

PATTERNS OF SETTLEMENT IN ICELAND:  
A STUDY IN PREHISTORY

BY ORRI VÉSTEINSSON

FOR THE BETTER PART OF THIS CENTURY the settlement of Iceland, the *landnám*, has received surprisingly limited attention from scholars, considering its significance for our understanding of the Viking Age and Icelandic history.<sup>1</sup>

The reason for this is clear enough. When it began to be realised, by the middle of the century, that the Book of Settlements and the Sagas of Icelanders could not be used as accurate descriptions of persons and events in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries, this period, which previously had been full of exciting history, was suddenly plunged into an impenetrable darkness.<sup>2</sup>

The retreat was sounded by Björn Þorsteinsson (1953) and Jón Jóhannesson (1956) who laid the foundations of the modern view of the history of medieval Iceland in the 1950s. Both attempted to build a general picture of developments based on Ari fróði's Book of Icelanders and to some extent on what each considered could plausibly be extracted from the Sagas. This left little more than an approximate date for the beginning of the *landnám* and an outline of constitutional developments garnished with the limited information provided by Ari on the early development of the Church in the eleventh century (*Íslensk fornrit* I, 3–28). There was, as a result, too little meat left on the bones for there to be much opportunity for historical inquiry and for the past two generations of Icelandic historians the period before 1100 has been, to all intents and purposes, pre-historical, with a historical period beginning only with events described in the contemporary sagas of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It is also fair to say that the anthropological approach to the interpretation of the Sagas has only contributed to this inattention to the early period, allowing as it does for an atemporal view of the society of the Sagas, a society which belongs no

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a paper given to the Viking Society in London, 7 March 1997, under the title 'New approaches to the Settlement of Iceland.'

<sup>2</sup> Melsteð 1903–30 is the last serious historical work making use of the Sagas as sources for actual events.

more to the tenth century than it does to the thirteenth (e. g. Sørensen 1977, 1993; Miller 1990).

It has therefore been left to a handful of archaeologists to worry about the settlement of Iceland, but while considerable work has been done in this field in the last fifty years, and we have now far more data to play with, it has not resulted in a significantly greater understanding of developments in Iceland in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries.<sup>3</sup> The reason for this is that until quite recently Icelandic archaeologists have, by and large, considered their task to be to retrieve objects and structures to illustrate studies of the texts and they have treated their results as capable of only very limited observations about the past (Eldjárn 1966, also Adolf Friðriksson 1994a, 1994b). In addition the principal issues that have occupied archaeologists, the dating of the *landnám* and the origins of the settlers, have not proved fruitful avenues of research in as much as nothing has turned up contradicting the long held view that Iceland was settled by Norsemen around and shortly after AD 870.

#### *The dating of the landnám*

Regarding the dating of the *landnám*, archaeological investigations continue to support Ari fróði's date of 871. In fact it now seems that his calculation was so accurate that it is almost uncanny. Traditionally, the evidence provided by archaeology has been based on artifact typology, in particular the typology of grave goods from pre-Christian burials. More than 300 such burials are now known in Iceland and a stylistic analysis of the grave-goods puts them squarely in the tenth century with only a handful of objects with a late ninth-century date and a single pair of brooches with an early or mid ninth-century date (Eldjárn 1956, 297–98, 394–96). While artifact typology cannot provide accurate dating for the *landnám* the sheer mass of this evidence makes all suggestions of an earlier *landnám* very implausible. Much stronger and more accurate evidence is provided by tephrochronology, the dating of geological and occupational deposits through the study of volcanic ash, or tephra. When volcanoes erupt they often emit large quantities of ash

<sup>3</sup>The exceptions come mainly from the natural sciences, where pollen analyses have produced a more detailed picture of the changes in vegetation following the *landnám* (Þorleifur Einarsson 1962; Margrét Hallsdóttir 1982, 1984, 1987; see also articles in Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1996) and analyses of fauna remains in early archaeological deposits have contributed to a better understanding of diet and farming practices (Amorosi 1989; McGovern *et al.* 1988).

which can be carried by winds over large areas. When the tephra sets, it forms a blanket which can be used as a chronological marker. The mapping of different tephra layers provides a relative chronology but when individual eruptions, or tephra layers associated with them, can be given a date, such layers become markers for absolute dates (Sigurður Þórarinnsson 1944). For late medieval and modern times contemporary documentation provides accurate dates for many of the major tephra layers, but for the period before 1100 no such aids are available, and the dating of the tephra layers has to a large extent been dependent upon radiocarbon analyses. In the context of the settlement of Iceland, the dating of a tephra layer normally called the *Landnám*-tephra is of crucial importance. The *Landnám*-tephra is found all over Iceland except in the far West and Northwest and is commonly observed directly beneath the earliest indications of human habitation at early archaeological sites. A large number of radiocarbon analyses from early archaeological deposits associated with this tephra have given very early dates, back to the seventh and eighth centuries even.<sup>4</sup> Needless to say this has resulted in considerable confusion and speculation about the possibility of a much earlier settlement date than the traditional late ninth-century one. The majority of scholars have, however, remained sceptical of these radiocarbon results and several factors have been suggested which could cause a systematic error in radiocarbon dates from Iceland (Vilhjálmur Ö. Vilhjálmsson 1990; Páll Theodórsson 1993). While this remains to be proved, a much more reliable and accurate method for dating the *Landnám*-tephra has been developed. This comes from the study of ice-cores from the Greenland ice cap. An annual cycle of freezing and thawing leaves horizons in the ice-cap which can be counted in a similar way to tree-rings. Recently traces of the *Landnám*-tephra have been found in the ice-cap and this produces the date 871, with a margin of error of less than two years, for the deposition of the *Landnám*-tephra (Grönvold *et al.* 1995). There can as a result be no doubt any more regarding the date of the *Landnám*-tephra and any claim for human habitation in Iceland predating 871 must therefore be based on finding actual human deposits underneath this layer. Claims for traces of human activity beneath the *Landnám*-tephra have been made for at least three sites, all in southern Iceland. The

<sup>4</sup> Particularly from the early settlement sites in Reykjavík (Nordahl 1988, 32, 39, 55, 57, 62–63, 83, 113–14) and in Herjólfssdalur (Margrét Hermanns-Auðardóttir 1989, 45–54). See also Vilhjálmur Ö. Vilhjálmsson 1991.

claim for Reykjavík has recently been refuted in the light of further excavation in the long-house in question (Einarsson 1995) and the claims for Herjólfssdalur in the Westmann Islands off the south coast and for Bessastaðir just outside Reykjavík are as yet lacking proper documentation and cannot be verified. More significant is the by now substantial body of evidence for human occupation just above the *Landnám*-tephra, that is from soon after 871. At almost every medieval site which has been investigated, both coastal and inland, and in all parts of the country where the *Landnám*-tephra can be found, there are signs of building activity just above the layer. This strongly suggests that not only did the settlement of Iceland commence shortly after 871 but that the process was a rapid one with some sort of human occupation established in all inhabitable regions of the country by some point in the first half of the tenth century.

#### *The origins of the settlers*

Regarding the origins of the settlers, no traces of any Irish presence have been uncovered in the archaeological record, despite quite a considerable effort to locate them (Eldjárn 1989), and the whole 'Irish question' is still unanswered and likely to remain so (Gísli Sigurðsson 1988; Jakobsen 1988). While there can be no good reason to distrust the accounts of Dicuill and Ari fróði, in particular because the two can hardly be connected, the fact that no traces of hermits in the eighth and ninth centuries have been found suggests that their presence was very limited and sporadic, possibly only seasonal as described by Dicuill, and that it had no discernible impact on the Norse settlements. Celtic elements, most notable in place-names (Hermann Pálsson 1965), are quite reasonably ascribed to contacts between the Norse and the Celtic peoples of Ireland and Scotland made prior to the settlement of Iceland. Evidence for continued contacts is surprisingly rare, which suggests that while a significant proportion of the settlers of Iceland may have come via the British Isles, their descendants looked to Scandinavia and the wholly Scandinavian colonies, Orkney in particular, for trade and cultural and political contacts.

For quite some time it also seemed reasonable to pinpoint a specific region in Scandinavia as the place of origin of the Icelandic settlers. West and Southwest Norway has always been the favourite, but this is based more on the Book of Settlements than any sound archaeological evidence (Roussell 1943, 194; Hörður Ágústsson 1982, 255). Recently Northern Norway has also been named, but this also is not supported

by any archaeological evidence (Einarsson 1994, 17–39, 107–19, 139–40). In general it is safe to say that most scholars shy away from speculations concerning the precise origins of the settlers of Iceland.

*How was Iceland settled?*

It turns out then that what was known with reasonable certainty half a century ago is now known with more reasonable certainty, but the considerable work which has been put into obtaining these results has not turned up any new research questions or new aspects of the settlement process for further study. This is a big problem, not only because knowledge of early Icelandic society will continue to be incomplete as long as new subjects for research are not identified, but also because expensive excavations will fail to record vital information if the contexts in which this information may be meaningful are not known to the excavator. As long as this is allowed to happen it is not likely that new data will emerge which can significantly increase our understanding of the settlement and early society in Iceland.

Although the lack of raw data is the principal reason for the lack of interest in the *landnám*, it is not the only reason. There are data-sets available, the grave goods in particular, which can clearly be made to answer a series of important questions, but have not been subjected to analysis or discussion. It is therefore a lack of ideas, as much as lack of data, which has held back research into the *landnám*.

Instead of the question of when and where from, the aspect of the *landnám* most in need of study is how. While we can be fairly certain when Iceland was settled, we can only hope to understand where the settlers came from and, possibly more importantly, why they came, if we can appreciate how they went about colonising the country and what sort of society they built for themselves in the tenth century. Research into this aspect of the *landnám* also has the potential to increase our understanding and appreciation of the Sagas.

The following discussion represents a collection of observations made in preparation for a research project about land use and territorial division in medieval Iceland.<sup>5</sup> The sources used are on the one hand the landscape itself, the vegetation and indications about vegetation change, and on the other late medieval and early modern records relating to land use and patterns of land-ownership. The documentary evidence can at

<sup>5</sup> Institute of Archaeology, Iceland, Landnýting og landamerki á Íslandi á miðöldum.

best be stretched back to the twelfth century, but it only becomes abundant in the fourteenth. By studying patterns of land use and the division of the land into farming units in the fourteenth century the aim is to extrapolate backwards into the *landnám* period on the basis that these late medieval patterns must ultimately derive from choices made at the beginning of the *landnám*. In this context the reconstruction of boundaries between farms is vital because it is often the only way to understand the relationship between major and minor farms and to differentiate between primary and secondary settlements. Maps of farm-boundaries are not available for Iceland and the investigation has therefore been limited to areas where fieldwork has been carried out allowing modern boundaries to be compared with medieval ones. The regions used as examples here are Eyjafjörður in the north, a very densely populated region with good hay-fields and rich meadows but restricted access to summer grazing for sheep, and Borgarfjörður in the south-west, an area of more varied conditions, with farms ranging from huge lowland estates to small inland cottages. This is not an ideal choice, in particular because these regions have only limited access to the sea, and it is therefore not possible at this stage to relate these observations to those important parts of the country like the north-west and far east where the economy was based on marine resources as much as on animal husbandry.

The basic aim is to get an idea of social stratification by looking at differential access to resources and to identify issues in this context which can be debated fruitfully on the basis of archaeological and environmental data.

#### *Where did people settle?*

The first issue that needs to be discussed is the location of the first settlements. That is, in what sort of environment did the first settlers choose to place their farms and to what extent was this significant for later developments? The obvious place to start looking for answers to this question is in restraints imposed by the environment and by the economic practices of the settlers.

Ari fróði's claim that the whole country between the shore and the mountainsides was covered in woods when the first settlers arrived is well known ('Í þann tíð vas Ísland víði vaxit á miðli fjalls ok fjöru', *Íslensk fornrit* I, 5). It is also supported by pollen analyses which show that birch dominated the Icelandic vegetation prior to the *landnám* but declined rapidly in its aftermath. Birch will grow virtually anywhere

and it is believed that much of the country as high up as 400 metres above sea level was covered in birch forest at the time of the *landnám* (Margrét Hallsdóttir 1996; Þóra Ellen Þórhallsdóttir 1996). That is, all the inhabitable areas of the country were covered in wood when the first settlers arrived. The conditions least favourable for birch are very wet bogs and estuaries where flooding occurs periodically, and very sandy and gravelly soils such as are commonly found on beaches and at the outlets of smaller rivers. It is natural to expect that the first settlers sought out clearings of this sort to build their farms in. Not only were they thus spared having to clear the forest for the time being but it is questionable if forest clearance would have solved any of the problems facing the settlers in their first years. The forest was a resource in itself, both as pasture for sheep, cattle and pigs and as a source of firewood, charcoal and even construction timber. A more immediate problem than the need for open spaces will have been the need for winter fodder, for the cows in particular. Sheep, horses, pigs and calves can be grazed almost the whole year round in southern Iceland and need little extra fodder to help get them through the winter. Furthermore that fodder need not be of high quality; dried leaves from the forest would suffice. Cows on the other hand need to be kept indoors for a long period over the winter months and they need good quality fodder, especially if they are expected to produce milk. Dairy products were a central part of the Icelandic economy in the later Middle Ages and it is reasonable to expect that they had been so from the beginning. This is to some extent supported by the fact that very early sites like Herjólfssdalur in the Westmann Islands and Granastaðir in Eyjafjörður have produced a much higher number of cattle bones, relative to sheep bones, than later medieval sites (Amorosi and McGovern 1994). Large byres are also commonly found at early sites—examples are Herjólfssdalur, Hvítárholt and Papey—which indicates the importance attached to dairy products. In late medieval times and to the present day, hay as fodder for milch-cows has been produced on improved hay fields surrounding each farm. Little is known about the formation of these fields but the indications are that it must have been a slow process and that the early settlers would not have been able to prepare such fields and expect them to produce hay of markedly better quality than ordinary meadows for the first years of the *landnám*, possibly not even for the first generation. The only alternative to hay from improved fields, as fodder for milch-cows, is hay from meadows which are permanently or periodically submerged by water, usually in

spring flooding. Several species of grass and sedge, which are nutritious enough to keep cows alive and milking, thrive in such conditions. As wetlands of this sort are also the type of area least likely to be covered in woods, it is reasonable to assume that it was precisely in these conditions that the earliest farms were established. Flooded wetlands occur most commonly close to or on the coast in the estuaries of large rivers. Large rivers not only often provide excellent harbours, and we know that many of them were used as such in the Middle Ages, but they are also the easiest route along which to explore the country. Following this line of reasoning, we should expect to find the very earliest settlements in or near estuaries of large rivers and other early settlements in a string along the river as far inland as any wetland is associated with it (see Fig. 1, Land types in Borgarfjörður, opposite). The type of settlement this applies to is one which is likely to have become permanent and to have dominated later stages of the settlement process when it came to large-scale forest clearing and the occupation of less favourable land. Access to flooded wetlands was a valued resource in the late Middle Ages and a high proportion of the major estates based their economy partly on flooded meadows. It is quite reasonable to assume that many of these major estates owed their extensive landholdings and access to diverse and valuable resources to the fact that they were the first settlements in their respective areas. This is supported to some degree by the place-name evidence. It has long since been pointed out that among the largest farms in the country, farms which had churches on them and came to be centres of parishes, names describing natural features are much more common than among less important farms, and conversely that the place-name ending *-staðir*, the most common in Iceland, is relatively rare for the major estates (Olsen 1926, 63–76; Vigfús Guðmundsson 1926; also Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1971; Svavar Sigmundsson 1992, 133–37). While the majority of the place-names describing natural features, names like Hólar (Hills), Höfði (Headland), Nes (Peninsula), add little to our knowledge of the environment at the time of the *landnám*, a fair number refer to the vegetation. Among these, there are many that refer to wetlands, and names like Saurbær, Keldur, Mýri, Seyla and Fitjar are common on major church farms. As a group of names on major estates they are rivalled only by names indicating dry grassland, like Vellir, Grund and possibly Eyri. This latter group of names may point to clearings in the woodlands that were already there when the first settlers arrived, but this is much more difficult to verify than the existence of the woodless wetlands. In many



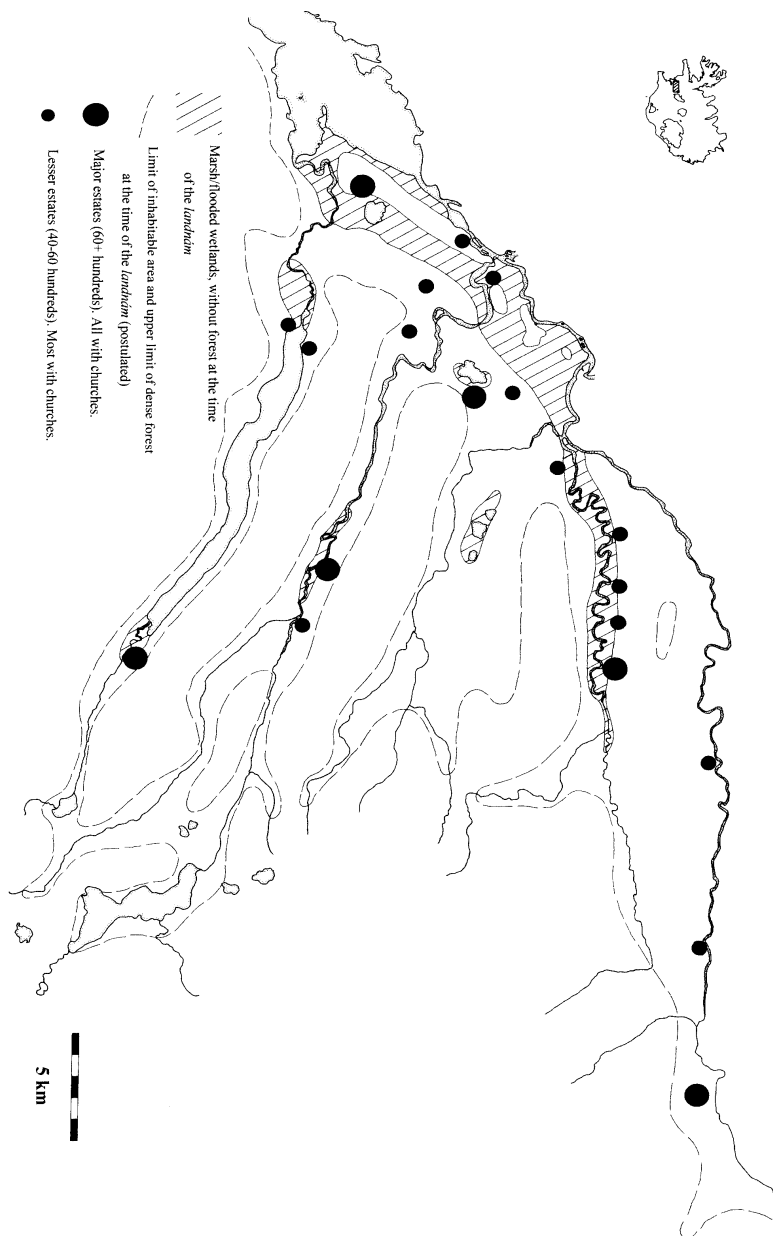


Fig. 1. Land types in Borgarfjörður. The map shows five districts (*hreppar*) south of the river Hvítá. Source: Orri Vésteinnsson 1996b.

cases it can be shown, however, that farms with such names are situated close to flooded wetlands, where the dry grassland may have formed a belt between the wetlands and the woods. Such conditions would presumably have been ideal for building a farm and may be the reason behind the later importance of major estates like Grund in Eyjafjörður, Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur and Vellir in Svarfaðardalur.

It is perfectly possible that there were in the early stages of the settlement process different kinds of settlements which would have relied primarily on hunting, subsidised with light animal husbandry. There are places in Iceland where small populations could be sustained by hunting and fishing the whole year round. These are primarily islands off the coast like the Westmann Islands and the numerous islands in Breiðafjörður, where there is ready access to a variety of marine resources both in winter and summer. The large and well built byres at Herjólfsdalur in the Westmann Islands speak, however, against such a suggestion, and indicate that even where it was possible to rely on hunting as the main source of nutrition people chose to base their livelihood primarily on animal husbandry. It is possible that the first settlers began seeking out areas where animal husbandry could easily be subsidised by hunting and fishing, that they settled first on the coast and on off-shore islands and that when people began to search for places to settle inland they sought out rivers and lakes where fish could be caught throughout the winter. This could explain the very early settlement at Hofstaðir near Mývatn, which was occupied in a matter of years after the *Landnám*-tephra was deposited (Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinsson 1995). While the Mývatn area is far from ideal cattle country, it has good sheep grazing all year round, uniquely for its altitude and the north of Iceland in general, and the lake is rich in trout and bird-life. A midden currently under excavation at Hofstaðir has turned up all the normal domesticated mammals, sheep, cattle, horse and pig, but also large quantities of trout, bird bones and egg-shell fragments (McGovern *et al.* 1996). This is suggestive of an economy based on animal husbandry but heavily subsidised by the local wildlife. Interestingly, bones from salt-water fish have also been recovered from this midden, and this is also the case with another early inland site in the north, Granastaðir in Eyjafjörður. This reminds us that people were capable of acquiring resources over very long distances, as Hofstaðir is more than 40 kilometres inland and Granastaðir little less, and this may also suggest that the inhabitants of these farms had a preference for marine foods, possibly because they originally came from a marine environment.

It will probably always be difficult to provide archaeological evidence for the different ages of the earliest settlements. It is notoriously difficult to estimate the time elapsed between the deposition of the *Landnám*-tephra and the first signs of building activity at a site. It is a greater problem, however, that the majority of early settlement sites which have been investigated are unsuccessful ones, that is, sites that were abandoned within decades of the original occupation. This is of course not surprising; one would expect a period of trial and error at the very beginning of the colonisation of an uninhabited country. An example of this is the site of Grelutóttir in Arnarfjörður in the north-west (see Fig. 2, Plan of Grelutóttir, below). The small long-house on this site was situated close to the beach by the outlet of a stream. It is likely that when the builders of this house settled here this shore-line was the only area not covered in birch forest. They therefore built their first dwelling near the beach but one or two generations later they moved it, presumably to the site of the farm Eyri which later became an important church-farm. The relocation of the farm was probably occasioned

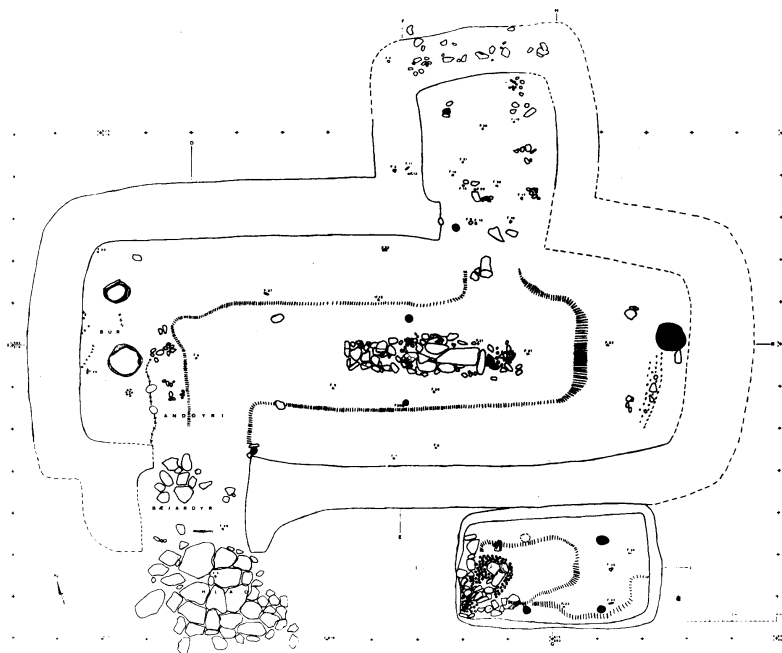


Fig. 2. Plan of Grelutóttir in Arnarfjörður. A tenth-century farmhouse with an adjacent pit-house (bottom of picture). Source: Guðmundur Ólafsson 1980, 32–33.

by the effects of forest clearance. The clearing of the forest made better farmland available higher up on the slopes, but it may also have caused instability in the soils in the overhanging mountainside, resulting in floods in the stream by which the original farm had been built; the site was covered with rubble from such floods (Guðmundur Ólafsson 1980). Such relocations of farms over short distances seem to have been common (several traditions to this effect are recorded in the Book of Settlements) but they will not have greatly altered the resource strategies or the land claims of the farmers in question.

#### *The social organisation of the settlers*

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the composition of the groups of people that came to settle in Iceland. It has always been assumed that each settlement consisted of a single family with relatives, servants and slaves and opinions have differed only as to the number and significance of the slaves. The Book of Settlements and the Sagas of Icelanders seem always to envisage that even if people sailed to Iceland in large groups of several families, each family would then establish its own farmstead with little or no economic or political links with the others. This of course is entirely in accordance with the general view of medieval Icelandic society that it consisted of isolated farmsteads controlled by independent farmers. It can, however, be reasonably suggested that this is an erroneous view and that the basis for it goes no further back than the nineteenth century when Icelandic farmers saw themselves exactly so, isolated and independent, and that the sagas can be read very differently. That would, however, require a discussion of the sagas which will not be attempted here. Instead it must suffice here to analyse the archaeological evidence, and this suggests that the earliest settlers sailed to Iceland in large groups of more than one family and that initially at least they stayed together. This is suggested most clearly by the site of Herjólfsdalur in the Westmann Islands off the south coast of Iceland (see Fig 3, Plan of Herjólfsdalur, opposite). It is one of the most complete early settlement sites excavated to date. This site has two long-houses with long-fires and raised benches along the sides, each accompanied by a byre with room for more than ten cows in each. In addition there are two smaller houses which were interpreted by the excavator as human dwellings on account of the cooking pits found in both, but it is of course not possible to see if these houses were occupied by different people from the inhabitants of the long-houses or if they had some specialised



Fig. 3. Plan of Herjólfssdalur in the Westmann Islands, off the south coast of Iceland. II and V are the long-houses (upper right-hand corner and lower left-hand corner respectively), each with an associated byre (VIII and IV). In one of the byres (VIII) there is a cooking pit indicating that it may also have been used for human habitation. Houses I and III have cooking pits and may have been used for habitation in addition to the long-houses. Source: Margrét-Hermanns-Auðardóttir 1989.

function, for instance in food preparation and storage. Furthermore, the inner half of one of the byres showed signs of human habitation (Margrét Hermanns-Auðardóttir 1989, 108–11). This is by no means the only early settlement site with more than one long-house. At Hvítárholt in Árnesþing three large long-houses were excavated along with five small pit-houses (Þór Magnússon 1973; see Fig 4, Plan of Hvítárholt, opposite, top). In Reykjavík the urban excavation found traces of two small long-houses side by side and a third larger one which was considered to be more recent (Nordahl 1988). At Bessastaðir southwest of Reykjavík an ongoing excavation has so far uncovered the remains of two long-houses (Sigurður Bergsteinsson, personal communication). At Goðatættur in Papey off the east coast a long-house with an accompanying byre with a habitation area was uncovered, remarkably similar to the set-up in Herjólfsdalur (Eldjárn 1989, 128–57). At Granastaðir there is an unexcavated house besides the one uncovered (see Fig 5, Plan of Granastaðir, opposite, bottom). A test trench led the excavator to suggest that this house was a byre, but judging from the section he has produced it could just as well be a long-house. At Granastaðir there is also a large pit-house which was clearly inhabited by humans (Einarsson 1994, 75–79, 92–94). In fact there is only a single early settlement site, that of Grelutóttir in Arnarfjörður discussed on pp. 11–12 above, that seems to consist of only a single long-house, though that house was in fact accompanied by two small pit-houses. All other early settlement sites have been investigated too incompletely for it to be safe to assume anything about the number of buildings at each site.

Excavations of late-medieval sites always turn up a single long-house, usually with adjacent rooms, suggesting a single household, presumably a nuclear family with relatives and servants. This and the ideas mentioned earlier on isolation and independence have led all the excavators of the early settlement sites with more than one long-house to suggest that the long-houses were not occupied contemporaneously, but that when one building was abandoned or fell into ruin another was built beside it. There is, however, nothing to suggest this in the stratigraphy of any of these sites and this is not the way in which people rebuilt their houses in later centuries. Excavations of Icelandic farm-mounds have shown that people normally rebuilt their houses on top of the earlier ones, often preserving both the shape and size of the earlier building. In fact, complete rebuilding was very rare; houses were repaired and rebuilt piecemeal for centuries on end, ensuring that the farmhouses occupied the same limited patch while accumulating into high mounds

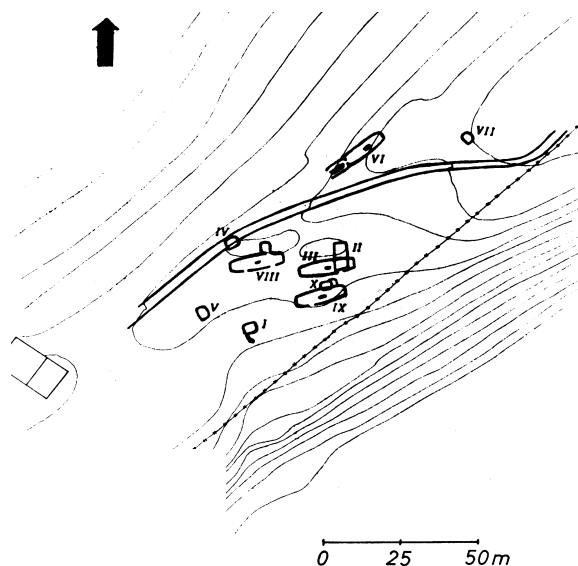


Fig. 4. Plan of Hvítárholt in Árnessýsla, S-Iceland. Nos III, VI, VIII and IX are long-houses, II is thought to have been a barn and the smaller buildings are pit-houses. Source: Þór Magnússon 1973, 11.

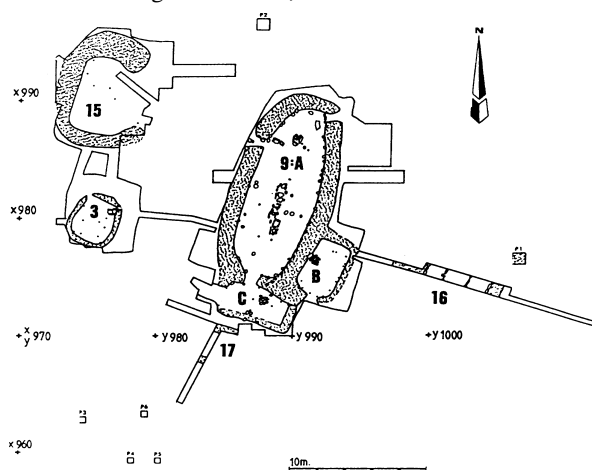


Fig. 5. Plan of Granastaðir in Eyjafjörður, N-Iceland. No. 3 is a pit-house which is believed to have been a dwelling, 9 is the long-house and 16 is a partially excavated building which the excavator suggested was a byre but which may equally plausibly be suggested to be a second long-house. Source: Einarsson 1994, 75.

of discarded building material and refuse (Mjöll Snæsdóttir 1991).<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to see why this pattern should not have been followed in the settlement period, especially as farm mounds are well known in both Norway and Orkney from the period prior to the Icelandic *landnám* as well as in later times (Bertelsen and Urbanczyk 1989). In the absence of any stratigraphic proof to the contrary, therefore, it is much more reasonable to believe that these early sites were occupied by more than one household at the same time.<sup>7</sup>

It is easy to see why this might have been preferable at the initial stages of the *landnám*. The first years in a new and unknown country will have been difficult for any group and there must have been obvious advantages in co-operating in the reconnaissance and initial clearing of the country. We may in this context be reminded of the three long-houses at L'Anse-aux-Meadows, a pioneer site if ever there was one. The abandonment of sites like Herjólfssdalur and Hvítárholt might suggest that once this initial stage of settlement was over, the ways of individual households parted and each household chose a new site some distance from the others. In these cases the original site was then abandoned completely, while at sites like Bessastaðir and Reykjavík a single household remained on the original site while others presumably moved away. This sort of scenario would be based on the presupposition that people either preferred to live in single households and abhorred the company of others or that the economy somehow dictated that the same site could not in the long run sustain more than a single household. This line of reasoning could prove treacherous, especially when it is considered that in late medieval and early modern times it was quite common for more than one household to share the same site and the same home field. In some cases these were independent households forming small hamlets, a pattern especially common in the coastal areas of the southern plains. Much more frequently, groups of households were made up of a single independent household, normally of high status, and a number of dependent and usually much smaller households on the same site or close by. Such groups of households often made up the core of the late medieval estates and suggest that it was advantageous for the running of large farming units to have more than one household working together. From looking at the two long-

<sup>6</sup> Compare also the farm mound at Bergþórshvoll where deposits are found all the way back to the tenth century (Eldjárn and Gísli Gestsson 1952).

<sup>7</sup> I am indebted to Mjöll Snæsdóttir for this interpretation of the early sites.



houses at Herjólfssdalur it is not apparent that one household was of higher status than the other; the slightly smaller long-house has for instance a much larger byre attached to it. Much the same picture emerges at Hvítárholt; no one long-house is significantly larger than the others. In these two cases it seems therefore that the households occupying the sites were of equal status.

The proximity of households at these early sites must surely imply economic co-operation, and if we also accept that the earliest and most successful settlements were those in the wetland regions, those which later appear as great estates with multiple households, it becomes reasonable to suggest that the people who sailed to Iceland settled together in groups of two or more households and that this pattern formed the basis for the Icelandic economy for centuries to come.

#### *Estates and church lands*

There is relatively abundant documentation on the great estates from late medieval times, as each normally had a church with a priest on it and the churches often owned parts of the estates. This property was listed in charters drawn up for each church and these give a comprehensive overview of the distribution of church lands among the great estates by the beginning of the fourteenth century. The indications are, however, that most of the major churches were endowed with most of their landed property back in the twelfth century (Orri Vésteinnsson 1996a, 145–46, 151–73).

Churches could own land in several different ways, but those that concern us here are four (see Fig. 6, Churches and church lands in Borgarfjörður, overleaf). Firstly, a church could own a cottage on the estate where it was situated. Such cottages did not normally have defined boundaries and only a fixed proportion of the home field, meadows and pasture of the estate belonged to them. An example of this is the church at Hvanneyri which owned a single cottage situated in the home field of the main farm (*DI I*, 592). Secondly, a church could own one or more outlying properties, that is, cottages or small farms which were considered a part of the whole but were situated on the periphery of the farmland. An example of this is the church at Bær, which in the late twelfth century was endowed with three cottages, called 'útlönd', around the farmland proper (*Biskupa sögur I*, 284–87; *DI V*, 401–02). In this case the evidence gives an indication of the extent of the lands originally belonging to the estate. Thirdly, a church could own a fixed proportion of the whole estate, usually a third or a

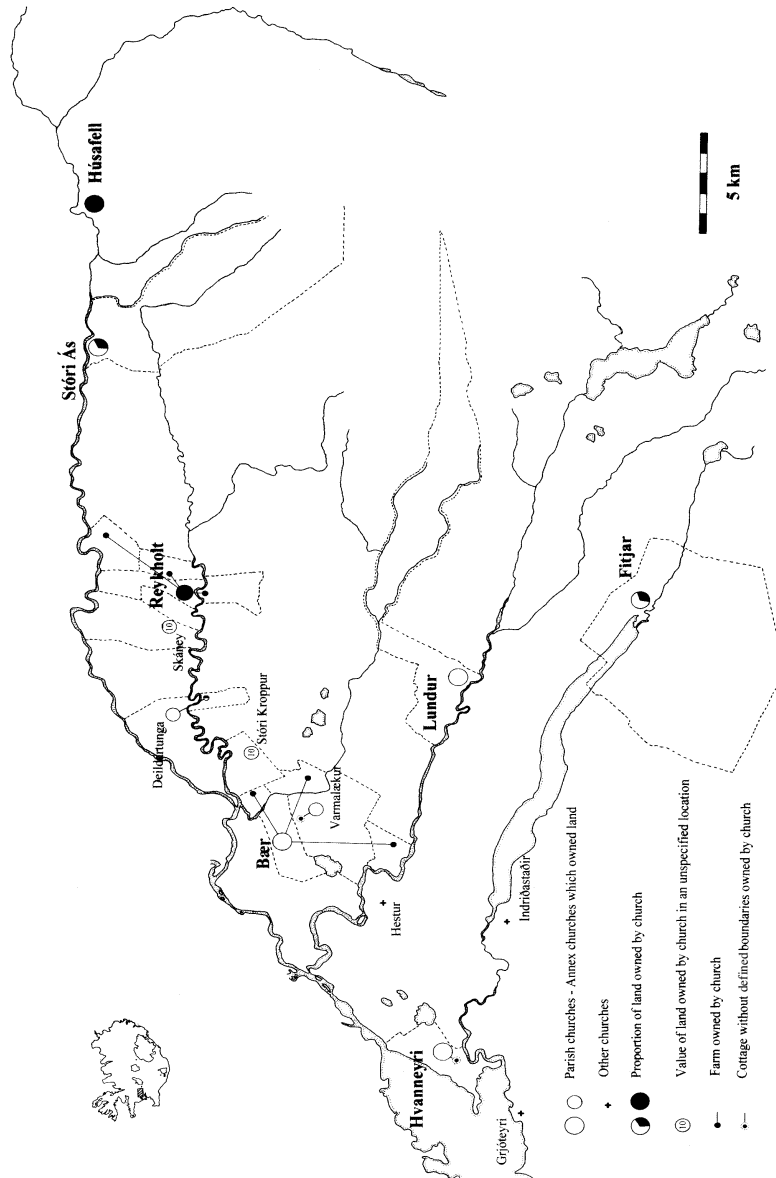


Fig. 6. Churches and church lands in Borgarfjörður. The map shows five districts (*hreppar*) south of the river Hvítá. Source: Orri Vésteinsson 1996b.

half. The charters often list all the farms and cottages which belonged to the church in this way and this can give an idea of the extent of the original estate. An example of this is the church at Fitjar which owned a third of the land it was situated on. It is clear from the charters that this included the farm Vatnshorn which *Laxdæla saga* would have us believe was the core holding of the estate (*DI* III, 124; IV, 119; *Íslensk fornrit* V, 184). Fourthly, a church could own the whole estate. An example of this is Reykholt which already by the late twelfth century owned not only the land of Reykholt itself but also a number of smaller farms immediately adjacent to it (*DI* I, 279–80, 350–51). The boundaries of these suggest that this compact chunk of land formed the original estate.

If we compare this information with the boundary map, a distinct pattern emerges. Firstly, the estates themselves always occupy the best land in their respective areas and they also have the widest range of access to different resources. They tend to have direct access to upland pastures and if not, then they own defined pieces of uplands for summer grazing. They also tend to own forests and fishing rights and have more than one shieling. These holdings are not always concentrated in one area and the manpower needed to make use of the scattered holdings must have been considerable, a fact often commented upon by early modern priests who did not have the resources to make use of all the property belonging to their churches (e. g. *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns* IV, 231). Secondly, the estates tend to be made up of two or three different types of holding: there is the main farm itself (it might even be called the manor), and there is a small and often fluctuating number of cottages in or around the home field of the manor. These did not have defined boundaries and sometimes not even defined areas of activity. Their inhabitants were economically and politically dependent on the estate owner and it is likely that the cottagers could easily have been called upon when the estate needed extra manpower and that this was their main usefulness to the owner. Thirdly, we often find a number of quite small but independent holdings on the periphery of estates. Holdings of this type were only independent in the sense that they could be bought and sold irrespective of the ownership of the estate. Their often quite limited access to resources and the poor quality of the land ensured that their farmers were both politically and economically dependent on the landowners and/or their powerful neighbours. It is possible that these peripheral holdings were originally shielings or some form of out-stations from the main farm which later developed

into independent farming units and may therefore represent a relatively late stage in the settlement process.

Immediately surrounding the large estates it is common to find medium sized or large single farms with a respectable access to resources (see Fig. 7, Andakill and Bæjarsveit, below). This type of holding tends to occupy good quality land in regard to hay-making and pasture but may lack access to important resources like fish or peat or fire-wood. It is reasonable to suggest that this sort of holding represents latecomers among the settlers arriving from abroad. Possibly they were able to seize good quality land in between the already large estates because the estate farmers could not make any reasonable claim to such lands on account of a lack of manpower.

*A secondary phase of settlement*

The large estates occupy a significant, but nevertheless small, part of the inhabitable area of Iceland. The rest of this area is dominated by coastal and valley environments where farms are by and large medium or small in size and have all more or less similar access to resources. This is the sort of landscape which was covered in thick forest when the first settlers arrived and was initially not as ideally suited for settlement

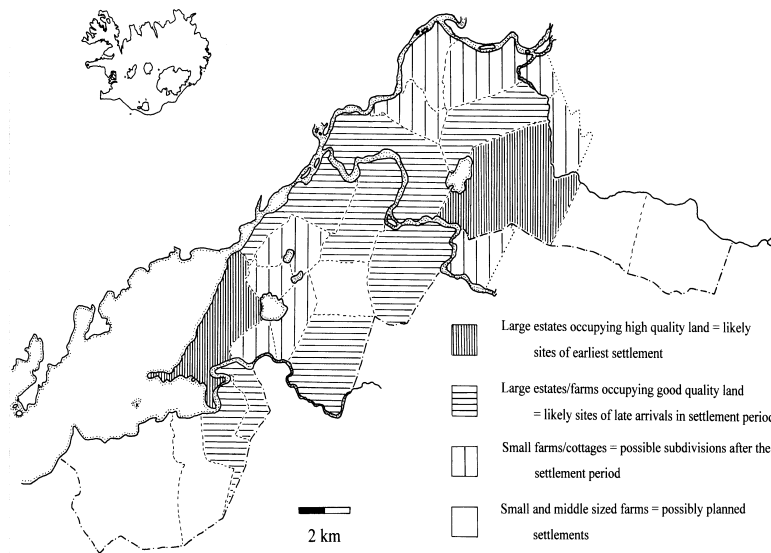


Fig. 7. Andakill and Bæjarsveit in Borgarfjörður (part of larger area shown in Figures 1 and 6). Source: Orri Vésteinnsson 1996b.

as the wetland areas. It is striking that in both Borgarfjörður and Eyjafjörður there is a large number of farms in areas of this kind which are almost exactly identical in size and shape and all have somewhat limited access to resources. In both regions farms of this type tend not to have enough land attached to them to have a shieling and many also lack access to peat or fire-wood (see Fig 8, Planned settlements in the parish of Hrafnagil in Eyjafjörður, overleaf). It is unlikely that any farmer would have occupied the land in this way if he had had a choice in the matter, and this pattern of landholding must surely suggest planned settlements. This is probably what one of the authors of the Book of Settlements had in mind when he said of the settler Blund-Ketill that he was a very wealthy man and that he had forests cleared in many places and established farms in the clearings ('Blund-Ketill var maðr stórauðigr; hann lét ryðja víða í skógum ok byggja', *Íslensk fornrit* I, 84). This presupposes that Blund-Ketill had previously laid claim to the forests he later had cleared and also that this was something befitting a great and wealthy man. Huge land-claims were well known to thirteenth-century scholars and whatever the truth behind individual stories of such claims it is inherently likely that the owners of great estates somehow tried to control the settlement of those neighbouring lands which they could not make use of. It was for them a natural precaution to keep these settlements small; nobody likes a rival in his back garden, but a large number of politically, as well as probably economically, dependent smallholders can always come in handy. This must be the reason behind the general pattern of Icelandic settlement which has the largest units, in terms of land, people and yields, in the most productive areas and the smallest units on lands least favourable for agriculture.

It seems, then, that there were two distinct phases in the settlement of Iceland. First was the establishment of great estates mainly in wetland areas, and this was followed by a planned settlement of less accessible areas. But how can we date these processes? One way might be to look at the distribution of cemeteries in the later Middle Ages. Iceland's ecclesiastical landscape was unusual in that chapels and minor churches were found at every second to third farm in the country and all of them seem to have had cemeteries attached to them. A chapel cemetery was normally only used for the household of the farm where the chapel was situated and this seems to have been the main function of these buildings. The simplest explanation for the high number of chapels and lesser churches in Iceland is that they were the successors to the pre-

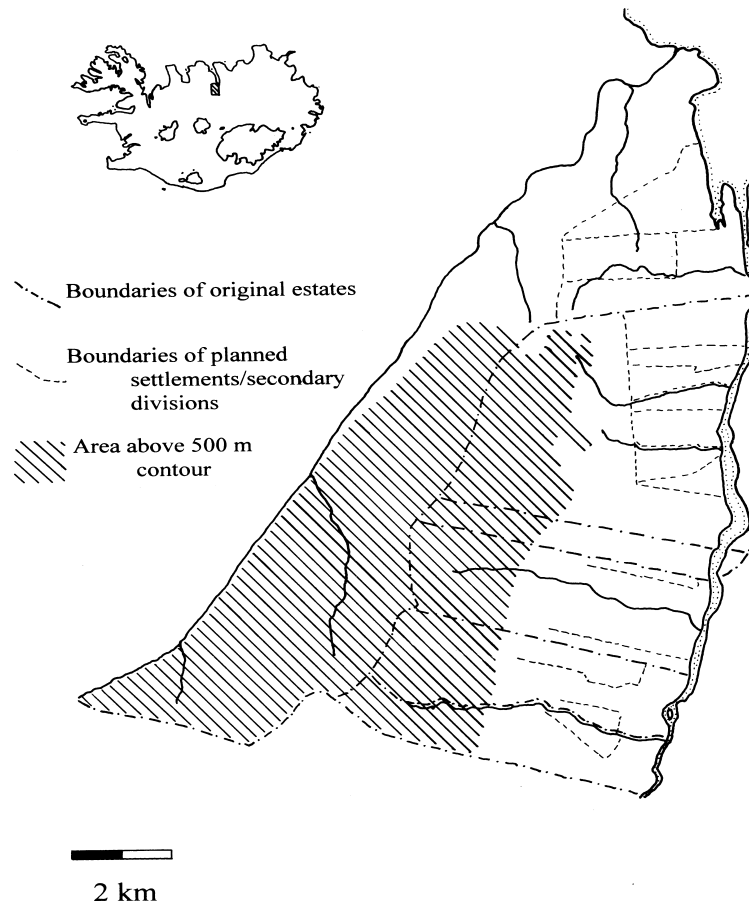


Fig. 8. Planned settlements in the parish of Hrafnagil in Eyjafjörður, N-Iceland.  
Source: Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinsson 1994, 1996a, 1996b.

Christian grave-fields which were normally situated just outside the home field of each farm. It seems that following the conversion in the year 1000 Christian cemeteries were established in different locations from the pre-Christian grave-fields, but on the same principles, that is, outside the home field and one for each farm. It follows from this that farms which have cemeteries or chapels associated with them are likely to have been established before the conversion, whereas farms without such a feature were probably only established after that event. This hypothesis still needs to be tested, but as a rule of thumb it seems to be useful. If it is applied to the smaller holdings which have been ascribed here to the second phase of settlement it emerges that this had only just got under way by the year 1000. Some of the larger farms in these less favourable areas had chapels, but the majority of such farms did not. This is in sharp contrast to concentrations of farms with much greater access to resources as for instance the cluster of church and chapels at Lundur, Gullberastaðir and Oddastaðir in Lundarreykjadalur. These three farms form a cluster and to them belong most of the highland pastures available to the inhabitants of the valley (see Fig. 9, Lundarreykjadalur, overleaf). The other farms in the valley are all much smaller and only two out of nineteen had chapels associated with them. The conclusion that the second phase of settlement was only partly under way by the year 1000 may be qualified by the likelihood that grave-fields were only established for independent farms and that outstations of different kinds could have a permanent settlement with all corpses brought back to the estate grave-field. This means that many of these settlements may have been long established by the year 1000 but that they were still being considered a part of some other farming unit, most likely a wetland estate. The majority of them must have got their independence in the eleventh century because by the end of that century the number of farmers paying assembly tax had reached the figure it would stay at for much of the Middle Ages and early modern times (*Íslenzk fornrit* I, 23; *DI* IV, 9–10).

#### *Highland settlement*

There is an aspect of the settlement which has intrigued many and needs to be discussed. This is the statement in the Book of Settlements that some of the settlers preferred to live high in the mountains because of the abundant pasture available there for sheep ('Sumir þeir, er fyrstir kómu út, byggðu næstir fjöllum ok merkðu at því landskostina, at kvikféit fýstisk frá sjónum til fjallanna', *Íslenzk fornrit* I, 337). To many this

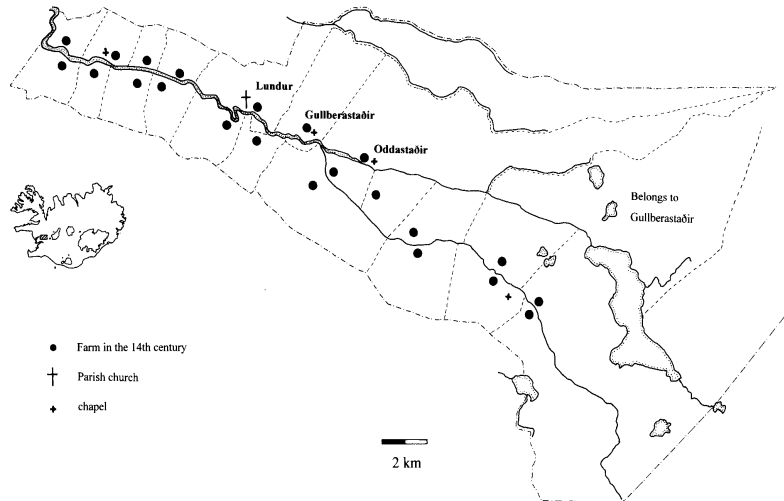


Fig. 9. Lundarreykjadalur in Borgarfjörður (part of larger area shown in Figures 1 and 6). Source: Orri Vésteinsson 1996b.

statement has seemed validated by the high number of early sites high up in the mountains, many of them further inland than any modern settlement has ever reached. In actual fact secure tenth-century dates can be found for only a handful of these sites and for the majority of them it is impossible to ascertain whether they were shielings or independent farms (Brynjúlfur Jónsson 1885; Bruun 1898; Eldjárn 1949; Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 1990; Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir 1992). In fact, only three sites are known from such highland areas which can with certainty be identified as tenth-century farms. Two of these are in Þórsmörk<sup>8</sup> and one in Bárðardalur.<sup>9</sup> Both these areas have been the scene of heavy erosion since medieval times and this has changed the landscape beyond recognition as well as revealing these early sites. It seems inherently unlikely that people would have preferred to become snowbound over winter with their sheep and nothing else to eat when there was still land available at lower altitudes. It is on the other hand

<sup>8</sup> Steinfínnsstaðir, dated by association with a pre-Christian burial, and Puriðarstaðir efri, dated by artifact typology to the ninth/tenth to eleventh/twelfth centuries (Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir 1992, 41–46).

<sup>9</sup> Undir Sandmúla, dated by artifact typology, in particular a large silver hoard (Matthías Þórðarson 1910; Erkes 1911).



quite likely that the large estates would from an early stage establish shielings from which the upland pastures could be made use of. At some later stages in the settlement process independent cottages may have been set up in these areas but it seems that as soon as the forest had been cleared from the lowlands, these marginal areas became valued for their forest resources, both as pasture for pigs and cattle and more importantly as a source of charcoal. These marginal areas were by and large owned by the great estates and the rich churches associated with them and in some cases it can be shown that such property rights were quite ancient. An example is Geitland, which belonged to the church at Reykholt and was clearly associated with the farm in the *landnám* myth of the Reykhyltingar family.<sup>10</sup> As soon as forests became a valuable asset it is likely that the estate owners removed the cottagers from such marginal areas in order to preserve the woodlands and use them more efficiently.

Long after 1000 there were still pockets here and there which seem not to have been cleared and which were used by neighbouring farms as well as faraway estates for pasture and charcoal making. These are invariably the very worst areas for agriculture, with poor soils where erosion has invariably set in when the forest finally disappeared. In Borgarfjörður there are two areas of this kind. In Skorradalur a large number of estates and churches owned rights to pasture and wood-cutting; here the last stage of the *landnám* was only accomplished in the sixteenth century with the establishment of four new farms, Grund, Grafardalur, Ytri Svangi and Eystri Svangi (*Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns* III, 160–61, 170). In Hálsasveit inland from Reykholt there seems to have been a swathe of forest separating the parishes of Reykholt and Gilsbakki on the other side of Hvítá; by the thirteenth century a large number of very small cottages had been established in this forest that seem to have specialised in ironworking (Smith 1995, 334–36), but they had disappeared along with the forest by the late fourteenth century.

<sup>10</sup> According to this the son of Grímr, who had settled at Hvanneyri in the wetlands at the mouth of Hvítá, was Úlfr, who took land in Geitland, and amongst his descendants was Þórðr Sölvason the ancestor of the Reykhyltingar (*Íslensk fornrit* I, 77–79). The family's ancestry is, however, reckoned differently in *Melabók*, an incomplete version of *Landnámabók* which contains much material directly from the early thirteenth century *Styrmisbók* (*Íslensk fornrit* I, 78 n. 1).

*Conclusions*

It has been suggested here that the very first settlers preferred to locate their farms in areas of flooded wetlands; that such settlements were inhabited by large numbers of people and quickly formed into large estates with a wide and varied economic base. Latecomers had to make do with slices of land in between these large estates. When all the really good and easily occupied land had been seized, a second phase was entered wherein land of lesser quality was chopped up into small units and sold or rented out to new arrivals or second-generation Icelanders. While the initial phase seems to have taken only a few decades the second phase may have stretched into the eleventh century.

The sheer size of the original estates and the number of households they sustained in later centuries suggests that they were from the beginning worked by large groups of people. How these groups of people were organised can only be guessed at. The long houses at Herjólfsdalur and Hvítárholt would suggest that there could be several households of equal standing whereas the later medieval pattern suggests that the situation was somewhat more unequal. It is possible that at such sites there were many households of different status, for instance one main household with a large number of servants and slaves and a number of smaller and dependent households. But it is just as plausible that they consisted of a single household with many families of different status, or a single household with a very large number of slaves. What can be maintained is that the successful wetland settlements which later appear as great estates were from the beginning worked by a large number of people, at least enough to fill two or more long-houses and probably always consisting of several families. The principal reason why a large number of people were required on each estate seems to have been the perceived need to maximise the utilisation of the greatest variety of resources. This probably far exceeded the bare minimum needed to survive, especially after the initial phase of settlement, and may suggest an economy geared towards equipping a chosen few with the means to eat, drink and show off.

If these suggestions are taken seriously, and should they be proved not far wrong by future research, it will have a serious effect on our understanding of medieval Icelandic society. Instead of being a land of isolated and independent farmers of equal status, it becomes a land of several hundred powerful farmers each in control of a considerable number of people on his own estate and having political authority over up to three thousand lesser farmers and cottagers bound to the estate

farmers by ties of ownership, and by the twelfth century also through church attendance and the payment of tithes.

### Bibliography

- Adolf Friðriksson 1994a. *Sagas and Popular Antiquarianism in Icelandic Archaeology*.
- Adolf Friðriksson 1994b. 'Sannfræði íslenskra fornleifa'. *Skírnir. Tímarit Hins íslenska bókmenntafélags* 168, 346–76.
- Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinsson 1994. *Fornleifaskráning í Eyjafirði I. Fornleifar í Eyjafjarðarsveit norðan Hrafnagils og Þverár*.
- Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinsson 1995. *Fornleifarannsóknir á Hofstöðum í Mývatnssveit 1995*.
- Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinsson 1996a. *Fornleifaskráning í Eyjafirði V. Fornleifar á syðstu jörðum í Öngulsstaðahreppi og milli Hrafnagils og Grundar í Hrafnagilshreppi*.
- Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinsson 1996b. *Fornleifaskráning í Eyjafirði VI. Fornleifar í landi Nausta, Hamra og Kjarna*.
- Amorosi, Thomas 1989. 'Contributions to the Zooarchaeology of Iceland. Some Preliminary Notes'. In Durrenberger and Gísli Pálsson, eds, *The Anthropology of Iceland*, 203–27.
- Amorosi, Thomas and McGovern, Thomas H. 1994. 'A preliminary report of an archaeofauna from Granastaðir, Eyjafjarðarsýsla, Northern Iceland'. Appendix 4 in Einarsson 1994, 184–85.
- Bertelsen, Reidar and Urbanczyk, P. 1989. 'Gårdshaugene i Nord-Norge. Eksempler på nordatlantiske teller'. *Hikuin* 15, 171–82.
- Biskupa sögur* I–II 1858–78. Gefnar út af Hinu íslenska bókmenntafélagi.
- Björn Þorsteinsson 1953. *Íslenska þjóðveldið*.
- Bruun, Daniel 1898. 'Nokkurar eyðibygðir í Árnessyslu, Skagafjarðardölum og Bárðardal rannsakaðar sumarið 1897'. *Árbók hins íslenska fornleifafélags, Fylgirit*, 47–77.
- Brynjúlfur Jónsson 1885. 'Um Þjórsárdal'. *Árbók hins íslenska fornleifafélags 1884–5*, 38–60.
- DI = Diplomatarium Islandicum eða Íslenskt fornbréfasafn* I–XVI, 1853–1976.
- Einarsson, Bjarni F. 1994. *The Settlement of Iceland: A Critical Approach. Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage*.
- Einarsson, Bjarni F. 1995. *Fornleifarannsókn í Aðalstræti 12 1993. Rannsóknarsaga, endurmat og landnám*.
- Eldjárn, Kristján 1949. 'Eyðibygð á Hrunamannaafreitti'. *Árbók hins íslenska fornleifafélags 1943–48*, 1–43.
- Eldjárn, Kristján 1956. *Kuml og haugfé í heiðnum sið á Íslandi*.
- Eldjárn, Kristján 1966. 'Ísland hefur enga forsögu'. *Tímarit Máls og menningar* 27, 352–65 [Interview].
- Eldjárn, Kristján 1989. 'Papey'. *Árbók hins íslenska fornleifafélags 1988*, 35–188.

- Eldjárn, Kristján and Gísli Gestsson 1952. 'Rannsóknir á Bergþórshvoli'. *Árbók hins íslenska fornleifafélags 1951–52*, 5–75.
- Erkes, H. 1911. 'Fra Islands Indre'. *Geografisk Tidsskrift* 21, 233–38.
- Gísli Sigurðsson 1988. *Gaelic Influence in Iceland. Historical and Literary Contacts: A Survey of Research*. Studia Islandica 46.
- Grönvold, Karl, Niels Óskarsson, Johnsen, Sigfús J., Clausen, H. B., Hammer, C. U., Bond, G. and Bard, E. 1995. 'Ash layers from Iceland in the Greenland GRIP ice core correlated with oceanic and land sediments'. *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* 135, 149–55.
- Guðmundur Ólafsson 1980. 'Grelutóttir: Landnámsbær á Eyri við Arnarfjörð'. *Árbók hins íslenska fornleifafélags 1979*, 25–73.
- Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, ed., 1996. *Um landnám á Íslandi: Fjórtán erindi*.
- Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir 1992. *Farm Abandonment in Medieval and Post-Medieval Iceland: An Interdisciplinary Study*.
- Hermann Pálsson 1965. 'Minnisgreinar um Papa'. *Saga* 5, 112–22.
- Hörður Ágústsson 1982. 'Den islandske bondegårds udvikling fra landnamstiden indtil det 20. århundrede'. In B. Myhre, B. Stoklund and P. Gjørder, eds, *Vestnordisk byggeskikk gennem to tusen år: Tradisjon og forandring fra romertid til det 19. århundre*, 255–68.
- Íslensk fornrit* I– . 1933– .
- Jakobsen, Alfred 1988. 'Den irske hypotesen'. *Det kongelige norske videnskabers selskabs skrifter* 4, 3–19.
- Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns* I–XI, 1913–43.
- Jón Jóhannesson 1956. *Íslendinga saga* I. Þjóðveldisöld.
- Margrét Hallsdóttir 1982. 'Frjógreining tveggja jarðvegssniða úr Hrafnkelsdal: Áhrif ábúðar á gróðurfar dalsins'. In *Eldur er í norðri: Afmælisrit helgað Sigurði Þórarinssyni sjötugum*, 253–65.
- Margrét Hallsdóttir 1984. 'Frjógreining tveggja jarðvegssniða á Heimaey'. *Árbók hins íslenska fornleifafélags 1983*, 48–68.
- Margrét Hallsdóttir 1987. *Pollen analytical studies of human influence on vegetation in relation to the landnám tephra layer in southwest Iceland*.
- Margrét Hallsdóttir 1996. 'Frjógreining: Frjókorn sem heimild um landnámið'. In Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1996, 123–34.
- Margrét Hermanns-Auðardóttir 1989. *Íslands tidiga bosättning: Studier med utgångspunkt i merovingertida-vikingatida gårdslämnningar i Herjólfssdalur, Vestmannaeyjar, Island*.
- Matthías Þórðarson 1910. 'Merkur fornminjafundur: Fundið fornt gangsilfur'. *Árbók hins íslenska fornleifafélags 1909*, 24–31.
- McGovern, Thomas, Bigelow, G. F., Amorosi, T. and Russel, D. 1988. 'Northern Islands, Human Error and Environmental Degradation: A View of Social and Ecological Change in the Medieval North Atlantic'. *Human Ecology* 16:3, 225–70.
- McGovern, Thomas, Mainland, I. and Amorosi, T. 1996. 'Hofstaðir 1996: A Preliminary Zooarchaeological Report'. In Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinnsson, eds, *Hofstaðir 1996*.
- Melsteð, Bogi Th. 1903–30. *Íslendingasaga* I–III.

- Miller, William I. 1990. *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law and Society in Saga Iceland*.
- Mjöll Snæsdóttir 1991. 'Stóraborg—An Icelandic Farm Mound'. *Acta Archaeologica* 61, 116–19.
- Nordahl, Else 1988. *Reykjavík from the archaeological point of view*.
- Olsen, Magnus 1926. *Ættegård og helligdom*.
- Orri Vésteinnsson 1996a. *The Christianisation of Iceland: Priests, Power and Social Change 1000–1300*.
- Orri Vésteinnsson 1996b. *Meningarminjar í Borgarfrði norðan Skarðsheiðar*.
- Páll Theodórsson 1993. 'Geislakolsgreining öskulaga og aldur landnámslagsins'. *Náttúrufræðingurinn* 63, 275–83.
- Roussell, Aage 1943. 'Komparativ avdelning'. In Stenberger, Mårten, ed., *Forntida gårdar i Island: Meddelanden från den Nordiska arkeologiska undersökningen i Island i sommaren 1939*, 191–224.
- Sigurður Þórarinnsson 1944. *Tefrokronologiska studier på Island*. Geografiska Annalen 26.
- Smith, Kevin P. 1995. 'Landnám: the settlement of Iceland in archaeological and historical perspective'. *World Archaeology* 26, 319–47.
- Svavar Sigmundsson 1992. 'Örnefni í Árnesþingi'. *Árnesingur* 2, 123–37.
- Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 1990. *Byggðaleifar í Hrafnkelsdal og á Brúardölum*.
- Sørensen, Preben Meulengracht 1977. *Saga og samfund: En indføring i oldislandsk litteratur*.
- Sørensen, Preben Meulengracht 1993. *Fortælling og ære: Studier i islændingesagaerne*.
- Vigfús Guðmundsson 1926. 'Nafngjafir landnámsmanna á Íslandi'. *Árbók hins íslenska fornleifafélags 1925–1926*, 22–31.
- Vilhjálmur Ö. Vilhjálmsson 1990. 'Dating Problems in Icelandic Archaeology'. *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 23, 43–53.
- Vilhjálmur Ö. Vilhjálmsson 1991. 'Radiocarbon Dating and Icelandic Archaeology'. *Laborativ arkeologi* 5, 101–13.
- Þór Magnússon 1973. 'Sögualdarbyggð í Hvítárholti'. *Árbók hins íslenska fornleifafélags 1972*, 5–80.
- Þóra Ellen Þórhallsdóttir 1996. 'Áhrif búsetu á landið'. In Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1996, 149–70.
- Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1971. '-stad. Island'. In *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder* 16, 378–84.
- Þorleifur Einarsson 1962. 'Vitnisburður frjógreiningar um gróður, veðurfar og landnám á Íslandi'. *Saga* 3, 442–69.

FEMALE EXPERIENCE AND AUTHORIAL INTENTION IN  
*LAXDÆLA SAGA*

BY LOREN AUERBACH

MUCH HAS BEEN MADE of *Laxdæla saga* being the story of two men. These, of course, are Kjartan and Bolli: such promising young men who are ultimately led by circumstances beyond their control to tragedy and death (see, for example, Andersson 1967, 171–73). One of these circumstances, taking up a major part of the narrative, is the age-old motif of the love triangle, with the third element provided by Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir. I believe, however, that to see the saga this way is to miss the essential point, to miss what the author is really trying to communicate.

*Laxdæla saga* is not the story of two men, but of one woman. It could easily be called Guðrún's saga. The tragedy of *Laxdæla saga* is what happens to Guðrún: the strong, intelligent and potent woman who is forced into a submissive, 'female' role—an action which unleashes bitterness, anguish, evil and destruction.

In my view, the focal point of the saga is the scene in Chapter 40 where Kjartan tells Guðrún that he is going abroad and she asks him to take her with him. At this moment she is expressing directly to him that she is his equal and as capable as he; and indeed, the text up to this point has been at great pains to establish this equality. Kjartan's answer, however, is not only a flat refusal, but that she must stay behind to look after her father and brothers. In this instant he rejects the fact that she is equal to him in promise and ability, and pushes her back into a subservient 'female' role. It is from this moment that all the tragedy, all the death and destruction, in the saga unfolds. If Kjartan had accepted her as being of equal potential and capabilities and she had gone abroad with him none of it would have happened.

When this is seen as the fulcrum of the saga suddenly light is thrown on many other incidents. For instance there is the long and detailed narrative at the beginning of the saga concerning Unnr Ketilsdóttir. The story of Unnr and her organisation of her descendants demonstrates clearly how a woman can be influential, intelligent, respected and perfectly capable of fulfilling a 'male' role. Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson suggest that the 'intense bearing on what follows' of

the early action of the saga is because ‘the great diversity of characters and incidents in the early stages are all designed to show how the wealth and property inherited by Gudrun’s lover, Kjartan Olafsson, were amassed by his ancestors’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1969, 10). The use of ‘all’ implies that they consider this explication of Kjartan’s ancestry to be the sole purpose for which the early portion of the saga is intended (as others do; see, for example, Andersson 1967, 172). I would contend that although this purpose is achieved, the nature of the way the story of Unnr is told—its emphasis, position in the saga and length—shows that it is there as an exemplum to be referred back to for the rest of the saga. Unnr’s capabilities and intelligence are stressed at all times, together with her ability to handle herself with distinction when travelling abroad, even in the most trying circumstances. She takes on great responsibility and is shown to be more than equal to the task. Her story is the first detailed study of a single person in the saga, after merely perfunctory descriptions of her father and brothers. It is remarkably long, spanning chapters 4–7 (pages 7–13 of the *Íslensk fornrit* edition), and remarkably detailed for a description of a peripheral character. Much less would have been sufficient if the sole purpose of describing her was to show how her descendants amassed their wealth.

Unnr makes her own decisions and acts on her own initiative in matters of great concern. She has a ship built in secret and transports all her wealth and living relatives away from Scotland, *ok þykkjask menn varla dæmi til finna, at einn kvenmaðr hafi komizk í brott ór þvílíkum ófriði með jafnmiklu fé ok foruneyti*, ‘and people think that an instance is scarcely to be found of one woman having come away from such unrest with as much wealth and as large a company’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 7). Although she has with her many men *er mikils váru verðir ok stórættaðir*, ‘who were of great worth and from important families’, the company is *foruneyti Unnar*, ‘the company of Unnr’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 7). It is she who makes the dynastic decisions as to who her female relatives will marry, and she who claims land, in her own name, and then gives it out to her (male) family and followers.

It is made clear that Unnr’s decisions are good ones, that there is general approval of what she does; and the important families that descend from her and the place-names that are said to survive pertaining to her also imply approval and appreciation of her sagacity and the position of influence she held. She is spoken of with respect at all times. There is an interesting reversal of roles when her grandson, Óláfr feilan, tells her that he will rely on her judgement in the matter of his

marriage (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 11). It is usually female children who rely on their male parents' judgement in these matters. Unnr's death is also described very carefully to show how she maintained her control in death as she did in life: *þótti monnum mikils um vert, hversu Unnr hafði haldit virðingu sinni til dauðadags*, 'people thought it very remarkable how Unnr had maintained her prestige to her dying day' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 13).

Unnr is introduced in the very first chapter of the saga, and named as *Unnr in djúpúðga*, 'Unnr the deep minded' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 3). She is named alongside her sisters Þórunn hynna and Jórunn manvitsbrekka. There is also a point of great interest here. Margaret Arent notes (*The Laxdoela Saga*, 1964, 198):

The byname *Manvitsbrekka* is compounded from *mannvit* meaning 'sense' and *brekka* meaning 'slope'. Its meaning as a byname is obscure, but *brekka* is frequently used as a simile for 'woman' in kennings.

Examples of *brekka* being used in kennings for 'woman' are readily accessible, appearing in *Katrínardrápa*, in *Gísla saga*, in the verses of Úlfr stallari, in *Hallfreðar saga* and in *Víglundar saga* (*Lexicon Poeticum* 1931, 63, 309, 313, 387, 402). The sense of *brekka* in kennings is of 'slope' as a land on which something, i. e. the other part of the compound, resides. *Hörbrekka* (Úlfr stallari) means 'linen-slope', i. e. a land where linen resides, i. e. woman. *Menbrekka* (*Víglundar saga*) means 'necklace-slope', i. e. a land where a necklace resides, i. e. woman. From this we can see that *manvitsbrekka* describes a place where *mannvit*, 'intelligence' resides. Used as a name it must indicate that that person is a repository of intelligence. This makes it clear, especially coupled with the fact that within the conventions of the system of creating kennings the term *brekka* is associated with the female, that *manvitsbrekka* as a woman's name must denote an intelligent woman.

Thus we have two women specifically named for their superior intelligence, Unnr the deep-minded and Jórunn the intelligent woman, in the first one hundred words of the saga. This seems surely to indicate that female intelligence and potential are of importance to the author.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that of Ketill's five children, three were specifically named daughters, and it is of the daughters that our author has chosen to give extra information. This is unusual in itself: in the lists of families from the settlement times known to saga-writers, daughters, if mentioned at all, were usually outnumbered by sons by ratios of up to nine to one, and the usual maximum number of daughters mentioned was one. Multiple named daughters were certainly



the exception rather than the rule (Clover 1990, 116). Our author has chosen to begin the saga by describing a family with three daughters and only two sons—and a family in which it is the daughters who are outstanding.

We have seen how the story of one of these outstanding daughters, Unnr, placed at the beginning of the saga and given in such detail, sets an important precedent for the acceptance of the ability of women to take on traditionally ‘male’ roles. It is followed by many other exempla reinforcing this premise. A whole litany of strong, autonomous women parade before us. Such a multitude of strongly characterised women is unique in the sagas, as Jónas Kristjánsson points out: ‘*Laxdæla* differs from all other sagas in the prominence it gives to women in the story’ (1988, 276). These women in *Laxdæla saga* are all seen to be operating potently within their environments, and their portraits illustrate in a variety of ways how women can be effective.

Þorgerðr Þorsteinsdóttir rauðs, the mother of Hǫskuldr, shows, as Unnr does, how a woman is capable of travelling abroad and of acquitting herself well in the process. We see Þorgerðr decide to go abroad and not only sail to Norway and make a new life for herself, but also sail back to Iceland. Again, much more detail is given about Þorgerðr’s life and her character than is necessary for pure establishment of genealogical or financial relationships (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 14–16).

Jórunn, wife of Hǫskuldr, is introduced as *skǫrungr mikill í vitsmunum* ‘a very outstanding person in intelligence’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 16). We see her make use of this intelligence: she is consulted about the marriage proposal and accepts it on her own consideration, *þann einn spurdaga hófu vér til þín, Hǫskuldr, at vér viljum þessu vel svara*, ‘all the information we have about you, Hǫskuldr, would make us wish to answer this favourably’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 17). After her marriage she manifests herself as *vitr ok vel at sér ok margs vel kunnandi*, ‘wise and capable and extremely knowledgeable’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 18). The culmination of her involvement in the saga is the use of her great intelligence to calm Hǫskuldr’s anger in chapter 19 with wise words. In a speech that is extremely long by saga standards—23 lines in the *Íslenzk fornrit* edition—she placates Hǫskuldr with her wisdom. She is seen to be very effective in this situation: *Hǫskuldr sefaðisk mjök við fortölur Jórunnar*, ‘Hǫskuldr calmed down greatly at Jórunn’s persuasion’; and Hǫskuldr and Hrótr *taka . . . nú up frændsemi sína góða heðan í frá*, ‘cultivate their kinship well from now on’ because of Jórunn (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 48). It is incidentally interesting that this

is the opposite of the motif of woman as inciter, i. e. woman as creator of enmity between males, a common role for women in sagas. Here the woman is given a more positive role, as a creator of peace between males.

Melkorka is also presented as a highly intelligent woman, who is able to rise above great adversity and take control of her own identity by the only means that she has at her disposal in her situation—she refuses to speak for years. She is thus able to retain her own selfhood in the face of the worst of suppressive situations: being taken captive and sold into slavery. As she uses her initiative to maintain her identity and self-respect, her dignity and self-possession shine through: *Qllum mǫnnum var auðsætt stórmennsku-mót á henni ok svá þat, at hon var engi afglapi*, ‘it was apparent to everyone that she had the mark of a great person about her, and also that she was no fool’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 27). Melkorka is not daunted by Hǫskuldr, the man who has bought her and given her protection; she makes her own plans for their son, Óláfr, and directs him to go abroad, even making her own arrangements for him to have the necessary finance (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 50). In doing this she not only facilitates Óláfr’s journey abroad, but she defies Hǫskuldr: she tells Óláfr *at Hǫskuldi muni þá tveir hlutir illa líka, þá er hann spyrr hvártveggja, at þú ert af landi farinn, en ek manni gipt*, ‘that Hǫskuldr will then dislike two things, when he hears of each of them, that you are gone abroad and I am married’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 50). This is also not the first time she has defied Hǫskuldr: she objected to his fostering arrangement for Óláfr on the grounds that it was too lowly a placement.

Auðr, the ex-wife of Þórðr Ingunnarson, takes matters into her own hands and takes revenge for her humiliation in the face of her brothers’ passivity. In going at night to attack her ex-husband physically, Auðr acquits herself in a role usually reserved for males. This is one of no fewer than three instances in *Laxdæla saga* of women drawing blood, two of which are against men. Auðr successfully wounds Þórðr and when she returns, her brothers, who had not had the courage to make an attack themselves, express their pleasure (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 98). Even the injured Þórðr expresses his appreciation of what she has done by saying she did only what she had to do (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 98). While the men are expressing their approval, however, it is Auðr who has accomplished revenge and the achievement is hers alone.

The other woman in *Laxdæla* who draws blood from a man is Vigdís, wife of Þórðr goddi and descendant of Unnr in djúpúðga. She is a woman vastly more effective than her weak husband. We see her

personally take on a family matter. Þórólfr, a distant relative, approaches her because he has heard that *Vigdís var meiri skörungr í skapi en Þórðr*, ‘Vigdís had a much stronger character than Þórðr’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 31), and this certainly turns out to be true. Vigdís hits Ingjaldr on the nose with the money bag so that *þegar fell blóð á jörð*, ‘at once blood fell to the earth’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 36) after the exposure of his and Þórðr’s arrangement to capture Þórólfr. The two men are unable to resist her and she continues to control matters by subsequently declaring herself divorced from Þórðr (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 37). The Vigdís episode is another clear example of extensive detail of character and action being given with respect to a peripheral, female, character.

Þuríðr Óláfsdóttir is another woman who takes matters into her own hands. It is she who introduces the sword Fótbitr into her family. It is interesting to note here that the impetus for this unfortunate event is again mistreatment, or perhaps rather underestimation, of a woman by a man. Geirmundr’s shabby treatment of Þuríðr prompts her drastic action (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 80). Þuríðr’s rowing out to Geirmundr’s ship and replacing his sword with the child is highly symbolic. She swaps her baby, the symbol of maternity and domesticity, for a sword, a symbol not only phallic but also one of war and battle, traditionally ‘male’ pursuits. Through her actions and initiative—the sabotage of the small boat—Geirmundr is powerless to react (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 82). It is also Þuríðr who later on in the saga expresses the importance of intelligence in a woman when she is encouraging Kjartan to woo Hrefna: *væntir mik, at þér þykki þar fara vit eptir vænleik*, ‘I expect that you will think her intelligence matches her beauty’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 137).

We also cannot forget Þorgerðr Egilsdóttir, an extremely intelligent woman whose effectiveness is felt strongly throughout the saga. She is described early on as *skörungr mikill*, ‘a very outstanding person’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 66) and we are told that *þat varð fram at koma er Þorgerðr vildi, til hvers sem hon hlutaðisk*, ‘with whatever she put her hand to, what Þorgerðr wanted had to come about’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 66). We find throughout the saga that this is certainly the case.

Royal women too, show initiative and autonomy: Gunnhildr helps Óláfr in her own right, using her own resources (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 52), and Ingibjörg, sister of King Óláfr Tryggvason, obviously has a relationship of enough mutual respect with Kjartan for him to have confided in her about his relationship with and intentions towards

Guðrún, and for Ingibjörg personally to present him with such a fine wedding gift for Guðrún (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 131).

Thus we see how several variations of female effectiveness are set before the reader, illustrating the ability of females to be potent. In conjunction with each other these combine to form a backdrop sensibility which illuminates the story of Guðrún and highlights her tragedy. Peter Foote, referring to Unnr and Guðrún, notes that ‘it is appropriate that the saga begins and ends with pictures of two old women, who after imperious and momentous careers are now described with small authentic touches that firmly anchor them in our own sort of reality’ (*The Laxdale Saga* 1964, xiii). He does not explain, however, why he considers this ‘appropriate’. I would suggest that this arrangement affirms how one woman sets the precedent for the other and emphasises the significance of the link. We are supposed to see the earlier woman as an example for the later. The very fact that the saga does begin and end with pictures of women is also unusual enough in itself in saga literature to warrant consideration that this may be an important and deliberate part of the author’s design.

Once the reader has been exposed to these illustrative precedents, as we have seen, Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir appears. The saga is very careful both to stress Guðrún’s potential and intelligence and to stress the equality between the two major players, Kjartan and Guðrún. Guðrún’s story is where the author makes particular the general theme that is being explored.

When Guðrún is introduced the saga is very specific about her, and emphatic in the description of her potential. We hear that she is *kvenna vænst, er upp óxu á Íslandi, bæði at ásjánu ok vitsmunum*, ‘the most promising woman brought up in Iceland, both in looks and in intelligence’. She is a *kurteis kona*, ‘a courteous, well-bred woman’, she is *orlynd*, ‘of a generous nature’ and she is the cleverest and most articulate of all women: *Allra kvenna var hon kænst ok bezt orði farin* (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 86).

The first time we meet Guðrún in person she is juxtaposed with Gestr Oddleifsson, well known from other sagas as a great sage. In chapter 33 Gestr greets Guðrún warmly and treats her as an equal—*taka þau tal saman*, ‘they begin to talk together’—because, the author tells us, *váru þau bæði vitr ok orðig*, ‘they were both wise and articulate’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 88). Gestr and Guðrún begin to talk together before any mention is made of the invitation to Gestr from Guðrún’s father. This invitation is only given after a good portion of the day has been spent

together, and then expressed as her own wish as well as that of Ósvífr (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 88). Having heard Guðrún described, as discussed above, in the previous chapter this is the very first time we see her physically. It must also be borne in mind that Guðrún is here about fourteen years old: she has not yet married her first husband, to whom she was betrothed at fifteen (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 93). This incident is therefore even more remarkable an introduction to Guðrún in that we see a fourteen-year old girl converse as an equal over a great part of the day with a noted sage such as Gestr.

We find this first impression of Guðrún's superior intellectual qualities echoed and re-emphasised later in the saga when we learn that Kjartan enjoys talking to her *því at hon var bæði vîtr ok málsnjöll*, 'because she was both wise and eloquent' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 112). Guðrún's capabilities are also stressed in her independence. In chapter 35 Guðrún rides to the Alþingi in her own right: Þórðr Ingunnarson accompanies her, not the other way round (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 95). Likewise in chapter 33 she comes alone to the baths and spends time with Gestr; she does not need a chaperone (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 88).

There are also many instances where the author makes it clear that Guðrún is of an equal standing to her brothers. The saga often speaks of 'Guðrún and her brothers' and Guðrún is always mentioned first. For example, in chapter 39 Ósvífr speaks *til Guðrúnar ok bræðra hennar*, 'to Guðrún and her brothers' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 111) and, importantly, it is Guðrún who answers her father, not one of her male siblings. (This reminds us of Auðr, who took action when her impotent brothers were unable to find the courage to do so.) When Snorri goði is introduced in chapter 36 Guðrún is named out of the family: *áttu þau Guðrún þar mikít traust*, 'Guðrún and her family had great support from him' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 100). Even Kotkell speaks to Þorleikr about *Guðrúnu ok bræðr hennar*, 'Guðrún and her brothers' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 101).

The author also carefully and specifically presents the equality between Kjartan and Guðrún to the reader. Kjartan, when he is introduced in chapter 28, is described in similarly glowing terms to those that describe Guðrún. Kjartan and Guðrún are both introduced by the use of superlatives. Kjartan is *fríðastr* 'most handsome' and Guðrún is *vænst* 'most promising' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 76 and 86). These superlatives are both emphasised by constructions explaining that these qualities are the greatest in all Iceland. Kjartan is *allra manna fríðastr*, *þeira er fæzk hafa á Íslandi*, 'the most handsome of all men who have been born

in Iceland' and Guðrún is *kvenna vænst, er upp óxu á Íslandi*, 'the most promising woman brought up in Iceland' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 76 and 86). Margaret Arent, in her book *The Laxdæla Saga: Its Structural Patterns*, points out the closeness of this correlation: 'the author . . . uses Repetition and marking of their superior qualities to underscore their affinity. From the beginning, for example, it is made clear that both surpass all others in Iceland' (1972, 86). She notes further that these phrases do not appear in descriptions of anyone else in the saga and are used only to describe Kjartan and Guðrún (1972, 87).

This type of construction is used again to emphasise the explicit authorial statement of their equality made when we first see them together in chapter 39: *Þat var allra manna mál, at með þeim Kjartani ok Guðrúnu þætti vera mest jafnræði þeira manna, er þá óxu upp*, 'It was the talk of everyone, that between Kjartan and Guðrún there seemed to be the most equal match of those people who were growing up at that time' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 112). The effect of the emphasis on the equality between the two young people is so striking that they have been seen as 'almost the ordained partners for each other' (Dronke 1989, 207).

So thus we see Guðrún: articulate, intelligent, exceptionally wise, gracious and stately, generous and open-handed—the woman of most promise in Iceland at that time. She is shown to be at least of equal potential to Kjartan, her equivalent male, i. e. the young male of most promise then in Iceland. However, when they come into contact the discrepancy between male and female becomes clear. Kjartan is able to follow his desires, go abroad and fulfil his potential whereas Guðrún is not allowed to, although she sees herself as capable of doing so. Kjartan, as mentioned above, rejects her request and her potential and pushes her into a subservient 'feminine' role: *Þat má eigi vera', segir Kjartan; 'bræðr þínir eru óráðnir, en faðir þinn gamall, ok eru þeir allri forsjá sviptir, ef þú ferr af landi á brott, ok bið mín þrjá vetr'*, "That cannot be", said Kjartan, "your brothers are not settled, and your father is old, and they will be completely without anyone to look after them if you go away abroad, so wait for me for three years" (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 115). She cannot come abroad with him, she must stay behind to look after her father and brothers. As has been mentioned above, the underlying tragedy of the saga is that Guðrún, who is clearly as strong a personality and as promising as Kjartan, is made unable to fulfil her evident potential, and her wise and generous disposition is destroyed. This leads to the overt tragedy of the deaths of Kjartan and

Bolli, which can be traced back to this one moment of suppression. This moment is particularly symbolic as the denial of the opportunity to fulfil her potential is made by her equivalent male, who does go on to fame and glory abroad; but the price of suppression of Guðrún's potential is high: eventually his and Bolli's deaths.

Einar Ól. Sveinsson gives a note in the *Íslensk fornrit* edition of the saga (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 115 n.) to the effect that historically it could not have been true that Guðrún's brothers were young and unsettled at this point in the saga although it could have been true at the time of Guðrún's first marriage (at which time no objection was raised in the saga to Guðrún leaving the family home). This makes it clear that this episode, including this reason for Kjartan's refusal to allow Guðrún to come abroad with him, has been constructed specifically for the purposes of the author and not for historicity. This fact emphasises and highlights the significance of this episode in the author's thematic scheme.

This original suppression of Guðrún by Kjartan is compounded by Bolli's disregard of her wishes when he approaches her with his marriage proposal. Although she has given him a definite refusal, together with her reasons, he is not concerned with how she feels: *vænti ek þó, at Ósvífr muni mestu um ráða þetta mál*, 'nevertheless, I expect that Ósvífr will have the most say in this matter' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 129). This is followed by suppression by her father: *Bolla mun eigi frá hnekk, ef ek skal ráða*, 'Bolli will not be turned away if I have my way', and by her brothers, who are concerned for themselves, not Guðrún: *Synir Ósvífrs fýsa þessa mjök; þykkir sér mikil slægja til mægða við Bolla*, 'Ósvífr's sons urged this strongly; they thought it would be a great advantage to themselves to have a marriage alliance with Bolli' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 129). Having built up Guðrún as a sympathetic figure with great potential, the author shows here several forms of suppression.

As has been mentioned at the beginning of this article, chapter 40 can be seen as the fulcrum of the saga. Before this the scene is being set; we are given precedents for accepting and appreciating female potency. The author goes to great lengths to make known Guðrún's abilities and intelligence and her equality with Kjartan, the male nominated as her equivalent. Finally, the two leading lights of Icelandic society, male and female, are put into a decision-making situation and the rest, as they say, is history. From chapter 40, until the end of the saga, we are dealing with the results of this act of suppression. We see Guðrún bitter, angry and frustrated. We see her rage and hurt in moments of explanation

of emotion unusual in saga writing, although her strength of character never allows her to break down completely. Whereas she had been described regularly by words such as *vitr*, 'wise', *orlynd*, 'generous, open-handed' and *málsnjöll*, 'eloquent', we see her become petty and hurtful in her bitter frustration; but above all we see the terrible consequences of such an act of suppression: the loss to the community and the terrible price to pay. It is not until after Bolli is dead that Guðrún is again referred to in a way that reflects the earlier descriptions of her: *er þat ok ekki ofmæli, at Guðrún er mjök fyrir qðrum konum um allan skörungsskap*, 'it is also not an exaggeration, that Guðrún greatly surpasses other women in all forms of nobility and strength of character' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 169). Unhappy retribution has been achieved.

Many scholars have, of course, noted the proliferation of women in *Laxdæla saga*. Peter Foote talks of a 'whole series of striking portraits' of women (*The Laxdale Saga* 1964, xiii). James Drever says that, apart from Guðrún, 'there are no less than six other "stirring women" who get more than a passing mention', and continues: 'this is, when one comes to think of it, a quite remarkable constellation' (1937–45, 109). A. C. Bouman notes that 'in no other Icelandic saga [do] so many women play their part as in *Laxdæla saga*' (1962, 113) and he elaborates on this (1962, 113–14):

Even those whose portrait is drawn in vivid colours, would have been mentioned only in passing in most other sagas. Not so in *Laxd[æla]*. No sooner does the author come across a woman, say in a genealogy, of whom he knows that her merits stand out above the average, than he pauses in his narrative and takes his time to devote more than one chapter to her. He may even go out of his way to introduce a personality whose story is linked with the main theme by the thinnest threads possible.

Perhaps the threads seem thin because the link 'with the main theme' is being missed. Everyone has noticed the striking incidence of strong women in *Laxdæla*, but in spite of its noteworthiness, no one has suggested a reason for it, or considered that there might *be* a reason—that there may be, as I am suggesting, a purpose to this 'quite remarkable constellation'. The purpose seems clear to me, that the saga is dealing directly with the problems of strong women with regard to their potential to function in society on an equal level to men. Bouman notes that the saga 'is so exclusively interested in Unnr, that the figures surrounding her are kept in the shadow, and information about them, to be found in *Landnámabók*, is either reduced to insignificance or withheld from the reader', but he offers no suggestion as to why this is so



(1962, 114). My reading solves this problem immediately, as it also solves the problem of the seeming disparity in pace and interest between the beginning, middle and end sections of *Laxdæla*. There is a strong, consistent and clearly discernible thematic connection that runs all the way through the saga.

The author's concern for Guðrún's potential and capabilities is clearly evident in the portrayal of Guðrún after the killings of Bolli and Kjartan. She remains central to the narrative, with her fourth marriage described in detail. She stands the cost of the wedding feast herself (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 201), which is reminiscent of Unnr standing the cost of Óláfr feilan's wedding feast (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 11–12), another link between the two women; and the events at her wedding display her stature clearly. When the quarrel arises over Gunnarr Þiðrandabani, Guðrún immediately leaves the bridal bench and rallies her men. It is she who has the most followers and there is no chance of her relinquishing her position. Snorri goði has to advise Þorkell to back down because Guðrún is such a *mikill skörungr*, 'very outstanding person' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 203). Þorkell quietens down at this and, relative positions having been established, great affection is able to develop between Þorkell and Guðrún (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 203). The saga's conclusion with the famous question regarding whom Guðrún loved the most, and the resultant list of the men who were part of her life (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 228), also reinforces Guðrún's central role in the saga: this incident shows clearly that the men revolve around her, not the other way round.

Guðrún's centrality to the saga has, of course, been noticed several times before. Patricia Conroy, for example, in discussing the similarities between *Laxdæla saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*, remarks that 'both their authors chose to structure their narratives . . . as stories about a woman' and that Guðriðr (*Eiríks saga rauða*) and Guðrún (*Laxdæla saga*) 'play more sustained roles in them than any of the men'. She considers that 'the *Laxdæla* author pioneered the use of the story of a woman' and that the author of *Eiríks saga rauða* copied this model (1980, 116, 125). Arnold Taylor, considering the author's involvement in *Laxdæla*, states that the saga 'is dominated by Guðrún' and that the author became 'so involved in this story of a woman—as no other saga writer ever did—that once she was on the stage he was unable to leave her, and nearly every incident is introduced to colour and enliven her portrait' (1974, 16, 20). He even goes so far as to say, when discussing the Brynhildr–Sigurðr legend, that 'Kjartan is developed into a new

tragic Sigurðr and Bolli into a Gunnar, but not, I would suggest, for their own sake, but to the greater glory of the woman Guðrún' (1974, 17).

The question of the ability of females to function on a par with males is also reflected in many other places in the saga. There are many marriages and generally a negative result is produced where the woman is not consulted or her wishes taken into account and a positive result is achieved when the woman is consulted and able to make her own choices. To give just one example of each kind: Guðrún's first marriage is entirely unsatisfactory in direct proportion to the complete lack of consultation with her, which is specifically pointed out: *Ekki var Guðrún at þessu spurð*, 'Guðrún was not asked about this' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 93); and this can be contrasted with, for instance, the happy and successful marriage of Óláfr and Þorgerðr Egilsdóttir. Their betrothal is described in detail. We learn initially, in a plain statement of fact, that Þorgerðr was also present at the Alþingi. Then much is made of the fact that Egill insists that he must consult his daughter. Egill says that although this is a very good match nevertheless *skal nú þetta við Þorgerði ræða, því at þat er engum manni færi, at fá Þorgerðar án hennar vilja*, 'this shall now be discussed with Þorgerðr, because it is within no man's capability to get Þorgerðr without her agreement' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 63). Finally, although Þorgerðr is consulted by Egill, she does not accept the match on his recommendation, and the decision to marry Óláfr, after she has met him, is Þorgerðr's alone (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 65). It is interesting that in *Egils saga* there is no mention of this. Where the marriage of Óláfr and Þorgerðr is mentioned, the two young people's qualities are described and then we are told that *Egill kunnir öll deili á Óláfi ok vissi, at þat gjaforð var gøfugt, ok fyrir því var Þorgerðr gipt Óláfi*, 'Egill knew all about Óláfr and recognised that this was an honourable offer, and so Þorgerðr was married to Óláfr' (*Egils saga* 1933, 242). Therefore, this episode has been specifically invented for, or specifically included in, *Laxdæla saga* to suit the purposes of the author.

The characterisation of the striking abundance of 'stirring women' in the saga is also interesting. In *Laxdæla* the female characters are given emotions and motivation. We are given far more insight into their emotions than we are used to in saga writing. There is a distinct feeling that the author has an innate understanding of the way the female mind works. Peter Foote remarks: 'Of the characters in the saga it is the women who have outstanding vitality and naturalness . . . By contrast the chief men, Olaf, Kjartan and Bolli Bollison [sic] appear still more

wooden' (*The Laxdale Saga* 1964, xii-xiii). Jónas Kristjánsson enthuses that Guðrún 'seems truly feminine in her love of gorgeous things and in her seething jealousy' (1988, 277). Female sexual jealousy is particularly well observed: in Auðr's need to attack her ex-husband; in the incident where Jórunn hits Melkorka with her stockings when suddenly her presence becomes too much, and Melkorka angrily retaliates and punches her on the nose; and especially in Guðrún's reactions when Kjartan returns to Iceland and marries Hrefna.

By comparison, the male characters are one-dimensional. They are stereotypes, almost caricatures, compared to the complexity of the women. The descriptions of male characters are of their exteriors: their appearance, their attractiveness, their clothes, their prowess. This is pronounced enough to have been noticed by several scholars. Foote talks of 'a certain preference its author shows for ornament above substance in the presentation of masculine character' (*The Laxdale Saga* 1964, vi). Jónas Kristjánsson, in his *Eddas and Sagas*, notices a proliferation of 'splendour in physical beauty and manly prowess' (1988, 273). The translation of the saga's description of Kjartan in this book, translated coincidentally by Foote, gives the mood extraordinarily well (1988, 273):

Kjartan Ólafsson 'was the handsomest of all men ever born in Iceland. He had well-marked features and a pleasing countenance, the finest eyes of any man, and fair colouring. He had an abundance of hair, silky bright and falling in curls'.

If one compares the descriptions of Kjartan and Guðrún the difference is striking. There is much more emphasis on Kjartan's appearance than on Guðrún's. Kjartan's appearance is described in detail, in a glowing description that Foote calls 'an idealised picture of virile beauty' (*The Laxdale Saga* 1964, xiv). That the description is concerned with his attractiveness as opposed to being a list of stock viking attributes is evidenced by the fact that *fagrt sem silki*, 'beautiful as silk' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 77) to describe hair is only used elsewhere in sagas in the description of one person—Hallgerðr langbrók Höskuldsdóttir in *Njáls saga* (*Njáls saga* 1954, 6; Bouman 1962, 123 n.). In marked contrast, Guðrún's physical appearance is not described at all. All the emphasis is on her mind: *allra kvenna var hon kænst ok bezt orði farin*, 'she was the cleverest and most articulate of all women' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 86). Throughout the saga the author does not show any preference for 'ornament above substance' in the presentation of female characters, as one might expect. Although Guðrún is a central character, and we are

told that she is the most promising in looks as well as intelligence, we are not, at any point, told what she looks like or any details such as what colour hair she has. Only once in the saga do we even see Guðrún's clothes, and that is when it is necessary for the plot. In chapter 55 her clothes are described when, after the killing of Bolli, Helgi Harðbeinsson wipes the blood from his spear on the embroidered cloth she has tied around herself (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 168). We see the clothes of the men, however, all the time. We are very aware of Kjartan's clothes, for example, and of those of Óláfr and Bolli Bollason, and of their physical appearance. This is not so with any of the female characters. Not only with Guðrún, but with all the women the emphasis is on their qualities of mind and not on their physical exterior.

There seems to be a different sexual perspective in *Laxdæla saga* from that in other sagas. The author appears to understand women from the inside and men from the outside. As we have seen, this appears not only in the descriptions but also in the motivation and characterisation. We are given insights into the emotional motivation of the women that are far more explicit than for the men. As Foote rightly points out, 'insight into Gudrun's mind is given on several occasions, into Kjartan's almost never' (*The Laxdale saga* 1964, xi). Jónas Kristjánsson notes that 'Kjartan and Bolli Bollason appear a pair of handsome dummies when compared with Guðrún and Þorgerðr' (1988, 277). The general emotional level, too, is higher in *Laxdæla* than in other sagas. There appears to be a heightened appreciation of human emotion that sets *Laxdæla* apart. Jónas Kristjánsson notes 'a novel feeling for love between a man and a woman' and comments that 'such magnificent outward show and such tenderness of feeling are not to be found in the sagas we have so far discussed, and not in any of the kings' sagas either' (1988, 274). This seems surely to indicate a perspective different from the norm.

The structural function of the female characters in *Laxdæla saga* is also different from that in other sagas. *Njáls saga*, for example, which is also famous for its women, follows a more typical saga pattern in that the women, though important, are merely cogs in the machinery of the plot. They are there to move the plot along by their actions; the events are then dealt with and controlled by the men. The women perform a specific function as a foil to the men; they do not cause the saga to grow and develop emotionally like the organic women of *Laxdæla*. In *Njáls saga*, a typically 'masculine' saga, that job is left to the male characters. In *Laxdæla saga* it is women who are the emotional channel. The

author seems to be able to transmit emotion through the female persona, which gives rise to the very different atmosphere, the ‘particular quality of attitude and temper’ (Andersson 1967, 171) which has so often been noticed in *Laxdæla* when compared with other sagas.

Several other scholars have also detected this different sensibility. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, for example, notes that there appears from time to time a *kvenlegri smekkur en í hinum sögunum*, ‘more feminine taste than in the other sagas’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, vi) and writes of certain passages (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, xi–xii):

Hér nýtur sagan vel næmleika þess og skilnings, sem söguritarinn hefur á tilfinningalífi kvenna, en hans sér víða merki í sögunni. Smekkur hans er nærri því kvenlegur, þegar miðað er við Íslendinga í fornöld.

Here the saga profits from the author’s sensitivity to and understanding of women’s emotional nature, the signs of which are widely seen in the saga. His taste is almost feminine, when compared with Icelanders of old times.

Bouman suggests that ‘surely our author differs from many others in that he cannot be accused of antipathy against women’ and that the author’s ‘sympathy for women in general is of a different kind and serves a definite purpose’ (1962, 114). He does not, however, go on to say what this purpose might be.

Although so many scholars have noticed these distinctive ‘feminine’ characteristics of the saga, strangely they have not made the connection that the author might have been a woman. Indeed, it was Peter Foote’s comments that first suggested to me the possibility that this was a woman writing, although I am sure this was far from his thoughts when he made his observations. To my knowledge, the only time a female author has been suggested is by Helga Kress in her article ‘“Mjök mun þér samstaft þykkja”’: um sagnahefð ok kvenlega reynslu í *Laxdæla sögu*’, and she too was surprised that this had not occurred to anyone else (1980).

It has been suggested, by Robert Kellogg (1973), that the remarkable use of the vernacular in Iceland’s extensive body of literary prose may indirectly imply the participation of women in the creation of that literature. In reference to *Laxdæla saga* in particular, although he says, in what appears a flippant remark, that ‘one may resist the temptation to speak of the *authoress* of *Laxdæla saga*’, Kellogg does admit to the temptation being there to surmise that the saga ‘draws upon a peculiarly feminine wisdom’ (1973, 254, 256).

Particularly because of the subjects dealt with in the saga, it seems to me perfectly possible that in the time the sagas were being written a woman may have been writing; perhaps the daughter of a wealthy and

influential literary man, himself a saga-writer, who would have had intelligence, leisure, literacy and access to the concept of saga writing, perhaps a woman who knew herself to be as intelligent as the men around her and was herself frustrated by the obstacles to acceptance in her path or the paths of other women. There is such an all-pervading sense in the saga of the need to show that women can be just as capable, be as intelligent and have as much potential as men that I cannot believe that the author was not personally concerned with this problem.

When the saga is looked at in the light of all the above it is also interesting to see what has happened to it in translation. Due to the modular degree system, many university courses in Britain are now taught only or chiefly in translation, a situation that may well exist elsewhere too. Furthermore, the majority of English-speaking casual readers, which I would suggest is a larger population world-wide than readers speaking Icelandic—or indeed than readers speaking any other single language—will only read the saga in English translation. For these students or readers their only access to and experience of the saga is through the translation they read.

On looking at English translations we find immediately that Guðrún, after all these years, is still fighting her same fight, still fighting to be heard, to be accepted for the intelligent woman she is. When she is introduced in the saga the text describes her very specifically: *hon var kvenna vænst, er upp óxu á Íslandi, bæði at ásjánu ok vitsmunum* (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 86). This means ‘she was the most promising woman brought up in Iceland, both in looks and in intelligence’. ‘Looks’ and ‘intelligence’ are very carefully given equal importance, using the word *bæði*, ‘both’ to stress this. Her looks and intelligence are both aspects of her ‘most promising’ nature.

However, when we come to this passage in the Penguin translation by Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson, which is the most widely read and widely available English translation, we find: ‘she was the loveliest woman in all Iceland at that time, and also the most intelligent’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1969, 118). Her physical attributes are stressed and intelligence is an afterthought here. This is not what it says in the text, which carefully stresses that looks and intelligence are of equal importance. Thus this interpretation is in opposition to the intention of the text.

‘Promising’ is a primary meaning of *vænn*. The meaning ‘loveliest’ or ‘most beautiful’ is a strange choice to translate *vænst*, the superlative, in the sentence we are concerned with, since it sits so uneasily with the rest of the sentence—how can one be ‘the most beautiful in

both looks and intelligence’?—whereas ‘promising’ sits very easily with the rest of the sentence and makes perfect sense.

This sentence describing Guðrún is not difficult to translate accurately. Muriel Press’s translation has ‘She was the goodliest of women who grew up in Iceland, both as to looks and wits’ (*The Laxdale Saga* 1964, 96). Margaret Arent’s translation, although she translates *vænst* as ‘fairest’ because she wishes to make a connection between *vænst* and the superlative *fríðastr* used of Kjartan (Arent 1972, 86), still retains the parity between looks and intelligence: ‘She was the fairest of all women born and raised in Iceland, foremost in beauty and intelligence’ (*The Laxdoela Saga* 1964, 75).

Magnus and Hermann then continue, in more subtle ways, to see Guðrún in a manner that is in conflict with what is presented in the text of the saga. On the same page, for example, they choose to translate *kænst* (*allra kvenna var hon kænst ok bezt orði farin*), as ‘shrewdest’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1969, 118). While meanings such as ‘wise’, ‘skilful’, ‘expert’, ‘clever’ are generally understood for *kænn*, Magnus and Hermann select ‘shrewdest’, a word that can carry connotations of slight underhandedness, of self-promotion or of thrift and domesticity—very different connotations from the idea of Guðrún being the cleverest or most wise of all women, which is what the text gives.

The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, incidentally, devotes five column inches to ‘shrewd’ and the definitions given, although mainly obsolete, are overwhelmingly negative. These range over ‘depraved, wicked; evil-disposed, malignant . . . Bad-tempered; vicious, fierce . . . Mischievous, hurtful; dangerous, injurious . . . Of evil nature, character or influence . . . Evil, bad, unfavourable . . . Poor, unsatisfactory . . . Fraught or attended with evil or misfortune; having injurious or dangerous consequences; vexatious, irksome, hard . . . As an intensive, qualifying a word denoting something in itself bad, irksome, undesirable: Grievous, serious, ‘sore’ . . . Of ill omen; hence strongly indicative (of something unfavourable) . . . Given to railing and scolding; shrewish’ (1933–77, II 1985). Although these meanings are not in general usage nowadays, such a pejorative history may perhaps inform the possible slightly distasteful senses of the word now. It is true that ‘shrewd’ can have a positive meaning, but it can also carry negative connotations, as discussed above, and these depart from the sense given in the text of the saga. As words are readily available which can translate *kænst* accurately without including these negative connotations, it seems to me an inappropriate choice here.

There is another striking passage in the Penguin translation which imposes Magnus and Hermann's idea of Guðrún with particularly deep effect. A major weakness in the saga seems to be, on reading the Penguin translation, that in chapter 43, when Guðrún is persuaded to marry Bolli, she gives in so easily. This does not fit in with what we have come to expect of Guðrún from the rest of the saga. In only the previous chapter she has said that she will marry no man as long as she knows that Kjartan is alive, and now, just a couple of pages later 'since Osvif took so firm a stand over this, Gudrun, for her part did not give an outright refusal, despite all her reluctance' (*Laxdæla saga* 1969, 155). The use of the word 'despite' gives the impression that she was able to surmount her reluctance (possibly by her own choice) and that she was not entirely unwilling in the matter. This seems very out of character and makes the reader wonder about Guðrún. She appears suddenly fickle—perhaps she was not being truthful about her feelings for Kjartan? She seems now to lack integrity and the reader therefore loses confidence in Guðrún. This reflects on the rest of the saga from this point onwards as the sympathy for Guðrún that has been carefully built up is lost. As this happens in chapter 43 and there are another thirty-five chapters, a large portion of the saga is coloured by this. Sympathy for Guðrún that should be there through her unhappy and enforced third marriage and through the period of animosity between the peoples of Laugar and Hjarðarholt culminating in the death of Kjartan, and indeed sympathy that we should feel for her for the rest of the saga, is lacking because of her seemingly speedy capitulation.

However, when we come to the text of the saga we find this weakness does not exist. The saga gives us: *Ok er Ósvífr tók þetta mál svá þvert, þá fyrirtók Guðrún eigi fyrir sína hönd ok var þó in tregasta í öllu*, 'And when Ósvífr opposed her so strongly in this, then Guðrún for her part did not refuse but was nevertheless most unwilling in all respects' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 129). If we look at the other English translations we find that this has been translated much more closely. Press's translation has 'as Osvif took such a strong view of the matter, Gudrun, as far as she was concerned, would not give an utter refusal, yet was most unwilling on all points' (*The Laxdale Saga* 1964, 148). Arent's translation has 'seeing that Ósvíf was so set on the match, Gudrún did not refuse outright, but nonetheless showed her unwillingness on every hand' (*The Laxdoela Saga* 1964, 112). These are close translations of the text and the sense is quite different from that given in the Penguin translation. Unwillingness in every aspect of this marriage transaction



is what one would expect from Guðrún at this moment; it is entirely consistent with her previous actions and speeches. The text states this unwillingness clearly: Guðrún did not give an outright refusal but *var þó in tregasta í öllu*, ‘was nevertheless most unwilling in all respects’. No doubt is left about the strength of Guðrún’s unwillingness by the use of the superlative *tregasta*, and the construction *í öllu* can only mean ‘in all respects’ (of the transaction).

The translation ‘despite all her reluctance’ at this crucial moment implies, as we have seen, that Guðrún’s ‘reluctance’ was easily overcome, which is in direct opposition to the statement of the text. As we have also seen, the text is easily translated closely and accurately here: it presents no problems of idiom, ambiguity or controversial words. Therefore, it seems strange to choose to translate it in this way. As discussed, this translation at this moment in the saga casts a quite different light onto Guðrún’s character from that which is presented in the text, and this affects the reader’s understanding of it right to the end of the saga. It certainly puts the whole of Guðrún’s marriage to Bolli into a different light: because it does not seem to have been forced, but to have come from her own fickleness, the reader does not have much sympathy for Guðrún. In the text the enforced nature of this marriage is made clear, thus directing the reader’s sympathies towards Guðrún for the rest of the saga rather than away from her (cf. Bouman: ‘She is married to Bolli, much against her will: *ok var þó en tregasta í öllu*’ (1962, 130)).

Further evidence of Magnus and Hermann’s attitude to the depiction of Guðrún is found in their description of her in their Introduction. On page 42 of the Penguin translation they describe her thus: ‘Gudrun Ósvíf’s-daughter, lovely and imperious, as fierce in hatred as in love, proud, vain, jealous, and infinitely desirable’. This is their summing up of Guðrún. Where does it say ‘intelligent’, ‘able’, ‘capable’, ‘strong-minded’, ‘clever’ or any of the other qualities we have come to recognise in Guðrún from reading the saga? Almost all the adjectives used are pejorative: ‘proud, vain, jealous’. This negative picture of Guðrún is nothing like the picture of her painted by the saga, one of a highly intelligent and capable woman of great potential, yet it is Magnus and Hermann’s picture of her. The only remotely positive word used is ‘lovely’, but this is purely to do with her physical appearance. This leads us to their ultimate judgement: ‘infinitely desirable’. Is this the most important thing about Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir? I think not. The text, as we have seen, dwells upon her mind, upon her qualities of character, and not on her physical appearance and desirability.

The extremely interpretative and, I believe, wrong translations at these important moments in the Penguin edition cause Guðrún's character to appear very differently from that carefully engineered by the saga author. Exactly the same happens to Guðrún as happens to her within the saga—she is forced to play a passive 'feminine' role where what is important is the way she looks, and her intelligence takes a second place. This is in direct opposition to what is clearly and painstakingly presented to us in the text. I believe this interpretation (and it continues throughout, affecting one's reading of the whole saga) actively subverts the author's intentions. The author takes great pains to show that looks and intelligence are equally important and, even more importantly, that men and women (particularly embodied by Guðrún and Kjartan) have equal potential. By shifting the emphasis away from what is presented in the text, Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson obfuscate major statements made by the saga and the saga author.

Magnus and Hermann conclude by telling us we can 'wonder still who it was she really loved the most' (*Laxdæla saga* 1969, 42), but this is not what really matters. They miss the point that it is what is done to Guðrún, what happens to her, the squandering of her potential, that is really significant.

The presentation of Guðrún's character, although the most striking, is not the only instance of Magnus and Hermann subverting the intention of the saga author. With Jórunn manvitsbrekka, for example, discussed above, they translate the nick-name as 'Wisdom-Slope' (*Laxdæla saga* 1969, 47), an epithet that means nothing to the modern reader, and offer no note or any attempt to elucidate its possible significance, although they claim to have studied Arent's translation with its 'useful Introduction and notes' (*Laxdæla saga* 1969, 43). (Press translates *Jórunn manvitsbrekka* as 'Jorunn "Men's Wit-breaker"' (*The Laxdale Saga* 1964, 1). While not technically correct, this 'translation' still has the effect of making readers stop and think when they find it in conjunction with Unnr 'the deep minded', so perhaps it is not so far from the author's idea, as it gives the sense of a woman who can at least equal, if not 'break', the wit of a man.

I believe that the way a work such as this is translated is extremely important, since, as I have suggested, the majority of readers of *Laxdæla saga* will not read it in the Old Icelandic. Therefore translators have a responsibility to put across as much of the ideas and intentions of the author as they can. The readers of a translation should be able to gain an experience of the text in their own language. Given that the Penguin

translation is the most widely available and most widely read English translation of *Laxdæla saga* I find the discrepancies between the translation and the text very worrying indeed. Those whose only access to the saga is through this English translation are denied the voice of the author, denied the opportunity to consider the points that he/she is trying to make. The author's clear exposition of certain subjects, as discussed above, is subverted by subtle (and not so subtle) interpretative rather than accurate choices in translation which shift the entire emphasis of the saga and leave a vast area of the author's exploration hidden.

I have tried to show three things here: that there are some serious problems with the Penguin translation of *Laxdæla saga*, that the author of *Laxdæla* was very possibly a woman (although, of course, this cannot be proved) and that, regardless of his or her gender, the author was actively trying to deal with the concept of the ability of women to function in society on an equal level to men.

Jónas Kristjánsson says of Guðrún that 'if she had been a man, the saga would probably be named after her' (1988, 276). This neatly exemplifies the problem that the saga author is trying to highlight and address: why should she have had to be a man to have the saga named after her?

### Bibliography

- Andersson, Theodore M. 1967, *The Icelandic Family Saga*.
- Arent (Madelung), A. Margaret 1972. *The Laxdæla Saga: Its Structural Patterns*.
- Bouman, A. C. 1962. *Patterns in Old English and Old Icelandic Literature*.
- Brennú-Njáls saga* 1954. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit 12.
- Clover, Carol J. 1990. 'The Politics of Scarcity'. In Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, eds, *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, 100–34.
- Conroy, Patricia 1980. 'Laxdæla saga and Eiríks saga rauða: Narrative Structure'. *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 95, 116–25.
- Drever, James 1937–45. 'The Psychology of *Laxdælasaga*'. *Saga-Book* 12, 106–18.
- Dronke, Ursula 1989. 'Narrative Insight in *Laxdæla saga*'. In John Tucker, ed., *Sagas of the Icelanders*, 206–25.
- Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* 1933. Ed. Sigurður Nordal. Íslenzk fornrit 2.
- Jónas Kristjánsson 1988. *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature*. Trans. Peter Foote.
- Kellogg, Robert 1973. 'Sex and the Vernacular in Medieval Iceland'. In Peter Foote, Hermann Pálsson and Desmond Slay, eds, *Proceedings of The First International Saga Conference*, 244–58.

- Kress, Helga 1980. “‘Mjök mun þér samstaft þykkja’”: Um sagnahefð ok kvenlega reynslu í *Laxdæla sögu*. In Valborg Bentsdóttir, Guðrún Gísladóttir and Svanlaug Baldursdóttir, eds, *Konur Skrifa*, 97–109.
- Laxdæla saga* 1934. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslensk fornrit 5.
- Laxdæla saga* 1969. Trans. Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson.
- Laxdale Saga, The* 1964. Trans. Muriel Press.
- Laxdoela Saga, The* 1964. Trans. A. Margaret Arent.
- Lexicon Poeticum Antiquæ Linguae Septentrionalis* 1931. Ed. Sveinbjörn Egilsson, 2nd edition rev. Finnur Jónsson.
- Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, The* 1933–77. Prepared by William Little, H. W. Fowler and Jessie Coulson, rev. and ed. C. T. Onions.
- Taylor, Arnold R. 1974. ‘*Laxdæla saga* and Author Involvement in the Icelandic Sagas’. *Leeds Studies in English* 7, 15–21.

HISTORY OF THE TROLLS?  
*BÁRÐAR SAGA AS AN HISTORICAL NARRATIVE*

BY ÁRMANN JAKOBSSON

1. *Introduction*

*BÁRÐAR SAGA SNÆFELLSÁSS* is on the periphery of the literary genre Icelandic Family Sagas (*Íslendingasögur*), which, as is customary with a literary genre, is defined by its centre, the more renowned *Egils saga*, *Laxdæla saga* and *Brennu-Njáls saga*. Yet it has probably been allocated to this genre for ages. In the fourteenth century, it was incorporated into the vellum manuscript *Vatnshyrna* along with other Family Sagas, as the oldest manuscript of the saga is a fragment from the so-called Pseudo-*Vatnshyrna*, a sister manuscript to *Vatnshyrna*. *Bárðar saga* has been dated to the period 1280–1390, with popular inclination favouring a late dating.<sup>1</sup> Concerning the author of the saga, the least said, the better. There is clearly an authorial figure in the background, responsible for composing the saga from vast and dispersed material, but it is impossible to identify any author. There has been some speculation as to his identity, none of which is relevant to research into the saga as a work of literature.<sup>2</sup> This article deals with problems relating to the structural unity of *Bárðar saga*. Only when this has been elucidated can the search for the author have any significance.

2. *History or Fiction?*

Few would dispute the fact that *Bárðar saga* is an artistic narrative, regardless of its artistic merit. The modern reader would not hesitate to deem it highly improbable and therefore probably not based on fact. The inference would thus seem to be that *Bárðar saga* is a work of fiction, but this is problematical. The author of *Bárðar saga* would be an unlikely candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature. His narrative is

<sup>1</sup> The manuscripts and date of composition of *Bárðar saga* are discussed at length by Þórhallur Vilmundarson in the introduction to *Harðar saga* 1991, v–vii, lxix–lxxiv, xcvi–xcix, and I have little to add to that.

<sup>2</sup> According to Finnur Jónsson (1902, 86), the same author was responsible for *Víglundar saga* and *Bárðar saga*. Þórhallur Vilmundarson (*Harðar saga* 1991, xcix–cvii) links the saga with the monastery at Helgafell on Snæfellsnes.

full of seemingly unimportant tales and information drawn from *Landnámabók* and much trouble is taken to explain place-names on the Snæfellsnes peninsula. This would indeed be an oddity in a modern work of fiction and it is hardly surprising that Sigurður Nordal (1953, 269) found *Bárðar saga* 'et ejendommeligt produkt, hvor man paa den ene side møder en stor interesse for genealogier, alle hentet fra ældre skrifter, paa den anden side fantastiske og halvmytiske troldehistorier, hvoraf en del kunde bygge paa lokale folkesagn'.<sup>3</sup> Paul Schach (1982, 202) similarly categorises the saga as either 'serious fiction by a superstitious author or a generic farce by a sophisticated one'. As a generic farce, however, *Bárðar saga* is completely unconvincing, as it is quite atypical of the genre. It is more convincing as serious fiction. That leaves the problem which puzzled Sigurður Nordal: on the one hand, the saga is replete with genealogical information and place-name lore; on the other hand its focus of interest is trolls, the inspiration possibly being regional folktales.

The problem is, of course, only a problem if it is assumed that narrative is either historical or fictional. In the view of Sigurður Nordal, these are fundamental opposites, but did the author of *Bárðar saga* take that view as well? In order to determine this, the important criterion seems to be whether the author believed in what he wrote, not whether present-day scholars do. A story of trolls and *landvættir* cannot, of course, be historical if one does not believe in the existence of such creatures. From the perspective of the disbeliever, a story with such a focus must be fiction, however poor, regardless of its close affinity with historical works. If the author, however, believed in the existence of trolls and suchlike, their presence in his work would not exclude it from being intended as a work of history. In fact, very little of what was regarded as history in the Middle Ages would pass muster in our age, e. g. *Historia regum Britanniae* by Geoffrey of Monmouth (cf. Grundmann 1965, 12–17).

It is customary in modern society to make a distinction between *natural* and *supernatural* phenomena. Such a distinction is, however,

<sup>3</sup> J. Gotzen (1903, 2) offers a similar description: 'Den grundstock der Bárðar saga bilden einzelne volkssagen, die man sich auf der Snæfellsneshalbinsel von Bárðr erzählte. Der Verfasser verband sie mit einander und fügte aus eigener Phantasie hinzu; er verflocht historische Persönlichkeiten in die Erzählung, benutzte stark die Landnáma und trug eine Fülle von Motiven zusammen, für die ihm die Fornaldar sögur und verwandte Erzählungen reichliche Vorbilder gaben.' According to Phillip Pulsiano and Jón Skaptason (1984, xvi), this apparent disorganisation reflects the genius of the author.

not entirely logical. To those who believe in the existence of trolls or elves, they are essentially a part of nature and subservient to its laws. Those who do not believe in the existence of non-human sapient creatures have no need for the supernatural, either; no category is needed for beings who do not exist.<sup>4</sup> When *Bárðar saga* was composed, Iceland was populated with all kinds of beings hidden to the normal eye. Natural forces, now considered non-existent, were then just as real as the sun, the wind and the soil (cf. Gurevich 1985, 38, 69–71). All sorts of evidence from medieval Iceland bear witness to a strong belief in dreams, prophecy, ghosts and all kinds of imaginary creatures which seems to have lost little of its strength through the Christianisation of Iceland (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1940, 71–72, 128–32). Belief in hidden people (*huldufólk*) was common in Iceland until the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries and for some people they are still a force to be reckoned with.<sup>5</sup>

To the author of *Bárðar saga*, Bárðr Snæfellsáss was as much a part of the past as Snorri goði was to the author of *Eyrbyggja*.<sup>6</sup> He is most decidedly a part of nature; once (ch. 6) his ‘nature’ is even spoken of. Our belief in the accuracy or probability of *Bárðar saga* should thus have no effect on whether it is classified as a work of history or fiction. Its inclusion in *Vatnshyrna* indicates on the contrary that, like other Icelandic Family Sagas, it was indeed to all intents and purposes an historical work. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen has recently argued that all the Icelandic Family Sagas were composed ‘i overensstemmelse med den viden om fortiden, der var til rådighed, og deres forfattere harmoniserede denne viden til et stort helhedsbillede’. He considers them ‘på én gang historisk virkelighedsskildring og litterær virkelighedsfortolkning’ and finds that they are not ‘skabt som en tematisk helhed i skønlitteraturens forstand’ (1993, 18, 23–24).

Sørensen (1993, 33–51) argues that Icelandic attitudes to the past were transformed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The heroes of the past gained greater credence and the fashion of the age was to trace one’s ancestry to prehistoric giants. Some of those ancient figures

<sup>4</sup> This argument stems from C. S. Lewis (1967, 66).

<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of 1996 the Icelandic Road-Building Institution (Vegagerð ríkisins) still took note of the alleged habitation of elves in its plans.

<sup>6</sup> In *Bárðar saga* Bárður is spoken of both as being a troll and a giant (pp. 111, 149) and a man (103, 127, 133, 135, 139). In this article the saga is quoted from the edition of Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson in the Íslenzk fornrit series (*Harðar saga* 1991).

were credited with a number of qualities since lost. Egill Skalla-Grímsson and other protagonists of the Icelandic Family Sagas were supposedly descended from half-human and beast-like ancestors and were thus partly supernatural in the modern sense. Bárðr Snæfellsáss is in this sense no more unbelievable than the semi-human Egill, and his troll-like nature is no barrier as such to his saga being a work of history. With this in mind, it may prove helpful to consider three characteristics of history which seem to me to emerge from a discussion by W. H. Auden (1968, 48–50). Firstly, works of history have interests different from those of works of fiction; they are often replete with names of people and places who do not contribute to the artistic unity of the work. Secondly, they demonstrate an historical and critical attitude; if something is obscure or based on insufficient evidence, its validity is questioned. Thirdly, the events and the dialogue must be plausible to those to whom the work is addressed. I have already contended that although some events and actors in *Bárðar saga* may seem strange today, this was not the case when the saga was composed. But this is not sufficient to determine whether it is a work of history or a realistic historical novel.

As Gotzen (1903, 14) pointed out, an abundance of toponyms is a dominant characteristic of *Bárðar saga*. In the last century these toponyms were proved to be for the most part authentic by Árni Thorlacius (1886). Recently Þórhallur Vilmundarson (*Harðar saga* 1991, lxxxii–xcviii) has argued that the author of *Bárðar saga* to a great extent used toponyms to create persons and events, even Bárðr himself. Though the saga may have some roots in false etymology, it is more probable that its explanations were based on legend, rather than simply fabricated by the author. The traditional method is to relate the story of an individual who dies or builds a farm on a spot which is afterwards supposed to be named after him, though other explanations might be more obvious. Dumbshaf is thus named after Dumbr the giant, Þúfubjörg after the sorceress Þúfa and Hítarhellir after the giantess Hít.

These etymological explanations, though for the most part obviously incorrect, are no more so than was the custom of the time.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, they serve as unequivocal testimony to a great deal of interest in the historical past of Iceland. Thus, the author mentions the existence of the toponym Helguhóll, which is irrelevant to the plot, and a narra-

<sup>7</sup> Cf. what Þórhallur Vilmundarson has to say of false etymology in *Harðar saga* and *Þorskfirðinga saga* (*Harðar saga* 1991, xxx–xli, cxx–cxxxviii).



tive about the later dealings of Bárðr with Þorkell bundinfóti is incorporated into the saga for no other purpose than to explain the toponym Bárðarhellir.<sup>8</sup> When Þorbjörn Grenjaðarson and Þórdís Skeggjadóttir built a farm at Tunga the story adds that this farm was later called Grænamýrartunga (p. 140). This trivial information, completely unnecessary for the saga's unfolding, is obviously aimed at those interested in the regional history of the Hrótafjörður area.

*Bárðar saga's* interest in toponyms is reminiscent of one of the main characteristics of history. It is brimming with information which does not serve the main narrative purpose. Just about everyone who attends the wedding of Þórdís Bárðardóttir and Tungu-Oddr (ch. 10) is mentioned by name. The same applies to the description of a Christmas feast at Hundahellir and the narrative dealing with the journey by the brothers Þórðr and Þorvaldr to the ogre Kolbjörn. This episode is folkloristic, as is true of a good deal of the material in *Bárðar saga*. However, Þórðr's description of the intended route is in direct speech and very detailed, as if taken straight from a road-guide, although nothing of interest happens on this journey. This demonstrates that although *Bárðar saga* draws on regional folklore, its perspective is historical. In folktales (*Märchen*), historical figures are seldom mentioned, but in *Bárðar saga*, the custom is not only to mention unimportant as well as important characters by name but also to add a lot of genealogical information (cf. Lüthi 1986, 4–23).

Not only is *Bárðar saga* full of historical information; most of that information is derived from *Landnámabók*. In a work of fiction this would be inappropriate, but in a serious work of history it is essential to use more ancient and thus more authoritative material. The function of this historical information is to link the life of Bárðr to the general history of Iceland. He is said to have arrived in Iceland along with Gnúpa-Bárðr (ch. 3), and to confirm this, *Landnámabók's* account of the settlement of Gnúpa-Bárðr is incorporated. Helga Bárðardóttir is linked to Eiríkr rauði, the settler of Greenland (ch. 5), Miðfjarðar-Skeggi (ch. 5) and Skapti Þóroddsson (ch. 7), and Þórdís Bárðardóttir marries Tungu-Oddr (ch. 10). The brothers Þórðr and Þorvaldr are, for their part, said to be related to the Hjaltasynir, who in *Landnámabók* are credited with the biggest wake in Iceland (ch. 22). In addition to *Landnámabók* and *Bárðar saga*, most of these personages appear in several Family Sagas and are well-attested historical figures of the

<sup>8</sup> This was the opinion of Gotzen (1903, 30).

tenth century. Their presence in the saga was intended to add to its historical value.<sup>9</sup> The author of *Bárðar saga* selects the historical figures to connect with his hero in a purposeful manner and not in a haphazard fashion as Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1860, v) believed. The narrative incorporated from *Landnámabók* seems to have the purpose of mending the saga's defects, the principal one being that Bárðr and his family disappear from the history of Iceland. He has ten children but no grand-children; his family does not link the period of the saga to the period of its writing. Therefore Bárðr and his family must be linked with other families and the incorporations from *Landnámabók* serve this end.

It is quite possible that 'borrowing' from other works may serve to discredit *Bárðar saga* from the perspective of modern historical criticism. But such was not the case in the fourteenth century. Borrowings from *Landnámabók* made the saga more credible, as its reconstructed past corresponded to the past of *Landnámabók*.<sup>10</sup> There is, therefore, a definite purpose in the saga's use of *Landnáma*. All the same, it is difficult to ascertain how the historical perspective is applied in *Bárðar saga*. The author does not always use his evidence critically. All kinds of marvels are described as completely natural phenomena and there is a serious chronological error when Greenland is described as being inhabited when Bárðr escapes the tyranny of Haraldr hárfagri and settles in Iceland. Apart from this error, the chronology of the saga makes sense. Bárðr, of course, outlives other settlers of Iceland, since human limitations do not apply to him after he has entered the mountain.

The narrative style of the saga is objective and the voice of the narrator is the voice of a scholar. He hesitates to comment on the nature of Bárðr when he leaves human society but refers to public opinion: 'þykkir mönnum sem hann muni í jöklana horfit hafa ok byggt þar

<sup>9</sup> Oddr is mentioned in *Íslendingabók*, *Egils saga*, *Gunnlaugs saga*, *Hænsa-Þóris saga*, *Laxdæla saga* and others. Miðfjarðar-Skeggi appears in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, *Þórðar saga hreðu*, *Kormáks saga*, *Grettis saga*, *Gunnlaugs saga* and *Hrómundar þátr*. The Hjaltasynir are mentioned in *Laxdæla saga*, *Bolla þátr* and *Grettis saga*. Skapti Þóroddson is mentioned in e. g. *Íslendingabók*, *Gunnlaugs saga*, *Brennu-Njáls saga*, *Grettis saga*, *Valla-Ljóts saga*, *Flóamanna saga*, *Ólkofra þátr*, *Egils saga* and *Heimskringla*; he was lawspeaker of Iceland 1004–30. Eiríkr rauði has his own saga and is a part of Icelandic historical tradition from *Íslendingabók* onwards.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Heffernan 1988, 137–42.

stóran helli' (p. 119), though he points to his upbringing in Dofrafjöll as a possible cause. After leaving human society, Bárðr becomes more distant from the narrative voice. Eyewitnesses are quoted to strengthen the author's narrative. Though he clearly believes in the historicity of Bárðr, he also takes no responsibility for the heathen gods Óðinn and Þórr, never claiming that they exist, but hiding behind the authority of public opinion.<sup>11</sup> The author never states whether Helga or Gestr had children but says that there is no report of any (chs 5 and 22). He treats some of his sources critically. When relating Helga's stay at Hjalli in Ölfus, the author corrects a common misunderstanding that Guðrún Gjúkadóttir stayed there (p. 123).<sup>12</sup>

*Bárðar saga* claims to be a work of history and has the appearance and characteristics of such. Thus, it seems probable that the historian considered himself to be relating the past 'wie es eigentlich gewesen ist'. Hans Kuhn (1968, 54) pointed out the inconsistencies between *Bárðar saga* and other sources and classified the author as 'ein klug und kühl überlegender Fälscher'. Modern historical criticism would indeed declare a lot of the information in *Bárðar saga* invalid; this, however, has no bearing on the belief of the medieval author who was unfamiliar with Ranke and E. H. Carr and probably believed that folktales from the Snæfellsnes region were sources as important as *Landnámabók* itself. If he is to be considered a forger, the next question must be: Why? What motive could a fourteenth-century saga author have for concocting a pseudo-historical work about a giant in Snæfellsjökull?

It is much simpler to conclude that the saga was motivated by the historical interest of an author familiar with legends and folktales about Bárðr Snæfellsáss, most of them related to toponyms. Narrative from *Landnámabók* is used to link Bárðr to historical events and famous people of his century, not because the author is less heedful of the truth than was the custom of his time, but because this is the demand of the genre. Since Bárðr was on Snæfellsnes in the tenth century, he must have known certain historical figures. Thus, the historian describes him meeting them. This was his licence.<sup>13</sup> He is allowed to interpret history in this fashion. His saga is thus both history and high literature. He uses other sources to improve on his material, thereby making his saga more

<sup>11</sup> This is on pp. 127 ('þykkir mönnum sem þat muni Þórr verit hafa') and 163 ('þóttust þeir þá vita, at þat hefði Óðinn verit').

<sup>12</sup> Gotzen (1903, 23) considered this evidence of the existence of an older saga of Helga Bárðardóttir.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Steblin-Kamenskij 1981, 17–37.

‘authentic’ and consistent with a past with which his audience was familiar. In addition, there are several motifs from the Icelandic Family Sagas in *Bárðar saga*. One is the narrative of the tyranny of King Haraldr hárfagri whose oppression makes Bárðr leave Norway, where the author copies almost word for word the narrative in *Egils saga*. Since *Egils saga* is much older, it is legitimate to assume that the author of *Bárðar saga* borrowed its description and used it for his own purposes.<sup>14</sup>

In *Bárðar saga* there are several motifs borrowed from the legendary sagas and folktales as well.<sup>15</sup> The passages containing them seem to be for the most part the work of the author. They fill the gaps left by the sources and are mostly in the second half of the story, where *Landnámabók* and toponyms are not so extensively used. *Bárðar saga* is not motivated by a creative outburst. Where the author lacks oral or written sources to base his story on, he embellishes the material he has, using events and figures from other historical works. The important thing is that they are true to the core of the saga: the nature of Bárðr and his family. The narrative motifs play the same role as the narrative incorporations from *Landnámabók*; they are important to the artistic unity of the saga. The structure of the saga is created by its author; he imposes order on various folktales, place-name interpretations and genealogies. His task was not only to choose the material for his story and the manner in which it is related, he also had to create order from chaos. Which brings us to another subject that has featured heavily in the scholarly discussion of *Bárðar saga*. Is it a single work or the combination of two sagas?

### 3. *One Work or Two?*

There is nothing in the manuscript history of *Bárðar saga* to suggest that it was ever anything other than one single saga. While there are slight variations from one manuscript to another, they are all derived from one text. However, *Bárðar saga* is demonstrably a disjointed piece of work which changes its direction halfway through when the son of Bárðr, Gestr, becomes the main character. It has thus been a popular suggestion that *Bárðar saga* is in fact two sagas pieced together,

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Bárðar saga* 106–07; *Egils saga* 1933, 12.

<sup>15</sup> These motifs have been discussed by Þórhallur Vilmundarson, *Harðar saga* 1991, lxxvi–lxxix; Gotzen 1903; Pulsiano and Jón Skaptason 1984, xxi–xxiv. The Motif-Index of Boberg (1966) lists at least sixty identifiable motifs in the saga.

the story of Bárðr and the story of Gestr, though not all scholars have endorsed this. Among the proponents of this theory were Finnur Jónsson (1902, 86), Gotzen (1903, 37–39, 63), Sigurður Nordal (1953, 269) and Allee (1968), while Hungerland (1905, 390–91), Bragi Halldórsson *et al.* (1987, 59), Pulsiano and Jón Skaptason (1984, xiv) and Þórhallur Vilmundarson (*Harðar saga* 1991, lxxiii) have argued the opposite case. There is obviously a serious discord between the two parts of the saga. In the first half, where Bárðr himself is the dominant figure, there is almost no direct speech, but there is a good deal in the second half, where Gestr is more prominent. *Landnámabók* is used a great deal in the first half, very little in the second half. There are five verses in the first half, only one in the second.<sup>16</sup> The section of the saga in which Bárðr is the main character is almost exclusively confined to Snæfellsnes, the parts where Gestr is the protagonist take place in Húnaþing and Strandasýsla. John G. Allee considered the use of place-names to be typical of the difference between the two halves. The toponyms figure more prominently in the first half of the saga. The toponyms explained are for the most part far from human settlement and may have been unintelligible at the time of the writing of the saga. The verdict of Allee was that ‘different minds were at work in *Bárðar saga* and *Gests saga* and . . . the different attitudes of these two minds can be most clearly seen by studying the way place names are used’ (1968, 16).

While the difference emphasised by Allee exists, the fact of the matter is that *Bárðar saga* only exists as a single work. The question thus arises as to whether the different components of the saga make sense within the structure of a single work. How does the section where Gestr figures fit in with the saga that the author of *Bárðar saga* was composing? Could one author have composed a saga which has two distinct parts or are we dealing with a compilation of separate sagas by separate authors? These questions can only be answered by examining closely the structure of *Bárðar saga*.

The first section of the saga, in which Bárðr himself is the dominant figure, is more diverse than the second half and seems at first sight to be only loosely structured. The saga begins with information about Bárðr’s ancestors and his youth, a sort of introduction to the main narrative which is common enough in Icelandic Family Sagas and

<sup>16</sup> Allee (1968, 17) considers the last verse to belong to the Gestr half; but this is at the end of a story which in most ways resembles the Bárðr half, and if we believe in a hypothetical \**Bárðar saga*, the end of the saga would belong to this, and not to \**Gests saga*, which would then have contained no verses.

indeed in biographies of all periods. The introduction serves the artistic function of delaying the appearance of the main character on the stage and at the same time it provides an historical causality, i. e. the nature of Bárðr is explained by his inheritance. Through the use of genealogy, the past and the present, the living and the dead, unite in an organic whole with a nature of its own. Thus a narrative of the hero's ancestors can predict his fate; as history repeats itself, the family's nature stays the same (cf. Clunies Ross 1993, 382–85). In *Bárðar saga*, the double nature of Dumbr (ch. 1) is emphasised, as is Bárðr's double nature to an even greater extent. He is a giant and thus handsome and of gentle disposition, but also a troll and thus moody and ruthless when he gets angry. His beauty is inherited from his mother, a being of unspecified nature who seems to represent the winter, and his wisdom from the sage giant Dofri in Dofrafjöll. This chapter is a description of Bárðr; he is explained in terms of his family and origins, a man and a giant and thus able to be originally one of the settlers of Iceland, and later a guardian spirit in a mountain. This is later used to explain why he enters the mountain: 'þat var meir ætt hans at vera í stórum hellum en húsum, því at hann fæddist upp með Dofra í Dofrafjöllum' (p. 119). Bárðr has mixed blood, being descended from giants, trolls and other beings. In entering the glacier, he is heeding the pull of this ancestry.

The settlement as described in the saga is also of great importance to the story as the origin of the history of Snæfellsnes, which in Bárðr has a founding father of enormous dimensions, akin to Skalla-Grímr or Geirmundr heljarskinn. The cause of the exodus and settlement is typical but the description of how Bárðr and his companions hallow the ground by giving names to places is unique (ch. 4).<sup>17</sup> The toponyms of Snæfellsnes become silent witnesses to the settlement of Bárðr. Each of the places where he makes his first sacrifice, where he first relieves himself and where he washes, derives its own name and its hallowed nature from its connection with the guardian spirit. The companions of Bárðr are also represented by toponyms. One by one, they settle in places which later become their memorial tombstones, relics of the past in the present. In this settlement chapter, Bárðr also makes his first appearance as the protector of the region in a typical story of exorcism and land purification, featuring Svalr and Þúfa who became troll-like ('trylldust') but were brought down by Bárðr.

<sup>17</sup> Helga Kress (1989, 135) considered this narrative to be the key to the saga: 'Bárðar saga fjallar um baráttu mannsins við náttúruna sem hann er að leggja undir sig með landnámi og stofnun samfélags.'

This is followed by the disappearance of Helga Bárðardóttir, following which the saga pursues two main strands. After this event, Bárðr takes up residence in the glacier and the next chapters deal with Bárðr as a regional protector, a sort of a collection of miracles where he shows himself to be a useful guardian spirit. This is described in general terms but there are also three examples, his aiding and abetting of Einarr Sigmundarson, Ingjaldr and Þórir Knarrarson. In the first case, Bárðr takes part in a conflict which was related in *Landnámabók*, where he is not said to have been present. These stories are no doubt based on regional folklore, and three verses, probably orally transmitted, are added in support of them, one in *Landnámabók*, two in *Harðar saga*. The longest narrative deals with the giantess Hetta who lures Ingjaldr, one of Bárðr's companions, out to sea. The tale has been shown to bear a remarkable likeness to a miracle story (Ólafur Lárússon 1944, 176) and has several parallels in medieval literature.<sup>18</sup>

The story of Helga Bárðardóttir is interlaced with these 'miracles', as it is the cause of Bárðr entering the mountain. A conflict arising from a game is exacerbated, as is common in the Icelandic Family Sagas, until Bárðr has killed two of his cousins and driven his half-brother from the region. This conflict is unique in the saga and can be shown to have four purposes. It adds new dimensions to the description of Bárðr, showing him to be both loyal to his friends and ruthless to those who have wronged him, and asserts his twofold nature which was commented upon at the beginning of the saga. Also, it moves Þorkell bundinfóti from *Bárðar saga* to the historical reality of *Landnámabók* where he settles Rangarvellir.<sup>19</sup> Thirdly, it causes Bárðr to enter the mountain and become guardian spirit of the Snæfellsnes region. Fourthly, it serves to introduce the tragedy of Helga Bárðardóttir.

Helga is described in the following manner: 'Helga var kvenna vænst. Hon þótti ok með undarligu móti þar hafa komit, ok fyrir þat var hon tröll kölluð af sumum mönnum; svá var hon ok karlgild at affi, til hvers sem hon tók' (p. 115). After Helga has drifted to Greenland she becomes the concubine of Miðfjarðar-Skeggi and saves his life, but he does not marry her and the saga comments that it is not known whether

<sup>18</sup> Gotzen 1903, 27–28. One is in *Víglundar saga* (82–84) where Þorkell skinnvefja also figures, and this has sometimes been taken to indicate that *Bárðar saga* is older than *Víglundar saga* and used by it. If this is so, one wonders why Ingjaldr is not mentioned in *Víglundar saga*, as he is said to be the uncle of Ketilríðr in *Bárðar saga*.

<sup>19</sup> *Landnámabók* 350–51. Gotzen (1903, 16) has commented upon this.

they had any children. When Bárðr learns of this, he brings her home but she has no joy thereafter, does not belong anywhere, travels around the country and is unable to find herself a new home.<sup>20</sup> Helga is neither troll nor human and this becomes her tragedy and, in fact, that of her whole family. This makes *Bárðar saga* essentially tragic in tone.

The story of Helga is an example of a story dealing with love between a human male and a female ogress, but from the opposite point of view to that taken in such stories. *Bárðar saga* is unique in describing this kind of relationship from the perspective of the woman, and thus a comic tale becomes tragic. It is no accident that Helga is confused with Guðrún Gjúkadóttir. She resembles her in being larger and fairer than her human contemporaries, doomed to drift, to recite verses of sorrow and play the harp. But she can also be violent, as the womanising Norwegian who tries to rape her discovers (ch. 7). The ultimate role of Helga in the saga is nevertheless that of a babysitter; she fosters her brother, Gestr, for a year, thus finally acting the role of a mother in spite of having no descendants, one more similarity with Guðrún Gjúkadóttir.

There were doubtless independent tales circulating about Helga, even poems, which may have been drawn on by the author of *Bárðar saga* (cf. Gotzen 1903, 20–23). The tale of Helga is, nevertheless, indispensable to the unity of *Bárðar saga*. The chapters following the settlement of Bárðr may seem discontinuous but each of them has one of two functions: a) to provide a depiction of Bárðr and his use to the community, b) to relate the desperate attempts of Bárðr and his family to maintain their line by marrying into human families. The family line of Bárðr becomes extinct with his death and that of his children. This is the final tragedy of *Bárðar saga* and in chs 5–12 the futile attempts of Bárðr to prevent this fate are depicted (cf. Pulsiano and Jón Skaptason 1984, xvi). First he loses Helga but then he learns that she is alive and the mistress of a married man. He therefore fetches her home, since she and Skeggi are unable to have children together. This venture is nevertheless in vain: Helga leaves him and becomes a lonely wanderer.

Ch. 9 marks the beginning of a new attempt by Bárðr to maintain his line. He invites Tungu-Oddr to a Christmas feast and marries his daughter to him, while educating him in matters of law. The knowledge Bárðr has acquired in the mountains of Dofri must continue in the

<sup>20</sup> This is reminiscent of the story of the wandering Jew (Metford 1983, 259–60) which may in Iceland have become attached to Guðrún Gjúkadóttir, unable to die and doomed to walk the earth for the crimes she committed against her own family.



family. But the tragedy persists; after three years of childless marriage Þórdís dies, in spite of great love between the newlyweds.<sup>21</sup> The Oddr episode bears many resemblances to legendary sagas, portraying the fostering of the hero by giants, from whom he gains wisdom, and his subsequent marriage to a daughter of these giants who later dies (cf. Ellis 1941, 78–83). The difference lies in the context. This episode is not part of the saga of the hero (Oddr) but the saga of the giant (Bárðr), which changes its meaning entirely. Finally, chs 11 and 12 depict Bárðr's last desperate attempt to maintain his dynasty by seducing the daughter of Miðfjarðar-Skeggi in disguise and getting her with child.<sup>22</sup> The offspring of this union is Gestr, who subsequently takes over as the hero of the story.

The emphasis placed upon these procreative attempts by Bárðr and his family makes the saga a tragedy since, as is stated at the conclusion of the saga, they fail: 'Ekki er getit, at Gestr Bárðarson hafi nökkur börn átt. Ok lýkr hér sögu Bárðar Snæfellsáss ok Gests, sonar hans' (p. 172). The saga of Bárðr is more decisively concluded than any other Icelandic Family Saga, as the future is out of his family's reach. This makes the saga tragic, though modern readers may find some irony in this; as Hilda Ellis has pointed out (1941, 76), Bárðr is a teacher of genealogy but his own family comes to an end.

Various small episodes are woven into the saga, which, though unconnected with the main story line, serve as descriptions of the life of the inhabitants of Icelandic mountains or, occasionally, as light relief. One is the episode of Lágálfr (ch. 9). This is a folktale about a man who hits his wife, whereupon a passer-by cuts down a sack of meal which hits the man on the head and stuns him. Thus the side of the woman is taken, as is often the case in *Bárðar saga*. The same applies to the story of Skjöldr and Gróa. They come to Iceland with Bárðr but discover that their temperaments are ill-matched, and Gróa leaves her husband. The saga does not condemn this at all and in its description of troll feasts the females of the species (Hít, Jóra and Guðrún knappekkja) enjoy the same respect as the males. The saga also provides one of the few examples in medieval Icelandic literature of friendship between a male and a female on an equal basis, that between Bárðr and Hít (ch. 13).

<sup>21</sup> Hilda Ellis (1941, 72–75) has observed that sexual liaisons between humans and trolls invariably end unhappily.

<sup>22</sup> As Gotzen (1903, 43) and Pulsiano and Jón Skaptason (1984, xix) have suggested, he gains from this the additional pleasure of avenging himself on Skeggi.

Although the first half of *Bárðar saga* could at first sight be said to resemble a discordant collection of assorted material, it has been given a strong unity, so that there can be no doubt about the integrity of the saga until ch. 12, where the second half of *Bárðar saga* begins. From ch. 14 to ch. 21 two distinct tales are related which are so different in atmosphere from the first half that it is tempting to consider them the work of another author. The end of the saga (ch. 22), however, is mostly incorporated from *Landnámabók*, like much of the material in the first half of the saga. In addition, the last chapters of the first half form what could be seen as a prologue to the second half and have often been considered to belong to *\*Gests saga*, even though Bárðr figures in them. Hence there is some reason to believe that the connection between the first and the second half of the saga is stronger than has often been claimed. On the other hand, if these two Gestr-episodes are an integral part of the saga, the next question must be: What is their function in the saga?

The episode in chs 14–16 has several Icelandic and foreign parallels (cf. Gotzen 1903, 49–51; Boberg 1966, 117, 120, 139, 145 and 232; *Bárðar saga*, 153 n.). Its plot is simple: A troll promises to wed his daughter to a human with the purpose of luring him into a trap and killing him. The troll is conquered with the aid of a superhuman helper. The deep structure is a conflict between nature and civilisation as in most adventures and folktales.<sup>23</sup> Kolbjörn and his trolls represent nature and are repeatedly likened to animals. They eat in animal fashion ‘ok rifu sem ernir ok etjutíkr hold af beinum’. When drinking mead they become ‘svíndruknir’ and when Gestr hurts one of them he yelps ‘sem varghundr’. Later they make ‘miklu meira óhljóð en frá megi segja, því svá má at kveða, at þeira hljóð væri líkari nágöllum en nökkurs kykvendis látum’ (pp. 153–54). They are coarse and rude, noisy and quarrelsome and completely devoid of any kind of manners.

Kolbjörn is described in much the same vein: ‘Sér hann mann, ef svá skal kalla. Þessi maðr var mikill vexti ok mjök stórskorinn; bjúgr var hans hryggr, ok boginn í knjám, ásjónu hafði hann ljóta ok leiðiliga, svá at hann þóttist önga slíka sét hafa, nef hans brotit í þrim stöðum, ok váru á því stórir knútar; sýndist þat af því þrúbogit sem horn á gömlum hrútum; hann hafði stóra járnstöng í hendi’ (p. 148). Kolbjörn is so

<sup>23</sup> It can indeed be described by Greimas’s actant-model, Þórðr being the subject of the story, Sólrún the object, Gestr the helper and Kolbjörn the villain (cf. Hawkes 1977, 87–95).

beastlike that he hardly qualifies as a human, in contrast to Gestr and his family. He resembles a ram and his death is in fact portrayed as the slaughtering of a beast: 'Í því kom Gestr at ok þreif í hjassann á Kolbirni, en setti knéin í baki svá hart, at þegar gekk ór hálsliðinum; hratt Gestr honum þá dauðum ofan af Þórði' (p. 157).

The story is full of traditional narrative motifs. The stealing of sheep is a specifically Icelandic one (Gotzen 1903, 48); a game as the origin of conflict is common in the Icelandic Family Sagas, as is a wise counsellor (Miðfjarðar-Skeggi) who knows exactly what has happened. Like the monster Grendel in *Beowulf*, the beast has a mother. Even this ogre is wise in this feminist story. The part that Gestr plays is nevertheless the defining aspect of the story. He is a 'trickster', a figure placed between nature and civilisation, who resolves the conflict and turns out to be the half-brother of the human protagonists, Þórðr and Þorvaldr. In this narrative, Gestr plays a role similar to Bárðr's guardian spirit role in the first half of the saga, a bit like 'Son of Tarzan'. The episode introduces Gestr in the role of Bárðr's substitute. Thus it serves as an introduction to the second episode, where Gestr is the protagonist.

When this episode is over, Norway again becomes the setting, for a conversion episode of sorts (chs 17–21).<sup>24</sup> It depicts a conflict between Christianity and heathendom and the message is that the assistance of the Christian God is more useful than the help of heathen gods, shamans and a guardian spirit like Bárðr. The episode is constructed around a traditional mound-breaking motif and tells of a journey from civilisation to nature where the antagonist is one of the living dead (cf. Boberg 1966, 159). Again, a traditional folktale-motif forms the basis of the story with the repetition of motifs giving it structure. Three ogres are forced to go underground. Heathen assistants are thrice powerless and the priest Jósteinn, representing Christianity, has to lend a hand; the fourth time King Óláfr Tryggvason himself has to help. The mound of Raknarr has to be broken into three times, and so on. This episode has analogues in other well-known texts, including the Bible, *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Icelandic sagas: *Eiríks saga rauða*, *Fóstbræðra saga*, *Grettis saga*, *Harðar saga* and several legendary sagas. These motifs will not be discussed here as they have been

<sup>24</sup> Gotzen (1903, 52, 61–63 and elsewhere) and Stefán Einarsson (1966) discuss the Christian influences in this part of the saga and similar motifs in the accounts of the conversion in *Flateyjarbók*.

commented upon by others. Raknarr himself is a demon, representing evil itself and far more dangerous than the trolls Gestr dealt with in Iceland.<sup>25</sup> On his quest, Gestr is armed with all kinds of useful gadgets as well as his own strength but nothing works except crucifixes, holy water and the will-power of saints and clerics.

The message of this episode is clear: Christ is the only God and his helpers are better in time of need than any guardian spirit. Heinz Hungerland (1905, 390) considered this to be the message of the story: ‘Die einheit der komposition scheint mir gewahrt durch den gedanken des siegreichen ringen des Kristentums mit dem heidnischen volks-glauben’. But it seems a great deal of effort to compose a long saga about a settler and regional protector on Snæfellsnes for the sole purpose of then showing his uselessness in comparison with the God of the Christians. Until ch. 17, there are only two scenes involving heathendom or Christianity. The dream of Bárðr in ch. 1 forebodes the new religion, and has several parallels in the Bible and Christian literature (Þórhallur Vilmundarson, *Harðar saga* 1991, xxvi). In addition, the heathen god Þórr appears in ch. 8, although his role there is very opaque. It is thus a gross overstatement to regard the conflict of heathendom and Christianity as the centre of the story. What, then, is the role of these final chapters? One explanation seems to suggest itself. The author of *Bárðar saga* must have realised that the Church would not look kindly upon an heroic saga about heathen protectors competing with Christ. The author’s interest in trolls and *landvættir* must thus be reconciled with a Christian view of the world. Therefore, he inserts in his saga an apologetic conversion episode which proves that in spite of all his might, Bárðr is still inferior to God. This is indeed explicitly stated, when the author tells of Bárðr’s education: ‘váru þetta allt saman kallaðar listir í þann tíma af þeim mönnum, sem miklir váru ok burðugir, því at menn vissu þá engi dæmi at segja af sönnum guði norðr hingat í hálfuna’ (p. 103).

On the whole, Bárðr and his family are kind creatures who assist people in need and must not be confused with evil trolls like Kolbjörn and his lot, Hetta, Torfár-Kolla, Svalr and Þúfa. Nevertheless, their time has passed when Christianity comes to Iceland. Bárðr realizes this and therefore his prophetic dream about the tree is ‘ekki mjök skap-

<sup>25</sup> Jón Jónsson (1901), Gotzen (1903, 54–55) and Þórhallur Vilmundarson (*Harðar saga* 1991, 162 n.) have discussed the origin of this story and each has his own theory.

felldr' to him (p. 104).<sup>26</sup> His efforts to maintain his line are in vain and his defeat is complete when the fruit of his last attempt, Gestr, betrays the religion of his ancestors. Bárðr appears to him in a dream and curses him so that Gestr dies in his white christening gown. The family of Bárðr disappears as Iceland becomes Christian. This was inevitable and Bárðr knew it from the outset; this is one more factor making his saga a tragedy. At the conclusion of the saga, the only people remaining are those helped by Gestr: Þórðr, Þorvaldr and Sólrún. The saga reveals that their progeny were many. But Bárðr has no offspring. He is history.<sup>27</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

*Bárðar saga* has long been considered an Icelandic Family Saga and the saga belongs in this category, though its material may be somewhat extraordinary. The chief difference is that the main characters of *Bárðar saga* are trolls, not humans. The saga, however, makes no clear distinction between the two, as both trolls and humans were part of fourteenth-century reality. The source material of the author was both written and oral, chiefly *Landnámabók* and folktales from the Snæfellsnes region. The latter part of the saga is characterised by its use of motifs found also in the Bible and numerous other Icelandic and foreign literary sources. The author of *Bárðar saga* concocts facts to strengthen the unity of his saga, which was to him a work of history. *Bárðar saga* would not be considered 'historical' by modern standards, but historical criticism has changed drastically since the saga was composed. The historical value of folktales has been rejected and doubt has been cast on the historical value of *Landnámabók*. However, there is nothing to show that the author of *Bárðar saga* had any doubts of this kind. Scholars have doubted the historicity of *Bárðar saga* because there are elements of the 'supernatural' in it, but the author of *Bárðar saga* would not have known this term.

*Bárðar saga* may seem disjointed but I firmly believe that it is a unified work and that every part of the saga can be understood in the context of its main theme. The driving force behind the saga is an

<sup>26</sup> Schach (1982) has pointed out that the reluctance of Icelandic saga heroes to accept Christianity is a motif and does not have to be seen as a negative trait.

<sup>27</sup> The saga at one juncture tells us that 'helzt þat alla stund síðan, meðan Bárðr lifði' (*Bárðar saga*, 112) and also that 'í þann tíma var Hít tröllkona uppi' (142). These creatures obviously belong to the past. They are no more.

interest in the past which in this case is directed towards the superhuman Bárðr Snæfellsáss and his family. The saga places them firmly in the context of Icelandic history and uses *Landnámabók* to this end, linking Bárðr and his family to renowned Icelanders of the tenth century. The latter part of the saga is a necessary epilogue to make peace with the most powerful social institution of the fourteenth century, the Church. Bárðr Snæfellsáss and his family were part of a past which Icelanders tried to recreate in writing the Icelandic Family Sagas and other historical works, a part of the historical past and not a fabrication of a clever forger with unclear motives or a novel by a romantic artist, satisfying his boundless ‘lust zu fabulieren’. *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* is an historical work of its own period that has become a work of literature with the passage of time.

#### Bibliography

- Allee, John G., Jr 1968. ‘A Study of the Place Names in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*’. In *Germanic Studies in Honor of Edward Henry Sehrt. Presented by His Colleagues, Students and Friends on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday, March 3, 1968*. Ed. Frithjof Andersen Raven, Wolfram Karl Legner and James Cecil King, 15–36.
- Auden, W. H. 1968. *Secondary Worlds. The T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures Delivered at Eliot College in the University of Kent at Canterbury, October 1967*.
- Bárðar saga*. In *Harðar saga* 1991, 101–72.
- Boberg, Inger M. 1966. *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*.
- Bragi Halldórsson, Sverrir Tómasson, Jón Torfason, Bergljót Kristjánsdóttir and Örnólfur Thorsson, eds, 1987. *Sígildar sögur I. Skýringar*.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret 1993. ‘The Development of Old Norse Textual Worlds: Genealogical Structure as a Principle of Literary Organisation in Early Iceland’. *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 92, 372–85.
- Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* 1933. Ed. Sigurður Nordal. Íslenzk fornrit II.
- Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1940. *Um íslenzkar þjóðsögur*.
- Ellis, Hilda R. 1941. ‘Fostering by Giants in Old Norse Saga Literature’. *Medium Aevum* 10, 70–85.
- Finnur Jónsson 1902. *Den oldnorske og oldislandske Litteraturs Historie* III.
- Gotzen, Joseph 1903. *Über die Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*.
- Grundmann, Herbert 1965. *Geschichtsschreibung im Mittelalter. Gattungen—Epochen—Eigenart*.
- Guðbrandur Vigfússon, ed., 1860. *Bárðarsaga Snæfellsáss. Víglundarsaga. Þórðarsaga. Draumavitranir. Völsapáttur*. Nordiske oldskrifter XXVII.
- Gurevich, A. J. 1985. *Categories of Medieval Culture*. Trans. G. L. Campbell.
- Harðar saga* 1991. Ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson. Íslenzk fornrit XIII.

- Hawkes, Terence 1977. *Structuralism and Semiotics*.
- Heffernan, Thomas J. 1988. *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages*.
- Hungerland, Heinz 1905. 'Über die Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss von Joseph Gotzen'. *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 21, 386–92.
- Jón Jónsson 1901. 'Raknaslóði = Ragnarslóði'. *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 17, 53–66.
- Kress, Helga 1989. 'Fyrir dyrum fóstru: Textafræðingar og konan í textanum út frá vísu eftir Helgu Bárðardóttur í Bárðar sögu Snæfellsáss'. *Tímarit Háskóla Íslands* 4, 133–44.
- Kuhn, Hans 1968. 'Bárður Snæfellsáss'. *Scientia Islandica* 1, 50–54.
- Landnámabók*. In *Íslendingabók*. *Landnámabók* 1968. Ed. Jakob Benediktsson. Íslensk fornrit I.
- Lewis, C. S. 1967. *Studies in Words*.
- Lüthi, Max 1986. *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*. Trans. John D. Niles.
- Metford, J. C. J. 1983. *Dictionary of Christian Lore and Legend*.
- Nordal, Sigurður 1953. 'Sagalitteraturen'. In *Nordisk kultur VIII:B. Litteraturhistorie B. Norge og Island*, 180–273.
- Ólafur Lárusson 1944. 'Undir jökli: Ýmislegt um Bárðar sögu Snæfellsáss'. *Byggð og saga*, 147–79.
- Pulsiano, Phillip and Jón Skaptason, trans., 1984. *Bárðar saga*.
- Schach, Paul 1982. 'The Theme of the Reluctant Christian in the Icelandic Sagas'. *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 81, 186–203.
- Steblin-Kamenskij, M. I. 1981. *Heimur Íslendingasagna*. Trans. Helgi Haraldsson.
- Stefán Einarsson 1966. 'Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss: Táknvísir og kristin áhrif'. *Eimreiðin* 72, 171–76.
- Sørensen, Preben Meulengracht 1993. *Fortælling og ære: Studier i islændingsagaerne*.
- Thorlacius, Árni 1886. 'Skýringar yfir örnefni í Bárðarsögu og Víglundar'. In *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenskra bókmenta að fornu og nýju* II, 299–303.
- Víglundar saga*. In *Kjalnesinga saga* 1959. Ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson. Íslensk fornrit XIV.

## ON THE OLD NORSE SYSTEM OF SPATIAL ORIENTATION

BY TATJANA N. JACKSON

**P**RINCIPLES OF SPACE ORIENTATION that characterise the *Weltmodell* of a medieval Scandinavian can be studied through the analysis of works of Old Norse literature. This is clear from certain published discussions of specifically Icelandic orientation, i. e. the semantics of orientation with regard to Iceland and to coastal navigation as reflected in the Icelandic Family Sagas (*Íslendingasögur*).

Since my interests mostly concentrate on the Icelandic Kings' Sagas (*Konungasögur*), I decided to examine them on the same subject. So as not to mix up my results with those of my predecessors I shall call principles of spatial orientation found in different saga genres by different names. I shall call 'Iceland-centred' those principles that have been observed in the *Íslendingasögur*, and 'Norway-centred' those that I manage to single out within the *Konungasögur*.

Before turning to my material I find it useful to give a summary of the results achieved in the study of 'Iceland-centred' orientation.

Two papers by Stefán Einarsson (1942 and 1944) are purely descriptive, but they have been brilliantly summarised and generalised by Einar Haugen (1957). Haugen's material, in its turn, has been re-presented and partially commented upon by Elena Melnikova (1978, 125–26; 1986, 33) and Kirsten Hastrup (1985, 51–57).

As it follows from the analysis of the *Íslendingasögur*, terms of cardinal direction were not monosemantic in Iceland; their meaning depended on the context in which they were used. Directions expressed by them could either correspond or not correspond to the compass. This means that the terms of direction could be used by the Icelanders with both 'correct' (better to say, 'approximately correct') and 'incorrect' meanings.

While summarising the material collected by Stefán Einarsson, Einar Haugen distinguished two types of orientation in space. He called them 'proximate' and 'ultimate'.

'Proximate' orientation is the one that is based on visual experience, both in the vicinity (cf. phrases like *fyrir norðan kirkjuna*, 'north of the church') and in the open sea, where celestial observation is the only possible way of defining one's location and of finding one's way. Cardinal terms are used in this case 'correctly'.



It is worth noting in this respect that the proper directions had been well known to the Icelanders since the time of their migration from Norway in the ninth century. They brought along with them not only the names of the four cardinal directions (*norðr*, *austr*, *suðr*, *vestr*), but also the names of the intermediate ones, those that reflected the peculiarities of the western coast of Norway. Thus, *landnorðr*, ‘north by the land’ meant northeast, *útnorðr*, ‘north and out, away’ meant northwest; correspondingly *landsuðr* meant southeast, and *útsuðr* southwest (cf. Stefán Einarsson 1942, 46; Haugen 1957, 451).

‘Ultimate’ orientation in space developed in land travel and in coastal navigation between the four Quarters (*fjórðungar*) that Iceland was divided into in 965 and which were named after the four cardinal directions. Going ‘west’ (from any geographical point within Iceland) meant movement towards the Western Quarter, going ‘north’ towards the northern part of Iceland, and so on. Accordingly, cardinal terms are used here ‘incorrectly’.

The ‘ultimate’ system is the one where directions are described in terms of a goal (each Quarter being a goal). Kirsten Hastrup (1985, 55) stresses that in such usage social coordinates enter into the physical (‘objective’) coordinates of space. Along with traditional terms for the designation of direction (*norðr*, *austr*, *suðr*, *vestr*), use is made of prepositions and adverbs with spatial meaning, such as *inn*, ‘inside’, *út*, ‘out’, and *upp*, ‘up’, *ofan*, ‘down’. According to Kirsten Hastrup’s precise characterisation (1985, 57), ‘ultimate’ orientation was ‘society-centred’, as opposed to ‘ego-centred’, ‘proximate’ orientation.

Sagas (though in a lesser degree than geographical treatises) also bear a reflection of a third orientation principle, a ‘cartographic’ one (cf. Podossinov 1978) which is connected with a theoretical system of geographical ideas. We can find it in the opening lines of *Ynglinga saga*, the first saga of Snorri Sturluson’s *Heimskringla* (I 9–10):

Kringla heimsins, sú er mannfólkit byggvir, er mjök vágskorin. Ganga hof stór ór útsjánum inn í jörðina. Er þat kunnigt, at haf gengr frá Nqrvasundum ok allt út til Jórsalalands. Af hafinu gengr langr hafsbotn til landnorðrs, er heitir Svartahaf. Sá skilr heimsþriðjungana. Heitir fyrir austan Ásía, en fyrir vestan kalla sumir Európa, en sumir Eneá. En norðan at Svartahafi gengr Svíþjóð in mikla eða in kalda . . . Ór norðri frá fjöllum þeim, er fyrir útan eru byggð alla, fellr á um Svíþjóð, sú er at réttu heitir Tanais . . . Hon kómr til sjávar inn í Svartahaf . . . Sú á skilr heimsþriðjungana. Heitir fyrir austan Ásía, en fyrir vestan Európa.

*Kringla heimsins* is divided, according to Snorri, into three parts, *heimsþriðjungar*. In *Ynglinga saga*, however, Snorri names only two of

them, the eastern one, Asia, and the western one, Europe, while in his *Edda* Snorri also names the third part of the world, Africa. Thus, in the ‘scholarly’ introduction to the *Ynglinga saga*, Europe occupies the western part—and in Snorri’s *Edda* and in geographical treatises the northwestern part—of the world circle. It is quite evident that the introductory chapters of *Ynglinga saga* reflect Old Norse geographical ideas on a theoretical level. The world-view described here answers to the main medieval cosmological concept. At the same time most of those geographical data that are spread over the sagas have a clearly different character, being a fixation (although a specific one) of the practical knowledge of Scandinavians collected during the Viking Age.

However, a ‘cartographic’ view of Norway can be found in the sagas not only in the ‘scholarly’ introductions, but also in those cases when, following the plot, the author needs to describe the boundaries of Norway. Thus, we read in *Saga Ólafs Tryggvasonar* by Oddr Snorrason (1932, 83–84):

Sa var konungr forðum er Nori het er fyrst bygði Noreg. en suþr fra Noregi er Danmork. en Suiþioð austr fra. En uestr fra er England. En norðr fra Noregi er Finnmark. Noregr er vaxinn með iij oddum. er lengð lanzins or utsuðre i norðr ætt fra Gautelfi oc norðr til Ueggestafs. En breiddin oc uiddin or austri oc iuestr fra Eiðascogi oc til Englandz sioar. En landit er greint oc callat þessum heitum Vik. Horðaland. Uplond. Prondheimr. Halogaland. Finnmark.

This description is strikingly close to reality. The three outstretched parts are: 1) the main southwestern part of Norway, 2) the narrow strip of land going as far north as Finnmark, and 3) the southeastern region which used to be much larger than at present and reached as far as the Göta.

Norway has no southern and western land-borders; from those sides it is washed by the waters of the North and the Norwegian Seas. To the north of Norway, beginning with *Vegestaf*, there was Finnmark. The eastern border (with Sweden) ran along the Göta, then through *Eiðaskógr*, and in its northern part, along the mountain range *Kjøl*. Correspondingly, only the northern and eastern borders of Norway are mentioned:

Óláfr konungr enn digri lagði þá undir sik allan Nóreg austan frá Elfi ok norðr til Gandvíkr (*Fagrskinna* 178).

Fra ægestaf norðan oc allt til ælvar austr (*Ólafs saga hins helga* 27).

In *Viðbætir við Ólafs sögu hins helga* in *Flateyjarbók* (IV 11) there is the following passage:

Hann [Ólafr Haraldsson] var einvaldskonungr yfir Noregi svá vítt sem Haraldr hinn hárfagri hafði átt, frændi hans, réð fyrir norðan Gandvík, en fyrir sunnan Gautelfr, en Eiðaskógr fyrir austan, Öngulseyjarsund fyrir vestan.

The description of Norway here corresponds closely to the one in a geographical treatise of the last quarter of the twelfth century (AM 198, 8°; *Alfræði íslenzk* I 11):

Noregr er kalladr nordan fra Vêgistaf, þar er Finnmork, þat er hia Gandvik, ok sudr til Gaut-elfar. Þesa rikis ero endimork: Gandvik fyrir nordan, en Gaut-elfr fyrir sunnan, Eida-skogr fyrir austan, en Aunguls-eyiar-sund fyrir vestan.

This ‘theoretical’ understanding of Norway being stretched far from south to north (which in fact is not quite correct since the real direction is from southwest to northeast) finds its reflection also in those ‘practical’ parts of the Kings’ Sagas which mainly tell of events in Norway. Saga heroes, primarily kings and earls, preparing themselves for battles, carrying out the Christianisation of their land, and solving their political problems, move from one place to another (within Norway) along its coastline, but they also go on long trips to the Baltic Sea, to the Atlantic Ocean or to the Mediterranean Sea. The directions of their movements are often indicated by saga writers.

To start my analysis I have taken *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* from Snorri Sturluson’s *Heimskringla* (I 225–372) and tried to choose those cases in which the terms of direction *norðr*, *suðr*, *vestr*, *austr* and their opposites—*norðan*, *sunnan*, *vestan*, *austan*—are used.

The material falls naturally enough into two large groups: terms of orientation within Norway, and those outside.

When the saga tells us about journeys *within Norway* the most common direction is the *northern* one: *norðr* is mentioned twenty-eight times (226, 241, 243, 247, 261, 275, 276, 277 (three times), 278, 293, 302, 303, 308, 310, 311 (twice), 315, 320, 322, 324, 325 (four times), 334, 344), along with seven cases of *norðan* (245, 276, 278, 279, 307, 325, 343). It stands in clear opposition to the *southern* direction: *suðr* eighteen times (244, 246, 248, 249, 250, 272, 276, 277 (twice), 309, 321, 322, 324, 325, 328, 334 (twice), 348) and *sunnan* twice (244, 324). The terms are used both in a general sense (when we are told, for instance, about the king’s plans to go to the north of his country next summer) and in situations when we are told about some concrete enterprises (the messengers are sent, as is told in the saga, north and south, both by land and by sea along the coast: *bæði norðr ok suðr með*

*landi it ýtra ok it øfra* 344). The terms can be applied to the whole coastline, from the southernmost point (from Agder *norðr á Rogaland* 277; *suðr til Víkrinnar* 334) to the far north (*norðr í Qmð* 325; from the island of Þjótta *suðr í Þrándheim* 322).

The *easterly* direction may also be singled out: seven times *austr* (228, 302 (twice), 303, 307, 309, 370) and *austan* twice (308, 314). But it is mostly used when describing territories in Norway (370), estates (302), people (308), the army from the eastern regions (314), etc., and rarely in connection with journeys.

The terms of direction can be applied not only to the whole country, but on a smaller scale. For instance, in the district of *Vík* (modern Oslofjord), one goes to the north of *Vík* from the south of *Vík* (303), i. e. from *Konungahella* on the Göta (310), etc. The king is said to have baptised all the people *austr um Víkina* (303). The king sails *suðr með landi*, *suðr um Stað*, and by early winter he comes *austr allt í Víkina* (309).

When the saga states that the king has given land to one of his kinsmen *norðan frá Sognsæ ok austr til Líðandisness* (307), the phrase is organised like the above quoted descriptions of Norwegian borders; only its northern and eastern boundaries are named because the sea forms the southern and the western boundaries.

It is easy to see that the saga describes journeys within Norway mostly in the northerly and southerly directions, while the easterly ones are rarely mentioned and the westerly never. Cardinal terms are used here 'correctly'. Accordingly we can say that the inner 'Norway-centred' system uses 'proximate' orientation, in Einar Haugen's terminology, although it is not restricted to local use but rather is extended to apply to directions throughout the large country of Norway.

Turning now to orientation *outside Norway*, as it is reflected in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, we can see that the system here has four main directions.

**East.** *Austr*—from Norway to Sweden (227, 229, 299, 311, 337); within Sweden (from Skåne to Gotland 255); from Sweden to Russia (*Garðaríki* 230); from Denmark to Skåne and *Gautasker* (260), to Sweden (349), to *Vendland* (349, 351). *Austan*—from *Vendland* to Norway (351); from Sweden to Denmark (351); from *Garðaríki* to the *Norðrlönd* via the Baltic Sea (252).

**West.** *Vestr*—from Norway to the *Veströnd* (291), to Orkney (241), to Ireland and Dublin (291), to England (320). *Vestan*—from Orkney to Norway (243), from Ireland to Norway (292).

**South.** *Suðr*—from Norway to Denmark (286), to *Vendland* (338); via Denmark, over Öresund and to *Vendland* (348); from the island of Bornholm to *Vendland* (252); from Sweden to Denmark (349). *Sunnan*—from Denmark to *Vík* (240); from *Saxland* to *Danavirki* (257); from *Vendland* to Norway (353).

**North.** *Norðr*—from Denmark to Norway (250).

Thus, the picture is as follows: to the east of Norway there are *Svíþjóð*, *Vendland*, *Garðaríki*; to the south, *Danmørk*, *Saxland* and again *Vendland*; to the west, *Orkneyjar*, *Írland*, *England*. The position of *Vendland* (the land of the Baltic Slavs) is dubious, since it lies to the south of the Scandinavian peninsula, near the ‘southern’ *Danmørk*, but traditionally Wends are considered to be among the *Austrvegmenn*, the peoples living along the eastern route.

It is very significant that there is no occurrence of direction from the north (*norðan*). I find this phenomenon quite easy to explain; here we are dealing not with the ‘ego-centred’, but with the ‘society-centred’ orientation system. The centre of orientation here is not an ‘ego’, but a society, in our case the country, and this country is Norway. But Norway is a northern country. Its very name, *Nóregr*, has originated from the word *norðrvegr* that had served as a designation of a route to the north.

Old Norse sources have preserved four place-names of the type ‘cardinal point + *vegr/vegir* (*vegar*)’. *Austrvegr* is often used, both in the singular and in the plural, while the three other directional terms are rarely used, and then mostly in early texts and only in the plural: *Vestrvegir* on a Swedish rune-stone, *Suðrvegar* in *Guðrúnarkviða II*, *Fóstbræðra* saga and Oddr Snorrason’s *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, and *Norðrvegar* in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*. These names could have served as designations of various actual routes in the easterly, westerly, southerly and northerly directions. Thus we see that medieval Scandinavians knew four ‘ways’ named after the four cardinal directions. The centre of this wind rose, as it may be called, could hardly have been Norway because the country itself was understood as one of the ‘ways’, the ‘way’ towards the north. It is evident that the original names of the country and its inhabitants, respectively *\*Norðvegr* and *Norðmenn*, could not have been of native origin (no peoples call themselves northern or southern). The name must have originated to the south of Norway, somewhere in the north of Europe (north Jutland?), or in the northern part of the Danish islands, or in the south of Scandinavia. And this is likely to have happened long before the sources in question were written down (Jackson and Podossinov 1997).

Early Scandinavians imagined the inhabited world (or the world visited by them) as consisting of four segments in accordance with the four routes corresponding to the four cardinal points. In the course of time all other lands in this system came to be viewed with respect to this country that occupies the northern 'segment'; I would even say, the northern quarter.

The position of other lands in their relation to Norway looks quite natural and even 'approximately correct', provided we take into consideration that sagas rarely use intermediate directions. Only once does the saga state that the wind *gekk til útsuðrs ok vestrs* (260).

Up to now I have not considered those cases that make us doubt the 'correctness' of the terms of direction in the orientation outside Norway.

The saga tells, for instance, how Óláfr Tryggvason came to England from Norway, sailed *allt norðr til Norðimbralands*, then again *norðr til Skotlands*, from there *suðr til Manar* (the Isle of Man), and then *til Bretlands* (Wales). From there he sailed *vestr til Vallands* (France), then he decided to return from the west (*vestan*) to England, but reached *Syllingar* (the Isles of Scilly), to the west of England (*vestr í hafit frá Englandi*, 264).

Óláfr Tryggvason's movements within Britain are described on the principles of 'proximate' ('correct') orientation. But suddenly he sails *vestr*, from Wales to France, and *vestan*, from France to England. These directions are not simply 'incorrect', but they are in strong opposition to the 'correct' ones. I can find two possible explanations: either Snorri was merely mistaken, or, in his understanding, France belonged to the Western lands (*Vestrlond*), and a trip to France is described not in its relation to England, where the hero has just been, but in its relation to the position of Norway in this system of orientation.

In fact, this is not an accidental mistake made by Snorri. France is understood as a western country not only by him, but also by an anonymous author of another compendium, *Fagrskinna*. Thus, speaking about Sigurðr Jórsalafari (the Crusader) both authors tell us that Sigurðr had come from Norway to England and that next spring he sailed *vestr* to France (*Fagrskinna* 315; *Heimskringla* III 240).

His further trip to Spain also turns out to be a western journey. He comes to Lisbon, now in Portugal, but then a large city in Spain, as Snorri characterises it, where heathen Spain was separated from Christian Spain. All the territories *er vestr liggja þaðan* are heathen (III 242). Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson comments on this usage: '*suðr* would be correct. For a long time the river Tagus separated the lands of Christians and

Muslims' (III 242 n.). If we look at the map we shall see that this river runs from east to west. Thus, the lands lie to the north and to the south of it, and here Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson was quite right. But I don't think that he was right to draw our attention just to this particular place in the sagas, since there are many cases when the indicated direction is in contradiction with the real one. We should either make our comments in each such case or accept the picture of the world as it was in the eyes of medieval Icelanders.

It was a matter of pure chance that I chose *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* with which to start my analysis. To my great disappointment there was scarcely any mention of eastward movements (which interest me most). Nevertheless I would like to enumerate those passages of the Kings' Sagas, such as they are, where voyages *austr* or *austan* are mentioned.

East of Norway are *Svíþjóð* 'Sweden' (*Fagrskinna* 178), *Eysýsla* 'the island Saaremaa, near the coastline of modern Estonia' (*Fagrskinna* 167, *Heimskringla* II 9, 10), *Kirjálaland* 'Karelia' (*Fagrskinna* 178), *Finnland* (*Fagrskinna* 167), *Garðar/Garðaríki* 'Russia' with *Aldeigjuborg* 'Ladoga' (*Fagrskinna* 141, 143, 165; *Heimskringla* II 414–15; *Orkneyinga saga* 54). Travellers go *austan* from *Hólmgarðr* 'Novgorod' to *Aldeigjuborg* 'Ladoga' (*Heimskringla* III 3), which is not 'correct' at all, since in fact it is a movement in a northerly direction; and from Ladoga to Scandinavian countries (*Heimskringla* III 91; *Orkneyinga saga* 55). It is quite evident that all the lands round the Baltic Sea, as well as those within eastern Europe, beyond the Baltic Sea, were considered to be eastern lands. By the way, the name of the Baltic Sea in Old Norse sources is *Eystrasalt* (*Heimskringla* I 252).

This *easterly* direction was thus used not only with respect to countries, but to smaller regions and towns within those countries. And thus the description of movements became still more 'incorrect'.

We can find such absolutely 'incorrect' directions in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (371) where it is told, among other things, that a Norwegian Augmund of Spanheim went from *Bjarmaland* ('the land near the White Sea') *austr* to *Suðrdalaríki* ('the land of Suzdal'), and thence *austr* to *Hólmgarðar* ('the land of Novgorod'), and from there *hit eystra* ('by the eastern (or more easterly) route') to the sea, and thus as far as *Jórsalir* ('Jerusalem'). Even with only the slightest idea of a map of Eastern Europe, one can understand that the indicated directions have nothing to do with the real ones.

This illustrative material is not complete, although it is typical, I think, of the whole set of data concerning Eastern Europe. Any move-

ment within the 'eastern quarter' is nearly always claimed to be movement *austr* or *austan*, which in the majority of cases is 'incorrect'.

The problem of source reliability that always troubles a historian can be viewed from a new angle. Among other questions that have to be answered there appears one more: should we disbelieve saga information on Eastern Europe because its geographical terminology seems to lack consistency, or should we explain all these apparent exceptions by the specific character of the Icelandic *Weltmodell*? I prefer to take the second position.

I have again used intentionally the term 'quarter' when speaking about European lands. In the 'Norway-centred' world-picture there exist, as we could see, four segments: the northern (that is Norway itself); the western (the Atlantic lands such as England, France, Iceland, Orkney and others); the eastern (the Baltic lands and the lands far beyond the Baltic Sea such as Russia); and the southern (Denmark and Saxony). The set of lands in each segment is quite permanent. The movement from one segment into another is defined not according to the compass points, but according to the accepted naming of these segments. Thus, when somebody goes from Sweden to Denmark he is said either to go *sudr* (*Heimskringla* I 349) because Denmark belongs to the 'southern segment', or to go *austan* (*Heimskringla* I 351) because Sweden belongs to the 'eastern segment'. This number of examples can easily be expanded. But, to prove that such 'segments' are not merely my invention and that they really existed, I want to remind you of such names, found in medieval sources, as *Austrhálfa* 'eastern region', *Norðr(h)álfa* 'northern region', and *Vestrhálfa* 'western region'. It is worth noting that there is no mention of the name *Suðrhálfa* in Old Norse sources (cf. Metzenthin 1941, 8, 76, 117). I think the reason for this is that practically all the lands that we now consider southern belonged, according to the medieval Scandinavian world-picture, to western or to eastern lands.

There are no descriptions in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* of trips to *Bjarmaland* (on the White Sea) or even to *Finnmark* (which is somewhat closer to Norway). If there were such stories, we would undoubtedly encounter some cases of an adverb *norðan* being used, since this was the way to describe journeys from those lands (*Heimskringla* II, 232). It looks at first sight as if I am contradicting myself in saying, on the one hand, that the 'ultimate' orientation has no term *norðan* and, on the other, that journeys from *Bjarmaland* and *Finnmark* were described with the help of this term. But, in my view, *Finnmark* and *Bjarmaland*



were understood by Icelandic writers as part of the *Norðrvegr*, as a continuation (in the northern direction) of the Norwegian coast and territory. I am sure that it is not accidental that *Finnmörk* is named in the passage quoted above (p. 74) from *Saga Ólafs Tryggvasonar* by Oddr Snorrason not only as a land lying to the north of Norway, but also in the list of Norwegian lands. Compare in *Historia Norwegiæ* (78):

Quarta H a l o g i a, cujus incolæ multum Finnis cohabitant et inter se commercia frequentant; quæ patria in aquilonem terminat Norwegiam juxta locum Wegestaf, qui Biarmoniam ab ea dirimit.

I am sure that journeys to these lands and back to Norway were described on principles of ‘proximate’ orientation.

We can say that when the Kings’ Sagas speak of voyages outside Norway, spatial orientation is described in terms of a goal, this goal being one of the four segments of the world, and that the orientation is, in the majority of cases, ‘incorrect’. I find it possible to say that this is nearly the same as the ‘ultimate’ system of orientation that had been formed in Iceland during journeys from one quarter into another and that found its reflection in the *Íslendingasögur*.

The specific character of the ‘Norway-centred’ system lies in the fact that while the ‘Iceland-centred’, ‘ultimate’ system of orientation had no permanent fixed centre, and the authors of *Íslendingasögur* effectively followed their heroes throughout Iceland, the ‘Norway-centred’, ‘ultimate’ system of orientation was constructed with respect to Norway. Such a transformation should not surprise us; it originates from the differences between the saga genres. The attention of *Íslendingasögur* is concentrated on Iceland as a whole, while *Konungasögur* are concerned with Norwegian history. That is why the attention of the authors of the Kings’ Sagas is directed towards Norway, but not towards other lands and countries.

The spatial and geographical structure of saga texts is not homogeneous. ‘Proximate’ and ‘ultimate’ orientations cross and intermingle as, for instance, in the passage from *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* discussed above (p. 78) where Óláfr sails to England (which must be understood as *vestr*), moves along its coast north and south (‘proximate’ orientation) and then goes *vestr* to France (‘ultimate’ orientation). The ‘Cartographic’ system of orientation is also observed in the same texts. This switching between systems causes problems for saga translators and interpreters. But these problems can be solved if attention is paid to the way of thinking of a medieval Scandinavian and to his *Weltmodell*.

**Bibliography**

- Alfræði íslenzk* I. 1908. Ed. K. Kålund.  
*Fagrskinna*. In *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum. Fagrskinna—Nóregs konungatal* 1984. Ed. Bjarni Einarsson. Íslenzk fornrit XXIX.
- Flateyjarbók* I–IV. 1944–45. Ed. Sigurður Nordal.
- Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*. In *Det Arnamagnæanske håndskrift 81 a fol. (Skálholtsbók yngsta)* 1910–86. Ed. Albert Kjør og Ludvig Holm-Olsen, 292–678.
- Hastrup, K. 1985. *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland: An anthropological analysis of structure and change*.
- Haugen, E. 1957. 'The Semantics of Icelandic Orientation'. *Word* XIII, 447–59.
- Historia Norvegiæ*. In *Monumenta historica Norvegiæ* 1880. Ed. G. Storm, 69–124.
- Jackson, T. and Podossinov, A. 1997. 'Norway in Old Norse Literature: Some Considerations on the Specific Character of Scandinavia Spatial Orientation'. *Skandinavistik* 27:2, 85–97.
- Melnikova, E. A. 1978. 'Geograficheskie predstavlenija drevnih skandinavov (K istorii geograficheskoj mysli v srednevekovoj Evrope)' ['Geographical ideas of Old Scandinavians (To the History of Geographical Ideas in Medieval Europe)']. In: *Metodika izuchenija drevnejshih istochnikov po istorii narodov SSSR [The Methodology of Studying Ancient Sources for the History of the Peoples of the USSR]*, 111–27.
- Melnikova, E. A. 1986. *Drevneskandinavskie geograficheskie sochinenija: Teksty, perevod, kommentarij [Old Norse Geographical Treatises: Texts, Translations, Comments]*.
- Metzenthin, E. M. 1941. *Die Länder- und Völkernamen im altisländischen Schrifttum*.
- Oddr Snorrason 1932. *Saga Ólafs Tryggvasonar*. Ed. Finnur Jónsson.
- Ólafs saga hins helga* 1922. Efter pergamenthaandskrift i Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, Delagardieske samling nr. 8<sup>II</sup>. Ed. O. A. Johnsen.
- Orkneyinga saga* 1965. Ed. Finnbogi Gumundsson. Íslenzk fornrit XXXIV.
- Podossinov, A. 1978. 'Kartograficheskij printsip v strukture geograficheskikh opisanij drevnosti (postanovka problemy)' ['Cartographical principle in the structure of geographical descriptions of ancient times (statement of a problem)']. In: *Metodika izuchenija drevnejshih istochnikov po istorii narodov SSSR [The Methodology of Studying Ancient Sources for the History of the Peoples of the USSR]*, 22–45.
- Snorri Sturluson 1941–51. *Heimskringla* I–III. Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Íslenzk fornrit XXVI–XXVIII.
- Stefán Einarsson 1942. 'Terms of Direction in Modern Icelandic'. *Scandinavian Studies Presented to George T. Flom*, 37–48.
- Stefán Einarsson 1944. 'Terms of Direction in Old Icelandic'. *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 43, 265–85.

### PROFESSOR JAMES E. CROSS (1920–96)

Jimmy Cross died on 18 December 1996. He was President of the Viking Society 1964–66, and a long-serving Member of Council. We miss his cheery presence, and it is meet, right and our bounden duty to pay tribute to his achievement.

Jimmy was a West-Countryman from the Forest of Dean. He went up to Bristol University in 1938 to read English, and it was there that the Second World War found him. He served in the Field Artillery, in North Africa, and at D-day in France, where he was severely wounded. In 1945 he returned to Bristol, took his first-class B.A. and went on to a Diploma in Education. He made his acquaintance with Scandinavia in 1947 when he was appointed English lektor at Lund University, holding that post for two years. In 1949 he returned to Bristol as a lecturer, becoming Reader in 1962, in which year he took his Swedish doctorate. In 1965 he was elected Baines Professor of English Language at Liverpool University in succession to Simeon Potter, and remained there until his retirement in 1987.

His *Festschrift*, published in 1985, catalogues his publications up to then. It is a formidable list as those who have tried to match his continuous stream of offprints know: more than seventy books, articles and notes, as well as many reviews. Nor did his research cease when he retired. A couple of dozen more items were to appear, including an important volume, a detailed study of a manuscript, Pembroke College, Cambridge, 25. In his introduction to that book he speaks of how he ignored 'the boundaries of separate disciplines', calling in the help of 'librarians, palaeographers, historians, experts on Latin and Celtic writings', as well as fellow Anglo-Saxonists. This was one of Jimmy's great strengths, his concern with the intermingling of cultures and disciplines. His Presidential Address to the Society is a case in point: his joint survey of the Old Swedish *Trohetsvisan* and a Chaucerian poem on a similar subject. It also informed his most important work, which traced relationships between Anglo-Latin and late Old English prose writings. Here he was one of the exponents of the study that was to develop into the prestigious *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* project.

He was eager to write on major themes like this, yet his restless mind did not neglect detail. In some of his most characteristic writings he would tussle at the meanings of Old or Middle English words that he thought had been neglected or misunderstood, probing their contexts. What we might call his Cross word-puzzles. Who but he would have written a learned article on the Anglo-Saxon elephant?

Though the British Academy did notice his existence by inviting him to give the Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture in 1972 ('The literate Anglo-Saxon'), Jimmy was one of those scholars, perhaps not untypical of his age and specialism, who are more honoured outside the United Kingdom than at home. He became an Honorary Docent of the University of Lund, a Visiting Professor at the University of Rochester, N.Y., and at Yale, a Senior Fellow of the Society for the Humanities at Cornell, and was elected a Corresponding Fellow of the Medieval Academy of America. And he was a welcome lecturer in Norway, Denmark, Finland and Iceland.

It was a very full scholar's life, and we are fortunate to have known him.

R. I. PAGE

#### DAVID ANTHONY HOWELL EVANS

David Evans, M.A., a long-standing member of the Viking Society, died on 22 April 1997. He was born in 1932 in Sheffield, educated at Manchester Grammar School, The Queen's College, Oxford, and Háskóli Íslands, Reykjavík, at which university he was awarded the degree of *Baccalaureatus Philologiae Islandicae*. He began his professional career lecturing in Modern English at the University of Uppsala. He returned to England, where he lectured in Icelandic in Oxford. Later he went once more to Uppsala, after which he took up a post at Háskóli Íslands. Finally, in 1978, he was appointed lecturer with special responsibility for Icelandic studies in the Department of Old and Middle English at University College Dublin. Among David's most striking characteristics were his loyalty to his heritage and his devotion to his chosen fields of studies. He took pride in being of Welsh extraction and taught himself Welsh. His love of Greek literature, instilled in youth, remained with him all his life. He spoke Icelandic and Swedish with the greatest fluency and was proud to count himself among the pupils of Gabriel Turville-Petre and Einar Ól. Sveinsson. As a teacher he was patient and caring, and he was much admired for his learning as well as his wit and humour. At University College, in addition to his work in Icelandic and Old and Middle English, he took great interest in the work of the Classics Department, contributed significantly to the M.Phil. programme in Medieval Studies and frequently attended the postgraduate seminars in Irish Folklore. Everything that David did bore the imprint of his total

dedication to truth and scholarly standards. In his reviews, not least in *Saga-Book*, he spoke out loud and clear against inferior workmanship and unfounded speculations. His own scholarly contributions include the excellent article 'King Agni: myth, history or legend?' (in *Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. Ursula Dronke *et al.*, Odense, 1981, pp. 89–105) and the carefully-executed edition of *Hávamál*, published by the Viking Society in 1986. This book I am proud to own in a copy inscribed by the author 'with thanks for thirty years' friendship in Reykjavík, Uppsala and Dublin'. In spite of his peripatetic career, David remained an Oxford man at heart. There, in his spiritual home, he kept a flat, which he visited as often as he could. He had looked forward to returning to Oxford for good after his retirement; but it was not to be. He was suddenly struck with severe illness, which he endured with characteristically stoic resolution, retaining his intellectual curiosity and his ironic wit to the very end. He will be missed: in his home country, in Ireland, in Sweden, in Iceland—and everywhere where scholarship, integrity and good humour are held in high esteem.

Bo Almqvist

## NOTE

### THE IRISH NICKNAME OF SITRIC CAOCH (D. 927) OF YORK

BY ANDREW BREEZE

SITRIC, king of Dublin and York, figures in many history textbooks. The son of Sitric (d. 896) and grandson of Ívarr the Boneless (d. 873), Sitric Caoch had a turbulent career. In 888 he killed his brother Sicfrith; in 917 he defeated a Leinster army at Leixlip and recaptured Dublin; on 15 November 919 he killed Niall Glúndubh (who ruled much of northern Ireland) at the battle of Islandbridge, near Dublin; expelled from Dublin in 920, he invaded north-west Mercia and destroyed Davenport (now a suburb of Stockport in Greater Manchester); he became king of York in 921 on the death of his cousin Ragnald; on 30 January 926 at Tamworth he married the sister of King Athelstan. Sitric died in early 927, and was succeeded at York by Olaf Cuaran (a son by a previous marriage), whom Athelstan quickly supplanted (*ASNP*, 62–63; *BB*, 44–45; Stenton 1971, 334; Smyth 1975–79, *passim*; Sawyer 1978, 115; *EHD*, 218).

This note deals with Sitric's nickname *caoch*, which is occasionally applied to him by scholars (Dolley 1958, 275; *EWGT*, 136). It is rarely explained correctly, however. In discussing Sitric's son Olaf Cuaran, Dunn thus states that Olaf had an Irish name, 'just as his father Sitric Caoch had been given an Irish cognomen (*caoch* "squint-eyed" or "blind")' (1965, 247; cf. Breeze 1997, who rejects Dunn's explanation of 'Cuaran'). In a Yorkshire Museum pamphlet, Hall similarly translates *caoch* as 'squinty'; Simon Evans, on the other hand, translates it as 'blind' (impossible here) and, better, as 'one-eyed' (Hall 1976, 17; *HGK*, 48–49). Dinneen understood Modern Irish *fear caoch* as 'dim-, one-, or squint-eyed man, a blind man' (*IED*, 159–60). More recently, *caoch* has been translated as 'blind, purblind', with no reference to one-eyedness or squinting (*FGB*, 185). Yet in the oldest Irish the sense *caoch* 'squint-eyed' was apparently unknown. There the standard sense is 'one-eyed'; also, more generally, 'purblind, dim-sighted' (*DIL*, s. v. *cáech*). These senses of Old Irish *cáech* may be compared with those of its cognates Middle Welsh *coeg* 'vain; blind'; Old Cornish *cuic*, which glosses *luscus vel monophthalmus* 'one-eyed'; Latin *caecus* 'blind'; and Gothic *haihs* 'one-eyed' (*GPC*, 529; Mac Mathúna 1979; Vendryes 1987, 6). Old Irish *cáech* is also used as an epithet, as of the Ulster king

Congal (d. 647), who (like the legendary Cormac mac Airt) was deprived of the sovereignty of Tara when he lost an eye (Byrne 1973, 58). Early Irish law stipulated that no king with a physical blemish could rule (Binchy 1970, 10). Marjorie Anderson notes that Congal is also known as *Cláen* ‘the squinting’ (1973, 150, n. 139). Whatever Congal’s exact handicap, the existence of both *cláen* and *cáech* shows that the Irish distinguished a squint from loss of an eye.

In the light of this evidence, there seem no grounds for believing Sitric had a squint, still less that he was dim-sighted or blind. If he had been unable to see well, he would have made a poor general. Thus the obvious interpretation of Sitric’s Irish epithet *cáech* is ‘one-eyed’. The careers of Admiral Nelson, General Kutuzov (who defended Russia in 1812), and General Dayan show that a blind eye need be no bar to military effectiveness; and Sitric, a successful leader in war and peace despite the loss of an eye (presumably in fighting), may be added to their number.

#### Bibliography and Abbreviations

- Anderson, Marjorie 1973. *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland*.  
*ASNP* = *Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems* 1922. Ed. Nora Kershaw.  
*BB* = *The Battle of Brunanburh* 1938. Ed. Alistair Campbell.  
 Binchy, D. A. 1970. *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship*.  
 Breeze, A. C. 1997. ‘The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 949 and Olaf Cuaran’,  
*Notes and Queries* CCXLII, 160–61.  
 Byrne, F. J. 1973. *Irish Kings and High-Kings*.  
*DIL* = *Dictionary of the Irish Language*.  
 Dolley, R. H. M. 1958. ‘Coinage’. In *Medieval England*, ed. R. L. Poole, 264–99.  
 Dunn, C. W. 1965. ‘Havelok and Anlaf Cuaran’. In *Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honor of Francis Peabody Magoun*, ed. J. B. Bessinger and R. P. Creed, 244–49.  
*EHD* = *English Historical Documents c. 500–1042* 1979. Ed. Dorothy Whitelock.  
*EWGT* = *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* 1966. Ed. P. C. Bartrum.  
*FGB* = *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* 1977. Ed. Niall Ó Dónaill.  
*GPC* = *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* 1950– .  
 Hall, R. A. 1976. *The Viking Kingdom of York*.  
*HGK* = *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan* 1977. Ed. D. Simon Evans.  
*IED* = *An Irish-English Dictionary* 1927. Ed. P. S. Dinneen.  
 Mac Mathúna, Liam 1979. ‘On the Expression and Concept of Blindness in Irish’, *Studia Hibernica* XIX, 26–62.  
 Sawyer, P. H. 1978. *From Roman Britain to Norman England*.  
 Smyth, A. P. 1975–79. *Scandinavian York and Dublin*.  
 Stenton, F. M. 1971. *Anglo-Saxon England*.  
 Vendryes, Joseph 1987. *Lexique étymologique de l’irlandais ancien: Lettre C*.

## REVIEWS

THE BOOK OF REYKJAHÓLAR: THE LAST OF THE GREAT MEDIEVAL LEGENDARIES. By MARIANNE E. KALINKE. *University of Toronto Press*. Toronto, Buffalo and London, 1996. xii + 322 pp.

This erudite, yet engaging, book represents the culmination of Marianne Kalinke's recent work on Icelandic hagiography, several strands of which are brought together in this first full-length study of *Reykjahólabók* since Agnete Loth's edition of 1969–70 (*Editiones Arnarnagæanæ* A 15–16).

As Kalinke's title suggests, the principal significance of *Reykjahólabók* (Sth. Perg. fol. nr. 3), apart from the intrinsic quality of the texts it preserves, resides in two things: its place in historical time and its relationship to Continental hagiographic traditions. The manuscript was produced by Björn Þorleifsson of Reykjahólar during the late 1530s, just as Icelandic Catholicism entered its final throes. It comprises twenty-two saints' legends, three of which are essentially copies of twelfth-century translations from Latin. The remaining texts were newly translated by Björn from Low German sources (see p. 27). In the first part of her study, Kalinke seeks to establish a receptive and compositional context for *Reykjahólabók*. After an initial survey of the development of hagiography, and changing attitudes to it, in the German language area (pp. 1–23), Chapter Two comprises a thoroughly researched and well written account of religious and scholarly life in Iceland in the decades preceding the Reformation. In particular, Kalinke focuses her discussion on what is known of Björn Þorleifsson's educational background (pp. 27–32), and on an enumeration of hagiographic material known to have been available in Icelandic libraries during the sixteenth century (pp. 34–44).

Perhaps the most valuable part of this book is the fascinating account of the sources of Björn's original translations in Chapter Three (pp. 45–77). Kalinke takes issue with the view propounded most fully by Hans Bekker-Nielsen and Ole Widding (in articles in *Maal og Minne* (1960), 105–28, and *Germanic Review* 37 (1962), 237–62) that the *Reykjahólabók* legends are poor translations from the fifteenth-century Low German *Dat Passionael*. In an examination of episodes from the *Reykjahólabók* versions of *Hendreks saga ok Kunegundis*, *Jeronimus saga* and *Augustinus saga*, Kalinke demonstrates that the Icelandic texts derive from different redactions of the legends from those preserved in *Dat Passionael* and that, where its own sources have survived, *Dat Passionael* can be shown to have condensed them considerably. Close comparison between Erbernand von Erfurt's *Heinrich und Kunegunde* and *Hendreks saga ok Kunegundis* (pp. 52–54) suggests that, contrary to Bekker-Nielsen and Widding's impression, the Icelandic text is faithful to both the style and the content of its source in the pre-*Passionael* tradition. The immediate sources of the Icelandic legends are no longer extant, and *Reykjahólabók* thus represents the only witness to certain Low German branches of the hagiographic tradition which antedate *Dat Passionael* and its High German counterpart, *Der Heiligen Leben*.

Björn Þorleifsson's contribution to *Reykjahólabók* is examined in Chapter Four, which sheds interesting light on the nature of 'authorship' in late-



medieval Icelandic texts and manuscripts. A comparison of passages from the legends copied from existing Old Norse translations—those of SS. Ambrose, Lawrence and Stephen—with corresponding episodes in the *Codex Scardensis*, Mombritius and *Legenda aurea* versions indicates that Björn was a scrupulous transcriber and that, in some respects, his exemplars were superior to those used by the revisionist scribe of *Codex Scardensis* (pp. 81–95). That the sources of the translated legends were now-lost Low German texts is confirmed by Kalinke's exhaustive analysis of the 'Low Germanic' features of Björn's syntax and diction (pp. 95–105). Björn's concern for the overall tautness and internal logic of *Reykjahólabók* and its place in his wider hagiographical *œuvre* are discussed on pages 106–22. The paradox of the legendary's historical backdrop is alluded to here and explored in detail in Chapter Eight (pp. 245–48), where Kalinke concludes that, like Snorri Sturluson and Haukr Erlendsson before him, Björn was inspired by the literary qualities of the stories he sought to preserve.

The remainder of Kalinke's book is concerned with these literary qualities, and here, again, many of the concerns of the author's earlier work are evident. In Chapter Seven ('Sacred Romances'), for example, folklore elements in *Gregorius saga biskups*, *Hendreks saga ok Kunegundis* and *Osvalds saga* are considered in the light of bridal-quest motifs in romance literature. Kalinke suggests that the legends gain from being read in the context provided by other texts in the manuscript (though a list of contents would have helped in this respect). Her own retellings and readings are both learned and entertaining—I was amused to discover, for example, that S. Nicholas's remarkable vision of the 'whirling fish' may be explained as a transmission error (pp. 142–43).

The preface to *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans* (quoted on p. 165) states that 'eru þeir fleiri menn, er lítill skemtun þykkir at heilagra manna sögum'. Let us hope that this highly enjoyable, scholarly study does much to redress the balance.

KATRINA ATTWOOD

WOMEN IN OLD NORSE SOCIETY. By JENNY JOCHENS. *Cornell University Press*. Ithaca and London, 1995. xvi + 266 pp. OLD NORSE IMAGES OF WOMEN. By JENNY JOCHENS. *University of Pennsylvania Press*. Philadelphia, 1996. xvi + 326 pp.

For some years now, Jenny Jochens has been one of the most prolific of scholars working on the perennially interesting theme of the role played by women in Old Icelandic history and literature. Thus the prospect of seeing this theme developed at book length, not once but twice, fills the reader with pleasant anticipation. These two volumes (henceforth *WONS* and *ONIW*) do not disappoint, in that they present a wealth of fascinating detail, never before collected to this extent. *WONS* offers a full picture of the lives of medieval Icelandic women, covering 'Marriage', 'Reproduction', 'Leisure', 'Work' and 'The Economics of Homespun'. From *ONIW*, the reader gathers an impression of the complex images of both divine and human females in Old Norse literature (categorised as 'Ancient Female Figures', 'Goddesses', 'The Warrior Woman', 'The Prophetess/Sorceress', 'The Avenger', 'The Whetter' and 'The Nordic

Whetter'). The justification for publishing two volumes, rather than a mammoth 'Old Norse Women', is thus apparently that one is essentially historical in approach, the other literary. Yet Jochens herself recognises that this division is artificial: not only are most of her sources 'literary' (though she does make use of laws), while her approach is essentially historical, in both books, but she also deliberately begins with the same thought linking 'historical' and 'literary' women in both. In *WONS*, Chapter One is entitled 'Guðný Bøðvarsdóttir and Guðrún Gjúkadóttir: Nordic-Germanic Continuity', and in *ONIW* these two female figures are each given a subsection in the first chapter entitled 'The Germanic-Nordic Continuum'.

*WONS*, the duller book, is also the more successful. Jochens has read her sources carefully, extracted everything of relevance, and ordered it logically and systematically. Her historian's training gives her a certain bias towards the laws and the *samtíðarsögur*, but she also makes full use of *Íslendingasögur* and *konungasögur*. An Appendix on 'Sources' gives a sketchy account of the problems of historicity, with a superficial nod to 'poststructural theories' (p. 181), but on the whole Jochens' approach is that the texts mean what they say and, on these topics and in these sources, this works well enough. Jochens tries to make use of the fact that the sources are Christian, while many of them describe a world that is pagan, to develop an argument that women's history is more characterised by continuity than men's, but can only come to the rather contradictory conclusion that 'an underlying continuum characterises issues of women and gender in the Germanic-nordic world, a continuum modified by Christianity and technological advances' (p. 161). *Ça change, mais c'est la même chose*. The book does not need this woolly framework and Jochens is at her best when disentangling the fascinating details of laundry day (p. 123), storing curds (p. 131) or the significance of 'shaggy coats' (p. 144).

*ONIW*, too, is a useful collection of material. The sources now range from Tacitus, through runes and poetry, to *fornaldarsögur* (though still including other sagas and laws), and the approach is historical in the sense that Jochens gives a chronological or evolutionary explanation for everything. Thus, 'the invading patriarchal Indo-Europeans swept . . . away' the 'religion of the original inhabitants of the Germanic-Scandinavian territories where a full-fledged mother goddess reigned in some distant period' (p. 80). Or 'the brother-sister bond was more ancient than the husband-wife contract' so that, in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, Sigrún's 'brother Dagr's response to her curse is indicative of the old way of thinking' (p. 151). Jochens is much exercised by the 'decline of the female element' in religion (p. 79), magic (p. 128) and royal power (p. 173), yet concludes that 'most often strong women are images constructed by male imagination' (p. 214). Thus, the 'continuity-change' paradox governs *ONIW* as much as *WONS*. For Jochens, medieval Icelandic literature reveals 'the patriarchal tenor of the nordic world' in which it was produced (p. 214), but also resonates 'with a common Germanic background' (p. 206). In the obligatory Appendix on 'Sources', Jochens is not concerned with historicity, as in *WONS*, but with the paradox of Christian authors who, 'three centuries into the new millenium', could 'draw coherent pictures of pagan women'

(p. 233). Like many authors before her, Jochens seems most fascinated by women when they are pagan and dabble in magic, just as ‘in nordic mythology Germanic men were prone to resort to women when they faced the unknown or the inexplicable’ (p. 139).

Both books damage their cause by their presentation: it is depressing to find that two university presses did not apparently care enough either for academic precision or for the English language to edit Jochens’ work more ruthlessly. *WONS* gets off to a bad start with lower-case *p* used instead of upper-case *P* in the first four pages of the text (also sporadically elsewhere in the book, at pp. 68–72, 76, 265–66). Both books abound in stylistic infelicities (the following examples are taken from *ONIW*): Danicisms in the syntax (e. g. a Scandinavian use of the definite article as in ‘the pagan Sweden’, p. 48) or in the form of literal translations (‘distributed on two persons’, p. 165; ‘little black skin book’ [of the Codex Regius], p. 207; ‘workwoman’, p. 283); English words misused (‘Malinowski interpreted myths as social charts’, p. 33; ‘a gray oxen’, p. 44) or misspelled (‘prophesy’ as a noun, *passim*; ‘born’ for ‘borne’, *passim*); and mixed metaphors (‘None of these strands can be isolated in a pure state . . . and the final amalgam of medieval civilization was achieved as the writings of the first two were filtered through the consciousness of the third’, p. 13; ‘This vignette was my lodestar’, p. 29). This lack of precision can muddy the argument. Admittedly it is difficult to find a good English equivalent of *Hetzerin*, but Jochens has used ‘female inciter’ in *WONS*, p. 199, and in a previous article, and the choice of ‘whetter’ in *ONIW* is bizarre, particularly as her use of the term is gender-specific. Her feeling for the Old Norse language can also be shaky, and her lack of control of linguistic concepts is revealed in a number of unsuccessful stabs at etymological or onomastic explanation: *Guðríðr* is a ‘derivative’ of *Guðrún*, *WONS*, p. 13; in *fordæða*, ‘the prefix *for-* adds a negative connotation to *dað* [sic] (deed) and designates a female by its form’, *ONIW*, p. 128; ‘Ildico suggests Germanic origin (similar to Norse *Hildigunnr*)’, *ONIW*, p. 137; of *hvot*, ‘the word is similar to English “whet”’, *ONIW*, p. 163. This culminates in a gloriously bizarre explanation of how ‘Kálfr’s nickname [i. e. Eggjar-Kálfr], acquired together with a pagan wife, may have been the single spark that inspired Snorri to expand Sigriðr’s role to *eggja* her new husband to avenge the alleged loss of her two sons’, *ONIW*, p. 177. Many of Jochens’ translations of Old Norse quotations could also have been sharpened up; thus nouns are sometimes translated as adjectives (*WONS*, p. 61), or the same line (*ok hugða ek þat args aðal*) is translated differently on two adjacent pages (*ONIW*, pp. 60–61). Her translations of Eddic poetry, in particular, tend to the impressionistic: a random example is when *Hárbarðsljóð* 30, *gladdak ena gullbjörto, / gamni mær undi*, is translated as ‘the gold-bright one was happy / to give me pleasure’ (*ONIW*, p. 58). These are not just typographical mishaps, but suggest a scholar uneasy with the language of her sources, which is unfortunate when she herself lays great stress on the linguistic and onomastic evidence (*WONS*, pp. 18, 20, 29–30, 42, 51, 61, etc.; *ONIW*, pp. 25–26, 65, 73–74, 76, 110, etc.).

JUDITH JESCH

THE POETIC EDDA. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by CAROLYNE LARRINGTON. *The World's Classics*. Oxford University Press. Oxford and New York, 1996. xxxiv + 323 pp.

Translations of the *Poetic Edda* into English are numerous. To date there are four well-known complete verse renderings, all of which have recently been reprinted: Henry A. Bellows (*The Poetic Edda*, 1923), Lee M. Hollander (*The Poetic Edda*, 1962), W. H. Auden and Paul B. Taylor (*The Elder Edda: A Selection*, 1969; and *Norse Poems*, 1981) and Patricia Terry (*Poems of the Vikings*, 1969, revised as *Poems of the Elder Edda*, 1990); there are also translations of some (not most) of the poems in the edition of Olive Bray (*The Elder or Poetic Edda*, 1908) and the superb work of Ursula Dronke (*The Poetic Edda* vols I and II, 1969 and 1997). Andy Orchard's version is forthcoming from Penguin in 1998. In prose we have the old renderings of *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* (CPB), and of select poems in Daniel G. Calder *et al.*, *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry*, vol. II (1983) (SA). None of these translations is satisfactory, however: Bray, SA, and (at present) Dronke are incomplete, and the former two lack explanatory notes; CPB, Bellows, Hollander, and Auden/Taylor use unpalatable archaic diction, and are often forced into distortion in their attempts to reproduce Norse metrical forms in English; Hollander, Bellows, Bray and Auden/Taylor also obscure the organisational design of the main manuscript of the *Edda* by reordering the poems; most of these renderings (Dronke and SA excepted) also contain numerous manifest inaccuracies. In view of this an accurate, informed, and aesthetically pleasing new translation is a clear desideratum (cf. the opinion of Joseph Harris in Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, eds, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, 1985, pp. 73–74). Carolyne Larrington's book fails to meet this need.

Larrington's short Introduction provides brief details of related works in Old Norse; a synthesised view of the Norse cosmos; outlines of the chief gods, races and heroes, and of 'mythic history'; sections dealing with the reception and critical interpretation of the *Edda* by English writers and by scholars; and details of Norse metre, which are marred by inaccurate descriptions of the stanza forms, and which are in any case somewhat otiose, since there is no real attempt to reproduce metre in the translation. The book is completed by an annotated index of names. There is general confusion over names, with no statement of principle about their treatment; some are translated in the text (e. g. 'New-moon' for *Nýi*, *Völuspá* 11.1.), some only in the Index (e. g. *Hild*, 30.4.), others not at all (e. g. *Draupnir*, 15.1., *Gunn*, 30.4.).

Larrington bases her translation on the latest edition of the standard text, *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, I. Text, ed. Gustav Neckel, 5th edn, rev. Hans Kuhn (Heidelberg, 1983) (NK). A detailed examination of her translation unfortunately shows it to be riddled with basic errors and stylistic infelicities; we have space here to record only the former from the first poem in the Codex Regius MS, *Völuspá*, but the lengthy list produced from this single text will provide sufficient indication of the overall unreliability of the book. This is the more surprising given that *Völuspá* is the

best-known poem in the collection, one for which detailed commentary and a glossary are available in the English version of Sigurður Nordal's edition (1978), and that the translator claims (p. x) that 'the poetry is not difficult to understand'. Numbers refer to stanzas/lines in Larrington's translation. The comments given reflect our own work on a new one-volume parallel text edition of the Edda.

*Völuspá*: **1.3.** 'wished', rather 'wish'; *vel* omitted. **2.1.** 'I, born of giants, remember very early' (!), rather 'I remember giants, born long ago'. **2.2.** *hofðo* omitted; 'then' is weak for *forðom*. **2.3.** 'I remember', second instance is an unwarranted addition. **2.4.** 'Measuring Tree', absent from Index, and not a proper name in *NK*. **3.4.** 'chaos yawned', the concept is rather of a void; *enn* omitted. **4.1.** 'First', rather 'Then'; 'the earth', rather 'land(s)'. **4.2.** 'the glorious ones who shaped the world between' (!), rather 'they who shaped glorious Midgard'. **4.3.** 'the hall of stones', rather 'the stones of the hall [i. e. earth]'. **4.4.** 'plants', rather 'leek' or 'grass'. **5.1.** 'Sun' personified (but not 'Moon'), an instance absent from Index. **5.3.** 'hall', rather 'halls'. **5.4.** 'place', rather 'places'. **6.1.** 'Powers' absent from Index. **7.1.** *Iðavelli* translated as 'Idavoll Plain' here, but as 'Idavoll' in 60.1.; Index lists both under 'Idavoll'. **7.2.** 'they', rather 'they who'; 'altars', *hørg* is sg. **7.3.** 'their' added. **10.1.** 'Then', rather 'There'. **10.3.** 'Many', rather 'many'. **10.4.** *dvergar* misconstrued as acc. **11.2.** 'West' wrongly numbered 11.1. in Index. **11.3.** 'and' added. **11.4.** Second 'and' added. **11–12.** Gap between stanzas inconsistent with statement on p. xxix. **12.1.** Second 'and' added. **12.2.** 'Colour and Wise', order follows *Hauksbók*, unnecessarily and without indication. **13.** All instances of 'and' added, except the second in 13.3. **14.2.** *líóna kindom* omitted; 'the people of Lofar', rather 'down to Lofar'. **14.3.** 'from the stony halls', rather 'from the stone of the hall [i. e. earth]'. **14.4.** 'dwelling', *siṛ* is pl.; 'Loamfield', *Aurvanga* is pl. Index mistakenly lists this as identical to the dwarf name Loamfield (*Aurvangr*) in 13.4. **15.3.** 'and' added. **16.3.** 'they'll', rather 'it will' (*þat* refers to *tal*). **17.3.** 'Ash' and 'Embla' wrongly numbered 17.4. in Index. **19.3.** 'valley', *dala* is pl. **19.4.** 'ever green', *æ* modifies *stendr*, not *grænn*. **20.3.** 'is called', rather 'they called'. **20.4.** 'slips', *skíði* is sg. **20.5–6.** Misleading punctuation. **20.6.** 'sons', rather 'children'. **22.2.** 'seer' for *volo*? Cf. title *The Seeress's Prophecy*; *vitti hon ganda* is problematic, but 'she charmed them with spells' is remote from most opinion. **24.1.** *oc* omitted; 'over', rather 'into'. **24.4.** 'indomitable' mistranslates *vígspá*. **25.3.** *alt* omitted. **26.3.** 'broke apart', rather 'were trodden on'. **27.3.** 'she sees, pouring down, the muddy torrent', rather 'she sees a river flowing in a muddy fall'. **27.4.** and **28.7.** 'wager', rather 'pledge'. **28.2.** 'the' unnecessary. **28.6.** 'Mimir', an instance absent from Index. **29.2.** 'a rod of divination', *spáganda* is pl.; the meaning 'spirits of prophecy' is more likely. **29.3.** 'all the worlds', rather 'every world'. **30.1.** 'coming', *komnar* is pp. **30.3.** *enn* omitted; *önnor* misconstrued as referring to *skildi*. **32.1.** 'so' added; 'lovely' mistranslates *mær*. **32.2.** and **32.4.** 'began (to)' + inf., simple preterite perhaps better. **32.3.** 'very quickly', rather 'soon'. **35.2.** 'Loki' wrongly numbered 35.4. in Index; 'she recognized' misconstrues *áþeccian* 'like'. **36.1.** 'from poison

valleys', rather 'through poison-valleys'. **36.2.** 'of', rather 'with'; 'Cutting' wrongly numbered 36.4. in Index. **37.3.** 'Never-cooled Plain' entered as 'Never-cooled' in Index. **37.4.** 'who is', rather 'and he is'. **38.3.** 'fall', *fello* is pret. (*falla* is the *SnE* and *Hauksbók* variant); 'roof-vents', *líora* is probably sg. **38.4.** 'the', rather 'that'. **39.1.** 'in' redundant. **39.3.** 'those who', *þannz* is sg.; 'seduced', *glepr* is pres.; 'the close confidantes', *eyrarunu* is sg.; 'of other men', rather 'of another'. **39.4.** 'Nidhogg' wrongly numbered 39.7. in Index; 'bodies', rather 'corpses'. **39.4–5.** 'sucks . . . tears', *saug* and *sleit* are pret. **39.5.** 'the corpses of men', rather 'men'. **40.1.** 'an', *in* is def. art. **40.2.** 'offspring of Fenrir' perhaps needs explanatory note; 'Fenrir' wrongly numbered 40.4. in Index. **41.1.** 'The corpses of doomed men fall' (!), rather 'He fills himself with the flesh (or blood) of dead men'. **41.2.** 'the gods' dwellings are reddened' (!), rather 'he reddens the dwellings of the gods'. **41.3.** 'the next summer', *sumor* is pl. **42.1.** *þar* omitted. **42.3.** *um hánom* omitted. **42.4.** and **43.4.** Inconsistent translation of *hani* obscures parallelism. **43.1.** 'for' mistranslates *um*. **44.2., 49.2.** and **58.2.** 'rope', rather 'bond, fetter'. **44.4., 49.4.** and **58.4.** Inconsistent translation of *sigtyva* obscures parallelism. **45.2.** 'bond', *siftom* is pl. **45.3.** 'much' mistranslates *mikill*. **46.1.** 'are at play', rather 'play'; 'catches fire', rather 'is kindled'. **46.2.** 'Giallar-horn' not hyphenated in Index. **46.3.** 'Heimdall' wrongly numbered 46.2. in Index. **47.1.** 'tree', rather 'ash'. **47.2.** 'is loose', rather 'breaks loose'. **47.4.** 'Surt' wrongly numbered 47.7. in Index; 'kin', rather 'kinsman'. **48.2.** 'Giantland', an instance absent from Index. **48.3.** 'howl', rather 'groan'; 'their' added. **48.4.** 'princes' mistranslates *vísir* 'wise ones'. **49.1.** *nú* omitted. **50.3.** *enn* omitted; 'in anticipation' has no basis in text. **50.4.** 'corpse', *nái* is pl.; n. to *Naglfar* on p. 266 uncritically accepts Snorri's description of its being made from the nails of the dead. **51.2.** 'waves', rather 'sea'; 'Loki' wrongly numbered 51.4. in Index. **51.3.** 'There are the monstrous brood with all the raveners' (!), rather 'All the kindred of the monster journey with the wolf'. **52.2.** 'the sun of the slaughter-gods glances from his sword', questionable interpretation—'the sun shines from the sword of the slaughter-gods' is more orthodox. **52.3.** 'crack open', rather 'crash'. **53.3.** 'Surt' wrongly numbered 53.6. in Index. **53.4.** (and elsewhere) 'must', rather 'will'. **54.** Numbered 55 in *NK*. No mention of the repetition of the half stanza refrain in *Hauksbók*. **54.2.** 'Vidar' wrongly numbered 54.3. in Index; 'Beast of Slaughter', rather 'carrion beast' for *valdýri* (absent from Index, and not a proper name in *NK*). **54.4.** 'Loki' wrongly numbered 54.7. in Index; 'Loki's', rather 'Hvedrung's'. **55.** Numbered 55H. in *NK*; no indication given that this stanza is found only in *Hauksbók*. **55.1.** 'in the air', rather 'across the sky'. **55.2.** 'terrible jaws of the serpent', rather 'jaws of the terrible serpent'; 'above' is weak for *i hæðom* 'in the heights'. **55.4.** brackets unnecessary; 'Vidar' wrongly numbered 55.7. in Index. **56.1.** 'of Earth', rather 'of Hlodyn'. **56.3.** 'of earth' mistranslates *miðgarðz*. **56.4.** 'leave' is weak for *ryðia* 'abandon'; 'homesteads', *heimstøð* is sg. **56.5.** 'Fiorgyn' wrongly numbered 56.10. in Index; 'child', rather 'son'. **58.1.** *nú* omitted. **59.2.** 'Earth', rather 'earth'; 'Earth' absent from Index. **59.3.** 'waterfall', *forsar* is pl. **60.4.** 'Mighty One', rather 'Mighty god'. **61.3.** *hofðo* omitted. **62.1.** 'Without sowing the fields', rather 'Unsown fields'. **62.2.** 'ills' for sg.

*böls*. **62.4.** ‘sage’s’, questionable—*NK* has *Hroptz*; ‘palaces’, rather ‘victory-sites’. **63.2–3.** ‘widely, the windy world’, rather ‘the wide wind-world’. **64.3.** ‘noble lords’, rather ‘trustworthy men’. **64.4.** ‘spend their days in pleasure’, rather ‘enjoy pleasure throughout eternity’. **65.2.** ‘judgement-place’, rather ‘divine rule’. **66.3.** ‘Nidhogg’ wrongly numbered 66.5. in Index.

It is regrettable that Oxford University Press should lend its name to a work of such deficient scholarship, still more regrettable that as a result many new readers will place their trust in its accuracy.

EDWARD PETTIT  
JOHN PORTER

EGILS SAGA: DIE SAGA VON EGIL SKALLA-GRIMSSON. Herausgegeben und aus dem Altisländischen übersetzt von KURT SCHIER. (Series:) *Saga: Bibliothek der altnordischen Literatur*, (subseries:) *Island—Literatur und Geschichte*. (No volume number in series.) *Diederichs*. München, 1996. 391 pp.

The present volume is a ‘completely revised edition’ of Kurt Schier’s *Die Saga von Egil*, which the Diederichs Verlag had published as volume 1 of a short-lived series *Saga* in 1978. According to an advertising leaflet from 1996, the new series called *Saga: Bibliothek der altnordischen Literatur* is to encompass five subseries and two companion volumes, with two or three volumes appearing each year; for the subseries *Island—Literatur und Geschichte* alone twelve volumes are projected. Should this ambitious plan succeed (at this writing four volumes have appeared), it will put an end to the long interregnum in the German-speaking world that has followed the lapsing out of print of almost all the texts of the venerable *Sammlung Thule*. (A set of five new translations by Rolf Heller, including *Egils saga*, had appeared in 1982 but is also currently out of print.)

The translation has been revised on many points of detail: the few inaccuracies pointed out in reviews of the 1978 edition have been corrected (though the correction made by D. A. H. Evans in *Saga-Book* 24:5 (1997), 355–56 appeared too late), the diction has frequently been modernised and the word order adjusted for clarity, longer compound sentences have been split up, and additional paragraph breaks have been introduced. The text has moved slightly further in the direction of modern idiomatic German, but it remains accurate and stylistically close to the original (tense shifts are retained and personal and geographical names remain untranslated, for example), which is Schier’s stated goal. The footnotes have been eliminated and their content relegated to the endnotes and the index of names.

Rather too modestly, Schier claimed in 1978 to have translated the verse into ‘prose’ (1978, p. 11), a statement that was repeated by that edition’s reviewers but was nonetheless patently untrue, as proved by the word order (e. g. ‘nicht rühm ich dessen sehr mich’, *lausavísa* 11). For the new edition he has gone further in the direction of poetry and now admits to using a ‘rhythmically tightened structure’ with some alliteration, while continuing to reproduce the

kenning constructions faithfully (1996, p. 17). The resulting compromise is both accurate and aesthetically pleasing, without the disadvantages of a strict *dróttkvætt* imitation. The *lausavísur* have been made still more accessible by the introduction of prose paraphrases into the fine-print apparatus following each strophe.

The ‘Einführung’ (pp. 11–19) is now more than twice as long as its 1978 version, but only minor changes have been made to the rest of the apparatus, which consists of additional texts (the full texts of Egill’s three long poems, Olthere’s travelogue), seventy pages of endnotes, a thirty-five-page ‘Nachwort’, a bibliography, genealogical tables, maps, a name index and a subject index. The five archaeological illustrations in the 1978 edition have all been eliminated, two maps added, the bibliography shortened, the timeline removed from the ‘Nachwort’ and made a separate appendix, and slight rewordings and additions (primarily a sprinkling of references to recent scholarship) made to the notes and ‘Nachwort’.

Sad to say, the revised apparatus was not proof-read as carefully as its predecessor. There are dozens of new typographical errors (I found only two that were carried over from the first edition), most involving elementary problems of word processing: character spacing, paragraph indenting, capitalisation, the use of italic and bold type, the use of quotation marks vs. italics for quotations and for secondary work titles (lack of consistency on this point repeatedly leads to confusion), hyphenation at line breaks, and the ‘special’ characters of Icelandic and German (some appear in the wrong place or not at all; some acute accents are missing). One cross-reference was left with the page numbers from the 1978 edition uncorrected: on p. 338, the reader should be referred to pp. 270–73, not 301–04, for the notes on the battle of Vinheiðr. Carelessness is especially evident in material added or changed since 1978. A telling example is on p. 320: after a reviewer of the first edition (Joseph Harris in *Speculum* 55 (1980), 396) pointed out that the reference to *Haupteslösung* here should really be to *Sonatorrek*, this correction was undertaken, but the result is both misspelled and in the wrong font. Another compounding of errors occurred when the note to the place name *Eyr* (ON *Eyrr*) in ch. 19 was expanded by—evidently thoughtless—copying from the corresponding note of Sigurður Nordal’s in his edition (‘*Eyrr* er *Skáneyrr*; þar var fyrrum fjölsóttur kaupstefnustaður’): the headword was changed from the correct *Eyr* of the 1978 edition (this is the form used in the translation) to *Eyrr* and supplemented by the tag ‘auch *Skáneyrr* (“Eyr in Schonen”)’. This is followed, as in 1978, by the correct geographical and historical identification, which is good, but as the name *Skáneyrr* occurs nowhere in *Egils saga*, it has no business being a headword in a textual note, and in any case neither name should have had a double *r* (or an acute accent) here. To add to the confusion, the phantom has been absorbed into the name index as well: ‘*Eyr* (*Eyrr*) = *Skaneyr* (*Skáneyrr*)’. Other examples of this kind could be mentioned. More serious is the fact that when the bibliography was shortened (inexplicable enough in itself), twelve of the works cited in abbreviated form in the notes and ‘Nachwort’ were left stranded there without corresponding entries in the bibliography. Also, the



number of references given under certain headwords in the subject index (e. g. 'Neiding', 'Runen') has been reduced—it is not clear whether by accident or design.

Other things were not changed that might have been. It is puzzling that Schier acted on almost none of the specific points of criticism that the first edition's reviewers had made regarding the lexical consistency of the translation (especially Marianne E. Kalinke in *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 79 (1980), 301–02) and details of the apparatus (especially Harris, *loc. cit.*). The systematic transliteration of *æ* as *ae* instead of *ä* (*Saeun*) and *œ* as *oe* instead of *ö* (*Moer*), though not criticised by earlier reviewers, is in my opinion a pointless irritant in a German-language text: although it does establish unambiguous transliterations for *æ* and *œ*, others remain ambiguous (*ö* = both *ø* and *o*, *d* = both *d* and *ð*, vowel length is unmarked), so this is no justification; nor can pronunciation be an argument, since the table on p. 240 tells readers that the sounds are pronounced *ä* and *ö*; the practice is not followed consistently anyway (*Ägir*); and most importantly, it is bound to disturb and mislead readers—such as the book's own typesetter, who divided *kva-edi* on p. 247.

A certain logical inconsistency resonates throughout Schier's commentary. In the newly written parts of the introduction, on the one hand, Schier repeatedly reminds the reader of the necessity of treating the sagas as literary creations of the thirteenth century and distances himself from the idea that they 'reflect "Germanic" thought and action, "Germanic" behaviour and ethical norms, in short the "Germanic" mind, and are therefore a part of our own past' (p. 11). He has toned down or deleted some of his earlier remarks in the 'Nachwort' on the historicity of *Egils saga* and its value for the study of Germanic religion. But there are also signs that he is not entirely willing to relinquish a belief in the saga's historical reliability that deviates considerably from the consensus of modern saga scholars. What is one to make, for example, of the bald statement that 'Egil is a historical person . . . and much of the scaldic poetry attributed to Egil was really composed by him' (p. 12)? Similarly, on p. 338 Schier triumphantly cites the information given in *Arinbjarnarkviða* as proof that the saga's account of Egill at York must be based on fact—and as a lesson that one cannot judge the historicity of a story by its plausibility—even though on p. 322 he had grudgingly had to admit with Baldur Hafstað that Egill's authorship of the poem cannot be proved. Contradictions aside, the apparatus remains full and reliable, even if it may not deserve Harris's label 'thorough and up-to-date' to the extent that the 1978 version did.

MARVIN TAYLOR

ISLÄNDISCHE ANTIKENSAGAS. BAND I: DIE SAGA VON DEN TROJANERN, DIE SAGA VON DEN BRITISCHEN KÖNIGEN, DIE SAGA VON ALEXANDER DEM GROSSEN. Herausgegeben und aus dem Altisländischen übersetzt von STEFANIE WÜRTH. (Series:) *Saga: Bibliothek der altnordischen Literatur*, (subseries:) *Unterhaltung und Gelehrsamkeit*. (No volume number in series.) *Diederichs*. München, 1996. 342 pp.

This collection of ‘sagas of the ancient world’, which apparently is to be followed by at least one more volume with the same title, contains German translations of the *Hauksbók* recensions of *Trójumanna saga* and *Breta sögur*, including the poem *Merlínusspá* (which is translated into Wagnerian long lines), and of the longer version of Brandr Jónsson’s *Alexanders saga* (AM 519 a, 4to), together with the younger ‘Letter of Alexander to Aristotle’. The volume inaugurates a subseries devoted to ‘entertainment and learning’ in Kurt Schier’s new series *Saga*, and it follows the plan familiar from Schier’s *Egils Saga*: the translations are preceded by a ‘Vorwort’ (pp. 7–8) and followed by notes (pp. 283–300), a ‘Nachwort’ (pp. 301–24), a bibliography, and an index of personal and place names for each saga.

Würth has produced an eminently readable and idiomatic translation, though this entailed taking certain liberties with the text. Conjunctions are added, deleted or changed (e. g. *ella* > ‘und’, p. 35), often in such a way that parataxis becomes hypotaxis; lexical consistency is not a high priority, nor does Würth shy away from introducing specialised terms such as ‘Omen’ and ‘Orakel’ in place of Icelandic circumlocutions (pp. 27, 46); the sequence of tenses is normalised in such a way that shifts occur only between sentences. Although the apparatus contains extensive discussion of the translation procedure the Icelandic writers followed, Würth reveals next to nothing about her own procedure (she says only that tense shifts were retained ‘as far as possible’, p. 8), so it is difficult to say how many of the discrepancies between original and translation are deliberate. In any case, some translations are clearly wrong, which is regrettable for a book that is sure to be relied on by medievalists of various disciplines for translations of these important texts, even though I am inclined to give it higher marks for accuracy, all in all, than Rolf Heller was willing to do (in *Germanistik* 38 (1997), 844). Some syntactic phenomena were not recognised, such as the conditional force of the present subjunctive in ‘hafi (hann) . . . vil ek . . .’ (p. 46), the compound genitive in ‘einka vin foður mins oc minn’ (p. 242), the preposition *at* (not conjunction of result) in ‘at þat ma hverr maðr ætla . . .’ (p. 154), or the interrogative conjunction *hvárt* (not pronoun) in ‘Hvart hyggið er . . .’ (p. 159). Würth makes a family of five siblings out of ‘Kastor ok Pollox af Sparta bræðr Eline . . . ok Klitemestre ok Agamemnon’ (p. 16); the text is corrupt, but *Agamemnon* cannot be a genitive parallel to *Klitemestre*, and Finnur Jónsson solved the problem a century ago by inserting *átti* after the last *ok*: ‘and (she) was married to Agamemnon’. Many logical links between clauses are distorted (a baffling example is the passage on the snakes on p. 276: both Würth’s translation and her explanatory note are contradicted by the Icelandic), and the boundaries between indirect speech, direct speech and narration are occasionally misplaced (as on pp. 13, 45, 47);

the paragraph break on p. 148 should logically have come two sentences earlier. A recurring problem is the translation of genuine superlatives as if they were intensives (e. g. 'þickir sv saga sannlegvz' > 'sehr glaubwürdig', p. 44, similarly p. 47). I did not find other lexical mistranslations as serious as those cited by Heller, but there are numerous minor inaccuracies: 'vier Fesseln' (p. 22) for *.ííí. fiotra* 'drei Fesseln'; 'seiner Natur eher entspreche' (p. 25) for *nær sinn skapi vera* 'ihm lieber sei'; 'Ich hoffe' (p. 26) for *vettir mik* 'Ich erwarte'; 'Hör doch die ewige Schmach' (p. 30) for *heyr þar eilifa vfrægð* 'Welch ewige Schmach'; 'so geschah nun mehrerlei gleichzeitig' (p. 35) for *þa dro nv til hvartvegia* 'dazu führte nun mehrerlei'; 'hier' (p. 44, twice) for *þar* 'dort'; 'mit List' (p. 46) for *smiðvelvm* 'mit mechanischen Vorrichtungen'; 'Ketten' (p. 46) for *festar* 'Seile'; 'schrecklich' (pp. 229, 231) for *hervelegan, herveligre* 'erbärmlich'; and others. There are also omissions, such as *ok þaðan* (p. 47) and *hinir nanvstv* (p. 48).

The apparatus is less full than that in Schier's *Egils Saga*, but the reader can look forward to a separate monograph by Würth on the subject of the Icelandic *Antikenroman*, which is promised in the bibliography. Besides supplying background information on the Norse texts and the principal Latin sources, the notes and 'Nachwort' concentrate on cataloguing the stylistic and substantive changes made by the translators. While many remarks are useful, some remain speculative, since neither a precise Latin source text nor a clear manuscript history is available for all parts of all the texts, and some are presented in a rather confusing way. The reader who turns to the 'Nachwort' after having read *Die Saga von den Trojanern* in this book will be puzzled to learn on pp. 307–09 that 'die *Trójumanna saga*' (without specification of manuscript) added direct speech to the account of Hercules's attack on Ilium and omitted the content of Paris's dream: this is true of all manuscripts of the saga *except* the one translated in this volume. (The note to p. 24 explains the manuscript transmission of Paris's dream correctly.) By eliminating repetition in the apparatus, room might have been made for more informative notes. The mythological prologue unique to the *Hauksbók* version of *Trójumanna saga*, one of the most intriguing texts in the book, gets surprisingly short shrift, and various problems are oversimplified; for example, Würth's notes on the *interpretatio Germanica* of Saturn and Jupiter (to pp. 11, 13, 17, 64, 160, 184) paint an incomplete picture of the variety of name-equations attested in other texts. Aside from some inconsistencies in the treatment of names, I found only half a dozen typographical errors, none serious.

MARVIN TAYLOR

RUNES AND Runic INSCRIPTIONS: COLLECTED ESSAYS ON ANGLO-SAXON AND VIKING RUNES. By R. I. PAGE. Edited by DAVID PARSONS. Bibliography by CARL T. BERKHOUT. *The Boydell Press*. Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1995. xiii + 346 pp.

These twenty-three articles, written over thirty-seven years, are here reprinted in the order of their original publication with two exceptions: the first, 'Quondam et Futurus', a survey by Professor Page of the current state of Anglo-Saxon

runic studies, written specially for this book, and the twenty-first, '*Runeukyndigeristeres skriblerier: the English Evidence*', dating from 1987 but never before printed. The essays deal chiefly with Anglo-Saxon runes and runic inscriptions, though two are included on the Scandinavian runes of the Isle of Man. Professor Page's scholarly interests are, of course, much wider than this collection might imply; just how wide is revealed by the full list of his publications from 1957 to 1994 which closes the volume.

A distinctive feature of this book are the brief, newly-written 'Postscripts' appended to most of the articles, in which Page considers new evidence that has come to light since he originally wrote and recent developments in scholarly opinion relevant to his topics.

'Quondam et Futurus' (1994) ranges widely over Anglo-Saxon runic studies. R. Derolez's contention that we should treat epigraphical and manuscript runes as manifestations of a single tradition rather than of two separate ones is queried. Page thinks the choice is much wider: 'there may have been many different permutations of runic and roman knowledge' (p. 4) among Anglo-Saxon inscribers and scribes. A more important question, he argues, is the degree to which the two traditions, both obviously rooted in epigraphy, have diverged by the time of the surviving Anglo-Saxon inscriptions and runic manuscripts. Variations between roman and runic letters in inscriptions are difficult to interpret, partly because of our imperfect dating techniques and partly because we cannot judge who was responsible for the choice of script—the inscriber or some supervisor of his work. Page emphasises the practical and technological considerations—the amount of space on the artifact, for example, or the availability of tools capable of forming curved shapes—which may lie behind the choice. B. Odenstedt's recent survey of the forms of runic letters in the very earliest (i. e. pre-750 AD) Germanic runic inscriptions is criticised: Page lists a number of English omissions from Odenstedt's corpus (St Cuthbert's coffin, some coins), and queries several of his inclusions.

In 'Northumbrian *æfter* (= in memory of) + Accusative' (1958), Page examines what may be a special linguistic feature of Northumbrian inscriptions. OE *æfter* most commonly governs the dative; but the accusative is frequent in some Northumbrian glosses. It is uncertain whether this usage represents genuine Nb. OE dialect or results from an attempt to imitate the grammar of Latin constructions (Latin *post*, 'after', takes the accusative). The relevant examples, mostly from the various early Anglian glosses, are set out. Most later Nb. inscriptions show *æfter* governing the dative. Thornhill I, Wycliffe, N. R. Yorks., and Yarm, N. R. Yorks., may show accusative forms though the inflections are ambiguous. Page concludes that we cannot prove the existence of a Northumbrian use of OE *æfter* (= 'in memory of') with the accusative, though 'the possibility of such a usage is too great to be rejected out of hand' (p. 22).

'An Early Drawing of the Ruthwell Cross' (1959) outlines the history of the monument from its partial destruction in the seventeenth century to its transfer to a specially built chamber within the Ruthwell church in 1887. The damage suffered by the cross has obscured some of its runic inscription but parts of what was lost are recoverable by reference to early drawings. Previously the

earliest known drawing was William Nicolson's, made in 1697 when the lower stone was already broken; but Page here publishes his rediscovery of a drawing (now in Cotton Julius F. VI, fol. 352) of part of the cross's runic inscription made by Reginald Bainbrigg *c.* 1600, before the cross was broken. Bainbrigg's accuracy as a transcriber is only fair; but Page thinks we may rely on his '+ond' or '+and' as the first letters of the cross's short version of the OE poem *The Dream of the Rood*, and some pointing at the ends of the first verse-lines of sections *a* and *b* of the inscription.

'Language and Dating in Old English Inscriptions' (1959) begins by observing that if the language of an inscription is to be used to date the monument on which it appears, we must be sure that the inscription is contemporary with the monument. The Whithorn head-stone, the Chester-le-Street stone, the Monkwearmouth stone with 'tidfirþ', the Hartlepool 'hilddigyþ' stone, the three Thornhill rune-stones and the Lindisfarne rune-stones are all put forward as possible examples of stones fashioned some time before they were inscribed. The possibility of the use of deliberately archaic linguistic forms in inscriptions is considered. Comparing English material from early manuscripts of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Page concludes that the Ruthwell Cross inscription might well be contemporary with it (i. e. early eighth century), though the back mutation evident in Ruthwell's form 'hêafunæs' suggests a date a little later than Bede's *HE*—towards the middle of the eighth century.

The chief aim in 'The Bewcastle Cross' (1960) is to see if inscriptions II and IV on the monument contain (as was commonly claimed when Page wrote) references to Alcfrith, son of Oswiu King of Northumbria, and his wife Cyneburuh, daughter of Penda King of Mercia. The supposed mention of Alcfrith in inscription II includes the sequence: '[.]lcfri|\*', where the first letter may be either the *a*-rune or the *o*-rune and the asterisk represents a runic character 'of which the form is clearly visible but the value undetermined' (see p. 49, note 12). Inscription IV reads 'kynibur\*g' and contains the same mystery-rune as '[.]lcfri|\*', though here it almost certainly represents *u*. Inconsistencies in J. Maughan's records of the cross, combined with the evidence of earlier transcriptions, lead Page to conclude that 'the inscriptions on the Bewcastle Cross were altered after his [Maughan's] early readings and before his later one' (p. 60)—probably between 1852 and 1857. An examination of pre-Maughan transcripts of inscription II reveals a consistent level of disagreement with the monument's readings as they now appear. No evidence emerges affecting the interpretation of the mystery-rune following the sequence 'olcfri' (or 'alcfrith'); but Page concludes that the connection of the monument with Alcfrith cannot be supported.

'The Old English Rune *ear*' (1961) is about the rune transliterated *êa* and generally believed to represent the final addition to the English runic series. Its name probably means 'grave, earth', though scholarly opinions differ considerably. The values of the rune are the reflex of Gmc *au*; the diphthong in OE *beheoldon*; the breaking of either Gmc *a* or Gmc *e* before *r* + consonant; and the back mutation of *e*. Page favours Keller's view that the *êa*-rune is formally an adaptation of the Gmc *a*-rune, though it might also have something of the

Anglo-Frisian *o*-rune in it. It is the only Anglo-Saxon rune representing a diphthong, which raises the question of why it was needed at all when diphthongs could easily have been represented by a sequence of two existing runes.

'A Note on the Transliteration of Old English Runic Inscriptions' (1962) emphasises the pitfalls of studying Old English runic inscriptions in a transliterated form. For instance, it is wrong to identify the graph *æ* in the transliterations 'gidræ[*f*]d' and 'limwærignæ' of forms from the Ruthwell Cross inscription as an Anglian dialect feature. The ligature in a manuscript written in the roman alphabet might be so interpreted; but *æ* in these forms is only the modern, conventional transliteration of the *epel*-rune (for West Germanic *ō* in conditions where it is subject to *i*-mutation); it tells us nothing about the quality of the vowel in the inscriber's language. The interpretation of the *æsc*-rune in inscriptions from parts (at least) of Mercia and Kent presents a similar difficulty; in these areas, OE *æ* was raised to *e* so that the name of the rune would become *esc*, not *æsc*, and the rune might therefore have been regarded as standing for the raised vowel. Dialectal variation of this kind is obviously concealed by any formal system of transliteration.

'The Use of Double Runes in Old English Inscriptions' (1962) sets out the standard view that the earliest runic inscriptions do not employ double runes, 'even to express long or repeated sounds' (p. 95), but questions if this is as true of Anglo-Saxon runic inscriptions as it plainly is of Scandinavian ones. The evidence of East and continental West Germanic inscriptions is inconclusive. In Old English inscriptions, most examples of double runes for single sounds and of single runes for double sounds are paralleled either in manuscript spellings or in non-runic inscriptions. Double vowel runes are sometimes open to interpretation as indications of vowel-length, a practice which, again, is attested in manuscript texts. Page concludes: 'the irregular spellings discussed above do not prove the existence of an Old English runic rule of writing single symbols for double or repeated sounds' (pp. 102–03).

In 'Anglo-Saxon Runes and Magic' (1964) Page notes the tendency of runologists to fall back on the uncertain theory of Germanic rune-magic when faced with inscriptions they cannot interpret. Here he re-examines the evidence for rune-magic in Anglo-Saxon England. The most positive Scandinavian evidence is runological: supposedly magical words, particularly the words *laukar*, *alu*, and *agla*, occur on objects with 'amuletic or sacral' uses. The literary evidence, mostly from Eddic poetry, is suspect: 'texts usually leave it uncertain whether the runes are magical in themselves or because of the words they form' (p. 108). On the Anglo-Saxon side, literary evidence for rune-magic is found in Bede's story of Imma's loosening of his bonds by magic in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Although *litteras* in Bede's text need not refer to runes in particular, Ælfric, in his version of Bede's story in the *Catholic Homilies*, translates using the word *runstafum*, showing that he understood runic magic to have been involved. The strongest Anglo-Saxon runological evidence is the inscriptions on three amulet rings—Greymoor Hill, Bramham Moor, and a third recorded in a Bristol collection (Page discusses these inscriptions in more detail in a later essay, pp. 303–04).

'Ralph Thoresby's Runic Coins' (1965) describes a Swedish coin with runic inscription known to have belonged to the Leeds antiquary, Ralph Thoresby, but now untraceable. The antiquary William Nicolson identified it as runic in 1691 and transcribed the runes as *Thur gut luetis*, though it was George Hickes in 1701 who interpreted it correctly as *Thor deus populi*, or *Thor nationis deus*. There were also at least two other runic coins, both Anglo-Saxon *sceattas*, in Thoresby's collection: an *Epa* coin, and a rarer type with the inscription *Æþiliræd*. A coin identical with Thoresby's *Æþiliræd* coin as described reached the British Museum sometime before 1868 and Page thinks it is Thoresby's, though he can find no record of its purchase. The 'Thor' coin was sold in London in 1764, to the Duke of Devonshire according to the records, though there is mention of a later owner in 1778. We hear no more of the coin after that. Thoresby's *Epa* coin has also disappeared.

'The Old English Rune *eoh*, *ih* "Yew-tree"' (1968) is difficult to summarise briefly. This rare rune is represented in the Dickins system of transliteration by the yogh, though its values are uncertain because it seldom occurs in inscriptions of which the meaning is clear. C. L. Wrenn thought it represented Germanic *hw*, but Page suspects it represents a front vowel. A reconsideration of the phonology and semantics of the rune's name and its values in Anglo-Saxon usage leads to a revised transcription of the Caistor-by-Norwich inscription as *raihan* which Page would here interpret (according to a rather strained chain of inference beginning with the root *\*rei-* 'coloured', 'dappled') as 'painter', 'rune-master'.

'The Runic Solidus of Schweindorf, Ostfriesland, and Related Runic Solidi' (1968) is a review article based on P. Berghaus and K. Schneider, *Anglo-friesische Runensolidi im Lichte des Neufundes von Schweindorf (Ostfriesland)* (Cologne and Opladen, 1967). The Schweindorf runic solidus, discovered in 1948, is considered by Berghaus and Schneider to be related to the *hada* runic solidus from Harlingen, Friesland, and the *skanomodu* runic solidus, of unknown origin, in the British Museum. Page questions Berghaus's confident numismatic dating of all three solidi (on the basis of the supposed derivation of features of their design from certain Roman coin-types) to the sixth century. He reports on a new examination of the *skanomodu* piece in the British Museum: the expert view is that the coin was struck, not cast as Berghaus maintains. On the runes themselves, Page argues that both **hada** and **skanomodu** are personal names rather than (respectively) a common noun meaning 'fighter', and a three-word sentence: *skan o modu*, meaning 'Er hat immer durch Mut gegläntzt'. The Schweindorf inscription is **weladu**, of which a number of interpretations are possible. The linguistic dating of all three solidi is shown to be fraught with all manner of uncertainties.

In 'Runes and Non-Runes' (1969) Page rids the Anglo-Saxon corpus of 'texts which have been wrongly or doubtfully listed as runic' (p. 162), and suggests a few additions, most of them recently discovered: rune-stones at Monkwearmouth, Orpington and Lindisfarne, the Leningrad Gospels, the Loveden Hill urns, the Dover brooch, the Welbeck Hill bracteate, the Sarre pommel, and (probably) the York wooden spoon and the cow's foot-bone from Hamwih inscribed 'catae'.

In 'How Long Did the Scandinavian Language Survive in England? The Epigraphical Evidence' (1971), Page reassesses the material from inscriptions both runic and roman relevant to this topic, first considered, in conjunction with the evidence of place-names and loanwords, by E. Ekwall in his 1930 article 'How Long Did the Scandinavian Language Survive in England?'. Taking Norse inscriptions in England first, Page adds to the list some texts not considered by Ekwall and eliminates others as irrelevant or valueless; but he concludes that as a group they 'tell us little of the continued use of the Norse tongue in the lands the Vikings settled' (p. 190). Of inscriptions in English from the Danelaw dating from the tenth to the twelfth centuries, Page concludes that although the Barking cross and the Aldbrough and Kirkdale sundials all show Norse linguistic influence, the evidence is meagre. The dearth of Norse-influenced inscriptions in England should not, however, be taken as evidence that there were few Norse speakers in the country. The 'Postscript' to this article adds some brief information about more recent finds.

In 'Anglo-Saxon Texts in Early Modern Transcripts: 1. The Anglo-Saxon Runic Poem' (1973), Page criticises Hempl's claim of 1903–04 that it was George Hickes who added material from the runic page of MS Cotton Domitian IX to the printed version of the Old English *Runic Poem* in his *Thesaurus* (Oxford, 1703). Hickes's edition of the poem, based mainly on MS Cotton Otho B. X, became our only source of knowledge of the poem's text when Otho B. X was damaged by the fire of 1731. Page doubts if Hickes borrowed the extra material directly from Domitian IX; he thinks it had already been added to Otho B. X by some modern hand and he suspects Robert Talbot, the early Tudor antiquary who, as R. Derolez has shown, annotated the runic page in Domitian IX and was certainly interested in alphabets and runes.

'Some Thoughts on Manx Runes' (1980) raises the question of why so small an island as the Isle of Man should have so many (twenty-nine) known Viking-Age rune-stones. Part of the reason, it is suggested, may be that the search for rune-stones on Man has been particularly energetic. Early drawings or casts of rune-stones once known but now untraceable may supply information about some of them; and Page here reconstructs a lost inscription from the village of Andreas on the basis of a transcript in MS BL Loan 29/259. The rebuilding of many of Man's churches in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought many of the inscriptions to light. Most of the stones are grave-stones and one must assume that they were originally set up in churchyards, as is confirmed by Page's list of the original find-spots. The 'Postscript' records the finding of two further pieces of rune-inscribed stone in Man.

In 'The Manx Rune-Stones' (1983), Page criticises Magnus Olsen's 1954 edition of the island's runic inscriptions as outdated and here offers 'a general view of the corpus' (p. 226). He suggests that the rune-stones 'combine two energetic traditions . . . a local Celtic one of raising crosses, and the incoming Norse one of raising runic memorials' (pp. 227–28). There are Norwegian parallels to the commemorative formula found on most of the Manx stones, though their use of the word *kross* 'cross' derives, in Page's view, directly from Celtic influence on the Scandinavian runemasters of Man. Page draws attention



to 'some diversity of practice' in the earliest Manx inscriptions, 'showing that the introduction of the script was not a simple one' (p. 237). Appendices to this essay offer (I) provisional transcripts of most of the Manx inscriptions; (II) illustrations of Manx fuparks and variant rune-forms; and (III) an analysis of the grammar of the inscriptions in terms of classical Old Norse.

'On the Transliteration of English Runes' (1984) emphasises that runes should not, ideally, be transliterated into the roman alphabet; scholars 'should be encouraged to approach these texts in runic terms' (p. 245). Moreover, difficulties stand in the way of any simple system of transliteration. The fact that some runes vary radically in form requires a system of indicating the choice of forms made in any given inscription. Sound-changes over time must sometimes be assumed to have affected the name of the rune and consequently its value (a point made earlier in Page's 1962 article: 'A Note on the Transliteration of Old English Runic Inscriptions', summarised above). Page argues for a system of transliteration for English runes distinct from the Scandinavian system. He deprecates some features of Dickins's system, but praises others and uses it as the basis for a new, improved version of his own.

'New Runic Finds in England' (1987) revises the estimate of the corpus of Anglo-Saxon runic inscriptions represented in Page's 1969 article 'Runes and Non-Runes' and his 1973 book *An Introduction to English Runes*, in which he listed between 60 and 70 runic objects. The book contained two maps of finds of Anglo-Saxon runic inscriptions with clear provenances, one for the pre-650 period plotting ten objects, the second for the post-650 period plotting over forty objects. Page notices here nine new runic inscriptions (in addition to coins) discovered since 1973. All are on portable objects, and of the seven that are datable, five are pre-650. Most come from the same areas as the objects plotted on the earlier of Page's two 1973 maps (the south of England and the east midlands in the earlier map, the north of England in the later). The content of the new inscriptions is on the whole disappointing, though one (part of a pair of tweezers from Brandon, Suffolk) exhibits a clear personal name, 'aldred'. The 'Postscript' mentions six yet more recent finds and a few additional runic coins.

'A Sixteenth-Century Runic Manuscript' (1987) concerns a paper manuscript (CCCC 379) in the hand of the Tudor antiquary Robert Talbot (c. 1505–58) left to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge in 1575 by Archbishop Parker. Folio 9<sup>r</sup> contains a roman alphabet against each letter of which appear the names of the corresponding runic letters in a mixture of Old English and Scandinavian forms; Latin glosses on the rune-names, probably added later than the rest of the text; and (in four cases) the actual runic characters. Page identifies various rune-rows, both English and Scandinavian, and associated annotations on folio 5<sup>r</sup> of MS St John's College, Oxford, 17, as Talbot's source for this material. Talbot reveals a limited understanding of runic conventions, for example by lumping English and Scandinavian runes and rune-names together. Page argues that Talbot took the name of the rare *k*-rune, *calc*, from MS Cotton Domitian IX in the British Museum—a manuscript Talbot certainly knew because he added Latin glosses to the rune-names it contains.

In the rather uncharacteristic '*Runeukyndige risteres skriblerier: the English Evidence*' (1987), Page explores the literacy of inscribers and readers of English inscriptions (runic and roman, Old English and Latin), and considers the extent to which Anglo-Saxon inscriptions generally succeed as communicative utterances. The inscribers of appeals for prayers for the souls of the dead obviously expected readers of their work. Some of the Hartlepool stones are of this type; but they were discovered 'under the earth's surface in obscure connection with graves', perhaps 'beneath the skulls of the dead' (p. 299) in some cases. Hartlepool I is so well preserved as to suggest that it has always been below ground level. For this text, Page suggests, 'there may have been no living audience'; Page also believes that the names on St Cuthbert's coffin 'may not have been intended to be read by people' (p. 299). Page turns next to evidence of the literacy of the inscribers themselves. He thinks that an informal text 'cut on an object of no substantial value' is 'more likely to be the autograph of a literate carver' (p. 300). The rough quality of the inscription on the cremation urn from Loveden Hill, Lincolnshire, suggests that 'the inscription, once incised, had achieved its object: it was important to cut the runes, not to read them' (p. 300). Page tests the literacy of the carvers of the Thornhill stones according to whether or not their word-division is sensible. Only Thornhill I fails the test: its words are unsatisfactorily split between lines. Page concludes: 'Each inscription needs studying within its context, expressed as precisely as possible. And we must not assume error or illiterate practice too easily' (p. 313).

In 'Roman and Runic on St Cuthbert's Coffin' (1989), Page argues against the popular idea of a connection between runes and paganism by pointing to the evidence of the Overchurch stone in the Wirral that runes were officially accepted in late Anglo-Saxon England for ecclesiastical purposes in memorial inscriptions. Runes were even welcome in the scriptorium: the *horn-* and *wynn-*runes penetrate bookhand by the eighth century, and the eighth-century Blythburgh, Suffolk, bone writing tablet, no doubt used in the scriptorium, contains a runic inscription. St Cuthbert's coffin, with its mixture of runes and roman, proves that runes were not 'thought unsuited to professional Christian or learned use' (p. 317) in Northumbria at the end of the seventh century, though Page thinks that the runic letters in this inscription are 'secondary, dependent on a pre-existent roman' (p. 321). Page finds other examples of this 'casual mixture of the two scripts' (p. 322) among East Northumbrian inscriptions in particular, as well as some parallel runic and roman texts. He cannot explain the mixture of runic and roman on St Cuthbert's coffin, but 'can at least set its inscriptions into a context that is both local and learned' (p. 323).

In the final essay, 'Dating Old English Inscriptions: the Limits of Inference' (1990), Page returns, though pessimistically, to an old problem. St Cuthbert's coffin can be dated by its historical references. Of non-runic inscriptions (apart from coins), the Kirkdale, N. Yorks., sundial contains reference points placing it between AD 1055 and 1065. Other inscriptions are datable within broad limits from the known dates of the institutions which produced them, for example

grave-markers from Lindisfarne, Monkwearmouth and probably Hartlepool. Typology and style, which provide the art-historian's chief points of reference, are not very reliable. Obstacles to the linguistic dating of inscriptions are the difficulty of establishing the linguistic significance of their forms and the fact that some inscriptions are too brief to offer a large enough linguistic sample for dating purposes. Inscriptions often come from areas of Anglo-Saxon England from which no manuscripts survive, so it is usually impossible to use manuscript texts as a control in assessing the significance of inscribed forms. A further complication is that we need to take account of the possibility of deliberate archaism: this could, if present, compromise linguistic dating. Palaeographical dating—dating by reference to the forms of letters used—is possible in theory though always difficult in practice. Page concludes: 'it is unlikely that dating will be other than approximate until a lot more primary material comes to light' (p. 336).

This is a most valuable and enjoyable book. Professor Page often emphasises how little we know of Anglo-Saxon runes, though he still finds plenty to say about them. Although his corpus has not yet appeared and may never do so, this volume reveals the weight of his contribution to the establishment of the texts of Anglo-Saxon runic inscriptions over the years; much of the work here, based as it is on a minute study of the inscriptions in their original context and on records of examinations of them made when they were more legible than they are now, will never be superseded and all later runologists will be grateful for it. But Page's book provokes some rather bleak reflections on the future direction of the study of Anglo-Saxon runes. Page himself, though enviably well-equipped as a student of most aspects of Germanic language and literature, has often insisted on the importance of remaining within the rather strict limits of Anglo-Saxon runology—limits that he himself has done much to define and within which he operates with unrivalled effectiveness. But experts in other fields—linguists, for example, or anthropologists—could scarcely fail to contribute something to our understanding of this runic material; indeed, a few of the topics on which Page writes here, particularly magic and literacy, really require the attention not only of runologists but also of other kinds of specialist. One wonders, however, if these specialists will dare to enter this field, for runology alone is clearly an exacting enough subject to fill an academic lifetime. Collaboration between runologists and other kinds of scholar might be the answer, though arrangements of this kind involving medievalists have never been common and seem to arise more by accident than design.

David Parsons has re-edited these essays very well, though it is a pity that the book contains no index of the inscriptions mentioned. The 'Erratum' slip supplies a representation of a rune which was omitted from p. 5; but there are other, similar omissions of runic characters on pp. 167 and 285. I was held up for a moment by the fact that, although the letters *æ* and *ǣ* are clearly differentiated in normal font, they are almost identical in italic (on pp. 87 and 89, for example). On p. 254, line 22, 'need' should be 'needed'. Finally, on p. 177 I was startled to read that in the eighteenth century John White of Newgate Street 'was a well-known dealer in antiquaries, which he sometimes made

himself.' Perhaps Professor Page, with the aid of this fascinating (if very expensive) book (£49.50), will make some too to follow in his footsteps.

PETER ORTON

OLAUS MAGNUS: HISTORIA DE GENTIBUS SEPTENTRIONALIBUS, ROMÆ 1555; DESCRIPTION OF THE NORTHERN PEOPLES, ROME 1555, VOLUME I. Translated by PETER FISHER and †HUMPHREY HIGGENS. Edited by PETER FOOTE, with Annotation derived from the Commentary by †JOHN GRANLUND, abridged and augmented. *Works issued by the Hakluyt Society*, second series, 182. *The Hakluyt Society*, London, 1996. xcvi + 288 pp.

The emergence of Sweden as a Protestant power was an involuntary and haphazard process, which lasted nearly as long as the much bloodier Reformation in England. Like Henry VIII, Gustavus Vasa plundered his clergy, bullied his subjects and mistrusted Papists and Lutherans impartially; his sons and grandson tended to put foreign policy before confessional commitment. It was the belief of exiled Swedish Catholics that their country had been deceived into schism, and was only waiting for a change of heart in the ruler, or a new dynasty, to rejoin the true faith. This was the *raison d'être* of the Magnus brothers, Joannes and Olaus, successive archbishops of Uppsala, who from 1530 to 1557, at various addresses on the continent (Gdansk, Vienna, Padua, Venice, Vicenza, Bologna, Trent, Rome) waged a war of words on two fronts.

On one, they hoped to convince their king and nobility that both tyranny and heresy were odious in themselves and inconsistent with the grandiose past and future of the kingdom, so that Gustav would come to his senses and expel those 'perfidious and sordid Lutherans who would never be able to propose anything notable, anything grand, anything worthy of kingly majesty'. On the other, they tried to persuade Catholic Christendom that Sweden was a rich country, worth conquering by the forces of the Counter-Reformation, preferably the Emperor's. They proposed this more than once to Charles V, and set out the project in a memorandum to Campeggio (convincingly dated 1538 by Foote). They were apparently untroubled by the inconsistency of these appeals. The Swedes, invincible in war, in wisdom and in virtue, would simply join and obey whichever ruler, native or foreign, defended their ancient faith—provided he were not a Dane of any description. For there was common ground between the papal pensioners and many of their fellow countrymen in the 'false memory' of a great Gothic past, and the true one of a frightful blood-letting by the last Danish king in 1520, at Stockholm. Olaus had witnessed the 'Bloodbath'.

Joannes and Olaus developed these themes with tireless versatility and art in their four great books: Olaus' *Carta Marina*, an atlas of the North published in 1539, and *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus* (published in Rome, at his own Brigittine press, in 1555); John's *Historia* of the metropolitan see of Uppsala (completed 1536, published 1557) and *Historia de Omnibus Gothorum Sueonumque Regibus* (finished 1540, published 1554). John's work was on sale in London by 1559, to the annoyance of the Danes, and *De Gentibus*, which

Olaus 'composed for many years with toil and in the shadows' became an immediate best seller. Both histories were presented to William Cecil in 1561 to further a planned match between Queen Elizabeth and Erik XIV, even though they included mordant criticism of Erik's father. The Vasas were parvenu kings, obsessed with 'the verdict of history', and anxious to validate their policies through the control of historical writing; but they founded their claim to rule on inheritance from the ancient Gothic kings glorified by the Magnuses, and on revulsion from Danish tyranny—a revulsion which the work of the brothers kept alive. The contest between the king and the exiles was not as unequal as it might seem.

Dispossessed, proscribed, dependent, sickly, horseless and hungry, the Magnuses were reduced in 1541 to lodging 'in a little room where the altar and the table and the bed and the privy appeared to be combined', and the smell was so bad that two friendly Spanish doctors prescribed incense and open windows. But they saw themselves as the mouse gnawing at the net that held the Swedish lion captive, and by importunity, by charm, by zeal, by duplicity and by doggedness they could deploy powers far subtler than those available in dull Stockholm, where Gustavus inhibited the few clever men he had on his side, while the press vented 'scurrilous religious pamphlets on the lowest level of verbal utterance' (Alrik Gustafson). They had papal patronage, imperial sympathy, the superb presses and engravers of Venice, the international brotherhood of humanism (Hosius, Cochlaeus, and Dantiscus were their correspondents) and the interest of useful prelates such as Cardinals Campeggio and Pole, the patriarch Querini of Venice, Archbishop Schaumburg of Cologne and Bishop Nausea of Vienna. They were always poor, but the ultimate failure of their cause was not their fault. No more elegant, ingenious and popular books were devoted to the aim of purging the heresies of the North by fire, except Sir Thomas More's.

The political context of these works has been memorably expounded by Kurt Johannesson, whose *Götisk Renässans* (1984) was translated by James Larsson, and published by the University of California as *The Renaissance of the Goths in Sixteenth-Century Sweden* in 1991. But the texts are not easy to come by; *De Gentibus* appeared in facsimile in 1971, and is now scarce. The English translation of 1658 is a sloppy rendering of an epitome by Scribonius, and Granlund's commentaries are naturally in Swedish. This fine translation of the first five books is therefore a long overdue treat for the English reader, who may be surprised to discover a Swede who anticipates Camden, Burton, Aubrey and Hakluyt in the range of his curiosity and observation.

In order to advertise the importance of Sweden, he sublimated that frigid political limbo into an imaginary great power called Scandia, or Scandinavia, which ought by rights to include the whole Northern world: Norway, Finland, Karelia, and much of Denmark. The Swedes themselves he addressed as members of a greater Gothic cousinhood extending over all Europe, through the dispersal of thirty-two nations from Scandinavia in ancient times. In their spectacular homeland, all that is fiercest, hugest and weirdest in nature brings out all that is bravest and best in man. These *folies de grandeur* tickle both Counter-Reformation crusaders and Swedish patriots; the learned he attracts by

incorporating ‘the universal ideas of . . . Cassiodorus . . . by origin a Goth’ and by borrowings and analogies from a long series of authorities, beginning with Herodotus and ending with Salviani’s *Histories of Aquatic Animals*, published while *De Gentibus* was being put to bed. This constant reference to classical sources disarms, or at least distracts the sceptic who, for example, might doubt whether Gilbert the wizard lies spellbound in the crypt of Visingsö church, visible to tourists; do not the tourists risk their lives by going underground, even as the ancients were endangered in the labyrinths of Daedalus and King Porsenna, and in the very Plutonium (III, 20)? And the wood-cut of the naked man supine under rune-written staves is memorable enough to carry the story. Most of these pictures are evidently based on Olaus’ own sketches: stark, vivid, and deliberately strange, to hold the eye and trap the mind.

His reputation as a naturalist is based on his careful descriptions, mostly from memory, for he more than any ‘heard on Lavernia Scargill’s whispering trees’. Learn from him of the twenty varieties of snowflake (I, 22), of the thirty effects of intense cold (I, 19), of the morphology of ice (I, 21), of the art of snow-balling and snow-castling (I, 23), of the technology of ice-transport (I, 28), of the shape of rocks (II, 31), of how rivers foam in spate (II, 18). Such passages command respect for their sometimes poetic precision, so that it is easy to forget that they serve in a rhetorical army deployed against heresy and tyranny. The same may be said of his evocations of the smell of drying fish (II, 6), of Lapps hunting (IV, 12) and of his explanation of how skis work, which failed to convince Pope Paul III (I, 4).

The problem of converting the Lapps to Christianity was his, as metropolitan of the North, and the Lutheran Ziegler had attributed the fewness of the baptised Sami to the avarice of the popes. Both the Magnus brothers had trekked far into the back country (in 1518 and 1526) and knew this to be a lie. Far from fleecing his Lapps, Joannes had spent more on visitation than he got in dues; and Olaus, in passages reminiscent of Las Casas and Quiroga on the American natives, insists that the respectable lives and dignified ceremonies of these peoples would make them amenable to Christian teaching, if only missions were not hindered by the Lutheranising king (IV, 18). The success of the Finnish churches proved it. But the king has impoverished his bishops and has left his arctic empire to the encroachments of the schismatic Muscovites. Where are the ‘golden knights’ of Sweden, who used to wage the holy war on behalf of the northern churches?

Formerly, the Swedes themselves were sunk in ‘gross errors’. In Book III, Olaus expounds Nordic paganism by repeating the euhemerist interpretations of Saxo Grammaticus, with Gothic embellishments. The reality of witches, wizards, shape-changers and spirits, ancient and modern, is not disputed, but legendary wonders are usually distinguished from observed or reported ones. The tale of the involuntary fratricides of Jönköping (I, 31) is offered ‘rather as told by the ancients, than as proven’ (*approbatione*: not ‘matter for approval’ as Fisher has it); and Olaus leaves the details of witchcraft ‘to all who investigate this madness too closely’ (rather than ‘who closely investigate these pointless activities’: it is an affliction, not a waste of time).

He was a moralist as well as a naturalist, and he applies some moral to nearly everything: thus, big modern clocks ‘provide a comfort for great men’, but little ones with springs are so dear as to be daylight robbery (I, 32). The fine natural complexion of northern women reminds him of how his brother disliked the rouge applied to the cheeks of Venetian girls (IV, 11); the sad songs at Lapp weddings are reactions to the ‘godless crimes’ committed among them by Swedish officials (IV, 8); the lack of coin in Bothnia proves the honesty and modesty of the people who live there (IV, 5); and even the violence of ancient giants, heroes and war-lords was redeemed by their exemplary temperance and austerity. Saxo’s *Starcatherus* becomes an honorary Swede, and the doubting reader is shown a picture of him heaving a stone monolith in each hand, one of them inscribed THE SWEDISH CHAMPION in runes (p. 237). The achievements of the Amazons are ascribed to the determination of young women to preserve their chastity against libidinous men, and the eulogy of Queen Amalasuintha by Cassiodorus inspires a further homily on the high value of sexual abstinence; for Olaus saw the Lutherans as especially detestable nun-violators, out to corrupt the North with dirty foreign pictures of naked women.

The appearance of this book in 1996 is the first-fruit of labours reaching back to the original commission by the Hakluyt Society in 1972, and it could not have been published at all without subventions from Sweden and elsewhere. The whole work is 22 books long (not as many as the Old Testament—a rare lapse by Foote, on p. xli—but the same number as Augustine’s *City of God*) and contains 777 chapters and an epilogue (half the date of its completion, 1554, and the exact life-span of Lamech, who ‘toiled and laboured with [his] hands so long on ground which the Lord has cursed’ in Genesis 5: 29); and no clear notice is given of when the rest will come out. The first volume will be especially useful for the introduction by the editor and translator. It sets a standard of printing and annotation which deserves all praise, and more cash. Hakluyt needs subscribing members; this book—free to members, £35 to others—will convince many that they need Hakluyt.

E. CHRISTIANSEN

GRUFFUDD AP CYNAN: A COLLABORATIVE BIOGRAPHY. Edited by K. L. MAUND. *Studies in Celtic History*, XVI. *The Boydell Press*. Woodbridge 1996. xii + 217 pp.

The significance of a biography of Gruffudd ap Cynan to Scandinavian studies may not be immediately apparent to those who, like the present reviewer, were not familiar with his genealogy (. . . *Avloed Vrenhin Cuaran mab Sutric mab Avloed Vrenhin mab [Harald] Harfagyr mab Brenhin Denmarc*, ‘. . . Óláfr Kvarán, son of Sigtryggr, son of King Óláfr, son of Haraldr Hárfagri’; cf. p. 88). It becomes rapidly clear from reading the work of Maund and his collaborators that there are at least two aspects of Gruffudd’s career which should be of interest to readers of *Saga-Book*. Gruffudd himself emerges as a figure whose biography is inextricably interwoven with the historical events of the later Viking Age and whose personal history is explained by and exemplifies the

shifting orientations of the North Sea islands within the gravitational fields of the developing entities of continental Europe and Scandinavia in the mid-twelfth century. In addition, contemporary accounts of his reign, in particular the *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan* and its attendant genealogies, are interlinked with similar accounts in the Scandinavian field, in particular the historiography of Magnús berfœtr in prose sources and in skaldic poetry.

Scandinavianist readers of the volume may be instinctively drawn to Judith Jesch's substantial contribution on 'Norse Historical Traditions and the *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan*' (pp. 117–47). Here Jesch is concerned with assessing the impact of Norse historiography on the fabrication of a *vita* and a genealogy for Gruffudd. Whereas earlier historians, e. g. van Hamel, have assumed that the Norse elements in the *Historia* were a product of Hiberno-Norse, presumably oral, tradition, Jesch argues for the direct influence of the Norse historiographical tradition on the *Historia* and in particular on the creation of a genealogy reaching back to Haraldr Hárfagri, mirroring twelfth-century Norwegian concerns with the legitimation of Magnús berfœtr's territorial claims. Rather than Scandinavian Ireland, the Orkneys would seem to be the key point in this model of transmission (cf. pp. 144–46). Jesch's article shows consideration for a readership without specialist knowledge of the problems of Old Norse source criticism, her treatment of editorial issues being exemplary.

The articles that follow, Nerys Anne Jones on the possible audience of the *Historia* (pp. 149–56) and Ceri Davies on its retranslation into Latin in the sixteenth century (pp. 157–64), though intrinsically interesting, have no direct bearing on Scandinavian issues, whilst the final essay in the collection, J. E. Caerwyn Williams on the poet Meilyr Brydydd (pp. 165–86), is instructive above all in the opportunity it gives for assessing the role of the Welsh equivalent of the *hofuðskáld* in the twelfth century. David Moore's 'Gruffydd ap Cynan and the Medieval Welsh Polity' (pp. 1–59), on the other hand, is by no means as restricted in scope as the title might imply. In essence, it is an exposé of the development of Gruffudd's power from its insecure beginnings to the establishment of a state strong enough to hold its own against Norman expansion. Scandinavian support was crucial at key stages of this process, Gruffudd's Hiberno-Scandinavian ancestry enabling him to mobilise Irish military support and use Norse ships as the backbone of a fleet (cf. p. 26). Norse historians will see in this narrative an instructive parallel to the rise of Sverrir in Norway. Similarly, in C. P. Lewis's succinct account 'Gruffudd ap Cynan and the Normans' (pp. 61–77) we find reminiscences of the struggles of the Norse kings. Lewis reminds us that Gruffudd's rise to power was set in a geographical and oceanographical milieu in which sea-power and coastal domination were crucial, and in which ships of Viking descent still formed the model for marine transport among the North Sea peoples. A vital component of Gruffudd's success was his ability to draw at will on this form of mobility. The remaining two essays in the collection, David Thornton's 'The Genealogy of Gruffudd ap Cynan' (pp. 79–108) and Maund's own contribution, 'Gruffudd, Grandson of Iago: *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan* and the Construction of Legitimacy' (pp. 109–16; with the colon but not the sub-title printed disconcertingly through-



out the running title), both deal with the treatment of the Scandinavian element in Gruffudd's genealogy, the obvious repute of his Norse ancestors forming an integral part of the propaganda by which legitimacy and suitability as king were to be established and being therefore given prominence in the biographical and genealogical material.

The volume, as one of the *Studies in Celtic History* edited by David Dumville, makes few concessions to the non-Celticist; quotations are frequently given in the Middle Welsh of the sources without translation and single words are given in mutated forms where the sources, but not the English matrix sentences, require them; 'Gruffudd's war-band . . . was no more than a *gedymdeithas*' (p. 51); I wonder how many Scandinavian scholars world-wide wishing to check this unexplained term would know that they should look up under C in a standard Welsh dictionary. Similarly, they would probably be disconcerted to find that the only index lemma to Magnús berfœttr has his cognomen as *berfættis*, presumably from Ordericus Vitalis (cf. p. 29), leading to the awkward possessive 'Magnus Berfœtts's Norsemen (p. 30; cf. 'the *Brut y Tywysogyons* (sic) *obit*', same page) despite the conventional Icelandic spelling's having been used throughout by Jesch. In the Bibliography, Icelandic words do not fare well; *P* is used for *B* (or *b*) throughout, diacritics are missing from *sögum* (p. 190) and *Landnámabók* (p. 197; if this and the preceding *Gormflaith and the Northment* (sic) are misprints in the source it would have been tactful to indicate the fact), *Halldórs þættir* (p. 198) appear as *Halldúrs Þættir*. All these in themselves are trifling slips but reinforce the impression, despite *Book of Tuliesin* (for *Taliesin*, p. 199), that the book is intended primarily for Celticists and not for specialists in the Scandinavian matter. This ought not to be the case; the 'Collaborative Biography' is a valuable contribution to inter-disciplinary studies of the history and literatures of the North Sea cultures and will be a welcome addition to specialist libraries on Scandinavian studies even in those institutes where no Celtic languages or literatures form part of the curriculum.

STEPHEN N. TRANTER

THE WORLD OF THE VIKINGS. CD-ROM for Windows. *York Archaeological Trust and The National Museum of Denmark. Multimedia Management and Past Forward Ltd.* York, 1996.

This CD-ROM is the result of a three-year collaboration between the York Archaeological Trust and The National Museum of Denmark. It consists of two separate software interfaces, one designed for schoolchildren, teachers and general use (the Evidence Boxes), and the other for university, college or independent researchers (the Research Database). Currently retailing at £62.50, the CD-ROM is within the individual's as well as the institution's price range.

#### The Evidence Boxes

Starting the Evidence Boxes program, the user is presented with a conventional window that contains twelve boxes overlying a colour picture of a fjord scene.

Each of these twelve boxes is labelled with a topic, such as: *Sources of evidence; Where did they settle? Why did the Viking world expand? Transport and Travel; Arts and Crafts; Power and Politics*. A double-click with the mouse on one of these boxes opens the box, and another window appears, containing icons that represent further sub-divisions within the topic. For example, *Sources of information* contains the categories *Documents; Runes; Sagas; Coins; Sculpture; Excavation; Hoards; Place-Names; Buildings*. If you click the Voice icon in the toolbar of this second window, a short introductory narrative on the topic is provided. A double-click on any of the icons takes the user into the topic's sub-divisions, where another short, more specific, narrative can be played. Within these sub-divisions, there is a series of pictures, with a short and simple text, that one can browse through with forward- and backward-pointing arrows.

Difficult or technical words are hypertext-linked (i. e. if you click on them, a brief explanation appears in a box), and places mentioned in the text are linked to a simple location map (of Europe). These hypertext-links further allow users to search for other references to the item or place that they have clicked on. There is also a search facility provided (*Find*, under the Navigation menu), which allows the user to search the boxes, glossary or atlas. A total of some 850 colour photographs are contained in the Evidence Boxes, and any of these can be marked and saved to disk as bitmap files, and thus subsequently printed out.

The narratives and the written text accompanying the pictures generally provide a clear and accurate introduction to a topic, covering a variety of sometimes complex themes in a sensible way. The sub-division of the categories also allows a variety of viewpoints to be put forward, rather than simplistic generalisations. For example, the introductory narrative to the Evidence Box *Why did the Viking world expand?* tells us that 'All sorts of ideas have been put forward but probably there is no single explanation'. The sub-categories in this box take these various ideas as their themes. Sometimes, however, the narratives and pictures do seem to focus too narrowly on one particular part of the topic. For example, the discussion of *Power of the Kings* in the *Why did the Viking world expand?* box concentrates almost exclusively on the physical remains of Harold Bluetooth's complex at Jelling. The ten pictures and the narrative on England in the *Where did they settle?* box deals mainly with the early Viking raids, including two virtually identical photographs of Bamburgh Castle. The settlement is described in the last but one box, where we are merely told that Vikings settled in large numbers, especially in York and Yorkshire.

Nevertheless, as a whole, the Evidence Boxes provide a balanced picture of the Viking Age, and one that is considerably wider in scope than many children's books. In these days of multimedia, the lack of moving images may make this less exciting than other historical CD-ROMs, but the narrative, the easy browsing between the pictures and the sheer wealth of high-quality photographic material should provide some compensation. As a final comment on the Evidence Boxes, it can be noted that the word *helmet* is glossed: 'A hat made

of metal or leather to protect your head during battle. Viking helmets did not have horns on them.'

#### The Research Database

*'The Research Database is for university, college or independent researchers who need flexible access to the most complete collection of information on the Vikings published to date. Over 3600 high quality 24-bit colour pictures of Viking sites, landscapes, objects and reconstructions have been scanned from original slides and packed onto a single CD-ROM.'*

This database is accessed through a search tool. The user is presented with a dialogue box that allows one to search the database by *Country; Region; Site; Name; Material; Type; Theme; Keyword; Reference number*. Within each of these options is an alphabetic list of the items relevant to that type of search. Items including the Scandinavian letters *å, ä, æ, ø, and ö* are listed as though they were *a, ae* and *o*, when they are not the initial letter. However, when they are the first letter of an entry, they are listed at the end of the alphabet under *Å-Ø*. There is no option for a free-text search, but it is possible to conduct Boolean searches, by clicking on the *more* button, which presents the user with a further two search boxes that can be added to the first search specifications (and/or).

What perhaps strikes one first when using the search tool is the rather haphazard way that the database entries are classified and spelled. For example, under *Keyword: R*, we find *Ringerike, Ringerike stone, and Ringerike style*, with the first and last categories both about the Ringerike style, while the second entry is for the Vang rune-stone, which is decorated in the Ringerike style. Under *Keyword: D*, the misspelling *Doomsday* is listed, but turning to the entries, we find the correct spelling, *Domesday*. Under *Keyword: R*, a list of rivers is given, but turning to one of these, the Ouse, we find that this is not listed under *Keyword: O*.

Some cities, such as Uppsala and Tórshavn (spelt both as *Torshaven* and *Torshavn*), are classified as regions as well as sites, and some regions, such as Telemark and Jylland, are listed under the both the *Region* and *Site* categories. Indeed, there generally seems to be a problem with classifying and spelling Scandinavian place-names: Telemark is entered twice in the *Region* category, first as *Telemark* and then as *Telemarken*; Jutland is not listed under *Site* or *Region*, but is listed under *Keyword*, and there is no indication that it is the same as Jylland (listed under *Site, Region* and *Keyword*); only Jämtland is listed under *Region*, but both *Jämtland* and *Jamtland* are given under *Keyword*; Sjælland in Denmark is listed three times, as *Sjælland, Sjaelland, and Sjællnd* (sic); and Skálholt in Iceland is listed with and without the length marker over the letter *a*. Stöng, the farm site in Iceland, is not listed under *Site*, but is found under *Keyword*. Even Scandinavia is listed twice under *Keyword*, once correctly and once as *Scandanavia*.

The Name category includes items such as *Adze, Amulet* and *Anchor*, rather than names of places or people. Names of individuals are instead generally listed under the *Keyword* category, which seems the most comprehensive list and thus the best category to search by. There are still some difficulties in

tracking down the information one requires: for example, all the kings included in the database are found under *King* in the *Keyword* category rather than under their individual names, a fact which I only discovered by accident.

Sometimes the entries that are found in a particular search do not seem to relate very closely to the search category. For example, a search under *Theme: Subsistence* found pictures of bear-tooth and boar-tusk amulets, and there was no information to relate them to the topic. Under *Theme: People*, one was presented with pictures of Norse gods as depicted in manuscripts and sculpture. A search under *Theme: Leisure* reveals a pendant in the shape of a human head, again leaving one somewhat at a loss as to how this is relevant. Perhaps more seriously, a search under the *Keyword: Hnefatafl* gives four entries (nos 3628, 3634, 3640, and 3648). However, the search *Theme: Leisure* reveals only one of these, while adding a further four entries (nos 3564, 3566, 3604, 3644) that refer to the game *hnefatafl*.

A search under *Keyword: Runestone* reveals 159 entries, while a search under *Name: Runestone* produces just 156 entries, and a search under *Keyword: Rune* gives just 48 entries (several of which concern rune-stones). It can be noted, for example, that the St Paul's rune-stone from London (no. 5963) is not listed under *Runestone*, but is found under *Rune* (and described as a grave marker). The list of entries found in the search *Keyword: Runestone*, displayed on the right-hand part of the screen, gives the database reference number and the word 'Runestone', without any further details about the object. This makes it difficult to find a particular rune-stone without browsing through the list, although an alternative search on the geographical location will eliminate this problem. The database entry that is currently selected is pictured, with a caption, in the left-hand side of the window. Clicking on the picture with the mouse reveals details about the picture, the find-place of the object (although it is somewhat misleadingly called the location), and an institution that may be contacted for further information.

Perhaps the single most serious problem with the database as a research tool is the lack of bibliographical references where the researcher can read more about the object. Again, in the case of the *Runestone* search, their reference numbers in the published catalogues *Sveriges runinskrifter*, *Danmarks runeindskrifter*, and *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer* are generally not provided. When they are occasionally given (in the captions), they take the form 'Runestone 123', without the country or county prefixes (although these can be reconstructed through the 'location' details that are provided).

This lack of bibliographical information is felt even more strongly because the captions that accompany the photographs are so generalised as to be almost useless to most researchers. For example, one of the rune-stones at Fresta, Uppland, Sweden (no. 5542) is accompanied by the caption: 'Smooth snakes decorate the surface of these runestones. Even though they are 1000 years old they look remarkably like the modern cartoon snakes we see today'. Incidentally, the photograph of this rune-stone (with its prominent cross) seems to have been confused with that of another rune-stone from Fresta (no. 2982), which has the caption: 'Crosses on runestones are thought to be a sign of Christianity',

but which is a close-up of the runic snake and lacks any illustration of a cross. The fatuousness reaches a high in entry number 58 which has a photograph of a cow, the location of which is given as Field, England, and the caption 'All living things contain a tiny but measurable amount of carbon 14'! Although it is not indicated in the database, this caption and photograph are actually taken directly from the Evidence Boxes (Box: *When, dating the Viking Age*, category *Carbon 14 dating*), as part of an interesting and well-explained narrative about how carbon 14 dates are obtained. Some of the captions are also misleading: at least half of the pictures of Jarlshof on Shetland show the pre-Norse broch site, accompanied by the caption: 'The Norse settlement at Jarlshof, one of the most important Viking Age sites in the British Isles and the first to be positively identified as Viking'.

Strangely, the information accompanying the database entries is sometimes less detailed than the information contained in the Evidence Boxes. For example, when one looks at the *Sagas* section of the *Sources of evidence* Evidence Box, a picture of Fenris wolf in a seventeenth-century manuscript is said to be taken from AM 738, 4to, bl. 43', but on checking the Research Database, the user is not given the manuscript reference. It was only by chance that the Evidence Box contained this picture and the fuller information.

The lack of cross-referencing in the captions is sometimes annoying: database entries 5564 and 5566, both described as coming from Lund, Skåne, and entry 5554, described as coming from Kulturen, Lund, are all the same runestone, and there is no information given to link the three. Similarly, a search under *Keyword: Mary* gives two entries and photographs of apparently the same coin from Lund, without any indication that this is the case.

The lack of contextual material is also a problem. For example, if one searches for entries relating to Trondheim in Norway, eight entries are found, but no information is provided about the circumstances of the finds or the history of the town. Nor is there any consistent information relating to the date of the artefacts, such details appearing randomly in the captions.

There are other more or less minor quibbles with the database. Entry number 3998 is supposed to show a sculptural representation of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer, but actually has a photograph of a street sign bearing the name Feasegate (a search under *Keyword: Feasegate* reveals the same photograph). The runestone (no. 3842) from Hovslund, Jutland is shown in mirror image in the Evidence Boxes: *Sources of evidence: Runes* and in the magnified photograph in the Research Database, while it is shown correctly in the thumbnail photograph in the Research Database. Some of the photographs are duplicated, as in the case of two pictures of the settlement site at Braaid, Isle of Man (nos 1407, 6741).

In conclusion, it must be asked whether it would not have been better to have separated the two parts of the CD-ROM. Some of the problems with the database seem to reflect uncertainty about the division between the Evidence Boxes and the Research Database. The overall impression one gets from the Research Database is that it was decided to assemble a large number of photographs on CD-ROM without any clear ideas about what limits *The World of the Vikings* might have or what purpose it was to serve beyond that of

providing a visual record. Nevertheless, while much of the above focuses on negative details, it must be stressed that this CD-ROM is indeed an excellent visual archive, providing an unparalleled opportunity of viewing a very wide variety of artefacts from a very wide range of places. In particular, the artefacts from regional and local museums and the inclusion of recent finds, such as those from the urban excavations in Scandinavia, the British Isles, the Baltic and Russia, are very valuable and make the material more accessible. And it is, after all, frequently true that one picture can say more than a hundred words.

KATHERINE HOLMAN

PUBLICATIONS LIST—1998

All in card covers unless noted as bound. Prices quoted as Members/Non-Members, P & P for ONE COPY as [UK/Abroad] in £.p.

TEXT SERIES

- I Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu. With introduction, notes and glossary by Peter G. Foote and Randolph Quirk. Repr. 1974. ISBN 0 903521 31 8. £4/£6 [0.70/1.10].
- II Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks. With notes and glossary by G. Turville-Petre. Introduction by Christopher Tolkien. Repr. 1997. ISBN 0 903521 11 3. £4/£6 [0.80/1.25].
- IV Two Icelandic Stories: Hreiðars þátr, Orms þátr. Edited by Anthony Faulkes. Repr. 1978. ISBN 0 903521 00 8. £3/£4.50 [0.70/1.25].
- VI Dag Strömbäck: The Conversion of Iceland. 1975. ISBN 0 903521 07 5. £3/£4.50 [0.90/1.45].
- VII Hávamál. Edited by David A. H. Evans. 1986. ISBN 0 903521 19 9. £8.50/£12.75 [1.05/1.65].
- VII (ii) Hávamál. Glossary and Index. Compiled by Anthony Faulkes. 1987. ISBN 0 903521 20 2. £2.25/3.50 [0.65/0.95].
- VIII Heimskringla: An Introduction. By Diana Whaley. 1991. ISBN 0 903521 23 7. £7/£10.50 [0.95/1.50].
- IX The Works of Sven Aggesen, Twelfth-Century Danish Historian. Translated with introduction and notes by Eric Christiansen. 1992. ISBN 0 903521 24 5. £8/£12 [1.00/1.60].
- X Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum: A Twelfth-Century Synoptic History of the Kings of Norway. Edited and translated with an introduction and notes by M. J. Driscoll. 1995. ISBN 0 903521 27 X. £8/£12 [0.90/1.45].

DOROTHEA COKE MEMORIAL LECTURES. £1/£1.50. [0.65/0.95].

- Brita Malmer: King Canute's Coinage in the Northern Countries. 1974. ISBN 0 903521 03 2
- Ursula Dronke: The Role of Sexual Themes in Njáls saga. 1981. ISBN 0 903521 17 2
- John Koussgård Sørensen: Patronymics in Denmark and England. 1983. ISBN 0 903521 29 6
- R. I. Page: 'A Most Vile People': Early English Historians on the Vikings. 1987. ISBN 0 903521 30 X
- Gillian Fellows-Jensen: The Vikings and their Victims: The Verdict of the Names. Repr. 1998. ISBN 0 903521 39 3
- Anthony Faulkes: Poetical Inspiration in Old Norse and Old English Poetry. 1997. ISBN 0 903521 32 6

MISCELLANEOUS PUBLICATIONS

- Icelandic Journal by Alice Selby. Edited by A. R. Taylor. 1974. ISBN 0 903521 04 0 [= Saga-Book 19:1]. £5/£5 [0.70/1.10].
- Stories from the Sagas of the Kings: Halldórs þátr Snorrasonar inn fyrri, Halldórs þátr Snorrasonar inn síðari, Stúfs þátr inn skemmri, Stúfs þátr inn meiri, Völsa þátr, Brands þátr örva. With introduction, notes and glossary by Anthony Faulkes. 1980. ISBN 0 903521 18 0 £2/£3 [1.55/1.90].
- Bandamanna saga. Edited by Hallvard Magerøy. 1981. (Published jointly with Dreyers forlag, Oslo.) ISBN 0 903521 15 6. £3/£4.50 [1.05/1.60].
- Alan S. C. Ross: The Terfinnas and Beormas of Ohthere. Reprinted with an additional note by the author and an afterword by Michael Chesnutt. 1981. ISBN 0 903521 14 8. £2/£3 [0.70/1.10].

- The Viking Age in the Isle of Man: Select Papers from the Ninth Viking Congress, Isle of Man, 1981. Edited by Christine Fell et al. 1983. ISBN 0 903521 16 4. Bound. £8/£12 [1.85/2.90].
- Snorri Sturluson: Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning. Edited by Anthony Faulkes. 1988. ISBN 0 903521 21 0. (Reprint of 1982 Clarendon Press edition.) £4.50/£6.75 [1.15/1.80].
- Neil S. Price: The Vikings in Brittany. 1989. ISBN 0 903521 22 9 [= Saga-Book 22:6]. £5/£5 [0.80/1.25].
- Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njáls saga. Edited by John Hines and Desmond Slay. 1992. ISBN 0 903521 25 3. £3/£3 [1.05/1.65].
- Viking Revaluations. Viking Society Centenary Symposium 14–15 May 1992. Edited by Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins. 1993. ISBN 0 903521 28 8. £15/£20 [1.15/1.80].
- J. A. B. Townsend: Index to Old-Lore Miscellany. 1992. ISBN 0 903521 26 1. £1/£1.50 [0.65/0.95]

PUBLICATIONS DISTRIBUTED BY THE VIKING SOCIETY

- Peter G. Foote: The Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle in Iceland. 1959. £1 [0.70/1.10].
- Proceedings of the Seventh Viking Congress, Dublin, 1973. Edited by Bo Almqvist and David Greene. 1976. ISBN 0 903521 09 1. Bound. £8 [2.70/3.40].
- Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre. Edited by Ursula Dronke et al. 1981. ISBN 87 7492 289 0. Bound. £12 [3.05/4.80].
- Jean Young: Letters from Iceland 1936. 1992. ISBN 0 7044 1247 0. £4 [0.70/1.10].
- Michael P. Barnes: The Runic Inscriptions of Maeshowe, Orkney. 1994. ISBN 91 506 1042 2. £13.50/£20.25 [1.85/3.10].