to be an

invention by the illuminator because it is not found elsewhere. This is certainly possible, but it is just as likely that the motif was known from manuscripts that did not survive, a possibility never addressed.

Another important issue that should have been addressed is the basis of the grouping of these manuscripts. The main argument for the grouping is the comparison of scribal hands carried out mainly by Ólafur Halldórsson and Stefán Karlsson. Both showed some caution in their initial conclusions; Stefán Karlsson, for example, claimed that it was *likely* that the same scribal hand was found in several manuscripts. Drechsler on the other hand states that Stefán Karlsson *concluded* that all manuscripts were written by the same hand (p. 51), ignoring the hesitation clear in Stefán's words. This type of hesitation from earlier scholars is similarly ignored when it comes to dating. When dealing with the dating of Icelandic manuscripts, we usually do not have any fixed dates, only estimates based on linguistic and palaeographic evidence. The Helgafell manuscripts are no exception, apart from AM 350 fol. which includes the date 1363. Based on that date, scholars have concluded that the main Helgafell manuscripts were written in the period *c.* 1350–75. All scholars who have discussed the manuscripts have allowed for some doubt as to when exactly they were written, but in this book they are often presented or discussed as if the dating was fixed. Many examples can be found, but of great consequence is Drechsler's dating of the second part of AM 233 a fol. to 1370–75, a dating so narrow as to be unheard-of without external evidence. This dating seems to spring from a combination of conclusions from Ólafur Halldórsson, Stefán Karlsson and Haraldur Bernharðsson, though none of them dated the manuscript more narrowly than to the third quarter of the fourteenth century. This dating is subsequently the basis for many assertions in the book which are either wrong or doubtful.

Inaccuracy in the use of secondary literature is also seen in the adoption of some technical terms. When introducing some of the stylistic features of the book paintings of these manuscripts, for example, Drechsler uses the term 'peppercorn eyes' to describe a prominent feature of the faces in some of the illuminations throughout. He refers to the art historian Guðbjörg Kristjánsdóttir for this term, but she describes the characteristic as *galopin augu* 'eyes wide-open'. The term 'peppercorn eyes' comes from Lene Liepe in her book on fourteenth-century book painting and should therefore be attributed to her, not Guðbjörg. He also incorrectly explains *œufs-de-grenouille* 'frog's eggs' as referring to 'trumpet-formed volute tendrils and palmette flowers' (p. 54), whereas in actuality it is an art-historical term referring to an element in pen-flourishing that is made up of small circles with a tiny dot in the middle. Subsequently, the use of the term throughout the book — sometimes correctly, sometimes not — is quite confusing.

Still more confusing is the use of the codicological term 'production unit'. It seems to be mainly used synonymously with 'different parts' of the manuscript, i.e., parts that are either known to be of a different age or originally not from the same book. This is obvious, for example, in the discussion on Codex Hardenbergianus in Chapter 4. At one point the term 'manuscript production unit' is briefly introduced (p. 36), but it is difficult to see how the explanation given here

applies to the use of the terms ‘production unit’ and ‘parts’ throughout. Defining production units often involves a specialised codicological examination, as it can be based on details such as different ways of pricking the parchment or arranging leaves in gatherings. It does not necessarily require a great gap of time or the involvement of different scribes, simply some kind of measurable change in a manuscript’s production.

A major flaw throughout the book arises from that the author’s failure to ask someone to read through his transcriptions from manuscripts. He explains historiated initials by quoting the text to which the image refers, offering a diplomatic transcription from the manuscript with an English translation below, which is, in principle, very useful. These quotations vary in length, from a few lines to around twenty lines. Hardly any of these transcriptions is without error. In a transcription from AM 233 a fol. 5r (p. 61) at least seventeen mistakes can be found, some minor but others of whole words; for example ‘ætt drottins iesu cristz’ is transcribed as ‘ætt dauids iherra cristz’. It is more difficult to understand the mistakes in a transcription from AM 226 fol. f. 93v; here the manuscript reads ‘Absalon for eptir feðr *sinum* vt yfir iordan. með huert þat barn er vapnum matti vallda’ but the transcription reads ‘absalon for eptir þeim sem vt yfir iordan með hann uar þeir hermenn er vapnum matti vaffria’ (p. 113). This in turn leads to an inaccurate English translation. Mistakes like this are unfortunate since they can lead to the circulation of erroneous quotations in subsequent scholarly discussion.

Only a fraction of the inaccuracies and misunderstandings in the book have been mentioned here and even though the book contributes to the study of fourteenth-century Icelandic manuscripts, it is a great pity that it is so lacking in attention to detail.

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DANSK EDITIONSHISTORIE. Edited by JOHNNY KONDRUP, BRITTA OLRİK FREDERIKSEN, CHRISTIAN TROELSGÅRD and DAVID BLOCH. *Museum Tusulanum*. Copenhagen, 2021. ISBN 978-8-763-54684-3.

Dansk Editionshistorie is a long-awaited, multi-volume publication dealing with the history of Danish scholarly editing. The publication is the result of a research project initiated in 2011 at the University of Copenhagen and consists of four extensive volumes. The first volume, edited by Christian Troelsgård and David Bloch, is devoted to the editing of Greek and Latin literature. The second, edited by Britta Olrik Frederiksen, is devoted to editing West Norse (henceforth Old Norse) and Old Danish literature. The third, edited by Johnny Kondrup, is devoted to younger Danish literature. The fourth consists of bibliographies (separate for each chapter) and two indices (one of personal names and one of subjects).

Readers of *Saga-Book* will probably be most interested in the contents of the second volume, which will therefore be the focus of this review. It is worth mentioning, however, that the first volume includes chapters on medieval Danish

charters and editions of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, while the third includes a chapter devoted to the publication of sources for Danish history, which can be of relevance to Old Norse scholars. Moreover, the introduction to the first volume serves more as an introduction to textual scholarship and editorial practice aimed widely at learned audiences than as a framing piece for the volume, and might prove useful as supplementary reading in courses devoted to textual scholarship and editorial practice, regardless of linguistic demarcation.

The second volume of *Dansk Editionshistorie* starts with an introduction which not only briefly introduces the volume's contents and outlines the rationale behind its structure, but also describes Old Norse and Old Danish source materials, their origins and transmission. Thanks to this, it serves as a fine introduction to medieval Danish and Old Norse manuscript culture. The volume consists of three main parts. The first (pp. 47–485) contains a chronological overview of editorial work on Old Norse literature, which the editors define as medieval Norwegian-Icelandic literature written in the West Norse language, used before 1370 in Norway and 1550 in Iceland. The second part (pp. 489–806) similarly contains a chronological overview of editorial work on Old Danish literature, which the editors define as literature in the Danish language composed before c.1515. The last part (pp. 809–94) is devoted to case studies and includes two chapters, one on Old Norse tradition and the other on Old Danish tradition.

The first part, devoted to Old Norse literature, is divided into four periods, each discussed in a separate chapter. The first, by Gottskálk Jensson, deals with the period before 1772, and provides valuable background on the early days of Nordic philology. In addition to the outline of the historical context in which early editions were produced, we can read here about Worm's 1636 *Literatura Runica*, Resen's 1665 *Edda Islandorum*, as well as the 1666 edition of *Hirðskrá* and the 1768 edition of *Speculum Regale*. According to Gottskálk, three editorial paradigms already existed in the 1600s, one of which included translations and adaptations aimed at readers who did not understand Old Norse. Arguably, in the period at hand, this was the dominant paradigm. Therefore it would have been justifiable (and desirable) to diverge from the overall rationale of the work in this specific chapter and devote more space to a discussion of the earliest translations of Old Norse texts. This would facilitate a better understanding of the intellectual context in which the early modern editions (and translations) were produced. Considering the length of the volume, however, it is understandable that it was decided not to do this.

The second chapter, covering the period 1772–1879, is in two parts. The first, by Ragnheiður Mósesdóttir, takes us on a fascinating journey through the scholarly circles of eighteenth-century Copenhagen, including discussion of power struggles within some of the most renowned academic societies. In this section we can read about the history and editorial activities of *Den Arnamagnæanske Kommission*, as well as a couple of societies that were directly or indirectly created as a result of the slow turnaround (or 'langsommelige arbejdstakt', p. 129) of the Arnamagnæan publications, including *Hið íslenska Bókmenntafélag*, *Det Nordiske Oldskrift-Selskab* and *Det nordiske Litteratur-Samfund*. This part also

outlines some of the independent publications of Old Norse literature that appeared in this period, as well as the first English translations of Old Norse texts by James Johnstone. The second part, by Gottskálf Jenson, discusses the publications of that period from the perspective of the history of ideas and with a strong emphasis on the development of editorial practice. It highlights the prominent role of Konráð Gíslason among his contemporaries as an innovative and meticulous philologist, and also provides some interesting insights into his personality, especially in the context of his dealings with Guðbrandur Vigfússon.

The third chapter, by Matthew Driscoll, covers the period 1879–1936. It starts with a short introductory section sketching silhouettes of Finnur Jónsson and Kristian Kålund, the two most prominent figures in Norse philology of that period. A detailed discussion of the editions published by *Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur* follows, which gives insight into the editorial methods employed in the series' best-manuscript editions. In the section devoted to normalisation, different scholarly classifications of editions are referred to, especially those of Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson and Odd Einar Haugen. Observations of a similar nature also appear in the second part of the previous chapter, but the classifications themselves are not systematically introduced anywhere. For readers' convenience, it would have been desirable to include them in the literature review section of the introduction to the volume and then only refer to them throughout the book. Other learned societies' publications are also discussed in this chapter, including, among other series, *Corpus codicum Islandicorum medii aevi*, publishing the monumental facsimile editions of some of the most important Old Norse manuscripts. Furthermore, we can find here some hints revealing personal sympathies and antipathies among the leading figures of Old Norse philology of the time, for example Halldór Hermannson's view of Finnur Jónsson's editorial endeavours. These and similar insights appearing throughout the volume are not only informative, but at times also quite entertaining.

The fourth and last chapter, written by Odd Einar Haugen and Jonna Louis-Jensen, deals with the period 1936–2015. This covers modern editions of Old Norse texts, dominated in terms of magnitude by the publications in the *Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ* series. Although the necessity of the lengthy descriptions of individual text traditions could be questioned, this part provides valuable insights into the broad array of editorial principles employed in modern editions, as well as different views on the purpose of scholarly editions. Unlike the previous chapters, this chapter does not celebrate individual scholars by devoting separate sections to their life and work. Nevertheless, the figure of Jón Helgason appears clearly as the driving force behind many publications and his principles of scholarly editing undoubtedly shaped the modern Arnarnagnæan editorial approach. Meanwhile, somewhat in the background appears the work of Jonna Louis-Jensen, one of the authors of this chapter, whose contribution to the field should not be overlooked, not only as the first and, to date, only female professor of Icelandic language and literature at the University of Copenhagen, but also as an active editor of multiple volumes in the *Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ* series.

The second part, devoted to publications of Old Danish literature, is divided into two main chapters. Again, following the chronological criterion, the first

chapter covers the period until 1825 and the following chapter 1825–2015. The first chapter, written by Marita Akhøj Nielsen, consists of twelve sections: the first two serve as an introduction, while the following sections are mainly centred on editors involved in publishing Old Danish texts (dominated by the law codes). This chapter provides an overview of editorial efforts from the 1495 edition of *Den danske rimkrønike* ‘The Rhymed Chronicle’ to the multilingual 1837 edition of *Jyske Lov* ‘The Law Code of Jutland’. The multilingual character of the latter reflected the editor’s explicit wish to ‘gøre sig en Forestilling om de Forandringer, som Loven i Tidens Løb har været underkastet’ (‘to get an idea of the changes that the law code underwent in the course of time’) (p. 535). This innovative statement might be interpreted as an early precursor of the transmission-historical approach, which gained popularity some one and a half centuries later and dominates the field today.

The second chapter, by Britta Orlík Frederiksen, deals with the period 1825–2015. Spanning almost 300 pages (pp. 537–806), this chapter could be a monograph in itself and deserves a separate review as such. Throughout the seven sections, the chapter outlines the relationship between the period’s editorial work and the awakening of nationalism in Denmark, which was accompanied by growing interest in Danish cultural heritage and language, in opposition to the ‘common Germanic’ heritage. In this period, a series of monumental editorial projects saw their completion, among them the edition of Danish provincial law codes (*Danmarks gamle Landskabslove*) and prayer books (*Middelalderens danske Bønnebøger*). Both appeared under the auspices of *Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab*, the establishment and management of which is greatly indebted to Lis Jacobsen’s skills and determination. In male-dominated early twenty-century philology, her role as the society’s founder and its first chair is worth highlighting. While all the descriptive sections dealing with specific editorial projects are of high value for the history of our field, the last three sections are especially invaluable. They give a coherent overview of the state of the discipline in the given period, summarise the period’s main developments and provide insights into contemporary editorial practice. One could only wish that every chapter of the book culminated in such an insightful and concise overview.

The last section of the volume contains two case studies. The first, by Gottskálk Jenson, can be seen as complementary to the chapter devoted to the period before 1772. It contains a brief historical background which outlines the circumstances in which the printing press appeared in Skálholt, followed by a presentation of the Skálholt publications between 1688 and 1690, including a discussion of the role of Bishop Þórður Þorláksson in these projects. The second chapter, by Anne Mette Hansen, can be seen as complementary to the chapter on publications of Old Danish works between 1825 and 2015. It is a thorough presentation of the editorial processes that accompanied the publication of Danish prayer books between 1946 and 1982. This discussion of a project, which had its roots in the early days of *Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab* but took some decades to complete, is a captivating study of various challenges associated with editorial work. These include fundamental matters such as sufficient funding and qualifications, but

also different theoretical and methodological approaches to source material, such as extensive discussions about whether expansions of abbreviations should be in cursive, or whether orthographic variants should be included in the apparatus.

While the paramount scholarly value of this volume for the field of Norse philology cannot be emphasised enough and the amount of editorial work put into creating a coherent multi-authored publication of this size deserves the highest praise, some minor shortcomings can be brought forward. These are not intended as criticism, but as possible lines of improvement in future editions. It would be more practical for each volume to have its own bibliography, rather than collecting individual bibliographies for each chapter in a separate volume together with the indices. Certainly, from the reader's point of view, it would be more convenient if each volume functioned as a stand-alone publication with its own apparatus. Also, an additional index of the titles of texts would be an invaluable aid. Without such an index, it is quite challenging to find out, for example, whether the 1756 edition of *Gisla saga* is discussed or not. One has to remember that *Gisla saga* was included in the *Agiætar fornmannasögur* published in Hólar and then find it in the bibliography for the case study of the Skálholt editions, rather than in the bibliography to the chapter devoted to the period before 1772. Furthermore, a surprising editorial choice for a volume dealing with Old Norse literature is the translation of Icelandic quotations into Danish, but not German or French. From the Old Norse perspective, it can be argued that the Icelandic text should remain untranslated, as the older forms of Danish largely do (with a few exceptions; for example, on p. 491 and p. 683). At the same time, from the perspective of the potential student reader, it would be desirable to stick to Modern Danish throughout the book. This would also require the editors to standardise the quotations from Árni Magnússon's correspondence, originally written in his flourished mixture of Danish, Latin and Icelandic. Finally, this would not be a review written by a materially-inclined philologist if no references to the layout and illustrations were made. The images are inconsistently referenced in the main text and frequently function as floating illustrations, sometimes with and sometimes without clear connection to the discussion. Some image captions, mainly the longer ones, are organised in two columns (for example, on p. 109, but not on p. 401), while others, the shorter ones, are in a single column (for example, on p. 148 and p. 195). While in the significant majority of citations the original line breaks are not indicated, in some quotations they are indicated with ']' (p. 724) and '/' (compare p. 816 and p. 826, where different practice is applied, even though in both cases the cited text comes from early printed editions). Unavoidably in a publication of this size, some minor errors have sneaked into the prose, such as calling the paper manuscript AM 610 c 4to a parchment manuscript (p. 295).

None of these minor inconsistencies diminishes the value of this publication, which will most certainly define the field in the years to come. One can only hope that an open-access, digital version will follow in the future to enable full advantage to be taken of the richness of the bibliographic information it contains. But even in its current, material form, the extensive descriptions of the history of our field are extremely thought-provoking and enable critical reflection on various aspects

of our work. The one conclusion that can be drawn — regardless of how clichéd it might sound — is that the perfect is the enemy of the good. As this thorough and comprehensive study shows, generations of philologists were striving to prepare perfect editions, which would cater to the needs of broad audiences of literary scholars, historians and linguists alike. The edition not only had to present a culturally important work and make it available to wider audiences, but **also** reveal the work's most original texts, and **also** present all significant variants, and **also** ensure that the rendering of the text was extremely reliable to enable linguistic examination. It is not surprising, then, that some editorial projects took many decades to complete. The question is whether at the time of their eventual publication they served the contemporary scholarly audiences well, or perhaps already seemed a bit outdated in light of recent developments in manuscript studies, textual criticism and/or literary history. Perhaps it is unfair to try to impose a judgement here as, to paraphrase Britta Olrik Frederiksen's words, editions are always tentative. Indeed, scholarly editions, like any other outcome of scholarly or creative work, reflect the times in which they were created and, regardless of how definitive they try to be, in one way or another they always remain tentative. This is beautifully illustrated by *Dansk Editionshistorie*.

Another point worth highlighting here is the (often hidden) collaborative nature of editorial work; this is something that can easily escape readers' attention when facing covers of editions bearing the name of only one editor. The implications of this practice for our field extend beyond questions of ethics and reach to the general misconception that philological research is centred around individuals and easily within reach of the academic enterprise of a single person. While scientific publications quite naturally and frequently have multiple authors, acknowledging the work of multiple individuals, editions of monumental works of Old Norse literature are often attributed to single editors. While Peter Springborg's name cannot be found among the editors of Old Norse literature (except for a short edition in *Opuscula* (1970) and as the initiator of *Manuscripta Nordica*) his work for the Arnarnagnaean editions of Reykjahólabók, *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances* and *Egils saga* remains somewhat obscure. The importance of publications such as *Dansk Editionshistorie* for revealing these hidden names has to be emphasised. With the new digital editions of medieval literature, pointed to by multiple authors in their respective chapters, we can hope for a paradigm shift towards a more inclusive and transparent editorial practice. This new approach will hopefully, for the future of our field, attract more young scholars who will choose to — paraphrasing Paul Diderichsen's words, quoted by Britta Olrik Frederiksen (p. 732) — 'offer the precious days of their youth to the thankless but exciting work of text editing' and contribute to writing new chapters in the history of scholarly editing of West Norse and Old Danish literature.

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— Other death omens of ill-luck are shared by Scandinavian, Orcadian and Gaelic tradition (cf. Almqvist 1974–76, 24, 29–30, 32–33).

— Anne Holtsmark (1939, 78) and others have already drawn attention to this fact.

— Ninth-century Irish brooches have recently been the subject of two studies by the present author (1972; 1973–74), and the bossed penannular brooches have been fully catalogued by O. S. Johansen (1973).

— This is clear from the following sentence: *iðraðist Bolli þegar verksins ok lýsti vígi á hendi sér (Laxdæla saga 1934, 154).*

— It is stated quite plainly in *Flatexjarbok* (1860–68, I 419): *hann tok land j Syrlækjarosi.*

— There is every reason to think that this interpretation is correct (cf. *Heilagra manna sögur*, II 107–08).

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