

FROM SAINT'S LIFE TO SAGA: THE FATAL WALK OF  
ALFRED ÆTHELING, SAINT AMPHIBALUS AND  
THE VIKING BRÓÐIR

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THE ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE OF CLONTARF in *Njáls saga*, chs 154–57, has long been recognised as something extraneous to the saga (Goedheer 1938, 87–102, and references there cited). It was evidently included because *fimmtán menn af brennumönnum fellu í Brjánsorrostu*, ‘fifteen of the men involved in the burning died in Brian’s battle [i. e. Clontarf]’ (*Njáls saga* 1954, 453), but much of the account has no obvious relevance to the main events of *Njáls saga*, and the narrative technique is different. Above all, the Clontarf episode is characterised by what is, compared with the rest of the saga, a simplistic dichotomy of good and evil, with elementary black-and-white characterisation, representing Brjánn as a saint and Bróðir as totally evil, with no hint of the moral ambivalence that characterises such figures in the saga as Skarpheðinn Njálsson or Mörðr Valgarðsson. The different tone of this episode appears most strikingly in the account of the death of the viking leader Bróðir, which is as follows (*Njáls saga* 1954, 453; cf. also *Njál’s saga* 1960, 341 n.):

Var þá Bróðir hǫndum tekinn. Úlfr hræða reist á honum kviðinn ok leiddi hann um eik ok rakti svá ór honum þarmana; dó hann eigi fyrr en allir váru ór honum raktir.

Then Bróðir was captured. Úlfr Hræða opened up his belly and led him round an oak-tree and so pulled out his entrails from him; he did not die until they were all pulled out of him.

To the modern reader this will seem both repulsive and absurd and neither attitude is altogether inappropriate; what would be inappropriate would be an unquestioning assumption that the account has any historical validity or that it represents in any simple way actual reality. As is now widely recognised, medieval historical, or quasi-historical, writing was often shaped by literary considerations and in this case a powerful shaping literary genre is identifiable (Morse 1991, 138–58). The Clontarf episode with its moral polarisation strongly suggests the genre of hagiography, as several commentators have noted (Lönnroth 1976, 131, 226–36; McTurk 1992, 115–16, 120–21), and it is above all

in saints' lives, far more than in chronicles, romances or family sagas, that one finds lurid and spectacular accounts of torture and death shaped by a convention that is ideological and fundamentally unrealistic. As one writer, referring to the lives of female saints but using terms of wider validity, puts it: '[the saint is] flogged, lacerated, burnt and boiled, and dismembered in some way, as it might be with awls or razor-edged wheels' (Wogan-Browne 1991, 315). Death in Icelandic family sagas is normally too serious a matter to receive this kind of fantasy treatment, which is one reason why the account of the death of Bróðir is so discordant with the main saga narrative. As it happens, there are models in hagiographic writing for the bizarre manner of Bróðir's death, and it is to be hoped that the interest of tracing the route by which this motif reached Iceland may justify concentrating on so intrinsically unsavoury a theme.

Commentators have pointed out that essentially the same story of Clontarf, with the same method of killing, appears in *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, and the resemblances are so close that one version is likely to derive from the other. Probably *Njáls saga* has priority, at least for this detail, but for the present discussion it is not important which came first (*Þorsteins saga* 1950, civ–cv, 301–02). The same method of inflicting death also appears, but with reference to a hero rather than a villain, in a later work, *Orms þátr Stórólfssonar* (Faulkes 1967, 74–77, 100–01). This text is late enough to have derived this detail from *Njáls saga*, though it differs in that what had there been a punishment for evil (perhaps prefiguring the pains of hell) here becomes a test of endurance (indicating, if not a potential for sanctity, at least an unshakeable moral strength), so *Orms þátr* may derive the motif directly from a hagiographical source rather than by way of *Njáls saga*.

Several commentators, notably Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Jón Jóhannesson and Faulkes in their respective editions, seem prepared to believe that, whether or not the account of the Battle of Clontarf has any historical accuracy, the grotesque method of execution is plausible (e. g. Faulkes 100, 'This method of execution seems to have been quite widespread in the middle ages'), though the parallels cited hardly constitute reliable historical evidence; the method seems in fact to owe less to realism than to a gruesome fantasy. To clarify this one must note the exact details of the account, however distasteful they may seem. One must note first that what the passage does not describe is death by disembowelment as the result of a wound inflicted in battle: Boberg (1966, 237, item S.139.1) gives a large number of references under the heading,

*Murder by twisting out intestines*, but most of these refer not to murder but to wounds inflicted in battle (e. g. in *Gísla saga*, *Svarfdæla saga*, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* and Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum* VI.vii.9). One reference, in *Egils saga einhenda*, is to a wound inflicted on a monster and another, in *Bósa saga*, concerns a boar. The reference in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* is to a non-fatal wound. Most are in late texts (*fornaldarsögur*) of an obviously unrealistic kind. Secondly, the concern here is not with murder but with execution, and even here one must still note that various methods were available. The passage in *Njáls saga* does not refer to the historical practice of execution by hanging, drawing and quartering, all too well confirmed by reliable records over a long period, in which the work was done by an executioner and the victim was neither able nor required to collaborate in his own death; rather the saga gives us a morbidly imagined variation of disembowelment, according to which the victim is made to bring about his own death. One alleged parallel cited by some commentators (from Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum* XII.iv.2) describes in fact a different method, according to which the victim's intestines are removed by winding them round a cylinder (in Saxo a log), the work being done by executioners, not by the victim. This is stated by Saxo to be a punishment inflicted on Baltic pirates, and it is a method that is familiar in medieval hagiography in accounts of the martyrdom of St Erasmus, in which the instrument of martyrdom is a windlass. The use of what was thought of as nautical equipment evidently arose from that saint's legendary association with seafaring and one might have more confidence in the historicity of Saxo's account if the men involved were not seafarers (Saxo Grammaticus 1931, 335; Farmer 1978, 133). The martyrdom of St Erasmus is a common motif in medieval art (e. g. in *The Hastings Hours*, of Flemish workmanship for an English patron; Turner 1983, 134–35, Pl. 53b) and it is particularly well represented among mural paintings in Denmark, where nine churches retain paintings of the martyrdom; there is also at least one in the former Danish province of Skåne, though all are a good deal later than Saxo (Saxtorph 1986, Index s. v. Erasmus; Haastrup 1991, 159). Another parallel cited by Faulkes (1967, 100) is in Helmold's *Chronicle of the Slavs*, I.52, but the wording there is unclear and could refer to the windlass method; in any case, the account concerns the martyrdom of Christians and has a strong hagiographic tone. As with all tortures inflicted on saints in medieval hagiography, one cannot affirm that these things were never done in practice, but one would wish to have reliable evidence if one

were to claim historicity for any of the more lurid processes described in any account that duplicates material from saints' legends. The method of execution described in *Njáls saga* should thus be seen as a hagiographic fantasy in which the victim is made to do the work himself rather than suffering the ministrations of an executioner (who might or might not use a mechanical aid such as a windlass). The origins in hagiography do not of course preclude the later circulation of the motif in popular tradition, and Desmond Slay kindly points out to me that the fatal walk occurs in a Danish folk-tale as the method of execution inflicted on the robber Jens Long-Knife (Simpson 1988, 60–61; Bødker 1958, 112–13). Whatever the ultimate source of this fantasy, it can be shown that there is a route by which it could have reached the saga-authors from earlier hagiography. Accounts of evisceration by making the victim walk round a stake appear in a number of texts and together they form a pattern showing how this motif circulated in England and was then probably transmitted to Norway, where the author of *Njáls saga* may have found it, or from where it could have been transmitted to Iceland by some intermediary.

The fatal walk round a stake is first mentioned, as far as I have been able to establish, in the early twelfth century in Geffrei Gaimar, *L'Estoire des Engleis* (Bell 1971, 153), where it appears in the account of the murder in 1036 of Alfred Ætheling, the son of King Ethelred ('the Unready') and brother of the future King Edward the Confessor. The historical details of this appalling episode are clear in outline if not in detail. Having been in exile in Normandy, Alfred came to England on the death of Cnut and fell into the hands of enemies (probably supporters of Cnut's son Harold) who blinded him, and he died of his injuries in the monastery at Ely; his followers were also treated with extreme brutality. The earliest sources of information for these events are the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MSS C and D, s. a. 1036, and the *Encomium Emmæ Reginæ* (composed c.1040–42); later accounts relevant to the present consideration are in William of Poitiers, *Willelmi Conquestoris Gesta*, and the *Liber Eliensis*; but none of these mentions the fatal walk (ASC I 158–60, II 211–15; Campbell 1949, lxiv–lxvii, 42–47; William of Poitiers, 1217–18; Blake 1962, 159). Gaimar in his account expands on the historical material by adding the motif, here clearly fictitious, of the fatal walk (lines 4825–35):

Idunc si pristrent Elvred,  
Enz en Ely l'en unt mened,  
Iloc firent ses oilz crever,

Entur un pel le funt aler,  
 Le gros büel l'en orent trait;  
 Od aguilluns qu'aveient fait  
 Le firent tant entur aler  
 Pur sa büele deramer  
 Qu'il ne pot mes ester en piez.  
 L'aneme s'en vait e il sunt liez,  
 Qui en tel guise le murdriront.

Then they took Alfred, led him to Ely and there had his eyes put out; around a stake they made him go; they pulled out his large intestine; with goads that they had prepared they made him walk round so as to tear out his entrails, until he could no longer stand on his feet; his soul departs and they who murdered him in this way are glad.

The motif of the fatal walk is introduced from some unknown source to augment the narrative as Gaimar found it in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (on Gaimar's sources in general see Bell 1971, lii–lxxvii, supplemented by Freeman 1996, 189–90). As well as narrating Alfred's death, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the *Encomium Emmæ* also describe the brutal treatment suffered by his followers; William of Poitiers broadly repeats these details but to the list he adds an item not found in either of the earlier sources: *partim diro fine necavit horribiliter evisceratos*, 'some he [Harold] put to a cruel death, horribly eviscerated'; this same sentence is also repeated in the *Liber Eliensis* (Blake 1962, 159), and Gaimar presumably took this detail from one or other of these texts (probably from William, as the *Liber Eliensis* may have been too late to be available to Gaimar) and transferred it from Alfred's followers to Alfred himself. It seems to me unlikely that Gaimar invented the method of evisceration by walking round a stake; he may have come across it in some hagiographical source and, prompted by the reference to evisceration in William of Poitiers, introduced it so as to transform history into hagiography in his account of a murder that was widely seen as a martyrdom. I know of no exact hagiographical source, but there are elements of resemblance to the legend of St Lucy, who, in some versions, perhaps later, had her eyes torn out, while in others, notably the Old English life by Ælfric, she was disembowelled (*heo wearð þa gewundod þæt hire wand se innoð út*, 'she was cut open so that her insides came out'); this resemblance may of course be a coincidence and I do not know any version of the Lucy legend before the twelfth century that combines the motifs of blinding and disembowelment (Farmer 1978, 250–51; Ælfric 1966, I 216, line 127). There

was a movement to regard Alfred as a saint, as so often happened with murdered royalty. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle affirms that his soul is with Christ, the *Encomium Emmæ* asserts that he was a martyr and that miracles occur at his tomb in Ely (ASC I 160; Campbell 1949, 44–47); the *Liber Eliensis* likewise claims that his soul is in paradise and that visions of lights appear at his tomb, adding in one manuscript that his body is now placed beside the altar of St Alban, a detail that has some bearing on the subsequent development of the motif of the fatal walk (Blake 1962, 160, note *a*). The cult of Alfred Ætheling was evidently short-lived; no doubt it was to his disadvantage as a potential saint that he never actually became king, and there is some uncertainty as to whether he was or was not the elder brother and thus a leading candidate for the throne. Actual consecration as king might well have ensured his canonisation, as happened in the case of his murdered uncle, Edward the Martyr, whose cult as a saint was much longer-lived (Fell 1971; Rollason 1989, 141–42). Alfred is commemorated in Ely calendars of the twelfth century but after that his cult declined (Dickins 1937, 18–19).

Gaimar's account of the manner of Alfred's death is followed in another Anglo-Norman historical text, *An Early French Prose History of the Kings of England*, probably from the late twelfth century (Tyson 1975, 13):

e a Alvred furent les oils crevés, e la boele luy fu trete fors del cors e a une estache afermé, e il fu chacé entur le estache ke tote la boele le vint hors entur le estache e il dunc chet mort.

Alfred's eyes were put out, his entrails were pulled out of his body and fastened to a stake, and he was chased round the stake so that his entrails came out round the stake, and he fell down dead.

Tyson identifies a number of sources for the *Prose History*, but none of them, as far as I can trace, includes the motif of the fatal walk, which must be presumed to have come from Gaimar. Christiansen (1980–81, I 271) refers to an account of the death of Alfred Ætheling by the fatal walk in a Welsh chronicle, *Brenhinredd y Saeson*, but this is presumably derived from Gaimar and supplemented from sources that implicate earl Godwin in the murder.

The *Liber Eliensis* locates Alfred's tomb in Ely beside the altar of St Alban and this connection points to the next example of the fatal walk. St Alban was of course the protomartyr of Britain, a pre-Anglo-Saxon (probably third-century) British saint, whose cult was nonetheless fostered by Anglo-Saxons from Bede to Ælfric and beyond. The cult was

naturally centred in St Albans, the traditional site of his martyrdom, and it was claimed that his relics were held in the abbey there, but the relics of St Alban became the subject of one of the most bizarre disputes of medieval English ecclesiastical history (Vaughan 1958, 198–204). The dispute arose between the monasteries of St Albans and Ely because the relics of St Alban were evidently taken from St Albans to Ely in the eleventh century for reasons that are not clear. Ely claimed that the relics were a gift brought by Ecgfrith, Abbot of St Albans, who fled to Ely in 1070 and died there in exile (Blake 1962, 176–77; Knowles *et al.* 1972, 65–66), while St Albans claimed that the relics were temporarily loaned to Ely for safe-keeping; thereafter the dispute over who was entitled to the relics, and who actually held them, continued for several centuries. In the mid-thirteenth century Matthew Paris of St Albans claimed, rather implausibly, that the authentic relics had never left St Albans and that what had been taken to Ely were the bones of a nameless monk, but he over-elaborated his argument by alleging that the monks of Ely, when ordered to return the relics to their original home, sent back a chest of worthless bones (*GA* I 34–36; Coulton 1936, 134–37). The whole affair is complicated by the possibility that the relics may well have been stolen from Ely by Danish raiders: *ASC* MS E, s. a. 1070 states that King Swegn (Svein Estridsson) raided England and stole various treasures from English churches, including Peterborough and Ely, and shipped them to Denmark (Clark 1970, 2–4). The loot included stolen relics, among others an arm of St Oswald and possibly the relics of St Alban, for it was subsequently claimed that these were in Denmark (Clark 1970, 2–3 and 64; Vaughan 1958, 202; *KLNM* IX 345, s. v. *Helgenskrin*). The Danish prince Knut (Svein's son), who was involved in the next attack on England in 1075 (*ASC* I 211–12; Clark 1970, 5–6 and 69) and may have taken part in the raid of 1070, became king of Denmark in 1080 and built a church in Odense dedicated to St Alban, with shrines containing alleged relics of Alban and Oswald (King 1962–63, 146–47; 1962–65, 197–99; Abrams 1995, 240). It was in this church in Odense that Knut was killed before the altar of St Alban in 1086, because, according to the *Roskilde Chronicle*, he had attempted to impose a poll-tax, *tributum quod nostrates 'nefgiald' uocant* (Gertz 1917–18, 23–24). Denmark thus acquired its first royal saint. The church in Odense was rebuilt c.1090 and dedicated to the new saint, and in 1096 a Benedictine monastery was founded there by monks invited from Evesham, which was henceforth the main English connection for Odense, but the alleged relics of St Alban

remained there and may be those that are still to be seen to this day; the crypt of St Knud's church contains two glass cases, one with the skeleton of the king, the other with more fragmentary remains that are not named and which may be those that were alleged in the Middle Ages, perhaps correctly, to be the bones of St Alban (Nyberg 1981, 110). That the claim of Odense to hold the relics of St Alban was taken seriously in St Albans is shown by Matthew Paris's obviously fictitious story (apparently modelled on a story previously told about Peterborough) of how a monk of St Albans went to Odense and succeeded in stealing the relics and sending them to England. Matthew implausibly places these events during the Danish attacks of the ninth century (long before there was any Christian foundation in Odense), because his story has to ensure that the relics were back in St Albans when the dispute with Ely arose in the eleventh century (*GA* I 12–19; Vaughan 1958, 202–03).

There was thus a good deal of uncertainty about the actual location of the relics of St Alban. Three places, St Albans, Ely and Odense, claimed to hold them, and by the mid-twelfth century it became clear that the abbey of St Albans needed some sort of insurance against the consequences of this uncertainty. Odense now had a new patron saint, Knut, and Ely's main appeal had always been (and long continued to be) the shrine of St Etheldreda (Audrey), an appeal now augmented by the presence of Alfred's tomb, but if St Albans no longer had St Alban himself, its main attraction might be thought to have disappeared. It is thus hardly surprising that the monks of St Albans felt the need for another saint with unchallengeable relics to attract the pilgrims and patronage that were such an important source of income, and fortunately one was almost ready to hand in the writings of that great twelfth-century deviser of fictions, Geoffrey of Monmouth.

The rise of the legend of St Amphibalus has frequently been described (Faral 1930; Tatlock 1934; Levison 1941; Westhuizen 1974; McCulloch 1981). The appearance of Amphibalus ('St Overcoat', as one commentator has sardonically called him) in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (Wright 1985, 50; V.v in some older editions) is no doubt due to a misunderstanding of *amphibalus*, 'cloak, robe', a rare Greek loanword in Latin, and probably also to a wrong inflection in a manuscript of Gildas used by Geoffrey; Tatlock (1934, 249–50) shows that the correct reading, *sub sancti abbatis amphibalo*, 'under the cloak of the holy abbot', must in some manuscripts have been miscopied as *sub sancto abbate amphibalo* (a reading attested in



the earliest printed edition), which looks as if it ought to mean 'under the holy abbot Amphibalus'. Unfortunately the plea of honest misunderstanding can hardly be extended to the whole cult of St Amphibalus as developed in St Albans in the late twelfth century, which shows a remarkable doggedness, and some ingenuity and imagination, in constructing and authenticating the cult of a fictitious saint. A Latin *Life of St Alban and St Amphibalus*, composed about 1166–83 by William of St Albans (AS 146–70), gave the process an appearance of authenticity, though of course it had to be presented not as something new but as the rediscovery of something old. William of St Albans proves himself to be a master of picturesque fantasy in claiming that his work was translated from a sixth-century English source, though Matthew Paris later refined on this by claiming that the lives of the two saints were found in a manuscript in the British language that was discovered in a hole in a wall in St Albans Abbey; as soon as the manuscript had been translated into Latin, it crumbled into dust (GAI 26–28). William's *vita* follows existing sources for the life of St Alban, but to this he adds, citing the authority of Geoffrey of Monmouth, a wholly fictitious life of St Amphibalus. If William believed, as many monks of St Albans presumably did, that relics had been stolen from St Albans by monks of Ely, there was a kind of rough justice in his taking in return from sources referring to Ely the technique of the martyrdom that he devises for Amphibalus, for the fatal walk of Alfred Ætheling here becomes transferred to the new, though allegedly much older, saint; and if this in any way detracted from Alfred's glory as a pioneer of this form of suffering, no one in St Albans was likely to complain. At any rate, Amphibalus, once an unoffending cloak, is made to take the same perambulation (AS 158):

Quem mox arripientes et tractantes atrocius expoliaverunt, visceraque ejus ferro patefacta, palo in terram defixo circumligantes, et flagellis nimiis Sanctum Dei concidentes, in circuitu ejusdem pali ambulare fecerunt. Cumque beatus Martyr, Dei munere, inter tot angustias constitutus, nulla daret doloris indicia; illi acriores effecti eum quasi ad signum statuunt, et cultellis lanceolisque quod reliquum erat corporis confodiunt. Vir autem Domini, tamquam nihil mali pateretur, vultu hilari stabat constantior; et signa sui martyrii toto jam corpore præferibat: prodigiosum cunctis de se præbens spectaculum, quod post tanta supplicia, post tot mortis genera, adhuc vivere potuisset.

They straightway seized him, beat him ferociously and stripped him, and cutting open his entrails with a sword they fastened them round a stake set in the ground; they lacerated the holy man of God with great blows of a

whip and made him walk round this same stake. When the blessed martyr, resolute in the service of God among such afflictions, gave no sign of pain, they stabbed with knives and spears the remaining parts of his body. The man of God, however, as if he had been exposed to no evil, stood firm with a joyful countenance and displayed the signs of his martyrdom in all his body, presenting a marvellous spectacle of himself to everyone there, that after so many tortures and so many kinds of death he could still be alive.

This of course is typical hagiographic writing. Even if Gaimar had had some hagiographic source for his account of Alfred, he had treated the motif in the customary manner of his chronicle genre, but William of St Albans restores conventional hagiographic emphasis on the holiness and superhuman capacity for suffering of his hero-saint, and the dominant impression on the reader is one of almost ludicrous unreality. William's *Life of St Alban and St Amphibalus* is a splendid piece of rhetorical writing that does great honour to its subject, but for the cult of a saint, particularly a newly discovered one, a *vita*, however splendid, was not enough; a successful cult required relics that pilgrims could venerate and to which offerings could be made. It therefore comes as no surprise that relics were duly found, as indeed William's *vita* had predicted they would be (Levison 1941, 356; McCulloch 1981, 768). According to Matthew Paris, a layman of St Albans was visited in a dream by St Alban, who gave instructions for locating the remains of Amphibalus. The monks searched in the spot indicated, and bones were duly found. It has been suggested that the place was probably the site of a pagan Anglo-Saxon cemetery (Levison 1941, 356), for the monks found an *embarras de richesses*, so that what was to have been the relics of St Amphibalus actually had to be identified as the relics of the saint and his companions; the alleged relics were then translated into the abbey church of St Alban and given a newly constructed shrine (*GA* I 192–93; *CM* II 301–08; Vaughan 1984, 49). Henceforth Amphibalus frequently appears in calendars with his feast-day on 25 June (St Alban himself having 22 June), and a life of St Amphibalus, including the motif of the fatal walk, is thereafter regularly appended to lives of St Alban. The motif eventually enters the English language in the poem on the two saints by Lydgate (Westhuizen 1974).

That the cult of Amphibalus was centred in St Albans is reflected in a number of manuscripts produced in the abbey there. This was of course the home of Matthew Paris, who was not only the greatest of all thirteenth-century English monastic chroniclers, but also a celebrated hagiographic author in both Latin and French and an outstanding artist. Matthew Paris's Anglo-Norman poem, *La Vie de Seint Auban*, based on

a Latin *vita* that Matthew had written (*CM I* 148–54), includes the life of Amphibalus; it survives in Matthew's own hand with his own illustrations in Dublin, Trinity College MS 177 [E. I. 40] (facsimile, James 1924; Morgan 1982, 130–33). Matthew's poem (Harden 1968) sets out the manner of Amphibalus's death in detail (lines 1601–10):

Un peel en terre afichent li paien criminal  
E la buele en sachent du ventre Amphibal,  
Cum liun ki desire char de cors bestial.  
Au peel l'unt ataché a grant turment cural;  
Les meins li unt lié d'une resne a cheval;  
Nel lessent reposer, ne nul liu prendre estal,  
Entur le pel l'enchacent cum a chemin jurnal.  
De lances e cuteus e gros bastun poinnal  
Ferent, batent e poignent cist pautener vassal  
Ke tut est esculé l'entraille corporal.

The evil pagans fix a stake in the ground and they pull the intestine out of Amphibalus's belly like lions that want flesh from an animal's body. To the stake they fastened it with great torment of the heart; they tied his hands with a horse's reins; they do not let him rest or stop anywhere, around the stake they chase him, as if he were walking for a whole day; with lances, knives and great pointed sticks these wicked soldiers strike, beat and prick him until all his entrails come out.

Matthew also gives an abridged account of the process in the rubric to his illustration of this episode (Harden 1968, 58), and his illustration in the Dublin MS, fol. 45r, gives a clear depiction of the scene; a similar illustration also appears in another St Albans manuscript, not in the hand of Matthew Paris, now London, British Library MS Royal 2. B. vi, fol. 10v (James 1924, Pl. 27; Morgan 1982, Pl. 286 and nos 85–86). No doubt Matthew's Anglo-Norman poem helped to make the theme of the fatal walk more widely familiar in England, and the illustrations by Matthew and others would also have contributed to this. The fame of saints could spread in various ways, but in this case there are specific circumstances that may account for the transmission to Scandinavia of the legend of Amphibalus and the fatal walk.

In Denmark the cult of St Alban probably declined in popularity after the cathedral in Odense acquired the relics of St Knut at the end of the eleventh century, so the rise of the cult of Amphibalus in twelfth-century St Albans may well have gone unnoticed in Denmark. It is hardly likely to have been emphasised by the monks of Evesham who were the new mentors for the cathedral priory in Odense, though, as mentioned above, the motif of the fatal walk as a method of execution

survives in Danish folk-tradition. There was, however, at least one other Scandinavian foundation dedicated to St Alban, the Benedictine monastery at Selje on the coast of Norway between Bergen and Trondheim, and Norway was of course the destination of a celebrated journey made by Matthew Paris in 1248. Apparently the only surviving record of this journey is that left by Matthew himself in his *Chronica Majora* (CM V 42–45; Vaughan 1984, 158–61). According to Matthew, the monastery of St Benedict at Holm (now Nidarholm, near Trondheim), which he claims was founded by Cnut the Great together with St Benet of Holme, Norfolk, had by 1147 fallen into grave financial difficulties and complete disarray, and appealed to Rome for help. The pope, according to an alleged papal letter quoted by Matthew, asked the abbot of St Albans in England to send Matthew to sort out the problem in Holm, and Matthew interpreted this as requiring him to act ‘as a reformer of the Benedictine order and visitor of the Benedictine abbots and monks in the kingdom of Norway’ (Vaughan 1984, 161). What actually happened in Norway is not known. We have only Matthew’s account, which suggests that he went full of high hopes, proud of his role as emissary of the pope and prepared to lay down the law to all Norwegian Benedictine abbots, but which ends rather uninformatively: ‘the affair was undertaken with success, so that the abbot of Holm in Norway continued in peace and prosperity, and through God’s grace the monastic order, though exposed to danger, breathed more easily, as did other monasteries in that region’ (Vaughan 1984, 161). The reference to ‘other monasteries’ implies that Matthew had wider contacts than solely with Holm, as one would expect from his interpretation of the papal brief, and it is hardly conceivable that he would have ignored the monastery of St Alban at Selje; indeed, Matthew informs us that the abbot of Nidarholm, whose affairs Matthew had been sent to investigate, had actually died *in cænobio videlicet Sancti Albani in Selio* (CM V 43; Vaughan 1984, 159). Matthew must therefore have had some contact with Selje, and one might expect him, as the greatest living authority on St Alban, to have wished to update the monks of Selje on the hagiography of their patron saint, with the added account of Amphibalus and his spectacular martyrdom, not least in order to correct the prevailing Norwegian view that Alban was the brother of Sunniva, the legendary Irish princess shipwrecked and martyred at Selje, to whom the earliest church at Selje had been dedicated. The origins of Selje are very obscure (see Abrams 1995, 241, and the other studies cited there), and there is even a possibility that the Alban of Selje may have been not the

British martyr but a German saint of the same name, but Matthew is unlikely to have known of any other Alban and his reference to the monastery of St Alban in Selje seems to imply that he identified that Alban with the patron of his own monastery at St Albans; any other identification would presumably have elicited some comment. The version of the legend of Sunniva in *Flateyjarbók (Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, chs 194–96) shows an awareness of the conflict between different versions of the legend of Alban, one by implication widely current, perhaps in Iceland but presumably especially in Norway, the other specifically localised in Selje, and it is this Selje version that identifies Alban (admittedly slightly unclearly) as the first Christian martyr in Britain (*Flateyjarbók* 1860–68, I 246):

Þat finnst skrifat at brodir Sunnifu sa er Albanus het hafui verit j þessu hinu helga lide ok farit vestan vm haf med Sunnifu. en þui er her ekki af honum sagt at synizst efanligt þat. en þo segia þat sumir menn þeir er j Selju hafua verit ok þar er kunnikt at þar se mikil kirkia helgut guds pislarvott Albano er fyrstr uar pindr firir guds nafnn ok segia þeir menn suo at þar se halæitliga dyrkat hofut þess Albani, er drepinn uar a Æinglande.

It appears in some writings that Sunniva's brother, who was called Alban, was in this holy company and travelled from the west across the sea with Sunniva, but he is not mentioned here [i. e. in the legend of Sunniva just narrated], since that seems uncertain. However, some men say who have been in Selja, and it is well known there, that there is a great church there dedicated to God's martyr Alban, who first suffered for God's name; these men say that the head of this Alban, who was killed in England, is sublimely venerated there.

It is possible, though obviously unprovable, that the currency of the English version of the legend of Alban in Selje is part of the legacy of Matthew Paris's visit to Norway.

There seems to be no evidence extant in Norway concerning Matthew's visit, but one detail of his account, his story of the ship in Bergen harbour whose mast was struck by lightning, is authenticated in a Norwegian source. This is recorded by Matthew as an event that befell the ship in which he had sailed from England and from which he had just disembarked, and what must be the same event is also related in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, ch. 260 (Vaughan 1958, 6; Vigfusson 1887, 256). There are differences of detail sufficient to show that each account is independent of the other, but both accounts place the incident shortly after the great fire of Bergen on 9 June 1248 (a few days after in the saga, the following day in Matthew). Moreover, the ascription to Matthew of a painting now in Norway points to the possibility

of a wider impact than could be deduced from Matthew's own account of his visit; Vaughan discusses the possibility of Matthew's influence on Norwegian painting and plausibly conjectures that a painting by Matthew on an oak panel, now in Oslo, was actually taken to Norway by Matthew as a gift to King Hákon or to the monastery of Holm (Vaughan 1958, 205–07 and 228–29). Against this background, it seems quite plausible that Matthew Paris might have introduced to the Norwegian court and monastic circles the legend of the death of Amphibalus, both verbally (whether in Latin, French or even English) and visually through an illustration of the incident, whether brought from England or made on the spot. At any rate, Matthew's visit to Norway in 1248 is the most obvious channel by which the hagiographic motif of the fatal walk passed from England to Scandinavia, and ultimately to Iceland to become incorporated in *Njáls saga*.

As already mentioned, there is a fundamental difference between the sagas and the other sources. In the stories of Alfred Ætheling and Amphibalus the fatal walk is part of the sufferings of a martyr, a treatment that is mirrored in *Orms þáttr*, but in *Njáls saga* and *Þorsteins saga* it is a punishment inflicted on an evildoer. At first sight this looks like a rather arbitrary and unmotivated transference of a tale of saintly suffering to a context and genre in which it seems out of place. A reason for this transference of the motif appears, however, in the narrative sequence in which it is placed in *Njáls saga*. Just as Gaimar seems to have introduced the motif of the fatal walk into his account of Alfred Ætheling because of a rather vague reference to evisceration in William of Poitiers, so the author of the Clontarf episode may have been similarly prompted by the reference to human entrails in *Darraðarljóð*, which is linked in the saga with the Battle of Clontarf. Whether or not *Darraðarljóð* originally had any connection with Clontarf is not relevant here; what is relevant is that the author of *Njáls saga* (or possibly the author of whatever account of the battle was used as a source for that saga) took it to be so, and the imagery of severed heads and entrails in the poem influenced the narrative of the deaths of Brjánn and Bróðir. The poem contains the following lines (stanza 2), referring to the loom on which the destinies of men are woven (*Njáls saga* 1954, 455):

Sjá er orpinn vefr	The warp was set up
ýta þørmum	with the entrails of men
ok harðkléaðr	and weighted down
höfðum manna.	with men's heads.

It appears that the Clontarf narrative has been developed (perhaps by the author of *Njáls saga*, perhaps by the author of a source-text) as an overtly Christian response to *Darraðarljóð*. Brján's head is cut off by Bróðir and Bróðir's entrails are pulled out in return. In parallel accounts in hagiography (in Ælfric's *Life of St Edmund*, for example, Ælfric 1966, II 326, lines 176–80), the saint's head miraculously grows back onto his body, signifying the perfect body of the Christian resurrection, but no miracle will restore the mutilation of the pagan (indeed, apostate) Bróðir, whose suffering will continue throughout eternity. The pagan web of destiny with its severed heads and entrails has no power over the Christian, but the pagan is for ever subject to its gloomy hopelessness. In this way the picturesque imagery of the pagan poem is developed for a didactic religious purpose, and the grotesque manner of the viking's death emphasises a literary shift to the conventions of hagiography and religious propaganda.

Finally, it may be noted that in *Orms þáttr* the fatal walk is paralleled by the rite of the blood-eagle: the giant Brúsi malevolently inflicts the former on Ásbjörn and Ormr inflicts the latter as punishment on Brúsi. It has been suggested that the rite of the blood-eagle is a literary convention, perhaps arising from a misunderstanding (Frank 1984; additional references in Frank 1990–93; see further McTurk 1994). It is certainly my view that the motif of the fatal walk is a purely literary convention, and in this case the antecedents of the motif are traceable. Whether this has any bearing on the rite of the blood-eagle is uncertain, but both motifs may exemplify a taste for gruesome detail that appears in some later medieval Icelandic writing, a change in taste that might be seen as reflecting W. P. Ker's classic dichotomy of epic and romance, if not Steblin-Kamenskij's theory of the baleful effects of religion (Ker 1908; Steblin-Kamenskij 1973, 45–48, 100–122). Few would deny that *Njáls saga* is a work of epic seriousness, while the death of Bróðir introduces an element of fantasy and unreality that is foreign to the pervading tone of the saga-narrative, and if this episode also introduces an element of brutality and savagery this is because of the shift from the values of the family-sagas, in which death has a seriousness and finality, to the values of saints' lives, in which suffering and death are a transient part of mankind's progress to the joys of heaven. How far this shift is aesthetically justified at this point is however another matter.

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I have occasionally modified editorial punctuation in quotations.

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## THE LOCALISATION AND DATING OF MEDIEVAL ICELANDIC MANUSCRIPTS

By STEFÁN KARLSSON

AS IS APPARENT FROM THE TITLE, the subject of this paper is the localisation and dating of medieval Icelandic manuscripts.<sup>1</sup> In this context I intend to touch on the identification of scribal hands in more than one manuscript, that is to say, the establishment of groups of manuscripts on the basis of common hands, and to consider attempts to identify individual scribes or at least to place them in a particular environment.

In my view, investigations of this sort can serve many purposes well beyond just satisfying pure curiosity, necessary though curiosity certainly is in a scholar. In many cases our work resembles that of the detective, although we seldom succeed in making our expositions as exciting as a detective-thriller.

Identification of scribes is not only of interest for the study of Icelandic biography and genealogy. Along with the dating and localisation of a group of manuscripts on the basis of common hands, it can contribute to our knowledge of where in Iceland manuscripts were produced and in what sort of environment. We can also get information about what literary genres were of interest in the communities in question.

A fairly secure dating for Icelandic manuscripts is more or less essential for students of literary history who are concerned with chronology and literary development. This is because the age of the oldest manuscript of a given text constitutes, of course, a *terminus ante quem* for that text. There are some interesting cases where this simple principle was ignored. In Stefán Einarsson's typological dating of the later *riddarasögur* (1957, 164; 1961, 204–05), for example, *Dínus saga drambláta* and two other sagas were put around 1500 or even after that date. In fact there are good reasons for dating the oldest manuscript of *Dínus saga* (AM 575 a 4to) to about or even before 1400, and the oldest manuscripts of the other sagas to the 15th century (*ONPInd* 1989, 172, 383, 268).

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a paper given to the Viking Society in November 1996; parts of the contents have been incorporated in other papers of which one has been published, cf. Stefán Karlsson 1998.

Moreover the dating of manuscripts is, of course, of enormous importance for students of linguistic history. In grammars of Old Norse, sound-changes and morphological innovations are often dated in a rather unsubtle manner which can be deceptive. When, for example, it is stated that short /o/ and short /ø/ fall together in about 1200 and long /æ/ and /œ/ fall together in about 1250 then this is an assertion which needs explanation. It is true that we find the first signs of these sound-changes at about these dates. But the concise way they are often formulated in modern grammars might give the uninitiated the idea that they took place either by the waving of some magic wand or even by a legislative act of the Icelandic parliament. In the large Icelandic speech-area we can, I think, reckon that it took something like fifty to a hundred years for a linguistic innovation to be carried through over the whole country. In some cases it may have taken considerably longer. Besides, we still have areas where older forms linger on, and where changes have not been carried through which took place centuries earlier elsewhere in the country.

Although we believe we know the main features of Icelandic linguistic history, much remains obscure, not least about where particular linguistic innovations have arisen and in which directions and how quickly they have spread. As is well known, the most radical changes which have taken place in Icelandic since the Middle Ages are in pronunciation, and certain shifts in the sound-system find no expression in orthography because no syncretism of sounds resulted. Other changes are, of course, manifested in the written language, but up till now it has been impossible to say with certainty exactly where in the country any innovation had its origin. The sparse and scattered population of Iceland and the lack of any significant urbanisation until the present century have meant that there have been no influential centres for linguistic innovations, and this, in turn, has been one of the reasons for the relatively conservative character of the Icelandic language.

It has also proved difficult to follow the spread of linguistic change. One reason is the very uneven distribution of the preserved documentary sources. There is no specifically dated and localised original charter preserved from before 1300. And up into the fifteenth century the overwhelming preponderance of charters is from northern Iceland. This means that it is almost impossible to get from the charters of this period any overall picture of the linguistic situation outside the northern part of the country.

In an article on the external circumstances affecting the development

of Icelandic, Helgi Guðmundsson (1977, 319) drew attention to the fact that the Icelandic speech-area was circular in form. This meant that linguistic innovations could gain ground on both sides, until, by a sort of pincer movement, they conquered the whole country. But the converse could also happen: a linguistic innovation might well succumb in a campaign on two fronts against the forces of linguistic conservatism. There is evidence in the written sources for quite a number of linguistic innovations which seemed to establish themselves and flourish for a few centuries, only to disappear entirely at a later date. The problem is that we have been unable to define with any certainty the dialect-areas in which they manifested themselves at a given time, and therefore they are rarely of value in localising a particular manuscript in which they appear.

One factor that makes it difficult to establish well-defined dialect areas and boundaries in Iceland is, of course, the mobility of its population (Jón Helgason 1931, 36–37; Helgi Guðmundsson 1977, 318–21). It may perhaps appear paradoxical that such mobility existed at the same time as Icelandic society remained extraordinarily static down the centuries from an economic point of view, but that is in fact the case. This mobility took various forms, of which two are most relevant to the present discussion. First, from the late Middle Ages down to the present century labourers moved from one part of the country to another because of the seasonal nature of employment. Second, the clergy often changed residence, as did members of the wealthiest families who commonly entered into marriages, inherited farms and settled down in places far from where they were born. One result of this mobility was doubtless what might be termed linguistic infiltration, which in turn contributed to a somewhat complex dialectal situation. Another factor undoubtedly was that many scribes had a role somewhat similar to that of itinerant journeymen. I shall return to them later.

What I should like to consider, then, are the methods that have been used for dating and localising medieval Icelandic manuscripts. I shall also touch on various conclusions which earlier scholars have come to in this field, and others I have come to myself, not all of which I have so far published.

Just as the great majority of Icelandic sagas are anonymous, so it is only in exceptional cases that the scribes of preserved manuscripts are named. The best known exception to this generalisation is the original part of the largest extant Icelandic medieval manuscript, *Flateyjarbók* (Gl. kgl. sml. 1005 fol., now in SÁM). This contains primarily sagas

about four Norwegian kings, but with lengthy interpolations from Sagas of Icelanders and other sagas that are connected in their subject-matter with the missionary kings Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr helgi. In a prefatory note in the hand of one of the scribes of *Flateyjarbók*, we are told that the book's owner was Jón Hákonarson, a prominent landowner of Víðidalstunga in Húnavatnssýsla, in the western part of the northern Quarter. We are also given the names of the book's two scribes, Jón Þórðarson and Magnús Þórhallsson, both of them priests, and are told which part of the codex each of them wrote and that Magnús illuminated the whole book. Elsewhere in the codex, 1387 is given as the year in which the book was written, but its youngest parts are a little later nonetheless, inasmuch as the annals which the manuscript contains continue as far as 1394 (Stefán Karlsson 1970b, 298–99). A single leaf from a manuscript containing an otherwise unknown *riddarasaga* called *Gregga saga*, AM 567 4to, XXVI (now in SÁM), has also turned out to have been written by Magnús Þórhallsson. Finally, on the basis of orthographically accurate copies by later scribes, I think I have convincingly shown that a largish codex called *Vatnshyrna* which contained a number of Sagas of Icelanders but which perished in the Copenhagen fire of 1728 was at least partly written in Magnús's hand (Stefán Karlsson 1970b). Long before this, however, the production of *Vatnshyrna* had been thought to be due to Jón Hákonarson's initiative because genealogies at the end of two of the sagas it contained are traced down either to Jón himself or to the woman we think was his wife (Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1860a, xiv–xvi; 1860b, ix–xi).

The manuscript Perg. fol. nr 2 in The Royal Library in Stockholm has saints' lives as its contents and the heading to one of these is: *Hér byrjar Benedictus sögu er Ormur Loftsson skrifaði*, 'Here begins Benedictus saga, which Ormur Loftsson copied'. The majority of the twenty-five other sagas in the manuscript are written entirely or partly in the same hand as *Benedikts saga*, and Peter Foote, in the introduction to the facsimile edition of the codex, detected the same hand in two leaves from another codex containing saints' lives (AM 238 fol., VIII). The scribe Ormur Loftsson must be identical with the person of the same name who was the Norwegian king's *hirðstjóri* (governor) in Iceland for a shortish period. He lived partly in western Iceland and partly in the western part of northern Iceland, dying probably at an early age before 1450 (Foote 1962, 10–12 and 17–18).

Then there is a single leaf, probably the final one, from a liturgical manuscript designated AM 80 b 8vo (now in SÁM), in which the scribe

provides specific information about the book's genesis in a colophon. He gives his own name as Jón Þorláksson and the name of the person who commissioned the book as Bjarni Ívarsson and says that Bjarni was also its illuminator. Bjarni lived at Meðalfell in Kjós in south-western Iceland but presented the book 'to the Virgin Mary at Munkaþverá', that is, to the Benedictine monastery at Munkaþverá in Eyjafjörður in northern Iceland. The year is given as 1473 (Kålund 1884–91). The reason why Bjarni gave this fine gift to a monastery in a far-off part of the country could well be that his wife (who was, by the way, a sister of the Ormur Loftsson I have just mentioned) came from the wealthy farm of Möðruvellir in Eyjafjörður which lies only twelve kilometres or so south of Munkaþverá. There is also circumstantial evidence that Bjarni, who himself came from south-western Iceland, may have grown up in the household of his aunt Margrét Vigfúsdóttir at Möðruvellir (I will be coming back to her later on). It is quite possible that Bjarni was sent to school at Munkaþverá, even though he never took orders. The scribe of the manuscript, Jón Þorláksson, who was also a layman, has been identified as the scribe of the preserved fragments of various other liturgical codices and also of a little prayer-book which Sir Joseph Banks presented to the British Museum in 1773 (BL Add. 4895). The legend about Jón Þorláksson is that the three fingers he used for writing did not grow stiff when rigor mortis set in at his death (Magnús Már Lárusson 1958; Jón Helgason 1968; Ólafur Halldórsson 1971; Andersen 1979; Stefán Karlsson 1979b).

Then there are examples of a scribe being mentioned in a manuscript without our having any further information about him. AM 152 fol. (now in SÁM) is a large saga-codex containing *Grettis saga* and also various *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*. It was written by two scribes, one of whom wrote the first quarter of the codex, including *Grettis saga*. In the margin of the part of the codex containing *Grettis saga*, on f. 46v, we find written: *Þessa sögu hefur skrifað bróðir Bjarnar Þorleifssonar*, 'The brother of Björn Þorleifsson wrote this saga'. Earlier scholars, most recently Jón Helgason (1958, 74), took it for granted that the Björn Þorleifsson mentioned here was the king's governor of that name who was killed by Englishmen in 1467. But it was later discovered that the scribal hand in question appeared in various charters, amongst them three from the years 1511–12 (*DIVIII*, nos 299, 327 and 334<sup>2</sup>) which concern the farm of Svignaskarð in Borgarfjörður in

<sup>2</sup> Bps. A I Fasc. XVIII 42, XVIII 43 and XII 6 in Þjóðskjalasafn Íslands.

western Iceland. On this farm there lived a man by the name of Þorsteinn Þorleifsson, who was half-brother to another Björn Þorleifsson, a grandson of the king's governor of the same name (Louis-Jensen 1969, 241–43). This younger Björn Þorleifsson is best known as the scribe, and perhaps also part-compiler, of the last great work of Icelandic hagiography, which goes under the name of *Reykjahólabók*. In addition to charters, his hand is also found in fragments of a couple of other codices which contain religious works (Overgaard 1968, ciii–cxi; Loth 1969, xxi–xxxv). In contrast with this, his half-brother Þorsteinn Þorleifsson's hand appears in fragments of a legal manuscript (Stefán Karlsson 1970a, 138).

The incorrect identification of the scribe of AM 152 fol. made by earlier scholars is closely related to the stagnation in the development of Icelandic script and orthography in the period between the great plague of 1402–04 and the Reformation. That stagnation was such that a number of codices which we now know to have been written in the first half of the sixteenth century, or about the middle of it, were formerly dated to the fifteenth.

To conclude this part of my paper, I will mention a group of codices in which the names of the scribes in marginalia have been the cause of trouble and divided opinion. Four manuscripts were seen to belong to this group as much as a hundred years ago. Three of them are among the largest codices from the end of the Middle Ages: the saga-manuscript AM 510 4to, the *rímur*-manuscript AM 604 4to, and AM 713 4to, which contains a large collection of Catholic poems. In addition, there is a small manuscript, AM 431 12mo, which contains a life of St Margaret of Antioch and prayers for women in labour. All four of these manuscripts are now in SÁM.

Now because the scribe of this last manuscript, 431, is referred to as Jón Arason, and because the manuscript contains some prayers in Latin, it was assumed by most scholars that this group of manuscripts was written by Jón Arason, the last Catholic bishop of Iceland. But in a long article, Jón Helgason (1932) produced strong arguments to show that, in fact, the bishop had no part in the production of these manuscripts. He pointed out that the two names Jón Arason and Tómas Arason appeared in marginalia in the saga-manuscript 510 and a 'séra Ari' in marginalia in the *rímur*-manuscript 604. After Agnete Loth had noticed that at the end of one of the sagas in 510 the book was said to have been written by *þrír feðgar*, that is either a father and his two sons, or a grandfather and his son and grandson; and after I had found one of

the hands of this manuscript-group in a charter written at Staður in Súgandafjörður in the Western Fjords in 1549 in which the priest Ari Jónsson was one of the witnesses (*DI XI*, no. 629<sup>3</sup>), Ólafur Halldórsson (1966, 25–26) clinched the conclusion put forward by Jón Helgason just as a possibility in his article that the scribes of this group of manuscripts were the priest Ari Jónsson from the Western Fjords and his two lay sons, Jón and Tómas. This Ari Jónsson was the grandson of a Jón Þorláksson who was either identical with, or a brother of, the well-known scribe of liturgical manuscripts whom I mentioned earlier (p. 142). Since 1966, more manuscripts have been added to the group, a little encyclopaedic manuscript and various law-books, so that we see that this college of scribes, up there in the Western Fjords, concerned themselves with most of the genres of Iceland's medieval literature (Stefán Karlsson 1970a, 139). Up to now, nobody has tried to ascribe individual parts of the manuscripts in this impressive group to particular members of the trio, but this should not be impossible despite the fact that, at first glance, the hands in these manuscripts resemble each other to the point of confusion.

There have always, of course, been groups of scribes who wrote individual characters and expressed individual phonemes in the same way. But in writing in general the graphic and orthographic possibilities were so numerous that it is highly improbable that any two scribes would adopt exactly the same combinations. It is true, on the other hand, that the probability is undeniably greatest in precisely the sort of situation we seem to have here, where two sons were presumably taught to write by their father.

In what I have said so far, I have given a few examples of how dated and localised charters can help us to identify the writers of manuscripts. Now the writers of Icelandic charters were, like the majority of scribes of the codices, anonymous. But we can sometimes identify the scribe of a charter with a reasonable degree of certainty, because his name will often appear in the charter itself, either as one of the parties in the particular piece of business or as one of the arbitrators or witnesses who execute the charter. If one has just one solitary charter, of course, it is usually useless to attempt to single out one of the persons named as the scribe. But if one has two or more charters in the same hand, then things become easier (and then normally in direct

<sup>3</sup> AM Dipl. Isl. Fasc. LI 23 (now in SÁM).



relationship to the number of charters one has). This is because a greater number of charters reduces the number of persons who can be seen to have been present on all the occasions when the charters were executed or to have had an interest in them all. And it is also an advantage if the relevant charters are chronologically spread over a longish period, since this reduces the possibility that likely candidates had the same secretary the whole time; and one can in certain cases observe small changes in writing which can contribute to a closer dating of any manuscript which might be in the charter-writer's hand.

When one has succeeded in identifying the hand in a charter with one in a manuscript, then identification of the scribe is obviously made easier if the manuscript's content gives some hint as to who the scribe was. This was the case with the earliest identifications of manuscript writers on the basis of charters. The first was Peter Andreas Munch's identification (Munch 1847) of lawman Haukur Erlendsson, who lived chiefly in Norway, as the main scribe of the manuscript *Hauksbók* (AM 371 4to (now in SÁM), AM 544 4to and AM 675 4to), a manuscript which was already connected with him by the genealogies in the version of *Landnámabók* it contains and because the writer of 371, on a now lost leaf, had given his name as Haukur Erlendsson. The second was Gustav Storm's identification (Storm 1888, xxi; cf. also Stefán Karlsson 1963, xxxix) of the priest Einar Hafliðason, *officialis* and administrator at Hólar, as the scribe of the so-called *Lögmannsannáll* down to 1361, a set of annals whose contents suggested him as their compiler and also partly their author. As far as *Hauksbók* is concerned, I have tried to establish a closer dating of those parts of the manuscript which are written in the same hand as two charters written by Haukur in 1302 and 1310 (*IO* nos 4 and 5, both in Riksarkivet in Oslo), and on the basis of minor palaeographical differences between the two charters, I have attempted to demonstrate that the major part of what Haukur wrote in *Hauksbók* (371 and parts of 544) was written between the dates of the two charters (Stefán Karlsson 1964).

In the course of the last few decades, scholars have recognised hands found in charters in manuscripts whose contents did not already point in a particular direction. But this is relatively rare in the period before 1400. There are two reasons for this. First, the corpus of Icelandic charters for the period prior to 1400 is rather limited—not many more than a hundred original charters. Second, there is the difficulty that scribes in the fourteenth century used two different types of writing: on the one hand, a style they used for writing codices, which may be called

a Gothic book-script, on the other a semicursive which they primarily used in writing charters. It seems that the most productive scribes mastered both styles and there are actually a few examples of a scribe using both styles in a single codex. But otherwise it is often almost impossible to recognise the style a scribe uses in writing codices from the one he uses in writing charters, and vice versa.

One reason why it is of such value to recognise the hand of a charter in a codex or to establish a close relation between the hands of charters and those of codices is, of course, that charters are dated and localised. Particularly where several charters exist in the same hand as a codex, it may be possible to arrive at a very accurate dating of the codex on the basis of a development in the writing which can be observed from one charter to the next. On the other hand, a dating based solely on a codex's script and spelling cannot reasonably be more accurate than to a period of a least fifty years.

The place where a charter was executed does not necessarily give any information about the place where the scribe lived nor, if we find manuscripts in the same hand, the place where he wrote these. Scribes were mobile, and the more competent amongst them were presumably in certain cases called upon to carry out their work in several different places. When we have a number of charters in the same hand, they will normally have been written in different places, not necessarily just within the same area, but sometimes in places quite far apart. Any concentration we find at or around a given place will, of course, give a hint as to the place where the scribe lived. And when one is able to put a definite name to the scribe of a charter, then other sources can make localisation of the scribe in question considerably easier.

I will give a single example of this which will also serve to show how careful we must be if we are to make use of localised charters as sources for dialect geography. A short contribution by Pierre Naert (1956) included in its title the words 'Med þessu minu optnu brefi'. This phrase, *með þessu mínu opnu bréfi*, literally, 'by this my open letter', is found at the beginning of numerous charters, and Naert had collected from *Diplomatarium Islandicum* cases where an intrusive *t* was found between the *p* and the *n* in the word *opnu*, the dative singular neuter of the adjective *opinn*, 'open'. In all, he found the spelling in thirty-eight charters from the period 1449–1567. They were spread over northern Iceland, western Iceland and the most westerly parts of southern Iceland. But the greatest concentration was in the southern part of Strandasýsla on the eastern side of the north-western peninsula,

and it was therefore reasonable to conclude that it was somewhere in that region of Iceland that the sound-change represented by the spelling in question had its origin. On the other hand, it is a little difficult to think of the rather isolated Strandasýsla as the dynamic centre of a linguistic innovation which subsequently spread elsewhere. And when one takes a closer look at the charters which figure in Naert's list, then one sees that at least a quarter of them, including all those from Strandasýsla, are written in the same hand in the years between 1488 and 1514. This hand is also found in certain other documents which were not in Naert's list, either because they did not contain the spelling in question or because they were not accurately reproduced in *Diplomatarium Islandicum*. In all, there are some thirteen charters in this one hand. The majority of them concern one and the same person, so it is reasonable to conclude that we have here the actual scribe. This person was called Þorbjörn Jónsson and he was a farmer at Kálfanes in Steingrímsfjörður in Strandasýsla. He seems to have travelled quite a lot and to have written documents, partly for other people, at various places in the north-western peninsula, and also at some distance off to the south in the monastery on Viðey and at the bishop's seat at Skálholt. Þorbjörn was an unusual character. The first time he appears in historical sources is in a document executed in 1487 by Raymundus Peraudi, the Pope's commissioner for indulgences in Germany, which grants an indulgence to Þorbjörn and his wife; the document is in Icelandic and was written by Þorbjörn himself, with the addition of a couple of Latin prayers in the same hand (*DI VI*, no. 524)! In addition we are told in two further documents that he received absolution for some unspecified transgressions from his bishop on Viðey in 1494 (*DI VII*, no. 269) and from his archdeacon at Kálfanes probably in 1499 (*DI VII*, no. 447). In 1514 he also received absolution from his archdeacon in Vatnsfjörður *ab adulterio* (*DI VIII*, no. 401). The last time we come across him is at Skálholt in 1515 in a charter where the bishop licenses a building erected by Þorbjörn in Steingrímsfjörður as a chapel and grants nine days' indulgence to people each time they go there to hear mass (*DI VIII*, no. 439). All five of these documents are in the same hand.<sup>4</sup> I will be coming back to Þorbjörn later on.

In the identification of Haukur Erlendsson and Einar Hafliðason as writers of codices, a combination of two factors was involved. First,

<sup>4</sup> AM Dipl. Isl. Fasc. XXVIII 13, XXXII 21, XXXIV 16, XLII 15 and XLII 25 (all now in SÁM).

certain things in their codices pointed to them as scribes or patrons; and second, the appearance of the same scribal hands in charters which concerned them and which were written many years apart made it highly likely that they had contributed to the writing of the codices in question with their own hands.

In certain cases it is possible to localise manuscripts, without necessarily pointing to a named scribe, on the basis of some local connection of the texts. This method was used in the last century to localise AM 279 a 4to, which became known as *Pingeyrabók* (*DII*, nos 80 and 112), because its oldest parts, written in the second half of the thirteenth century, contain among other things information about foreshore rights belonging to the Benedictine monastery at Pingeyrar.<sup>5</sup> In the 1960s, it became apparent that the latest parts of the codex are written in the same hand as certain documents which concern Jón Þorvaldsson who was abbot of Pingeyrar at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and he probably wrote these documents himself (Stefán Karlsson 1963, xxix–xxxiii). The same hand is found as one of those in AM 624 4to, which contains exempla and many other texts, including *Visio Pauli* (Tveitane 1965, 6–7). Two of the oldest hands are also found in other manuscripts, one of them in fragments of a manuscript of *Gregorius saga* and Gregory's *Dialogues* (NRA nos 71, 72, 72b, 76 and 77, and AM 921 4to, IV), and another in the oldest extant fragment of *Karlamagnús saga*, NRA 61 (Stefán Karlsson 1992). Both the manuscripts of which these fragments are the remains were probably in Norway in the medieval period and are therefore one of several indications that the scriptorium at Pingeyrar to some extent produced manuscripts with an eye to exporting them to Norway (Stefán Karlsson 1979a, 8–9).

Information about who owned a manuscript or the place it was kept can also provide evidence about its place of origin. The value of such evidence is, however, naturally qualified by the length of time between a manuscript's date of origin and the date of such information. Thus it has become clear over the years that several of the manuscripts which Árni Magnússon in his time acquired from Skálholt, and which on that

<sup>5</sup> One of the oldest parts of this manuscript, 'Skipti á spákonuarfi', was dated to about 1200 (*DII*, no. 80) or a little later (Hreinn Benediktsson 1965, xviii), probably since it contains a reference to a statement by abbot Karl (d. 1212 or 1213). But it is not certain that Karl's statement would have been written down in his lifetime, and in any case one cannot assume that AM 279 a 4to is the original of this document.

basis were in some cases formerly regarded as products of Skálholt, were in fact written in other parts of the country. This is very understandable. Ecclesiastical establishments not only produced manuscripts; they also received them as gifts and bequests. And as far as Skálholt is concerned this was particularly necessary because its stock of books was greatly reduced by various fires (Stefán Karlsson 1967a, 57–58<sup>6</sup>).

An example of a generally accepted localisation of a group of manuscripts on this basis is to be found in Ólafur Halldórsson's exhaustive monograph, *Helgafellsbækur fornar* (1966). Here Ólafur presented various indications that a large group of manuscripts from the second half of the fourteenth century, established as a group on the basis of common hands, had been written in the Augustinian monastery at Helgafell. One of these manuscripts is AM 226 fol., containing among other things material from or connected with the historical books of the Old Testament, known as *Stjórn*. Also belonging to the group are several manuscripts of saints' lives, including Codex Scardensis with its lives of the apostles, the manuscript of the Óláfr sagas AM 61 fol., and some law-books, including the beautifully illuminated *Skarðsbók*.

In his 'Tesen om de två kulturerna', Lars Lönnroth put together a very useful list of most of the groups of manuscripts known at the time to have had one or more scribal hands in common, with brief comments (1965, 65–73). Now in my view the production of manuscript books in the Middle Ages in Iceland was not limited to the ecclesiastical foundations and clerics to quite the degree that Lönnroth argued. He is, of course, right in arguing that wealthy farmers often commissioned ecclesiastical establishments or local priests to carry out literary work for them, perhaps primarily copying and compiling, the sort of work that *Flateyjarbók* exemplifies. We can, of course, as Lönnroth suggests, talk about two cultures in medieval Iceland, one clerical, the other secular. But we must never forget that the bearers of the secular culture belonged to a Christian community, and more people than we have specific information about would have received at least some education, sometimes in monastic schools, without going on to be ordained as priests (Stefán Karlsson 1970a, 133 and 136).

In a critique I wrote of Lönnroth's arguments (1970a, 131–40), I argued that the ability to read and write was more common amongst the

<sup>6</sup> There are more manuscripts than are mentioned here that Árni got from Skálholt and have been shown to have been written elsewhere.

secular population of medieval Iceland than he was inclined to admit.<sup>7</sup> I have, of course, never argued that all or even the majority of Icelandic farmers in the Middle Ages were able to read and write. On the other hand, I suggested that it was probable most of the landowning farmers, and with them, of course, the chieftains, and certain other people, were able to do so. This literate group, however, was only a minority of the total number of farmers. Among the farmers who leased the farms they worked there was undoubtedly a significant disparity depending on the value (and with that the scale of the farming) of the farms they leased.

In this connection I will mention that in a study still to be published I have tried to use a source from the middle of the seventeenth century to get an idea of what proportion of the farmers of that time could read and write. The documents are from assemblies which were held throughout the country in 1649 in connection with the swearing of oaths of allegiance to Frederik III as absolute monarch (*Skjöl* 1914).<sup>8</sup> In a number of these documents we are told that all those who were able to write signed them themselves. The material proved to be rather variable, but my conclusion is that it is probable that about 20–25 per cent of all farmers could write. The document from one such assembly in Barðastrandarsýsla in the Western Fjords is the clearest because it tells us from which farm each person came. This particular assembly covered forty farms, which can be divided into three categories according to the valuation they are given in an inventory from 1710 (*Jarðabók* 1938). Sixteen farms were valued at twelve hundreds or less; of the farmers on these farms there was only one who signed. Eight farms in the second class were valued at sixteen hundreds; from them two farmers signed. Finally, sixteen farms were valued at eighteen hundreds or more, and from these seven of the farmers signed—that is nearly half of them. This shows, I think, that there was a close correlation between economic prosperity and social status on the one hand and the ability to write on the other.

Before I move on from this old dispute of mine with Lars Lönnroth, I will just mention one further point. I myself, and others before me, have quoted statements from the sixteenth century, by Peder Palladius, bishop of Sjælland, in 1546, and by two slightly later Norwegian writers, about the remarkable, in fact almost universal, literacy of the

<sup>7</sup> Later modifications of some of his views appear in Lönnroth 1990, 9.

<sup>8</sup> These documents are preserved in the Rigsarkiv, Copenhagen, in the section 'Island, Færø, Grønland' as nos 42–44.

Icelanders. I disagree with Lönnroth that the statements in question are so similar in wording that they have no independent source value. The bishop writes in general terms that he observes ‘that there are not many to be found in the country who cannot themselves both read and write their mother tongue.’ Absolon Beyer of Bergen writes in 1567 that it is customary among the Icelanders to teach their children to read and write, ‘females just as much as males, and young lads are put to studying their law-book until they know it off by heart.’ And the archdeacon Peder Claussøn Friis, writing in 1580, begins with an echo from Saxo Grammaticus to the effect that the Icelanders had writing and composing as a substitute for warfare and goes on to say that every farmer could read and write and that they taught their children to do the same, and concludes with the statement that every member of the *lögrétta* (public court of law) had his own copy of the law-book with him at the Alþingi (Stefán Karlsson 1970a, 133–35).

In this article of 1970 I accepted that these three statements exaggerate, but even so they presumably contain an element of truth in representing literacy in sixteenth-century Iceland as a good deal more widespread than in the neighbouring countries. There is no evidence that literacy was given any special impetus by the Reformation; in any case the Reformation had not been carried through in the whole of Iceland when Palladius was writing. On the other hand, it is possible that Icelandic clergy of the time might have stressed the country’s vigorous literary tradition to Palladius, who functioned more or less as their archbishop after the Reformation, and might have exaggerated literacy there as an argument for Iceland having its native language as the language of the Church. As we know, this was not what happened in Norway and the Faroes, which were also under Danish rule.

We can, of course, be entirely certain that the two bishop’s seats in Iceland were centres for the production of books, although there are very few preserved medieval manuscripts that can be connected with them as having been written there. On the other hand, as I have said, there are various groups of manuscripts which with varying degrees of probability appear to be the products of monastic houses. I have mentioned the large group dated to the fourteenth century connected with the Augustinian monastery at Helgafell and a smaller one from the thirteenth century connected with the Benedictine monastery at Þingeyrar; there is also a larger group of fourteenth-century manuscripts that has been linked with the monastery at Þingeyrar (Johansson 1997, 9–18

and 66–80). Other groups have with varying degrees of probability been identified as monastic products: one from the second half of the fourteenth century (Louis-Jensen 1968, 10–13) and another from the middle of the fifteenth century (Stefán Karlsson 1963, lx–lxi) have been associated with Benedictine Munkaþverá in Eyjafjörður; one from the middle of the fourteenth century (Stefán Karlsson 1967a, 26–29)<sup>9</sup> and another from a century later (see below) with Augustinian Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur; and one from the late fourteenth century (Lönnroth 1965, 71–72) with the Benedictine nunnery at Reynistaður in Skagafjörður.<sup>10</sup>

I will elaborate a little on the later of the two groups of manuscripts that have been linked to the monastery at Möðruvellir. It consists of two large manuscripts written around the middle of the fifteenth century, one of which has been divided into two, AM 81 a fol., which contains *Sverris saga*, *Böglunga sögur* and *Hákonar saga*, and AM 243 a fol., which contains *Konungs skuggsjá*. The other manuscript, Perg. fol. nr 7 in The Royal Library in Stockholm, contains various *riddarasögur*. The two manuscripts are connected by the fact that two identical, or at least closely related, hands appear in both (Holm-Olsen 1961, 15; Jónas Kristjánsson 1964, xiii–xiv), and in addition a number of other scribes were involved, some of whom have written just a few lines.

Now when Ludvig Holm-Olsen wrote his introduction to the facsimile edition of 81 a, he established that one of the main hands of these manuscripts was to be found in a charter (*DI V*, no. 77<sup>11</sup>) written in 1451 at the farm of Myrká in Hörgárdalur, that is, not far from the monastery at Möðruvellir. Because of the large number of hands in the group, Holm-Olsen concluded that these manuscripts were in all probability written at some ecclesiastical establishment, possibly at the bishop's seat at Hólar or at one of the monasteries, either Möðruvellir

<sup>9</sup> The localisation in this case is based on very weak foundations.

<sup>10</sup> The handwriting of these manuscripts is very like that in documents mostly relating to Brynjólfur ríki Bjarnarson of Akrar in Skagafjörður, who was for a time steward of the monastery at Reynistaður, and his son (Stefán Karlsson 1963, xxxvii–xxxix), and their origin (or at least that of some of them) has been linked with this family (Ólafur Halldórsson 1963; Stefán Karlsson 1970a). Peter Foote (1990, 38–60) has given a comprehensive account of this group of Skagafjörður manuscripts and considered the likelihood of whether they originated in a monastery or in the household of a great secular landowner. Cf. also Ólafur Halldórsson 1993, 17–22.

<sup>11</sup> AM Dipl. Isl. Fasc. XIII 1 (now in SÁM).



in Hörgárdalur or Munkaþverá in Eyjafjörður (Holm-Olsen 1961, 14–16).<sup>12</sup> Jónas Kristjánsson (1964, xiv–xvi) and especially Lönnroth (1965, 72) favoured Möðruvellir, and so did Holm-Olsen in his later works (1986, xix–xxiii; 1987, 11–12), though with greater reservation. In the introduction to his edition of 81 a, he said (1986, xxiii): ‘a codex with as many scribal hands as 81 a and 243 a have can hardly have been written in any other place than one of the monasteries’, and here Holm-Olsen is thinking of either Möðruvellir or Munkaþverá.

Now I must confess that I am very sceptical of such arguments. I think it is faulty logic to argue (as others have done besides Holm-Olsen) that because a manuscript is written in a number of different hands it was necessarily written at an ecclesiastical establishment. We must not forget the large farms to be found in Iceland at the time. In them the country’s wealthiest families resided and probably at least the male members of these would have been able to read and write. In addition, most of these larger farms were at the same time great church-places where one could find up to four clerics, two priests and one or two deacons. There might, then, have been almost a dozen literate people at such places, and they would in my opinion have had all that was needed to allow them to function as cultural centres producing books (Stefán Karlsson 1967b, 81). Also, as Jonna Louis-Jensen has pointed out in another connection (1969, 249–50), it is possible to explain the many minor hands that have written just a few lines of a manuscript as those of literate guests who perhaps put in an appearance at the place while a manuscript was actually being written.

Furthermore, a strong argument that the two manuscripts under discussion were not written in the monastery at Möðruvellir, nor indeed at Munkaþverá nor Hólar, is that not a single one of the many hands contained in them is also found in any of the considerable number of documents from the same period which concern these three ecclesiastical establishments.

I have a different suggestion to make. At the farm of Möðruvellir in Eyjafjörður, which is about forty kilometres south of the monastery of the same name, a document (*DI V*, no. 331<sup>13</sup>) was written in 1463 in a hand very similar to one of the hands common to the two manuscripts

<sup>12</sup> ‘The manuscript [AM 81 a fol.] evidently served as an exercise-book in the teaching of penmanship at one of Iceland’s educational centres, an episcopal residence or a monastery’ (Holm-Olsen 1961, 9).

<sup>13</sup> AM Dipl. Isl. Fasc. XV 21 (now in SÁM).

in question (Jónas Kristjánsson 1964, xiii), and a related hand is found in two transcripts of documents written at the same place in 1461 (*DI V*, nos 221 and 222<sup>14</sup>). Möðruvellir was one of the largest farms in the country and there was a church there served by two priests and a deacon (*DI V*, p. 307). At the time it was owned by Margrét Vigfúsdóttir, whom I mentioned earlier (p. 142 above), a lady of a distinguished, partly Norwegian, family (Einar Bjarnason 1964). She was an aunt of the Bjarni Ívarsson whom I mentioned before (p. 142) as a donor and illuminator of a book. In 1436 Margrét married Þorvarður Loftsson of Möðruvellir, son of Loftur Guttormsson, one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in Iceland in the early decades of the fifteenth century. But only ten years afterwards Þorvarður died and she lived on at Möðruvellir as a widow for some forty years. That she had an interest in art is apparent from the inventories of churches in the district, which list works of art she had given them, and to her own church she presented a fine English altar-piece of alabaster (*DI V*, p. 308) which can still be seen in the little wooden church from the last century now standing at Möðruvellir.

From a marginal note in 243 a it is clear that the lawman Þorvarður Erlendsson, a grandson of Margrét Vigfúsdóttir, owned 81 a and 243 a for a time (Holm-Olsen 1961, 14–15; 1987, 10), and the oldest name to be found in the marginalia of Perg. fol. nr 7 is the rare name Ívar Narfason (Jónas Kristjánsson 1964, xxxvi); but this was the name of a grandson of Bjarni Ívarsson, Margrét's nephew (Einar Bjarnason 1964, 83–86), possibly her foster-son,<sup>15</sup> who married Soffía Loftsdóttir, a sister of Margrét's husband Þorvarður. I conclude, then, that in all likelihood these manuscripts come from the farm Möðruvellir in Eyjafjörður; a cultural centre such as this was undoubtedly capable of producing books. The circumstances surrounding the above-mentioned manuscripts and others belonging to the same group will be discussed further by Christopher Sanders in his introduction to a forthcoming facsimile edition of Perg. fol. nr 7.

Before finishing, I will mention a single manuscript which also has been linked to an ecclesiastical establishment.

<sup>14</sup> AM Dipl. Isl. Fasc. I 1 (now in Þjóðskjalasafn Íslands) and VI 23 (now in SÁM).

<sup>15</sup> Bjarni Ívarsson's brother Guðmundur seems to have been brought up in Margrét's household at Möðruvellir; their father Ívar hólmur Vigfússon was killed in 1433 (Einar Bjarnason 1964, 82–89).

AM 551 a 4to contains the end of *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and also *Víglundar saga* and *Grettis saga*. Of the four scribes of this manuscript, the one who wrote the major part of it also wrote various marginal notes, including this sentence in the margin of *Grettis saga*: *Standi þar fyrst, því að mál er að krjúpa krossi*, that is, 'Let it remain so for the time being; it is time to kneel before the Cross.' In his facsimile edition of the manuscript, Jón Helgason (1954, viii) took this as evidence that this scribe was a cleric or a monk. This view was accepted by Lars Lönnroth (1965, 64), who also thought that the *faðir minn góður*, 'my good father', to whom in other marginalia the scribe makes apologies for the shortcomings of his work, was his abbot. Certainly the word *faðir* can have the sense 'abbot' and can also mean 'confessor'. But in this case it is really more natural to interpret these marginal notes in 551 a as addressed to the scribe's natural father, identical with the *frændi*, 'kinsman', of whom he takes his leave in another note elsewhere in the manuscript.

The fact is that it is apparent from a comparison of the hands that the person who wrote this saga-manuscript is identical with that same amanuensis of charters I mentioned earlier, the one who wrote the dative neuter singular of *opinn* with an intrusive *t*, Þorbjörn Jónsson of Steingrímsfjörður in the north-western peninsula. And I have also found Þorbjörn's hand in two incomplete erotic poems in AM 155 b 8vo<sup>16</sup> and in a medical miscellany, AM 434 a 12mo,<sup>17</sup> which contains, amongst other things, a prayer to the Holy Cross.

Þorbjörn was not a member of society's highest class, but he was a travelled and landowning farmer. And layman though he was, he was also a member of the Universal Church. It was therefore natural for him to interrupt his scribal work for a while and kneel before the Cross.

<sup>16</sup> Printed in Ólafur Davíðsson 1894, 308–09.

<sup>17</sup> Printed in Kålund 1907; facsimiles of two pages pp. 42–43.

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## RELIGIOUS IDEAS IN *SONATORREK*

BY JÓN HNEFILL AÐALSTEINSSON

**T**HE RELIGIOUS LIFE of the Icelanders during the tenth century, in the days of the pagan Nordic religion, is a relatively closed book to modern people.<sup>1</sup> The source material is scant and fragmentary, and most of it has already passed through the hands of several generations of people who were strongly opposed to the pagan Nordic beliefs of the tenth century. Nonetheless, in spite of everything, it remains possible that even today we are in possession of certain examples of trustworthy source material in which tenth-century people give personal descriptions of their own religious attitudes and views about individual gods. I am here referring to those poems and occasional verses (*lausavísur*) dealing with religious subjects which are said to have been written by tenth-century poets.

I ought to stress two things, however, before going any further. First of all, it is unlikely that we will ever be completely certain about whether the poems and occasional verses attributed to tenth-century poets are actually their work or not. Secondly, we do not know whether these works have been preserved in an uncorrupt state, that is to say, whether they still have the same shape as that in which they were originally composed. Both these considerations have to be borne in mind whenever any attempt is made to evaluate the work of tenth-century poets as source material for their religious beliefs.

Egill Skalla-Grímsson (c.910–90) was more prolific than any other Icelandic poet of the tenth century. A great deal of his poetry deals with gods and beliefs, and in this regard his poem *Sonatorrek* has a special position. Certain doubts have been raised as to whether Egill really was the author of everything that has been attributed to him, and *Sonatorrek*

<sup>1</sup> This article originally took the form of a lecture that was presented at University College London on 17 October 1996. I would like to express my gratitude to Richard Perkins for inviting me to give the lecture, and to Richard Perkins, Peter Foote and Michael Barnes for their useful notes and comments on it. A draft version of the lecture was earlier presented at a meeting of Vísindafélag Íslendinga in April 1990, and note has been taken of various comments made at that time. Finally, I would like to thank Terry Gunnell for his useful comments and careful translation.

is one of those that have been called into question (Bjarni Einarsson 1992). Opinions on this matter vary so greatly that there is little reason to spend much time on it here (Sigurður Nordal in *ÍF* II, v–xvi; Guðrún Nordal *et al.* 1992, 239–42).

*Sonatorrek* has been explained as meaning ‘Loss of Sons’, *torrek* then meaning ‘heavy loss’ (Cleasby and Vigfusson 1975). It is possible, however, that a more original meaning is contained in the title, and that *Sonatorrek* means *torrekin sonahefnd*, ‘a revenge for sons that is hard to achieve’ (Sigurður Nordal in *ÍF* II, 257 n.; Ásgeir Bl. Magnússon 1989).

In this present article I mean to discuss the religious ideas expressed in *Sonatorrek*. Three things in particular come into question here.

First of all, how do the religious ideas expressed in the poem about the fate of the poet’s sons after death fit in with the general Scandinavian belief that those who die in battle will go to Óðinn in Valhøll, those who drown will go to Rán, and those who die of illness end up going to Hel?

Secondly, what does the poem tell us about the belief and world view of the poet who composed it?

Finally, to what extent do the conclusions that we can draw from *Sonatorrek* support those conclusions that can be drawn from other sources about religious belief at this time?

The editions of *Sonatorrek* that I will mainly be referring to in this article are those of Sigurður Nordal in *ÍF* II (1933) and E. O. G. Turville-Petre in *Scaldic Poetry* (1976). Before continuing any further, however, I ought to give a little information about the poem, its author and the reason why the poem was composed.

*Sonatorrek* is believed to have been composed in about 960, and is preserved in *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, which in all likelihood was written 1220–40. The saga itself has been preserved in a number of manuscripts which scholars, led by Jón Helgason (1961, 29), have divided into three main groups. The most important manuscript in the first group is Möðruvallabók (M, AM 132 fol.) written c.1325–50. This version of the saga has formed the basis of all printed editions of the saga. The second group (the so-called Ketilsbók group, which I will be referring to simply as K) is based on two nearly identical copies of the saga which were made by the Reverend Ketill Jörundarson, who died in 1670. The main manuscript in the third group is known as Wolfenbüttelbók, or simply W. This comes from the mid-fourteenth century. For readings in the text of *Sonatorrek*, in addition to the printed editions, I have made use of photocopies of the K manuscripts.



The first strophe of *Sonatorrek* is preserved in M and in certain seventeenth-century manuscripts related to W, which itself has a lacuna at this point. One and a half other strophes from *Sonatorrek* (st. 23 and the first half of st. 24) are also contained in Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda. The complete poem, however, is only preserved in Ketill Jörundarson's manuscripts, K1 and K2, which are believed to be copies of a vellum manuscript dating from the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Jón Helgason believed that the first strophe of the poem was the only strophe of *Sonatorrek* to have been recorded in the original version of *Egils saga*, and that the poem had been written down elsewhere and was fitted into the lost manuscript that formed the basis for Ketill Jörundarson's copies. Jón Helgason believed that the original recording of the poem must have taken place at the time when early poems were still being collected from oral tradition, that is to say, before the middle of the thirteenth century (Jón Helgason 1961, 29). Turville-Petre (1976, 28) supports Jón Helgason's words, and says of *Sonatorrek*, 'It was inserted, presumably from an oral source, at an early date, when ancient poetry still lived orally.'

*Egils saga* ch. 78 recounts the events leading to Egill's composition of *Sonatorrek* as follows: Egill's young and promising son, Bǫðvarr, drowned off the coast. Egill found the corpse washed up on shore and took it to the grave-mound of his father, Skalla-Grímr. He then rode back home and entered his bed closet, locking the door behind him. He lay there for the whole of that night, the next day and the following night. On the third day, Egill's wife Ásgerðr had a horse fetched, and sent someone off as fast as possible to inform their daughter Þorgerðr at Hjarðarholt. Þorgerðr came to Borg late that evening. She immediately went to her father in his bed closet and said that she wanted to go the same way as he. They were then given water to drink in the bed closet, but on drinking it, discovered that it was milk. The saga now runs as follows:

Then Þorgerðr said, 'What shall we do now? This plan is now at an end. Now, father, I want us to lengthen our lives in order that you may compose a memorial poem for Bǫðvarr which I will write on a (rune) stick, and after that we may die if we wish to.' . . . Egill said that it was unlikely that he would be able to compose even if he tried, 'but I will make an attempt at it,' he said. Egill had had a son called Gunnarr, who had also died a short time before that. And this is the start of the poem.

*Sonatorrek* is quite an accessible poem. It is written in the *kviðuhátt* verse-form, though this is used with a certain freedom. The material is

well organised and the poem is not difficult to understand—wherever the text has been preserved in an uncorrupt state. In other places, however, the text is obviously somewhat corrupt and distorted, and it has proved difficult for scholars to solve all the difficulties that this has caused. In this connection, it is worth remembering Sigurður Nordal's comment on the subject (*ÍF* II, 245 n.): 'Even though we know that corrections must be necessary, we rarely know where they should be made or how.' Nordal's words should be borne in mind whenever any attempt is made to explain any unclear wording in *Sonatorrek*.

Before going any further, I will outline the subject matter of the poem. The poet starts by describing how difficult it is to compose. He senses the end of his family line, and says that it is hard for those who bear their deceased relatives out of the house (stt. 1–4). He remembers the death of his mother and father and then, for several strophes, turns especially to the drowning of his son. He says that the goddess Rán has been hard to him, and that if he could gain revenge with his sword, Ægir's days would be numbered. The poet is, however, powerless against 'ship-killer' (*skipsbananum*); everyone can now witness the helplessness of an old man (stt. 6–9). The sea has taken much from the poet. His son, the shield of the family, was well made, and deserved to be allowed to grow and mature. He always followed his father's advice and was a support in all ways (stt. 10–12). The poet thinks about the death of his brother Þórólfr. After his death the poet has had no real fighter by his side in battles. Friends grow fewer, and none can be trusted any more (stt. 13–16). No one can take the place of a dead son except another son. The son of the woman has reached his destination. The picture of Ægir again appears before the eyes of the poet, who describes his weakness (stt. 17–19). In st. 20, the poet turns to the son that died in his sick-bed, and in st. 21 tells of a son that Óðinn has received into the home of the gods. The next three strophes deal with the relationship that has existed between the poet and Óðinn, and in the final strophe of the poem, the poet paints a picture of himself facing Hel whom he claims to await both gladly and fearlessly.

The next thing that needs to be done is evaluate whether the religious ideas of *Sonatorrek* fit in with other available evidence on religious ideas from the tenth century. The first part of *Sonatorrek* makes it very clear that the poet's son has drowned. Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* and other thirteenth-century prose works give several accounts of how those who drown end up in the keeping of the sea goddess, Rán. Snorri's *Edda* states that Rán had a net in which she caught all those

men who came into the sea: *Rán átti net þat, er hon veiddi í menn alla, þá er á sæ kómu* (1931, 121). *Eyrbyggja saga* expresses a similar idea when Þóroddr and his companions appear soaking wet at their own wake: *þá hófðu menn þat fyrir satt, at þá væri monnum vel fagnat at Ránar, ef sædauðir menn vitjuðu erfis síns* (*ÍF* IV, 148).

Rán appears in a similar way in the poems of the Poetic Edda. In *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, it is said of a ship that was saved: *snørisk ramliga | Rán ór hendi* (*PE* 1962, 134). In *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*, Atli, addressing Hrímgærðr who has made an attempt to sink his ship, speaks of *ræsis rekka | er þú vildir Rán gefa* (*PE* 1962, 144).

Considering the evidence of these works, it might be presumed that the composer of *Sonatorrek* would have expected his drowned son to rest with Rán and Ægir. As mentioned earlier, the poem clearly states that the poet believes Rán and Ægir took his son away from him. It is therefore somewhat surprising to find several scholars interpreting three strophes in *Sonatorrek* (stt. 10, 18 and 21) as suggesting, as will be shown below, that after Bǫðvarr drowned, he went to Óðinn in Valhǫll. According to most other sources (like the Prose Edda and poems of the Poetic Edda), Valhǫll was reserved for those who died in battle (de Vries 1957, 377–79 and references; Simek 1993, 113; Halvorsen 1975, 464–65 and references). There is clearly some conflict of ideas here.

I will now re-examine the three strophes in question in order to see exactly how strong the logic is behind the traditional interpretation that scholars have tended to give. The tenth strophe of *Sonatorrek* runs as follows:

Mik hefr marr	The sea has
miklu ræntan,	robbed me of much,
grímt es fall	it is cruel to
frænda at telja,	count the death of relations,
síðan's minn	since mine
á munvega	on <i>munvega</i>
ættar skjöldr	shield of family
af lífi hvarf	vanished from life.

Most of this strophe is very clear and easy to understand. The main problem is the meaning of the word *munvega*. Sigurður Nordal (*ÍF* II 250) explains *munvegjar* as meaning *gleðivegir* ('paths of joy') and in support refers first to the name *munarheimr* ('the world of love') in *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* 42 and then to *goðheimr* ('the world of the gods') in st. 21 of *Sonatorrek*. *Goðheimr* in st. 21 is undoubtedly

Valhöll, and thus, if we follow Sigurður Nordal's explanation, it is natural to assume that Bǫðvarr must have gone there. Turville-Petre supports Nordal's interpretation, giving the following explanation of *á munvega*: 'on the paths of joy, the road to Valhöll' (1976, 34). Many other commentators and editors have accepted this interpretation.

Nonetheless, in the light of the widespread belief expressed in early works that those who die at sea go to Rán rather than to Valhöll, I think we should look more closely at the interpretations given by Nordal and Turville-Petre. Certainly, there is no doubt about the wording of the text in K. The key word is certainly *munvegar*.

The masculine word *munr*, in the genitive *munar* or *muns*, is very old in the Scandinavian languages. *Muns* appears in Wulfila's fourth-century translation of the Bible meaning 'mindedness', 'intention', 'thought' and so on (Köbler 1989). In ancient Scandinavian, *munr* has three meanings: 1. Intention, mindedness and thought; 2. Longing, will, joy; and 3. Love. Compound words stemming from *munr* are *muntún* ('the home-field of thought') and *munströnd* ('the shore of thought/love/longing') which are used for the head or breast.

In view of the meaning implied by the use of *munr* in early works it seems to me that it would be most natural to interpret *munvegar* as meaning 'the paths of thought, of the spirit or of the mind', and to understand the word in an unspecific sense as referring the field of spiritual existence to which all people go when they die. In line 8 of st. 10, Ketill Jörundarson writes in two words that the son has departed *af lífi*, 'from life', on these *munvegar* and it seems to me much more natural to write it thus than as *aflífi* as is usual.

In st. 10, the poet is giving a frank description of his deep grief at the death of his son, and it would thus be highly contradictory for him in this context to talk about happiness or 'paths of joy'. Furthermore, if we take a closer look at the concept of *munarheimr*, 'the world of love', as it appears in *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*, we may note that that poem is essentially a love poem. The bird asks Atli (*PE* 1962, 140):

Sáttú Sigrlinn,	Did you see Sigrlinn
Sváfnis dóttur,	Sváfnir's daughter,
meyna fegurstu,	the most beautiful maiden
í munarheimi?	in <i>munarheimr</i> .

The 'most beautiful maiden in *munarheimr*' here might be taken to mean 'the most beautiful girl in the world of love', or the most beautiful girl it was possible to imagine.

Later in the same poem, Sváfa says (*PE* 1962, 149):

Mælt hafða ek þat	I had said it
í munarheimi,	in <i>munarheimr</i>
þá er mér Helgi	when Helgi
hringa valði.	chose me rings.

Both examples of *munarheimr* in this poem occur in descriptions of events pertaining to the world of love. These descriptions are quite alien to the circumstances in *Sonatorrek*. The two examples can therefore hardly be regarded as comparable. As a result, I think it impossible to interpret *munvegur* in st. 10 as being ‘paths of joy’, and even less permissible to conclude that with these words the poet is stating that his son has gone to Valhøll.

It might be added that in st. 11 of *Sonatorrek*, the poet wishes that the son had been allowed to grow and mature until *her-Gauts hendr of tæki*. These words are considered to mean either that the son would manage to mature until he had ‘gained warrior’s hands’, or until he fell in battle and went to Óðinn. Whichever meaning is right, both contradict the idea that the poet thinks his son has already arrived in Valhøll.

What, then, is the poet saying about the fate of his son when he states that he has vanished *af lífi á munvega* (‘from life onto the paths of thought/mind/the spirit’)? I think it is simplest to interpret the words as meaning that the poet believes his son has disappeared from the living world onto the paths of the invisible existence of thought or the spirit, in the world of the departed. In fact, then, with these words, the poet is saying little more than that his son is dead, and from the words of st. 10 alone it is impossible to draw any further conclusions about exactly where he believes his son has gone after death.

I will now turn to st. 18 of *Sonatorrek* which runs as follows, according to K:

Erumka þokt	I am not pleased
þjóða sinni	by my compatriots
þótt sérhverr	even though everyone
sátt um haldi;	keeps the peace;
bír er bískips	<i>bír bískips</i> has
í bæ kominn	arrived in the farm
kvánar son	the son of my wife
kynniss leita.	searching for <i>kynni</i> .

The first part of this strophe is easy to understand. The poet finds no pleasure in the company of others even though people keep the peace. Some commentators have altered *þokt* in the first line to *þekt*, but this has the same general meaning and thus makes little difference.

The second half of the strophe, however, has caused numerous headaches. A wide variety of proposals for alterations in the text have been offered. The fifth line, *bir er biskips*, has caused particular problems.

Most commentators have suggested that the word *bir* should be altered to read *bur* or *burr*, 'son'. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and F. York Powell suggested the couplet should read *burr es býskips í bæ kominn*, 'the son has come to the farm of the ship of bees', which would then probably refer to the sky (Vigfússon and Powell 1883, 279). Finnur Jónsson (*Lexicon Poeticum* 1966, 73) suggested the alternative reading *býskeiðs* instead of *býskips*, meaning 'the son has arrived in the farm of the track of bees', which would again imply the sky.

Sigurður Nordal (*ÍF* II, 1933, 253) proposed the alteration *burr's Bileygs í bæ kominn*, meaning that the son has come to the one-eyed Óðinn (Bileygr). Many later editors and translators have adopted Nordal's interpretation, some of them without making any comment at all or any mention of the fact that the original text has been altered. Magnús Olsen suggested alterations first of all to *Bylræfrs* (1936, 240 ff.) and then later to *Bilskeiðs*, which he saw as meaning the same as *Bifröst* (1962, 74 ff.). According to both interpretations it means 'the sky'. Ernst A. Kock, however, went even further with his proposal of *hýskis í bæ*, 'to the living place of his family' (1937, 13). In his edition of *Sonatorrek* in 1976, Turville-Petre takes note of all the alteration proposals I have mentioned, but adopts none of them. He simply prints the original K text, *bir er biskips*, indicating that it is an uncertain reading and leaving a gap in his translation.

Before going any further I would like to look carefully at the text of st. 18 in its original form in the manuscripts, and first of all at the troublesome word *biskips*. To the best of my knowledge, most scholars have ruled out the use of the original word. *Biskips*, however, is composed of two parts: the prefix *bí* and then *skips*, the genitive singular of *skip* 'ship'.

*Bi* is an old prefix. According to Icelandic etymological dictionaries and various other sources, it was common in Gothic and the West Germanic languages (as in Gothic *bimaitan* 'circumcise', *bigraban* 'surround by diggings', *bigairdan* 'gird'; German *besuchen*; Old Saxon *bikuman*; Old English *becuman*). The old prefix has since disappeared in Icelandic and the other Scandinavian languages. It had the meaning of 'with' or 'about', and remnants of this meaning are still found today in several Norwegian and Swedish words (see, for example, Ásgeir Bl. Magnússon 1989, 53; Alexander Jóhannesson 1920, 119).

In early Norse works, the prefix *bi* appears in a number of places, as in these words:

*Bígyrðill* ‘belt’, ‘the waist’ or some kind of framework. The word is used in *Pórsdrápa*, from the late tenth century (Snorri Sturluson 1931, 109).

*Bilífi* ‘the high life’, which appears on three occasions in *Alexanders saga*, which was translated into Icelandic by Brandr Jónsson in about 1260 (1925, 19, 35 and 45).

*Bífala* ‘place in (somebody’s) care’. The word appears in a seventeenth-century paper manuscript at the end of the medieval *Páls saga biskups* (in *Biskupa sögur* I, 1858, n. 7): *En Páll biskup bífalaði sik og hana [hjørð sína] á vald almáttugs guðs, áðr hann var frá oss kallaðr.*

*Bístanda* ‘assist’. The word appears in *Stjórn* (see Cleasby and Vigfusson 1975).

All the above words are regarded as being foreign loanwords in Icelandic,<sup>2</sup> but there is some discussion about whether they were borrowed from Old English or Old High German (Halldór Halldórsson 1980, 16).

The preposition *bi* also appears in a runic inscription on a spear hilt from Kragehul in Denmark, believed to come from shortly after AD 400. The ending of the inscription has been taken to read: *víge \*bi g(eire)*, ‘I fix on the spear’ (Alexander Jóhannesson 1920, 119–20).

Considering the above examples of the use of the prefix *bi*, it seems to me in no way ridiculous to assume that the word *biskips* might also have entered Old Scandinavian as a loanword, especially if it is possible to trust the words of *Egils saga* that the poet who composed *Sonatorrek* spent a long time living in Norway, travelled to Sweden and even farther to the east, and after that dwelt for a period in England. Such a man was more likely than others to resort to a foreign borrowing when under pressure. *Biskips* is an adverb and means ‘beside the ship’ or ‘near the ship’. It is formed like the adverb *miðskips* and blends easily with the Icelandic language.

There are two main reasons that I feel weigh most heavily in the case for allowing the word to remain unaltered. 1. *Biskips* as a foreign loanword is no less easily understood in Icelandic than a word like *bígyrðill* ‘frame, belt’. 2. The word *biskips* is clearly written in the extant manuscripts containing *Sonatorrek*.

<sup>2</sup> Baldur Jónsson examined these examples with me. I am grateful to him for his scholarly comments.

The next thing is to consider whether *bískips* in this sense fits in alongside the other words of the second half of the strophe, thus leading to a good understanding of st. 18 as a whole, and I now turn to the word *bir*, which scholars have commonly altered to *burr*. In post-medieval manuscripts, *bir* might be a spelling for *byr*, i. e. *byrr* ‘breeze’. This latter word is common in early kennings which are connected to either the sky or the sea. *Byrræfr* (‘breeze-roof’) and *byrtjald* (‘breeze-tent’) mean the sky, while *byrskið* (‘breeze-ski’), *byrsóti* (‘breeze-horse’) and *byrstóð* (‘breeze-horses’) are used as kennings for ships (*Lexicon Poeticum* 1966). In *Skáldskaparmál*, Snorri Sturluson (1931, 116) writes that the sea might be referred to as *hús sanda*, *þangs* or *skerja*, ‘the house of the sand, seaweed or skerries’. It can also be referred to as *land dorgar*, *sæfugla*, *byrjar* (‘the land of fishing line, seabirds or breeze’). The last of these kennings, ‘land of breeze’, would probably be in the form *byrland*. Going on from there, it would not be too far-fetched to propose the kenning *byrbær*, ‘the farm of the breeze’. If we consider the whole line, *byrbæ bískips* (‘the farm of the breeze beside the ship’), it is clear that the farm meant must be in the sea, if it is not actually a reference to the sea itself, especially if the ship in question is lying on the bottom of the ocean.

The reading presented here involves two parts of a compound word being taken from different verse lines.<sup>3</sup> In Old Norse poetry it is not all that rare for there to be so much space between two elements of a compound. One might compare *rein- . . . -vári* and *Ið- . . . -uðr* in Snorri Sturluson 1931, 100 and 112. This phenomenon (tmesis) exists in poetry attributed to Egill Skallagrímsson, for instance in the line *í dalmiskunn -fiska* (*ÍF* II 119). The proposal I make below for the meaning of the strophe is therefore not based on anything out of the ordinary. Moreover, no letter found in the manuscript needs to be changed. The conclusion of st. 18, then, can be read as follows: *Kvánar son er kominn í byrbæ bískips kynnis leita*. This would then mean: ‘The son of the woman has come to the farm of the sea beside the ship in search of company.’

Before going any further, I think it is necessary to take a closer look at the expression *kynnis leita*. When explaining these words, Sigurður Nordal refers to ch. 31 of *Egils saga*, where the three-year-old Egill is quoted as saying that he has the same *kynni* (i. e. relatives) as his

<sup>3</sup> This fact is noted because of comments that were made in the discussion that took place on this subject at the meeting of Vísindafélag Íslendinga.



brother Þórólfr at his maternal grandfather's farm. Going on from this, Sigurður Nordal interprets *leita kynnis* as meaning 'visit one's relatives' (*ÍF* II, 81 n.). Most other scholars have taken up Nordal's interpretation and considered that according to the words of st. 18, Bǫðvarr was heading for a meeting with his deceased relatives.

This interpretation might pass, but I do not think it is the most obvious. Personally I would draw a line between the expressions *at eiga kynni* and *at leita kynnis*. To my mind, *at eiga kynni* somewhere means that you know you will find good friends and relations there, and can happily visit them whenever you wish. *At leita kynnis*, on the other hand, seems to me to be understood most naturally as meaning that you are looking for new company in a place as yet unknown to you. If we examine matters from this new viewpoint, the interpretation of the poem changes completely. The anguish of the the poet composing a work about the death of his son becomes deeper. He no longer imagines his son visiting deceased relatives, which in some ways might be seen as a consolation, but rather heading into unknown territory in the grip of Rán and Ægir.

I now turn to st. 21 of *Sonatorrek*, which has been interpreted as a description of Bǫðvarr's journey to Valhǫll. In relation to this strophe, I shall be considering what the poem tells us about the religious belief of the poet who composed it.

The strophe runs as follows:

Þat mank enn	I still remember
er upp um hóf	when he raised
í goðheim	into the world of the gods,
Gauta spjalli,	the friend of Gauts,
ættar ask	the ash tree of the family,
þann er óx af mér	the one which grew from me
ok kynvið	and the family tree
kvánar minnar.	of my wife.

*Gauta spjalli*, 'the friend of Gauts', is definitely Óðinn, and in this strophe the poet describes how Óðinn has taken the poet's son to himself in the home of the gods, Valhǫll. This description, however, does not have any sense of the anguish which characterises those strophes of the poem which deal with Bǫðvarr and his fate. In K, st. 21 is very clear, and there are no difficulties about the way in which the strophe should be read. The problem relates more to the initial words and the position of the strophe in the poem as a whole. It has sometimes been argued that the poet is again talking about Bǫðvarr, the son that

drowned a few days before, but it should be noted that though the first part of *Sonatorrek* deals with Bǫðvarr and his drowning, in fact after st. 18 where he states that Bǫðvarr has arrived in the *byrbær biskips*, and st. 19 where he feels that he is facing a stern-faced Ægir, the poet leaves Bǫðvarr. In st. 20, he goes on to describe the sick-bed death of his innocent and well-made son. St. 21 then commences with the words *Þat mank enn*, 'I still remember'. These words seem to me to contain a direct reference to events which must have taken place some time before the other events described in the poem, that is before the drowning of Bǫðvarr and the death of the other son. I have previously suggested that st. 21 probably refers to a third son who must have died in battle (Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1991, 16).

It should be noted that stt. 21–24 of *Sonatorrek* form a complete unit in which Óðinn plays a central role. St. 22 runs as follows:

Áttak ek gótt	I had a good relationship
við geirs dróttinn	with the lord of the spear,
gerðumk trygg	I grew trustful
at trúa honum,	in believing in him,
áðr vinátt	before friendship
vagna rúni	the wagon friend
sigrhöfundr	author of victory
um sleit við mik.	broke with me.

This strophe has usually been interpreted as follows: 'I got on well with the god of the spear and had steadfast faith in him until the friend of wagons, the author of victory, broke friendship with me.'

There are several uncertain features in this interpretation of the strophe which need closer examination. The first part is clear and easy to understand. Here, the poet claims to have had a good relationship with Óðinn and to have been loyal to Óðinn as his personal god. This statement about the loyalty of an individual to a pagan Nordic god is more strongly worded than any other extant source concerning the old Nordic faith. Sigurður Nordal has paid special attention to this half-strophe in his article 'Átrúnaður Egils Skalla-Grímssonar'. In this article Sigurður Nordal assumes that Egill will have been brought up believing in the agricultural gods of farmers, that is, Þórr and Freyr. As an adult, however, he rejected them and took up faith in Óðinn. The first part of the strophe is a clear reference to such a change of opinion, or complete revision of faith (Sigurður Nordal 1924, 157–59).

The second half of the strophe, however, has proved to be more problematic. The fifth line in K is *áðr umat*. Scholars have read a

variety of things out of these words, but all of them agree that the nonsense word *umat* must be a confused spelling of some other word meaning ‘friendship’, though any such known word in this position would provide an extra syllable which would make the line too long for normal *kviðuhátt*. Sigurður Nordal proposed the word *vinan*, Magnus Olsen (1936, 245) *vinúð*, and Jón Helgason (1961, 38) and Turville-Petre (1976, 39) read *vinátt*, but none of these word-forms appears anywhere else. The words *vagna rúni* in line 6 (actually written *vagna runne* in K) have been interpreted as meaning ‘the friend of wagons’, someone who is usually associated with wagons or rides in one. Several scholars (e. g. Sigurður Nordal in *ÍF* II, 255; Turville-Petre 1976, 39–40) believe that this must also be a kenning for Óðinn, although it is doubtful whether it is possible to point to any other kenning for Óðinn in which he is associated with wagons, or indeed whether there is any evidence anywhere to suggest any special link between Óðinn and wagons. On the other hand there is little question that the *sigrhöfundr* of line 7, ‘the author of victory’ or ‘he who decides victory in battle’, must be Óðinn. The idea that Óðinn decides who should have victory is common in early poems.

The second half of st. 22 of *Sonatorrek* would thus seem to contain a number of elements which do not fit in with the accepted facts and beliefs encountered in other old Scandinavian sources. First of all, the words *vinan*, *vinúð* and *vinátt* which have been suggested as replacements for *umat* in the manuscripts are not known in any other sources. Secondly, it seems unlikely that the expression *vagna rúni* (or *runne*) could be a kenning for Óðinn since no indisputable link between Óðinn and wagons is suggested in other sources. Finally, according to the various interpretations of the second half of st. 22, Óðinn broke his friendship with the poet. In spite of this, the following strophe begins with the poet stating (in the present tense) that he makes sacrifices to Óðinn. St. 23 runs as follows:

Blótka ek því	I do not make sacrifices to
bróður Vílis	the brother of Vílir
goðjaðar	the chief of the gods
at ek gjarn sék;	because I am eager;
þó hefr Míms vinr	yet Mímir’s friend
mér um fengnar	has given me
þqlva bætr	consolation for woe
ef hit betra telk.	if I look on the good side.

The brother of Vílir, the chief of the gods, and the friend of Mímir is of course Óðinn, and the conclusion that can be drawn from the strophe is that, in spite of everything, the poet feels that without eagerness he makes sacrifices to Óðinn to comfort himself.

It is not clear why the sacrifices made by the poet lack eagerness. Moreover, the poet's statement that in spite of everything, for personal consolation, he makes sacrifices to a god who earlier broke friendship with him sounds very strange.

Before proceeding any further, I would like to see whether there is a possibility of reading anything out of the second half of st. 22 other than the traditional interpretation. I start with *áðr*, the first word in line 5. This is traditionally understood as the equivalent of a conjunction meaning 'until', with the events of the second half of the strophe chronologically later than those of the first. But it can equally well be read as an adverb, 'previously', and this has the effect of making the events of the second half of the strophe earlier than those of the first.

*Vinátta* is the only known word which could fit the meaning that has been read out of the word *umat* in the second half of st. 22. As was mentioned above, however, this word would make the line one syllable too long. The odd lines of *kviðuháttir* normally have only three syllables. But it has long been acknowledged that the composer of *Sonatorrek* makes very free use of the metre. For example, in st. 1/5 there are five syllables ('esa nú vænligt'), though the first two count as one by resolution; there are four in st. 11/5 ('ef sá randviðr') and st. 23/5 ('þó hefr Míms vinr'). Since other strophes of *Sonatorrek* have a varying number of syllables in the fifth line, I think it quite permissible to emend to *vinátta* in the fifth line of st. 22.

As mentioned above, the sixth line of st. 22 is written *vagna runne* in K, and many scholars have felt it necessary to interpret this as a kenning for Óðinn, especially in the light of the fact that the second kenning in this half-strophe, *sigrhöfundr*, 'the author of victory', is unquestionably related to this particular god. *Runne* could be a spelling of *runni*, the weak form of *runnr*, though this does not occur in early Icelandic. As I have said, *rúni* 'friend' is the reading that most scholars have favoured, and the kenning *vagna rúni* certainly works as a description of someone who tends to ride in a wagon. Nonetheless, to my mind, there is good reason for also considering *vagna runnr* as an alternative, especially since the word *runnr* is a common element in early kennings for 'man', *runnr* meaning 'bush' or 'tree'. *Vagna runnr*, 'wagon man' would then be comparable to *sigrunnr* which is a kenning

for Óðinn in the poem *Húsdrápa*. *Vagna runnr*, on the other hand, would be most naturally interpreted as a kenning for Þórr, similar to the expression *vagna ver*, ‘wagon man’, which is found in *Alvíssmál*, and then should in *Sonatorrek* be genitive dependent on *vináttu*. In other words, by changing only one letter of the existing text in K, we have a kenning for Þórr in this strophe. The alteration made here is extremely minor, and in making this suggestion, I am also bearing in mind what manuscript experts have told me about the last letters of words in early manuscripts being those which cause the greatest uncertainty.

If the changes I have proposed are accepted, the half-strophe in question reads as follows:

áðr vináttu  
vagna runns  
sigrhǫfundr  
um sleit við mik.

This half-strophe can be interpreted in the following way: *áðr um sleit sigrhǫfundr vináttu vagna runns við mik*, that is ‘before this (i. e. before I took up firm belief in Óðinn), he broke Þórr’s friendship with me.’

The interpretation fits particularly well with the earlier argument proposed by Sigurður Nordal, and mentioned above, that Egill was brought up believing in Þórr, but later abandoned that faith, and took up belief in Óðinn (Sigurður Nordal 1924, 159). As I have stressed, the alterations in the text of the manuscript needed to bring about this understanding are in fact minor. The incomprehensible word *umat* is changed to the common word *vináttu*, which is based to some degree on the spelling of the former word. A single letter is then changed in another incomprehensible word in what follows in such a way that it gives us a meaning that is appropriate for the circumstances. The fifth line becomes four syllables in length rather than three, but this represents no greater departure from normal *kviðuhátt* than is found in other strophes of *Sonatorrek*, and anyway this abnormally long fifth line is countered by the sixth line which now has only three syllables instead of four. As a result, in performance, the half-strophe as a whole becomes much lighter and more fluent.

To my mind the most important features of the changes that I have proposed are, first of all, that a difficult kenning has been made easy, and secondly that the religious relationship existing between the poet and Óðinn has been made more convincing, more consistent and generally more comprehensible. According to the interpretation that I have proposed here, Óðinn never broke his friendship with the poet; indeed,

to my mind, a poet with the temperament that the composer of *Sonatorrek* had would hardly have gone on sacrificing to a god who let him down in times of need.

In this article I have touched on several of the religious ideas that appear in *Sonatorrek*. In the final part I summarise the main conclusions reached and trace the pattern of religious faith displayed in the work that faces us after making the minor alterations that I have proposed.

The poem commences with the poet's statement about how difficult it is to drag poetry, the plunder of Óðinn, from the hiding place of thought. In the second strophe, poetry, the joyful find of the gods, creeps out of the place of mind, but is not easily drawn from there as a result of deep sorrow. Anguish and hopelessness hang over the third and fourth strophes; the foam howls at the cliffs, the family is about to fade, and the man who carries out the bones of his kinsman is heavy in thought. In the fifth strophe, the poet remembers the deaths of his father and mother and at that point it is as if poetry finds release, the poet carrying his subject like timber out of the holy sanctuary of words clad in the leafy decoration of language.

The actual memorial poem for the drowned son commences in the sixth strophe. It is first stated here that Hrǫnn (daughter of Ægir and Rán) has cruelly caused a deep gash in the family. This injury that the personified sea has caused remains open and unfilled. In the seventh strophe, the poet states that Rán has treated him badly and that he is impoverished as regards loving friends. The sea (*marr*) has broken away part of himself. In strophe 8 he continues that if he could revenge himself for these offences with his sword, the 'Ale-brewer' (Ægir, the sea) would be finished. If he could kill the brother of *hroði vágs*, the 'storm of the bay', i. e. Ægir, he would go against him and *man Ægis*, 'the wife of Ægir', i. e. Rán. But the poet (st. 9) is powerless against 'the ship-killer', and the helplessness of an old man is there for all to see.

The tenth to twelfth strophes deal solely with the drowned son and what he was like. First the poet states that the sea (*marr*) has robbed him of much, and that it is painful to discuss the deaths of close relatives now that the shield of the family has vanished from life on the road of the departed. He would certainly have been very promising material if he had managed to mature until he had attained the hands of a warrior. He was always obedient to his father, stood with him and supported him against all others.

In the next three strophes, the poet remembers his brother in particular, or rather the lack of his brother. He has no one courageous at his side

any longer, and it would be hard to find anyone in the world that he can believe. Now people take compensation payments for their relations.

St. 16, of which only two lines survive, deals with asking for payment. The next three strophes, however, return to the son that drowned. The poet says first that nothing can replace a son except for another son who has been bred to come in place of the first. The poet feels uneasy in company. The son of the woman has come to *byrbær biskips*, ‘the farm of the breeze beside the ship’, in search of fellowship. The poet sees Ægir facing him with a heavy countenance, and describes his powerlessness.

At this point the poem changes subject. The actual memorial poem to Þoðvarr has come to an end. St. 20 deals with the poet’s son who died on a sick bed. He was innocent and careful in his choice of words. For the next four strophes, Óðinn takes a central position. In st. 21, the poet states that he still remembers when Óðinn took his son to himself in the home of the gods. There is no obvious grief in this strophe. In direct continuation of this (st. 22), the poet describes the good relationship he has had with Óðinn since taking up steadfast belief in this god who broke his friendship with Þórr. The poet makes sacrifices to Óðinn, the god of poetry, not because the poet is by nature a great man for sacrifices, but rather because Óðinn offers spiritual consolation if one turns to him wholeheartedly (st. 23). The poet received the art of poetry from Óðinn, as well as his shrewdness at being able to sense the enmity of deceitful people (st. 24). These four strophes contain no fewer than seven kennings for Óðinn. In the final strophe of *Sonatorrek*, the poet faces Hel and awaits his death with equanimity.

I return briefly to the questions that were raised at the start. As regards the first, about conformity of belief, it seems clear that the composer of *Sonatorrek* expected those who drown to go to Rán, those who die in battle to go to Óðinn, and those who die of illness to go to Hel. This belief reflected in the poem parallels what can be read out of most other written sources from early Scandinavia, such as those which were mentioned above (pp. 162–63).<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, on the basis

<sup>4</sup>Jónas Kristjánsson (1992, 108–09 and 112) argues differently. He suggests that the idea that men who die in battle go to Óðinn and those who die of illness go to Hel is a piece of fiction invented by Snorri Sturluson. There is no space here to discuss Jónas Kristjánsson’s argument in detail, but it might be noted that it is partially based on a different reading of certain strophes of *Sonatorrek* than that presented here.

of my examination it is clear that the ideas regarding the gods and the spiritual world that are depicted in *Sonatorrek* are somewhat different from those which usually appear in early Nordic works.

Óðinn is the only male god to appear by name in *Sonatorrek*. He is mentioned at the start of the poem as having sought the mead of poetry, and at the end the poet spends four strophes tracing his relationship with the god and his belief. Óðinn is presented as a trustworthy god whom the poet of *Sonatorrek* has sincerely believed in and still worships. The poem places particular stress on the fact that Óðinn was also the bestower of precious poetry.

*Sonatorrek's* picture of Óðinn as a trustworthy personal god is, to the best of my knowledge, unique in early Scandinavian sources. Many sources refer to Óðinn as an unreliable, highly devious deity. As *Hávamál* states, *Hvað skal hans tryggðum trúa?* ('How much can you believe in his good faith?'). When he is described in detail, as in Snorri Sturluson's *Ynglinga saga*, the main emphasis tends to be placed on Óðinn's magical skills and magical power (*ÍF* XXVI, 17–23).

Concerning the world picture presented in *Sonatorrek*, it is interesting how great a role the various personified forces of the sea play in the poem. Rán and Ægir are very much alive and active, as is one of their daughters, Hrǫnn. *Marr* or *Særinn* ('the Sea') is personified. We also hear of Ægir's brother, *Hroði vágs* ('the storm of the bay'), which is probably another name for *Hræsvelgr* ('Wave-sweeper', one who cleans all loose objects from the surface of the sea and destroys them; see Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1990, 16–20). Rán and Ægir are presented in the poem as the equivalents of gods, gods of a world of death, because they are said to have taken the son to themselves in the dwelling place of the drowned.

In that part of the poem which deals with the personified figures of the sea and their activities, no other gods are named. The ideological world that appears in this part of the poem is thus quite different from that which appears in various other works that deal with pagan Scandinavian belief, for example, accounts of how the ships of the missionaries coming to Iceland ran into difficulties at sea. The ship carrying Stefnir Þorgilsson sank in high waves and storm. Pagan believers said that the powerful gods who were still in the country brought this about (*Kristnisaga* 1905, 17), but neither Ægir nor Rán is named. When the missionary Þangbrandr ran into similar difficulties, the poetess Steinunn said that Þórr had caused this, and that Christ had not been



able to prevent it (*Kristnisaga* 1905, 27–28). Once again, there is no mention of either Ægir or Rán.

For the main part, these missionary accounts reflect the same world view and belief as that found in most other sources dealing with pagan Nordic religious practice. There it appears that Þórr and Freyr were the gods that were most commonly worshipped in Iceland during the tenth century, while the worship of Óðinn hardly existed at all (Turville-Petre 1958, 23–24; Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1988, 19–22). As I have noted above, the picture of belief given in *Sonatorrek* is in many ways very different from what appears in other sources dealing with pagan Nordic belief in Iceland.

The difference between the attitudes, ideological worlds and deities presented in *Sonatorrek* on the one hand, and those in most other sources on the other, is an interesting and challenging area of research. An attempt has been made here to solve some of the problems involved, but it can by no means be regarded as a complete examination of the poem. It will be necessary to carry out further investigations into particular strophes of the poem and their probable accuracy of preservation before any final conclusions can be drawn about the age and subject-matter of *Sonatorrek*.

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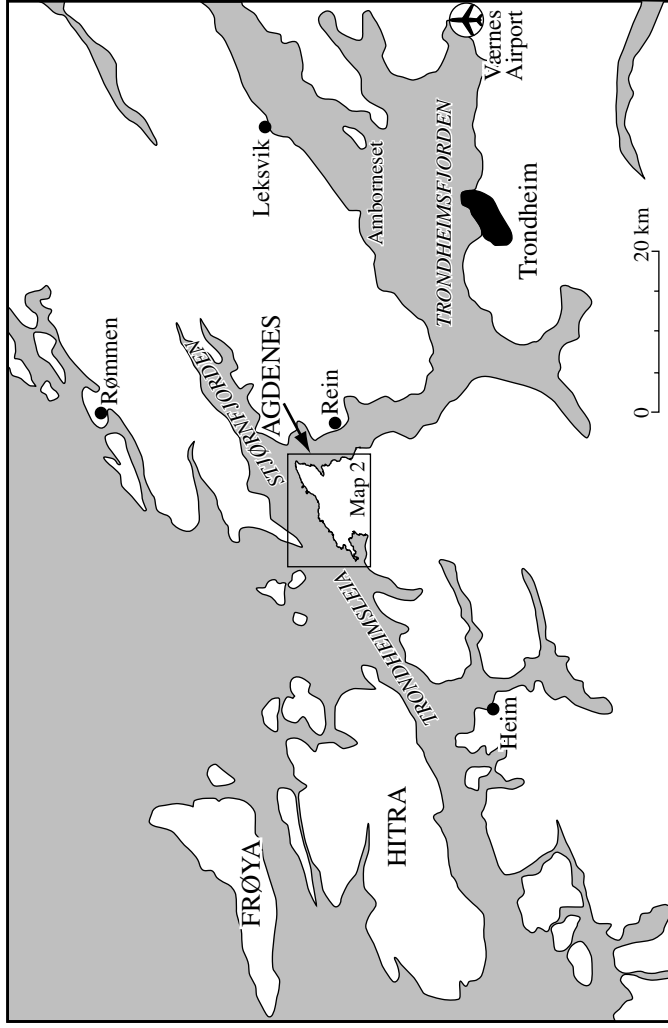
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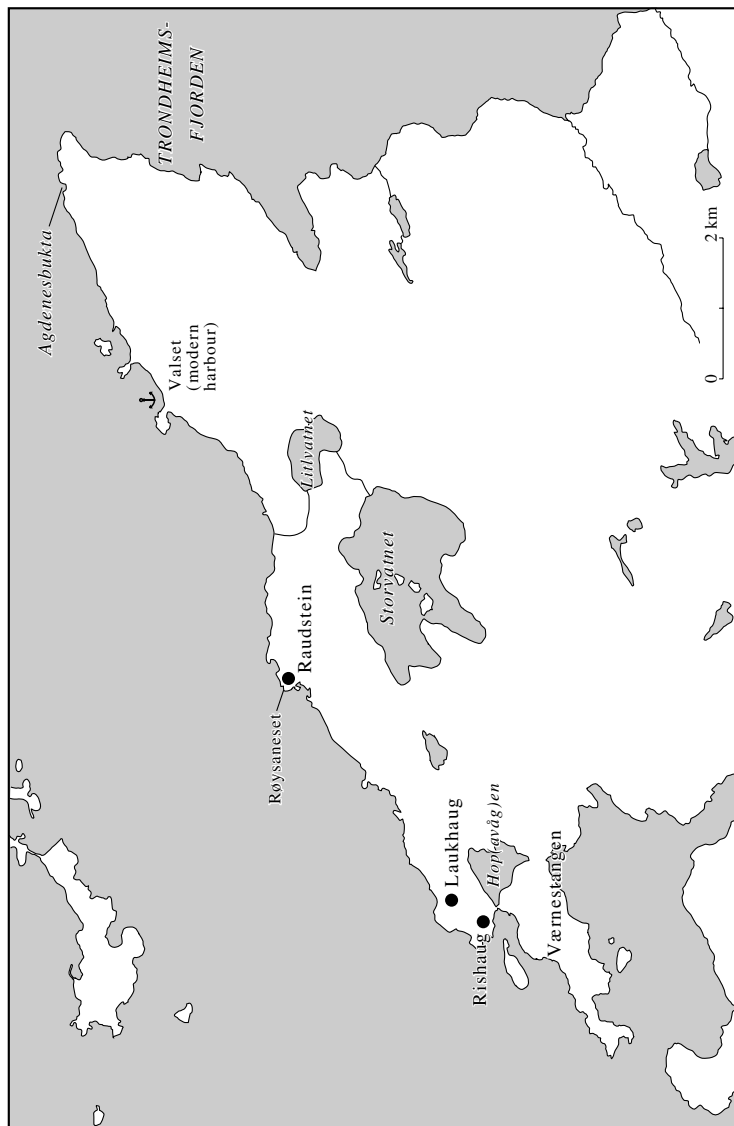
THE GATEWAY TO TRONDHEIM:  
TWO ICELANDERS AT AGDENES

BY RICHARD PERKINS

THE TENTH INTERNATIONAL SAGA CONFERENCE was held in Trondheim, Norway, in August 1997. Many of its participants, modern pilgrims to the great centre of medieval Norse culture, arrived by air, landing at the airport at *Værnes*, some 30 km east of the city centre. *Værnes* is, as it were, the gateway to Trondheim in the the age of the jet-plane and air travel. In the Middle Ages, Trondheim had some sort of counterpart to *Værnes* in *Agdenes* (Old Norse *Agðanes*) which lies about 40 km to its north-west on the southern side of the mouth of Trondheimsfjorden. At a time when long-distance travel was, of course, very often by sea, harbours at *Agdenes* served Trondheim in perhaps something of the same way as *Værnes* does today. Because of dangers in rounding the headland itself, difficult currents in the fjord and often contrary winds, passengers and pilgrims frequently disembarked at *Agdenes* and made the final part of their journey overland. The place is mentioned on various occasions in the Kings' Sagas (cf. *KL*, s. v. *Hamn, Norge*). For example, *Heimskringla* (*ÍF* XXVIII, 255) tells us that King Eysteinn Magnússon (r. 1103–1123) built a church, fortification and harbour here. And at least what are perhaps the remnants of this harbour's mole are still to be seen in *Agdenesbukta*, just to the west of the tip of *Agdenes* (*NiT* 100–05, 116). Ships may also have found havens on *Agdenes* somewhat further to the west (in *Litlvatnet*, Hop(avåg)en; *NiT* 105–09). King Hákon Hákonarson (r. 1217–1263) also fortified the place (*KS* III, 462) and down the centuries, *Agdenes*, at the entrance to the fjord, must have had considerable strategic importance for the control and defence not only of Trondheim itself but also the whole of the surrounding *Trøndelag* (*NiT* 120–28). And as we shall see, there were, so to speak, direct connections between *Agdenes* and, for example, the major harbour at *Gásir* in northern Iceland. It must have been the place where many Icelanders first set foot on Norwegian soil and the place where many of them said their last farewells (Steen 1942, 296). Since, then, one of the themes of the conference was 'Norway as seen from Iceland in the sagas', it seemed appropriate to focus a little attention on *Agdenes*. This I did, albeit



Map 1: Trondheimsfjorden



Map 2: Agdenes

somewhat obliquely and as a pretext for discussing other issues, in a paper presented to the conference entitled ‘The gateway to Nidaros: two Icelanders at Agdenes’ (= *GtN*; reproduced in the conference’s proceedings, *Preprints*, 521–31). The present contribution is, like *GtN*, divided into two distinct parts. Its first section, ‘Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld at Agdenes’, has more or less the same form as it had in *GtN*. The second section, ‘Sneglu-Halli at Agdenes’, on the other hand, represents a palpably altered version of its counterpart in *GtN*, made in the light of further investigations and comments and other help from various quarters. In working on this revision I have benefited not least from Merete Moe Henriksen’s unpublished thesis *Nøkkelen til Trøndelag* (= *NtT*) which appeared in late 1997 and which covers, with full bibliography, not only the archaeology of Agdenes but also references to it in the written sources. A re-reading of Olrik and Ellekilde’s monumental *Nordens gudeverden* (= *NG*) and of Svale Solheim’s *Nemningsfordomar ved fiske* (= *NvF*) has also proved fruitful.<sup>1</sup>

*Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld at Agdenes*

The story of Hallfreðr Óttarsson’s conversion to Christianity by Óláfr Tryggvason in Trondheim is well known. And the account in *Hallfreðar saga* of how Hallfreðr arrives in Norway prior to his conversion is of interest in the present context. It may be quoted from the Möðruvallabók-text of the saga (from *ÍF* VIII, 151–52, with one minor change), but with certain variants or additions (in round brackets) from the version of the saga in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* (*ÓTI*, 347):

Ok eitt sumar, er hann [i. e. Hallfreðr] kom af Íslandi, þá lágu þeir við Agðanes. Þar hitta þeir menn at máli ok spurðu tíðenda. Þeim var sagt, at höfðingjaskipti var orðit í Nóregi; var Hákon jarl dauðr, en Óláfr Tryggvason kominn í staðinn með nýjum síð ok boðorðum. Þá urðu skiparar (skipverjar

<sup>1</sup> ‘Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld at Agdenes’ relates, in turn, to material from my presidential lecture to the Viking Society in November, 1993. I hope to publish further on these matters before long and then with acknowledgements of help from various quarters. In revising the second section, ‘Sneglu-Halli at Agdenes’, I have benefited from comments and other assistance from several colleagues and here would like to mention particularly Bo Almqvist, Margaret Clunies Ross, Anne Grønli, Geir Grønnesby, Jannie Roed, Frode Klepsvik, Jørn Sandnes and Claes Wahlöö. I am especially grateful to Merete Moe Henriksen for making her thesis available to me and for giving me answers to a number of queries. The editors of *Saga-Book*, particularly Anthony Faulkes, have made a number of suggestions for improvement and saved me from various errors. What shortcomings remain are, of course, my responsibility.

allir) á þat sáttir, at slá í heit (til þess at þeim gæfi byr at sigla brottu af Nóregi nokkur til heiðinna landa), ok skyldi gefa Frey fé mikit (ok þriggja sálda ǫl) ef þeim gæfi til Svíþjóðar, en Þór eða Óðni, ef til Íslands kæmi, en ef þeim gæfi eigi í brott, þá skyldi konungr ráða. Þeim gaf aldri í brott, ok urðu at sigla inn til Þrándheims.

And one summer, when he [i. e. Hallfreðr] arrived from Iceland and they were lying off Agdenes, they fell into conversation with some men and asked what news there was. They were told that there had been a change of rulers in Norway: Hákon jarl was dead and had been succeeded by Óláfr Tryggvason who had a new religion and new laws. Then the mariners (all the ship's company) agreed to make a vow (so that they could at least get a fair wind to sail away from Norway to some heathen land); and they should give much of value (and three measures of beer) to Freyr if they got a fair wind to Sweden but to Þórr or Óðinn if they got to Iceland. But if they got no wind at all, then the king should have his way. They had no wind and were forced to sail in to Trondheim.

Subsequently Hallfreðr meets Óláfr Tryggvason and the king stands sponsor to him at his baptism. The moral of this story is clear. It is, of course, essentially of Christian authorship and, in Christian eyes, it is a Christian god who controls the winds. The heathen Icelanders pray to their pagan gods to give them a wind to escape from a Norway under the sway of the Christian Óláfr. But no such wind comes and they are forced to sail into Trondheim and be baptised there. The Christian god is mightier in his power over the winds. And this is not the only place in Norse literature where we find the Christian god (or his saints) controlling wind and weather. And the heathen deities were seen as having the same function. Thus, for example, Snorri writes of Óðinn in ch. 7 of *Ynglinga saga* (ÍF XXVI, 18): *Þat kunni hann enn at gera með orðum einum at slökkva eld ok kyrra sjá ok snúa vindum hverja leið er hann vildi.* And in chapter 7 of *Gautreks saga* (FN IV, 28–31) King Víkarr is sacrificed to Óðinn in the hope of getting a favourable wind (cf. also the sixth book of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*). The evidence that Freyr was able to provide a fair wind is perhaps somewhat less, but by no means negligible. And when we turn to Þórr, there is ample evidence that he was thought of as a wind-god. For example, Adam of Bremen specifically tells us that amongst the things Þórr was said to have control of were the winds (cf. MRN 244). In chapter 21 of *Flóamanna saga* (ÍF XIII, 280) when the hero Þorgils's ship is becalmed on a voyage to Greenland, some of the people aboard suggest that sacrifices should be made to Þórr for a fair wind (*at þeir mundu blóta Þór til byrjar*; note the alliteration). At the beginning of Dudo's *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniæ ducum* there is a gruesome

account of human sacrifice made to Þórr for the purpose of getting, amongst other things, it seems, a favourable wind (cf. *MRN* 94). And in *Landnámabók* (*ÍF* I, 250), we are told of Helgi magri Eyvindarson that he believed in Christ but had recourse to Þórr when on journeys by sea and in difficult situations: *Helgi var blandinn mjök í trú; hann trúði á Krist, en hét á Þór til sjófara ok harðræða*. Now there is a source which appears to tell us of the way, or one of the ways, Þórr was thought able to produce a wind. This is *Rögnvalds þáttur ok Rauðs* (= *RR*) which is incorporated into *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* (*ÓT* I, 313–22, 325–27, 328–32, 349–51) and also appears as a separate entity in *AM* 557, 4to. *RR* tells the story of how Rauðr is living on an island off Hálogaland. He has inherited from his foster-father a temple (*hof*) dedicated to Þórr and also, it appears, an image of the god. He puts such a spell on this image that it is able to converse and walk with him around the island. Later in the story, the proselytising Óláfr Tryggvason heads for Rauðr's island with the intention of converting him and the other people there. The text of the version in *ÓT* (I, 328/9–329/5) is as follows (normalised, with certain minor adjustments and variants unnoted):

En er konungr kom norðr fyrir Naumudal, þá ætlaði hann út til Rauðseyjar. Þann morgin gekk Rauðr til hofs síns sem hann var vanr. Þórr var þá heldr hryggiligr ok veitti Rauð engi andsvör, þó at hann leitaði orða við hann. Rauð þótti þat mjök undarligt ok leitaði marga vega at fá mál af honum ok spurði hvi þat sætti. Þórr svarar um síðir ok þó heldr mœðiliga, sagði þetta eigi fyrir sakleysi, 'því at mér er,' segir hann, 'mjök þröngt í kvámu þeira manna er hingat ætla til eyjarinnar ok mjök er mér óþokkat til þeira.' Rauðr spurði, hverir þeir menn væri. Þórr sagði, at þar var Óláfr konungr Tryggvason ok lið hans. Rauðr mælti: 'Þeyt þú í mót þeim skeggrödd (328/19; *AM* 325 IX 1b, 4to: *skeggraust*; *Flateyjarbók*: *skeggbrodda*) þína, ok stöndum í mót þeim knálíga.' Þórr kvað þat mundu fyrir lítit koma. En þó gengu þeir út ok blés Þórr fast í kampana ok þeytti skeggraustina (328/21). Kom þá þegar andviðri móti konungi svá styrkt, at ekki mátti við halda ok varð konungr at láta síga aprt til sömu hafnar sem hann hafði áðr verit ok fór svá nokkurum sinnum. En konungr eggjaðisk því meirr at fara til eyjarinnar ok um síðir varð ríkari hans góðvili með guðs krapti en sá fjáandi er í móti stóð. And when the king got north of Naumudalr, he determined to go out to Rauðsey. That morning, Rauðr went to his temple as was his habit. Þórr was rather downcast and gave Rauðr no reply even though he addressed him. This seemed very strange to Rauðr and he tried in many ways to get Þórr to talk and to find out what the matter was. Eventually Þórr answered, albeit in very weary tones, that he had good reason for his mood, 'for,' he said, 'I am put in a very difficult predicament by the intended visit to our island of those men for whom I have the greatest loathing.' Rauðr asked who those men might be. Þórr said it was King Óláfr Tryggvason and his force.



Rauðr said: ‘Sound (*þeyt þú*) the voice of your beard (*skeggrødd/skeggraust þína*; or, if we accept Flateyjarbók’s *skeggbrodda þína* (also found in AM 557, 4to) ‘sound (the bristles of) your beard’) against them and let us resist them doughtily’. Þórr said that that would be of little use. Even so, they went outside and Þórr blew hard into his whiskers (*blés Þórr fast í kampana*; or less probably, ‘puffed out his cheeks’) and sounded the voice of his beard (*þeytti skeggraustina*). Straight away there arose a head-wind against the king so strong that he could not withstand it and he had to retire to the same harbour as he had set out from. This happened several times but the king felt spurred on all the more to get to the island. And eventually, by the power of God, the king’s good intentions prevailed over the devil who was offering him resistance.

Now it is my contention that, by representing Þórr as being able to produce a wind, whether favourable or contrary, by blowing into his beard, *RR* is giving expression to a generally held belief about the god. We have here something more than just the invention of the author of the *þáttr*. I cannot produce in detail here all the arguments in favour of this proposition, but some of them may briefly be mentioned.

The idea that a powerful figure, whether mortal or supernatural, could produce a wind simply by blowing is a common one in folk-belief (Watson 1984, 327–29). Thus modern Cretans say of an unwelcome wind from the south which affects their island, ‘Colonel Gaddafi is blowing.’

The verb *þeyta* is particularly used of the blowing of wind-instruments and in the passage under consideration, Þórr appears to ‘play’ his beard like a wind-instrument. It is a common idea that supernatural figures produce wind(s) by playing instruments (Watson 1984, 242, 245, 254). Thus Boreas, the north wind, was represented as an old man with flowing grey locks blowing a conch-shell trumpet.

Þórr’s beard seems to have had particular potency and when in the first stanza of *Þrymskviða* he gets into a rage and shakes his beard, we can well imagine that this may have had meteorological repercussions.

The passage under discussion seems to suggest that the wind might be equated with the voice of Þórr (cf. the elements *-rødd*, *-raust*). The idea of the (noise of the) wind as the voice of some supernatural being appears to be found in mythology and folklore elsewhere in the world (Watson 1984, 261).

But the main argument in this connection is that in later Icelandic sources we find Þórr and other supernatural figures (e. g. Kári) appearing to produce a wind by blowing into their beards. The following are three examples out of some five or six I have been able to gather:

(a) We find that Matthías Jochumsson (1835–1920), in his poem

*Þórs-mál* has this verse (Matthías Jochumsson 1902–1906, III 202):

Litið lograstir  
leiftra við himin;  
Þór er að þeyta  
þrúðga skeggbrodda,  
hljóðar húmstormur,  
hræðist kyn þjóða.

Matthías's *Þórs-mál* is based on Longfellow's *The Challenge of Thor* (in his *Tales of a Wayside Inn*), which, however, has no exact equivalent to the verse just cited.

(b) In *Höddu-ríma* by Eggert Ólafsson (1726–1768), it is said of Kári that he *óðum blès í skegg-broddana* (see *Kvæði Eggerts Olafssonar* 1832, 202); we are told, 'þessi ríma var gjörð í góðum byr, á ferð frá Kaupmannahöfn til Vestmannaeyra, árið 1750.'

(c) In *Bjarni í Skemmunni* by Theodóra Thoroddsen (1863–1954), there is a reference to *vindstrokurnar, sem hann gamli Bárður Snæfellsás sendir okkur úr skeggbroddunum* (see Theodóra Thoroddsen 1960, 156).

In view of this material, then, we can reasonably conclude that in the ancient Norse world, Þórr was thought of as able to produce a wind by blowing into his beard. With this conclusion arrived at, we return to Hallfreðr, now in Trondheim, newly baptised although perhaps rather reluctantly.

The poet stays with Óláfr Tryggvason, although not in entirely happy circumstances: Óláfr takes exception to the heathen content of some of his poetry. Also Hallfreðr quarrels with two of the king's courtiers, Óttarr and his brother Kálfr. He kills Óttarr and is condemned to death, and although this sentence is subsequently commuted, relations remain strained. We then find this episode in ch. 6 of *Hallfreðar saga* (*ÍF VIII*, 162–63; again from the Möðruvallabók-text, with, in round brackets, the same additions from the version of the saga in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* as are noted in *ÍF VIII*; cf. *ÓT I*, 394–95):

Eitt sinn var þat, at konungr spurði, hvar Hallfreðr væri. Kálfr segir: 'Hann mun enn hafa vanða sinn, at blóta á laun, ok hefir hann líkneski Þórs í pungu sínum af tǫnn gǫrt, ok ertu of mjök dulinn at honum, herra, ok fær hann eigi sannreyndan.' Konungr bað Hallfreð þangat kalla ok svara fyrir sik. Hallfreðr kemr þar. Konungr mælti: 'Ertu sannr at því, er þér er kennt, at þú (hafir líkneski Þórs í pungu þínum ok) blótir?' 'Eigi er þat satt, herra,' segir Hallfreðr; 'skal nú rannsaka pung minn; hefi ek hér ekki undanbragð mátt hafa, þó at ek vilda (því at mik varði eigi þessa áburðar).' Nú fannsk engi sá hlutr í hans valdi, er til þess væri (líkligr, sem Kálfr hafði sagt á hann).

It happened on one occasion that the king asked where Hallfreðr was. Kálfr says: 'He is probably still following his old habit of secret heathen worship and he carries an image Þórr made of walrus ivory (*líkneski Þórs af tǫnn gǫrt*) in his pouch. You're too much taken in by him, my lord, and you've not fully put him to the test.' The king called for Hallfreðr to answer for himself and he came. The king said: 'Is it true, as is alleged of you, that you (carry an image of Þórr in your pouch and) indulge in heathen worship?' 'That is not true, my lord,' says Hallfreðr. 'Have my pouch searched. Even if I'd wanted to, I could have had no shift in this affair (as I've had no fore-warning of this accusation).' No object was found in Hallfreðr's possession that made it (likely that what Kálfr had said about him was true).

Later in the same chapter, Hallfreðr gets his revenge for the slander by blinding Kálfr in one eye.

While the object referred to by Kálfr, an image of Þórr made of walrus ivory, turns out to be a malicious invention, there can be little doubt that such objects did actually exist in pagan Scandinavia. Indeed, such an object, it has been argued, is still actually preserved. This was found in Lund (Skåne) and is now kept in the museum Kulturen in that same city (KM 38.252; see Illustration 1; *VH* 387 and references; = LI). This is a small image of a man made of walrus ivory and about 4.6 cm high. The figure has large, staring eyes and an open mouth, is holding his long beard with both hands and is seated on what appears to be a so-called log-chair. It is true that not all scholars have agreed that this object was intended to represent Þórr. Some have interpreted it as a playing-piece. But I can only agree with Ivar Lindquist (1963) in his arguments that we have here an image of the god. It is possible that the ring-and-dot ornament on LI's reverse side may be intended to represent Þórr's hammer. Large staring eyes appear to have been part of the iconography of Þórr. Þórr was conventionally represented as seated (cf. Adam of Bremen's account of his image in the Uppsala temple). And he was clearly often represented as bearded. In LI, then, we have, it seems certain, a representation of Þórr. Now in this context we must also consider four other figures who clutch their beards (none of them, it is true, made of walrus ivory), at least three of which have also, by others than myself, been interpreted as representations of Þórr.

(1) The well-known bronze figurine, often referred to as the Eyrarland image and now in Þjóðminjasafn Íslands (no. 10880). (A suggestion that this is not Þórr, but a playing piece, should be categorically dismissed; cf. Perkins 1994.) See Illustration 2.

(2) A whale-bone figure also in Þjóðminjasafn Íslands (no. 6) found



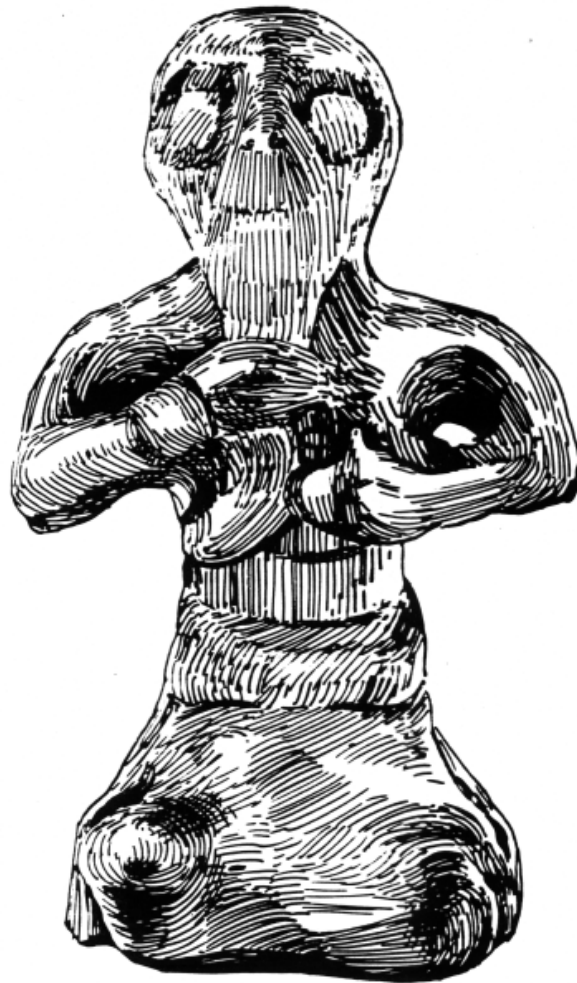
Illus. 1: Walrus-ivory figure from Lund, Sweden (= LI; height 4.6 cm.).  
(By courtesy of Kulturen, Lund)



Illus. 2: Bronze figure from Eyrarland, Iceland (height 6.7 cm.) (Photo: Gísli Gestsson; by permission of Þjóðminjasafn Íslands, Reykjavík).



Illus. 3: Amber figure from Feddet, Sjælland (height 4.7 cm.). (By permission of Werner Forman Archive/Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen).



Illus. 4: Bronze figure from Chernigov, Ukraine (height 4.6 cm.).  
(By kind permission of the artist, Elena Kruchina).

at Baldursheimur, near Lake Myvatn in northern Iceland. Cf. Graham-Campbell 1980, 25, 214 and references; *VH* 246.

(3) A half-length amber figure, about 4.7 cm high, found near the shores of Præstø Fjord (Feddet) in Sjælland and now in Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen (no. C24292). Cf. *VH* 247, 203. See Illustration 3.

(4) A bronze figurine found in the burial mound Chernaia Mogila, Chernigov in the Ukraine and now in Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Muzei, Moscow (no. 76990, 1539/77). Cf. *VH* 308. See Illustration 4. One of the reasons for interpreting this figure as Þórr is the broad belt around the waist, seen as the god's *megingjarðar* (so Pushkina 1984).

While scholars have been inclined to interpret LI and the four other figures just mentioned as Þórr, none of them has offered any explanation as to why the god should be clutching his beard. My explanation would be this: The wind was, of course, of first importance to sailors, not least the medieval Norse, whose vessels were relatively dependent on a following wind. A favourable wind could confer huge advantages, a contrary wind or no wind many disadvantages, delay, shipwreck and drowning. And when they needed the right wind, the Norse were prepared to invoke the supernatural, magic and their deities (cf. *KL*, s. v. *Vindmagi*). They were also prepared to employ wind-amulets; a typical one of these in Scandinavia was the so-called 'wind-knot', a series of three knots tied on a rope supposed to ensure a favourable wind. Another typical form of amulet is one which represents a god or other revered figure. I suggest, then, that the five figures in question represent Þórr in the process of *at þeyta skeggraustina*, producing a wind which can be used for sailing or other purposes. That they represent the thunder-god in miniaturised form does not matter. After all, Þórr's hammer could be miniaturised (*SnE* 124) as could the ship *Skíðblaðnir* which had a fair wind as soon as its sails were hoisted but could also be kept in a pouch (*SnE* 123). To be efficacious and to 'come alive', the object in question would probably have to be 'charmed' in some way, endowed with some special mana-like power or what in Old Norse might be called *megin*. The Old Norse verb was *at magna* and this is the verb used in *RR* of the process by which Rauðr's idol of Þórr is brought alive (*ÓTI*, 320/12); cf. *ÍF* VII, 249–51; IX, 112, 225–26, for parallels. It is also possible that LI was given its special powers by the ring-and-dot ornament on its reverse side, which might represent not only Þórr's hammer (see above) but also his *megingjarðar*. Representations of religious figures are often believed to come alive; madonnas sometimes weep. As recently as 1995, images of the elephant-headed



Hindu god Ganesha were reported to have started drinking milk in many places around the world. We note also the miniaturised image (*hlutr*) of Freyr in the first chapters of *Vatnsdæla saga* (*ÍF* VIII, 26–42; cf. *ÍF* I, 217–19), normally kept in a pouch, but sometimes very much alive. When the five beard-clutching figures under discussion were used as wind-amulets, this was, I would tentatively suggest, often to the accompaniment of an oral spell (cf. Máni skáld's verse in *Sverris saga* 1920, 90), perhaps appealing for a wind of a particular strength from a particular direction. It may reasonably be assumed that the amulets would have been manipulated from the stern of a vessel, i. e. behind the sail. As some sort of parallel to what I consider to be the function of these wind-amulets, attention may be drawn to the 'statue' which a Lithuanian fisherman is reported by Matthäus Praetorius (d. 1707) as having at the stern of his ship (cf. Pierson 1871, 27–28): this was an effigy of a 'god' the fisherman called *Vėjopatis*, 'Lord of the Wind'. While there is no mention of a beard, this figure had two faces with open mouths, one apparently for blowing a *ventus secundus*, the other a *ventus adversus*. It is not impossible that *Vėjopatis* had some connection with the Old Lithuanian god Perkūnas, who in turn may have connections with Þórr (cf. for example *WM* 447, 431–34).

I conclude this section with a tentative and speculative suggestion about LI, the figurine found in Lund, which may now be interpreted as a representation of Þórr and as a wind-amulet. We note that it is in Trondheim that Hallfreðr is accused by Kálfr of possessing an image of Þórr made of walrus ivory and LI is made of that same material. The greatest supply of walrus ivory probably came from northern Norway as well as Greenland. And Trondheim seems to have been something of a centre for work and trade in walrus ivory in the medieval period; see *VH* 202–05, 390–91. Now in *VH* (390), Claes Wahlöö remarks that while there are a few signs of walrus ivory being worked in Lund, a fragmentary walrus-ivory gaming-piece found there is perhaps more likely to have come from a Norwegian workshop. One wonders, then, if LI itself may not have been carved in Norway, and then possibly in Trondheim. If it was, and if it was also (as I suggest) a wind-amulet, then one might like to fantasise that it was at some time employed by its owner in the hope of getting a fair wind in Trøndelag and if so perhaps precisely at Agdenes.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> On walrus ivory and work in that material in Trondheim, cf. also Roesdahl 1995. Note also, for example, the two walrus tusks (both with inscriptions, at

*Sneglu-Halli at Agdenes*

A second passage connected with Agdenes is in the first chapters of *Sneglu-Halla þátr* (= *Snegl*). This *þátr* is preserved in five significant manuscripts, Flateyjarbók, AM 593 b, 4to, Morkinskinna, Hulda and Hrokkinskinna. The first two of these represent a redaction considerably longer than the other three and it is normally assumed that shortening (rather than lengthening) has taken place, quite possibly because of the obscene content of the original *þátr*. However this may be, the present discussion will be concerned almost entirely with the longer version as represented by Flateyjarbók, obscenity and indelicacy notwithstanding. *Snegl* is probably to be dated to about 1230 at the latest and may well have been written a few decades earlier (*ÍF IX*, cxiii–cxiv). The version in Flateyjarbók begins (*ÍF IX*, 263–66) by describing King Haraldr Sigurðarson. Of him, it says:

Hann var skáld gott. Jafnan kastaði hann háðyrðum at þeim mǫnnum, er honum sýndisk; þolði hann ok allra manna bezt, þótt at honum væri kastat klámyrðum, þá er honum var gott í skapi.

He was a good poet and always abused whomsoever he wished with scornful words. And when he was in a good mood, he showed great forbearance, even when assailed with obscenities.

It then tells the following story: Sneglu-Halli takes ship at Gásir in northern Iceland with a captain called Bárðr, described as *hirðmaðr Haralds konungs*. They put out to sea,

ok hófðu langa útivist, tóku Nóreg um haustit norðr við Þrándheim við eyjar þær, er Hítrar heita, ok sigldu síðan inn til Agðaness ok lágu þar um nótt. En um morgininn sigldu þeir inn eptir firðinum lítinn byr, ok er þeir kómu inn um Rein [on the northern side of the fjord], sá þeir, at langskip þrjú reru innan eptir firðinum. Dreki var it þriðja skipit. Ok er skipin reru hjá kaupskipinu, þá gekk maðr fram ór lyptingunni á drekanum í rauðum

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least one of which is a mark of ownership) found at Rømme, about 25 km from Agdenes, ‘i en kystbygd litt nord for innløpet til Trondheimsfjorden’ (see Map 1), and now in Vitenskapsmuseet in Trondheim (T2383a+b; cf. *VH* 385). These tusks have been seen as belonging to a storage depot for goods to be transferred later to other places, including Trondheim. Such a storage place for walrus ivory could well have existed at Agdenes. Othere, informant of King Alfred of England, must have passed at least the mouth of Trondheimsfjorden as he carried walrus ivory from his home in northern Norway to England (and doubtless also to Denmark where the walrus-ivory LI was found in Lund); his narrative implies that he might often have had to wait for favourable winds as he travelled the Norwegian coast (cf. *The Old English Orosius* 1980, 13–16).

skarlatasklæðum ok hafði gullhlað um enni, bæði mikill ok tigurligr. Þessi maðr tók til orða: ‘Hverr stýrir skipinu, eða hvar váru þér [í vetr], eða hvar tóku þér fyrst land, eða hvar lágu þér í nótt?’ Þeim varð næsta orðfall kaupmönnum, er svá var margs spurt senn. Halli svarar þá: ‘Vér várum í vetr á Íslandi, en ýttum af Gásum, en Bárðr heitir stýrimaðr, en tókum land við Hítrar, en lágum í nótt við Agðanes.’ Þessi maðr spurði, er reyndar var Haraldr konungr Sigurðarson: ‘Sarð hann yðr eigi Agði?’ ‘Eigi enna,’ segir Halli. Konungrinn brosti at ok mælti: ‘Er nokkurr til ráðs um, at hann muni enn síðar meir veita yðr þessa þjónustu?’ ‘Ekki,’ sagði hann Halli, ‘ok bar þó einn hlutr þar mest til þess, er vér fórum enga skömm af honum.’ ‘Hvat var þat?’ segir konungr. Halli vissi gørla, við hvern hann talaði. ‘Þat, herra,’ segir hann, ‘ef yðr forvitnar at vita, at hann Agði beið at þessu oss tignari manna ok vætti yðvar þangat í kveld, ok mun hann þá gjalda af höndum þessa skuld ótæpt.’ ‘Þú munt vera orðhákr mikill,’ segir konungr. Eigi er getit orða þeira fleiri at sinni. Sigldu þeir kaupmenninir til Kaupangs ok skipuðu þar upp ok leigðu sér hús í bænum. Fám nóttum síðar kom konungr inn aprt til bæjar, ok hafði farit í eyjar út at skemmta sér.

and had a long voyage, making land in the autumn northerly in Norway, off Trøndelag by the island(s) called Hitra. They then sailed in to Agdenes and spent a night there. In the morning they sailed in along Trondheimsfjorden with a light breeze. And as they passed Rein, they saw three longships rowing out along the fjord, the third a dragon-ship. And as these vessels passed the merchant-ship, a man in scarlet clothes with a gold band around his head went forward from the poop of the dragon-ship. He was tall and of noble appearance. This man began: ‘Who is in command of your ship? And where did you spend last winter? And where did you first make land? And where did you spend last night?’ The merchants were rather at a loss to find answers to so many questions asked all at once, but Halli replied: ‘We were in Iceland last winter, sailed from Gásir, the captain is called Bárðr, made land at Hitra and spent last night at Agdenes.’ The man, who was in fact King Haraldr Sigurðarson, then asked: ‘Hasn’t Agði fucked you?’ ‘Not so far,’ answered Halli. The king smiled at this and said: ‘Is there any chance that he’ll do you that favour at some time in the future?’ ‘No,’ said Halli, ‘and there was one particular circumstance which accounts for our suffering no disgrace at his hands.’ ‘What was that?’ asked the king. Halli knew very well who he was talking to and said: ‘Sire, if you really wish to know, it was that Agði was awaiting men of higher rank than us for that purpose: he expects you there this evening and will then discharge that office very thoroughly.’ ‘You are clearly a very abusive person,’ said the king. No further exchange between them on this occasion is reported. The merchants sailed on to Trondheim, unloaded their cargo and rented quarters in the town. A few nights later, the king returned. He had been out to the islands amusing himself.

Later, Halli and Bárðr go to meet the king in Trondheim. When asked, Halli admits to being the man the king spoke with out on the fjord. The

king agrees to his staying at the court but says that they may not always get on well together.

We focus mainly on the exchange between Haraldr and Halli on the fjord and its background. This begins with the king putting a startling number of questions to the Icelanders. Halli, however, is not at a loss for prompt answers and responds by stating that they have come from Gásir in Iceland, that their captain is called Bárðr, that they first made land at Hitra and that they spent the previous night at Agdenes. Although Bárðr has earlier been described as one of Haraldr's followers (*hirðmenn*), the king makes no reference to him. At Halli's mention of Agdenes, on the other hand, the king immediately asks the less than delicate question: 'Hasn't Agði fucked you?' Here, then, we have the introduction of the figure of Agði to which attention may be given.

Commenting on this passage in his edition of *Snegl*, Jónas Kristjánsson (*ÍF IX*, 265, n. 1) writes: 'Agði þessi er vafalaust búinn til eftir nafni nessins, virðist eiga að vera einhvers konar landvættur eða goðvera. Í Flateyjarb. [= *Flat*] I, 23, er nefndur Agði Prymsson (kenndur við Agðir) og Agði jarl í Þorst[eins] þ[átr] bæjarmagns; báðir eru fornaldarsagnapersónur.' Now there can be little doubt that Agði's name is secondary to the place-name Agðanes.<sup>3</sup> The first element of this probably has the same origin as the place-name Agder, which could well go back to 'eit opphavleg \*ogd til indoeur[opeisk] \*ak- "vera skarp". Namnet [i. e. *Agder*] kan da tyde "landet som stikk ut (i havet)" eller "landet med framstikkande punkt"' (*NS 53*). Certainly Agdenes projects up northwards to command the entrance to Trondheimsfjorden (cf. p. 179 above). And when Jónas characterises Agði as 'einhvers konar landvættur' he is doubtless also on the right track. It is often difficult to distinguish between the various minor deities and other supernatural beings who were part of Norse belief, but the *landvættir* appear to have been thought of as the guardian-spirits of particular areas or localities. As such they defended their territory against hostile forces and controlled the welfare of its inhabitants and those who travelled through it (Briem 1945, 71–90; *NG 334–588*; *AR I*, 260–61; *KL s.v. Landvette*; *MRN 230–35*). Their domain was often by the sea or other waterways. We know, for example, of Bárð(u)r Snæfellsáss from western Iceland (see *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* in *ÍF XIII*; *NG 462–63*; Briem 1945, 81–83).

<sup>3</sup> Other examples of the names of supernatural beings in Scandinavian folklore secondary to the first elements of place-names are (from Sweden) *Omnia* from *Omberg*, *Ålle* from *Ålleberg* (*NG 448*); (from Denmark) *Grön* from *Grönsund*, *Fane* (Grön's wife) from *Faneffjord* (*NG 508*).

Another local deity also known from medieval sources is the female Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr associated with the island of Sula (Møre og Romsdal) and probably originally a figure in the primitive beliefs of the fishermen and seamen of the area (*NG* 458–62; *AR* II, 340–42; *KL* XX, cols 382–84 and refs). And in later times and further south, we hear, for example, of Kullamannen of Kullaberg (Skåne), Ellekongen of Stevns Klint (Sjælland) and Klintekongen of Møns Klint (Møn), these last two sometimes regarded as one and the same. Near the southern tip of Gotland we find Hoburgsgubben, perhaps rather more good-natured than various other figures of this type. Agði, then, must belong to the band of supernatural beings who dwelt along the coasts of Scandinavia controlling local conditions. There can be little doubt that there was genuine belief in *landvættir* in Norway at the time *Snegl* was written. This we may safely infer from King Magnús Hákonarson's Christian Law Section for Gulapíng ('Nyere Gulatings kristenrett') of the late 1260s which prescribes measures to combat belief in *landvættir*, which were seen as dwelling in groves, mounds (*haugar*) or waterfalls (*NGL* II, 307–08):

þa a konongr ok biskup . . . at ranzsakca at menn fare æigi med ofmikilli (v. l. opinberre) villu ok hæidenvm atrvnade. En þæsser luttir høyra till villu ok hæidins atrvnaddar . . . at trva a landvættir at se j lvndum æda havgum æda forsom.

then the king and the bishop have to make investigations to ensure that men do not indulge excessively (v. l. manifestly) in superstitious practices and heathen beliefs. And these things may be considered as superstitious practice and heathen belief . . . believing in *landvættir*, that they dwell in groves or mounds or waterfalls.

Indeed, as will be seen below, belief in the sort of supernatural beings with which we are here concerned probably survived at least in some places in Scandinavia down to the nineteenth century or even the twentieth. We may also consider the location of Agði on Agdenes in more detail. As already suggested, Agdenes had particular strategic importance, not least for the defence of Trondheim and Trøndelag, and *landvættir* and similar figures were regarded as defenders of their particular territories. Thus in the story of the wizard sent by Haraldr Gormsson to Iceland in *Heimskringla* (which contains, it is true, various literary and Christian elements), the four parts of the country are defended by different *landvættir* (*ÍF* XXVI, 271; cf. *MRN* 232–33). And in Danish folklore Ellekongen of Stevns was thought of as preventing a British force of 1807 from invading his territory at Tryggevælde Å in Sjælland (*NG* 394–95, 452).

Agdenes was a point one had to pass, like it or not, to get to Trondheim by sea. We often find figures like Agði at such points (*NG* 443–45). For example, Kullamannen lived on Kullaberg keeping guard over the entrance to Øresund and the Baltic; supernatural beings on Blå Jungfrun in Kalmarsund were thought of as controlling shipping along the east coast of Sweden; and Dovre of Dovrefjell watched over the main land-route between Gudbrandsdalen and Trøndelag.

Agði is located on a promontory and for various reasons supernatural figures (e. g. Bárð(u)r Snæfellsáss, Kullamannen, Hoburgsgubben) were often thought of as living in such places. Agdenes rises to a height of some 165 metres and hills, mountains, cliffs and other eminences (whether near the sea or inland) were frequently the haunts of supernatural beings, for example, Bárð(u)r Snæfellsáss (Snæfellsnes), Álle (Álleberg, Västergötland), Klintekongen (Møns Klint) (cf. *NG* 249–51, 443–85; also 437–42).

Promontories are, of course, close to the sea or lakes and from them supernatural beings were thought of as controlling the fates and fortunes of those travelling on the nearby waters (*NG* 429–42). Thus they could, for example, confer success in fishing on local favourites (cf. for example *NG* 449); or they could, like Klintekongen of Møns Klint, destroy whole fleets of hostile ships (*NG* 467). Particularly in the age of oar and sail, mariners had considerable apprehensions about doubling headlands and often took laborious measures to avoid doing so. Rounding promontories often meant encountering new currents and changed wind-conditions. As already suggested, entering Trondheimsfjorden had its difficulties and shipwreck and other hazards were not uncommon here (cf. *Morkinskinna* 1932, 384; *KS* III, 90). It would not be surprising then to find a figure like Agði on Agdenes controlling wind and weather at the entrance to the fjord.

There is a further reason why we should find a supernatural figure like Agði inhabiting a promontory. We know from both literary and archaeological sources that funeral mounds and cairns were frequently located in such places. One reason for this is clearly suggested by lines 2802–08 of *Beowulf* (1950, 105; cf. 221): to be a memorial of the dead person to passing seafarers (cf. *Hávamál* 1986, stanza 72). And *landvættir* and figures like Agði were frequently thought of as inhabiting grave-mounds (cf. *NG* 500–12, 242–49). This is more or less directly implied by the passage from King Magnús Hákonarson's Christian Law Section for Gulapíng quoted above (p. 197). It is therefore interesting that there are a number of grave-mounds and the like on Agdenes with which

Agði might have been associated. Here attention might be particularly focused, for example, on the mound called Agdeneshaugen in Agdenesbukta itself (its purpose somewhat uncertain; cf. *SBA*); or on the mounds in the vicinity of Værnestangen, Rishaug and Laukhaug;<sup>4</sup> or on a large cairn ('røys') at Raudstein. These features are all more or less on the shore of the seaway in past Agdenes (Trondheimsleia) and visible from it. They are also close to the places on the western side of Agdenes where harbourage was to be found (*NtT* 38, 84–87, 116 *et passim*; see p. 179 above).

The king asks Halli if Agði has not sexually used him and his companions; from the subsequent exchange between the two we may infer that Agði had a fairly voracious sexual appetite, prepared to bugger Icelanders and Norwegian kings alike.<sup>5</sup> As also noted, Agði had control of the mouth of Trondheimsfjorden just as Kullamannen presided over the entrance to Øresund and supernatural powers in Blå Jungfrun over Kalmarsund.<sup>6</sup> Now figures like Agði were often capricious,

<sup>4</sup> In *GtN* 530, I tentatively suggest that the Old Norse first element of the still extant place-name *Rishaug* on Agdenes, i. e. (*h*)*rís*, 'brushwood', might by folk-etymology perhaps have been associated with Old Norse *risi* (cf. Norwegian *rise*, 'giant'; see *NtT* 16). Certainly the word *bergrisi* is used of a *landvættir* (*ÍF* XXVI, 271). Bárðr Snæfellsáss was of *risakyn* (*ÍF* XIII, 101–02). Ross (1895, 605) notes that the Norwegian word *rise* is used not only of a 'Jätte', but also 'om Gravsted fra Oldtiden' (in Jæren), and also mentions the word *reesegrav* (from Jæren). Blom (1896, 137–38) mentions a *Rishaug* (possibly also called *Tussehaug*; cf. *NG* 244) at Viken in Setersdal where, as late as the eighteenth century, cocks were sacrificed to the spirits ('vetter') thought to dwell in the mound.

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps only the Grettir of *Grettisfærsla* could compete; cf. MS 18 and refs.

<sup>6</sup> The expression 'Nordens Gibraltar' for Agdenes, used during the Second World War and alluded to by Merete Moe Henriksen (*NtT* 122), is thought-provoking. We may recall the episode in Snorri's *Óláfs saga helga* (*ÍF* XXVII, 25) in which Óláfr is waiting for a fair wind (*at biða byrjar*) at Karlsár (Cadiz?) to take him through the Strait of Gibraltar (Nørvasund) on his way to the Holy Land (cf. The Legendary Saga of St Óláfr, ch. 17 (*KS* I, 232); *Fagrskinna*, ch. 27 (*ÍF* XXIX, 169–70)). A strange man of fearsome aspect (Hercules? Cf. *Monumenta* 164) appears to Óláfr in a dream and tells him to return to Norway where he will become king. Is this man a figure who holds sway over Nørvasund just as Agði controls the entrance to Trondheimsfjorden and Kullamannen the entrance to Øresund? Apparently the man in Óláfr's dream can see into the future like Agði and Kullamannen (and like this last can predict the destiny of kings). May we assume that it is he who controls the winds at Nørvasund just as Agði seems to at Agdenes? At all events, in both The Legendary Saga and *Fagrskinna*, Óláfr gets no wind to continue his journey into the Mediterranean.

sometimes benign, sometimes malevolent. They had to be treated with great respect and caution and ordinary mortals often sought to win their favour. They were often appeased with offerings or accorded other marks of respect. For example, until quite recent times first-time travellers or novice seamen (Norwegian ‘skårunger’) along the west coast of Norway were often prevailed upon (frequently by way of a trick) to doff their hats or caps in respect when the supposed haunts of such figures were passed. Or they might be called upon to treat the others in the vessel or pay a fee. Concrete offerings might take the form of bread, tobacco, measures of liquor or coins. In Møn, for example, farmers put aside the last sheaf of oats for Klintekongen’s horse. But there was another way of currying favour with such figures, particularly those regarded as females. This was by symbolic sexual intercourse (Danish ‘symbolsk samleje’; cf. *NG* 343). Here the figure in question was represented by a stone into which a stick might be thrust in imitation of the sexual act. Seamen along the Norwegian coast paid their respects to objects and localities representing sexual organs and the like (cf. for example the female *Kontevika*, ‘Cunt Bay’, and *Hondsfitå*, ‘Bitch’s Cunt’; the male *Eistene*, ‘The Testicles’; *NvF* 147–49). And when we turn from mainland Scandinavian folklore to the Old Icelandic sagas, we find a figure who seems to resemble Agði in a relevant way. The scene in ch. 123 of *Brennu-Njáls saga* (*ÍF* XII, 311–15) where Skarpheðinn presents Flosi with a pair of dark blue (*blár*) knickers is well known.<sup>7</sup> By this act, Skarpheðinn upsets the delicately arranged settlement after the killing of Hǫskuldr Hvítanessgoði. The passage has recently been the subject of informed discussion in *MS* (9–13 *et passim*). Of interest are Skarpheðinn’s words when Flosi asks why he should have need for the knickers: *Því þá—ef þú ert brúðr Svínfellsáss* [v. 1. *Snæfellsáss*], *sem sagt er, hverja ína níundu nótt ok geri hann þik at konu*. The slur here clearly suggests that Flosi had some sort of erotic relationship, albeit of course a symbolic one, with the Svínfellsáss. The latter would have been the active party, Flosi the passive. It is presumably implied that Flosi submitted himself to the Svínfellsáss in this way in order to ingratiate himself. It seems, then, that Agði (and other *landvættir* like him) had very much the same sexual proclivities as the Svínfellsáss. And Haraldr could well be implying that Halli and his companions allowed themselves to be used by Agði in order to win the latter’s favour.

<sup>7</sup> Dark blue (*blár*) garments seem to have been favoured by sodomites (cf. the *hǫttr blár* of ch. 17 of *Bjarnar saga Hítðlakappa* (*ÍF* III, 154)).



Skarpheðinn, then, accuses Flosi of serving the Svínfellsáss sexually; and King Haraldr by his questions to Halli and his companions raises the possibility that they have been used in like manner by Agði. It will now be clear why people should allow themselves to be sexually exploited, albeit symbolically, by such supernatural figures. *Landvættir* like Agði and the Svínfellsáss had, as we have seen, authority over specific areas. Their powers were localised and they controlled the general welfare of their domains in matters, for example, of climate, crops, success in husbandry (*MRN* 232–33). Moreover, Agði on his promontory had control over the entrance to Trondheimsfjorden. The *landvættir* had their favourites; and as we have seen, one way of currying favour with them was through sexual liaisons with them. Skarpheðinn's slur on Flosi could well imply that he acted as woman for the Svínfellsáss in order to secure the advantages this latter might confer locally at Svínafell. If Agði had control of the waters around Agdenes, he could probably grant safe passage into the fjord and to Trondheim and away to other places south, west and north from Agdenes (cf. pp. 182–83 above). One may assume, then, that Agði demanded sexual services from those passing through his territory as (to borrow an expression from Øresund) some form of 'sound-dues' (Danish 'sundtold'). It was quite possibly the granting of this privilege that the king implies that Halli and his companions might be prepared to prostitute themselves to Agði to secure (*at láta serðask til*; cf. p. 209 below). But it might not be reading too much into the text to go a step further. In sailing *lítinn byr* along the fjord (cf. p. 194, line 26 above), Halli and his companions—unlike Haraldr, whose men have to row—have at least something of a following wind, i. e. from a northerly to westerly direction; in reality, sailors rounding Agdenes on their way into the fjord perhaps more often have to contend with winds from the east or south-east (*NiT* 13; cf. p. 179 above). Might not Haraldr be implying that the fair wind driving Bárðr's ship was sent by Agði because its crew and passengers had allowed themselves to be sexually used by him? Halli, it is true, denies that he and his companions were so used, and the reasons for his denial will be evident from what follows below. We may here note, however, in support of the suggestion just made, that it appears from the quotation from Theodóra Thoroddsen referred to above (p. 186) that a figure similar to Agði, Bárð(u)r Snæfellsáss, was able to produce breezes (from his *skeggbroddar*). As the scribal slip reflected in certain manuscripts of *Njáls saga* reveals, the Snæfellsáss and the Svínfellsáss must have been thought of as very

similar figures (cf. p. 200, line 28 above; *ÍF* XII, 314, n. 3; Briem 1945, 81). Certainly other supernatural beings (and not least Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr of Sula) were thought of as having control over wind and weather or even as being personifications of these phenomena (cf. for example *NG* 429, 446, 450, 458–62).

We move on to Halli's final repartee of the exchange, the insinuation, however deferentially and euphemistically couched, that Agði is waiting for Haraldr at Agdenes and will thoroughly bugger him when he arrives there that very evening. From Halli's remark, we see that he regards Agði as prescient. If Halli is right, then prescience is a gift that Agði shares with other similar figures. For example, Kullamannen of Kullaberg had the gift of prophecy and rightly predicted that Valdemar II's three sons would all be king after him (*NG* 449). Halli also implies that Haraldr will suffer rough treatment at the hands of Agði. This is probably precisely because Haraldr is a nobler (*tignari*) man than Halli and his companions rather than despite the fact. While figures like Agði were prepared to defend their territories against foreign powers, they would not tolerate the presence there of any other king, not even the king of the realm himself. We may note here, for example, a legend about the Danish Christoffer III's death in 1448. Christoffer was warned not to visit Skælskør (Sjælland) as there was an elfin king ('ellekonge') there who would brook no other king's presence. Christoffer answered that he was a Christian and unafraid of the troll. But next day, as he rode away from Skælskør, he was struck between the shoulders so hard that he almost fell dead from his horse and no one saw who hit him. He had himself carried to Helsingborg where he died (see *NG* 452 for this and other pertinent examples). In *Snegl*, then, Halli implies that Agði will have little respect for Haraldr's status and indeed will be more likely to sodomise Haraldr than himself and his companions. Haraldr seems somewhat deflated by all this and can only conclude the exchange with the rather lame remark that Halli was clearly *orðhákr mikill*.

We now consider Agði's later history. In the notes to his translation of *Snegl* (Flateyjarbók-version), Finnur Magnússon (Magnusen 1820, 34) refers to Agði as 'en Højboer, Trold eller Jætte, af hvem Næssel mentes at have sit Navn'. This confident statement makes one almost wonder if Finnur knew sources about Agði quite independent of the medieval Icelandic *Snegl*, conceivably Norwegian oral traditions of his own time. In fact, it is rather doubtful that he did. Even so, and in view of what has already been said, it seems far from impossible that traditions about some supernatural being or beings residing on Agdenes

were still alive in Norwegian folklore of more recent centuries. For example, when Gerhard Schøning visited Agdenes in the 1770s he noted the strong belief there in the giants of former times and was told that a certain cairn there owed its origin to the activities of such beings (Schøning 1910, I 80–81).<sup>8</sup> And Merete Moe Henriksen (*NtT* 16) seems to presuppose the survival of similar superstitions down to fairly recent times. She states that as late as the end of the nineteenth century it was not uncommon practice to row with muffled oars around Agdenes in order not to disturb the troll residing there ('så sent som på slutten av 1800-tallet var det ikke uvanlig å linne tøy på årene når man rodde forbi Agdeneset for ikke å forstyrre trollet').<sup>9</sup> There is perhaps need for further investigation here. Moving to the twentieth century, we find that *Agði* has a female descendant. In Chapter IX of his *Nemningsfordomar ved fiske* (*NvF* 116–75), Solheim gives attention to the various features along the Norwegian coast, for instance dangerous skerries and rocks, which were personified as supernatural beings. These were represented sometimes as males (e. g. *Vågakallen*, Andøya, Nordland; *NvF* 155, 157) but probably more often as females. There are, for example, several instances of *Finnkjerringa* (*NvF* 142, 151). The element *kjerring* (lit. 'old woman') was common in the names of such beings (cf. Hovda 1941). They were seen as potentially harmful, to be humoured, as we have seen, by offerings or marks of respect. As we have also seen, novice sailors were frequently prevailed upon (by tricks) to pay their respects by doffing their hats. In this way knowledge of the seaways and their hazards would be thoroughly implanted in the young men's minds. Here a passage in Solheim's book (*NvF* 149) has special interest for Trondheimsfjorden. An informant from Leksvik tells how, when a young man passed by boat for the first time what is probably the promontory of Amborneset (on the north side of the fjord, about 15 km across from Trondheim; cf. Map 1), it was a common prank to try to get

<sup>8</sup> Schøning here makes, admittedly without much conviction, an identification between the *Thialfahellir* said in Theodoricus's History of the kings of Norway (*Monumenta* 14, 17) to lie on Agdenes (cf. *KS* I, 60) and a small cave just to the east of Valset (itself less than 4 km to the west of Agdenesbukta). There was a mythical figure called *Þjálfi* (cf. *AR* II, 129–30) and such beings were sometimes apparently thought of, like *Surtr*, as residing in caves (cf. Briem 1945, 79–81).

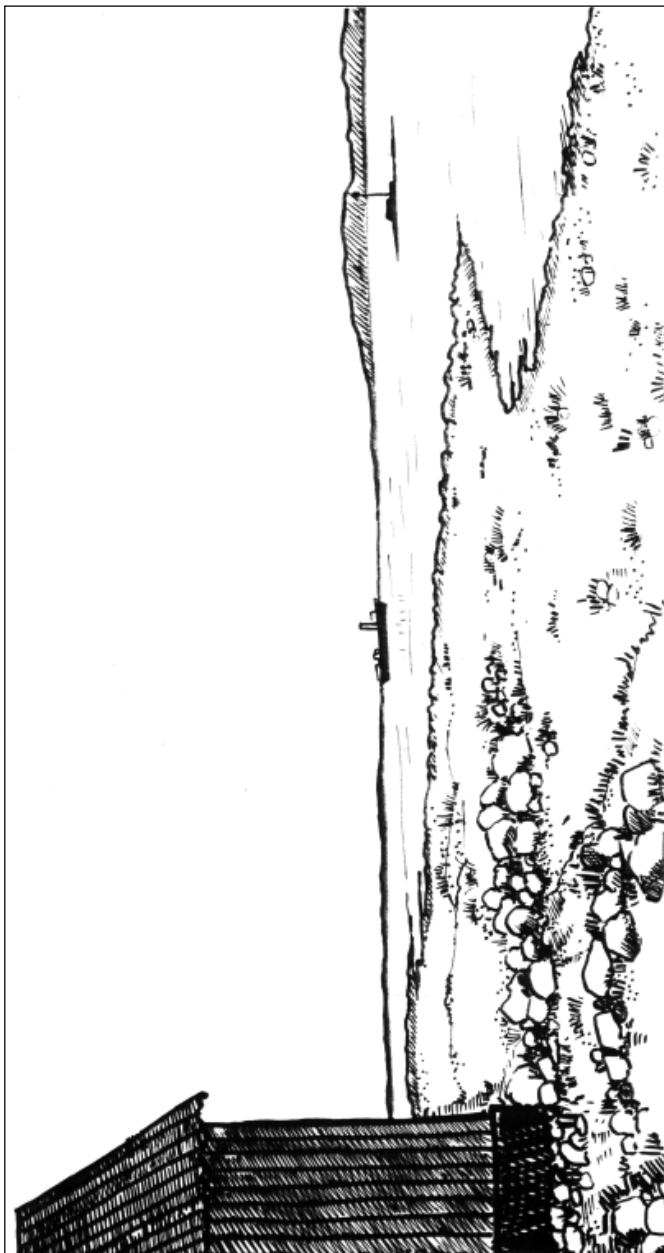
<sup>9</sup> Merete Moe Henriksen (personal communication) informs me of the source for this statement. It is somewhat popular, but appears to be backed up by oral testimony and is not to be lightly dismissed.

him to salute Urskjerringa by ordering him to take his hat off. If he complied, his action was met by hearty laughter from the others on board.

I Leksvik narra dei ungdomane til å helse på *Urskjerringa*. Om dette skriv ein korrespondent: ‘Omtrent i skillet mellom Leksvik og Leksvikstranda sogner er det en bergodde ved sjøstranden som stikker noe mer frem end de andre. Denne odde er fra så langt tilbake man vet kaldt Urskjærinna. Den ligger i nærheten av Ursbekken. Når en ungdom første gang var med båt forbi Urskjærinna, så var det et almindeligt narrestrek å få ham til å hilse på Urskjærinna. – “Nu må du ta hatten av,” sa en av de gamle, da de kom til stedet, og hvis han efterkom påbudet blev det en oplivende latter ombord.’ Og i leia ved mynnet av Trondheimsfjorden galdt føregjerda eit viktig punkt for navigasjonen. ‘Å narra dei yngre ombord til å helse på skjer og holmar, seglmerke o.l. er i bruk den dag i dag. Fyrste gongen eg fór forbi Agdenes på veg til Trondheim, narra skipperen meg til å helse på *Agdenes-kjerringa*, ei jernstøtte på ei flu ved Agdenes,’ fortel ein heimelsmann frå Heim. Karakteristisk er det at det i nyare tid er sett opp ei jarnstytte på denne kjerringa for å markera leia.

It is noteworthy that, as at Agdenes, prehistoric remains (grave-mounds and cairns) are to be found on Amborneset; cf. pp. 198–99 above. Solheim cites a second informant, Johan Hellandsjø from Heim in Sør-Trøndelag well to the south-west of Agdenes (*NvF* 181; cf. Map 1). Hellandsjø tells how, when he travelled for the first time past Agdenes in to Trondheim, the skipper of the boat fooled him into paying his respects to Agdenes-kjerringa, represented, it seems, by an iron perch set up on a skerry. In the 1990s, Agdenes-kjerringa is still to be seen as Solheim’s informant described it, not far from the shore at Agdenesbukta (the skerry covered at high tide); cf. Illustration 5. It is marked simply as ‘Kjerringa’ on Chart 39 and is still known locally as such. In Solheim’s second informant, then, we have a twentieth-century Norwegian who, however perfunctorily, has on his first trip past Agdenes paid obeisance to some supernatural being.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> When this contribution was at proof stage, Merete Moe Henriksen kindly drew my attention to Einar Jakobsen’s book *Festningen ved havet* of 1997. Jakobsen makes a number of references to the presence at Agdenes of ‘Agdenestrollet’, traditions about whom seem to have been current amongst Norwegian servicemen stationed at Agdenes Festning in the years around the beginning of the Second World War (cf. Jakobsen 1997, 13–17 *et passim*; there is a picture of a carving of ‘Agdenestrollet’ on p. 15). Agdenestrollet seems to have been thought of as having some control over the wind in the locality and also seems to show scant respect for a modern Scandinavian monarch (cf. Jakobsen 1997, 106). But how far such traditions could go back to written



Illus. 5: Agdenesbukta at low tide. The skerry Kjerringa with its perch to the right. (Drawing by Ece Turaman)

We turn from Johan Hellandsjø back to the Sneglu-Halli of the *þátr*. It is highly unlikely that a historical figure called Sneglu-Halli as portrayed in *Snegl* actually experienced events described in the *þátr* (or even existed at all). There was never, in all probability, any meeting between such a figure and the Norwegian King Haraldr Sigurðarson on Trondheimsfjorden. On the other hand, there are doubtless various realities behind the literary episode. As an Icelander, Halli could expect to be subjected to a certain amount of teasing and even bullying (cf. Mundal 1997, 487–88). *Morlandi* is an insult, albeit a mild one, he might well have heard used of himself and his companions. As a young man sailing into Trondheim for the first time (we may suppose), he was, to use the Norwegian word of more recent times noted above, something of a *skårunge*, a youngster on his first trip to sea, the potential butt of jokes and potential victim of pranks (cf. pp. 203–04 above; *NvF* 9, 11, 153–62). Having circumnavigated Agdenes, Halli and his companions sail in past Rein, where they meet three longships rowing in the opposite direction, the commander of which fires a barrage of questions at them. It is not impossible that vessels seeking access to Trondheim by sea were subjected to some official control at Agdenes or on the fjord (cf. *NiT* 120–31); and the first four questions asked by Haraldr contain perhaps reminiscences of the sort of interrogation the captains of visiting ships actually underwent. With his initial questions promptly answered, Halli's interlocutor, now revealed as King Haraldr Sigurðarson, turns to raillery. The king's reputation as a poet with a taste for banter already mentioned in the *þátr* could well have some basis in fact (cf. p. 194 above). 'Hasn't Agði fucked you?' he asks, and it is noteworthy that neither the author of *Snegl* nor the redactor of its shorter version accord Agði any introduction. It seems quite probable that Agði was not only familiar to the Halli of the *þátr* (who was certainly in the know) but also to its audience in Iceland and to the townsfolk of Trondheim of the thirteenth century. He was, I would suggest, a stock figure. Moreover, Haraldr's question is, of course, a *níð*, an insinuation that Halli and his companions had been passive partners in some act of sexual perversity. The delivery of such insults was specifically forbidden in the medieval laws of Iceland and Norway (i. e. the Law of Gulaping and the Law of Frostaping; cf. Almqvist 1965, 38–88; MS 14–32). There were, for example, laws against declaring that a man had

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sources (perhaps even to *Sneglu-Halla þátr* itself) may be regarded as a matter of uncertainty.

borne children or that he had been a woman every ninth night (cf. p. 200 above). More relevantly to our discussion, heavy penalties were laid down for describing a man with the participial adjectives *sannsorðinn*, ‘demonstrably sodomised by another man’ (in the Norwegian laws) or simply *sorðinn*, ‘sodomised by another man’ (in *Grágás*; both words related to the verb *serða* which Haraldr uses). But how far such laws were actually enforced is a matter of debate and one which cannot be discussed here. In reality it seems very probable that insinuations like these, in all their lewdness and crudity, were part of everyday life in the Norway of the thirteenth century and went largely unpunished. We may note here, for example, a runic inscription from Oslo (possibly to be dated to c.1200) in which a certain Óli is referred to as *stroðinn í rassinn* (cf. Knirk 1991, 18–19). Óli was doubtless a historical person (indeed possibly identifiable) but there is no reason to think that the carver of the runes or anyone else suffered any legal consequences for the inscription. Nor is it likely that Óli was actually subjected to buggery. Here, as frequently in the literary sources, the sexual imputations are used figuratively (cf. MS, *passim*).<sup>11</sup> Thus when Skarpheðinn threw his taunt of sexual perversity at Flosi in ch. 123 of *Brennu-Njáls saga* he can, as noted, hardly have expected to be taken seriously in a literal sense. What Haraldr is asking Halli and his companions (I would argue) is some such question as whether they have paid their respects (in however demeaning a manner) to an object representing Agði at Agdenes; or whether they have made an offering to him there; or simply whether they have rounded Agdenes under his supposed aegis;<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> I am grateful to Jonna Louis-Jensen and James Knirk for pointing out to me that Fr. Macody Lund’s interpretation (1934–1936) of a Latin inscription on an exterior part of Trondheim cathedral according to which the Icelander Laurentius Kálfsson (1267–1331; Bishop of Hólar from 1324) is defamed as ‘Peter’s anus’ is far from certain.

<sup>12</sup> Agdenes as a promontory might have been interpreted as some sort of phallic object, capable of both sodomy and heterosexual intercourse. As the etymology of its name implies, it is something which projects (cf. p. 196 above); moreover it is directed, as it were, at Stjørnfjorden to its north-east and Stjørnfjorden might in turn have been seen as representing an anus or vagina. Now it might be argued that features like these are unlikely to have been seen in the somewhat cartographical way needed to suggest such comparisons. However, as noted above (p. 200), the name *Kontevika* was used of a bay on the Norwegian coast. Furthermore, in ch. 4 of *Ólkoфра pátttr* (*ÍF* XI, 94), Broddi Bjarnason likens the cleft between Guðmundr Eyjólfsson’s buttocks to *Ljósavatnsskarð* (cf. MS 34–39, 103). Rounding Agdenes by boat might then

or perhaps even whether they have paid a fee at Agdenes before proceeding into the fjord.<sup>13</sup> To admit to having been used by Agði was, then, probably not as discreditable as it might seem and there were perhaps many Icelanders and medieval inhabitants of Trondheim who could claim the distinction. I would argue, therefore, that Haraldr is indulging in a stock joke about a stock figure, one well known to all familiar with Trondheimsfjorden. To his question *sarð hann yðr eigi Agði?* Haraldr is, doubtless, expecting an affirmative answer from Halli and to be able to make merry over this. In discussing the practice of fooling young seamen into saluting features representing local spirits along the Norwegian coast, Solheim stresses the element of jest involved. We have learnt from Solheim's informant from Leksvik in Trøndelag how prevailing on a youngster to doff his hat to Urskjerringa produced a peal of laughter from his older companions on board (cf. p. 204 above). Solheim (*NvF* 148–49) gives other specific examples from other informants of the mirth produced by similar tricks elsewhere. Further, on p. 153 of *NvF*, he shows how strong the link between the custom in question and the consequent mirth must have been and argues that it goes far back in time:

Det er eitt drag i skikken [i. e. that of hoodwinking young men into paying their respects to supernatural figures] som går att i alle oppteikningane frå dei seinaste år: skjemten. Det vart alltid moro av det når nokon, d. v. s. av dei unge og urøynde, vart narra til å helsa. Ein kan av tradisjonen få den tokken at det var moroa som var sjølve motivet til skikken. Men det tilfanget vi til dessar har gått gjennom, er nok til å visa at skjemtmotivet på ingen måte kan gjeva fullnøyande forklaring på skikken, og eit nærare studium syner då også at opphavet til slike føregjerder har vori heilt andre ting enn berre trongen til moro og høvet til å stetta den. Utan tvil er skjemtdraget gamalt og opphavleg i samanheng med skikken. Sjølve situasjonen under ei slik 'helsing' eller 'narring' gjer det naturleg. Men det er sikkert i nyare tid, etter at det eigenlege grunnlaget for skikken hadde teki til å kverva bort, at dette draget har vorti det dominerande.

Customs like those described by Solheim were not confined in Scandi-

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have been interpreted figuratively as accommodating Agði's organ. Another possibility is that the expression 'to be used by Agði' meant the reverse, to be delayed by wind and weather at Agdenes; but much of what has been said above runs counter to such an interpretation.

<sup>13</sup> In *SBA* 23 it is suggested that a demand for dues from sea-traffic entering or leaving Trondheimsfjorden may possibly have been made at the harbour in Agdenesbukta.



navia to Norway; Nordlander (1926–1927, 66–70) describes an example of the practice from Sweden. Just how far back in time such customs go is demonstrated by the episode in *Snegl*. Jokes of this sort along the coasts of Norway must be at least as old as the thirteenth century, perhaps older than Solheim thought. In the fictional world of the *þáttr* the king is expecting to satisfy the same sort of need to tease as that reported by Solheim’s modern informants. Halli’s quick wit deprives him of the pleasure. The king seems to take it all in good part and even produces a smile. But the joke is at the expense of the illustrious Haraldr harðráði and not the Icelandic new boy he thought to ridicule. And all this merriment apart, there was probably a very real respect for the genius of Agdenes amongst many of those who actually sailed Trondheimsfjorden.

The episode in ch. 2 of *Snegl* we have been discussing has something of a parallel later in the *þáttr* (ch. 10; *ÍF* IX, 293–94) in the following incident not found in the shorter version. One day Halli is with King Haraldr who is carrying an elaborately decorated axe. The king notices that Halli cannot keep his eyes off the weapon and the following dialogue ensues. The king asks:

‘Hefir þú sét betri øxi?’ ‘Eigi ætla ek,’ segir Halli. ‘Villtu láta serðask til øxarinnar?’ segir konungr. ‘Eigi,’ segir Halli, ‘en várkunn þykki mér yðr, at þér vilið svá selja sem þér keyptuð.’ ‘Svá skal vera, Halli,’ segir konungr, ‘tak með, ok njót manna bezt, gefin var mér, enda skal svá selja.’

‘Have you seen any better axe?’ ‘I don’t think so,’ says Halli. ‘Would you let yourself be bugged to get (*láta serðask til*) it?’ asks the king. ‘No,’ says Halli, ‘but you could be forgiven for letting it go at the same price as you paid for it.’ ‘So it shall be, Halli,’ says the king. ‘Take it now and may you have the greatest joy from it; it was given to me and on the same terms I shall pass it on.’

In MS 27, Haraldr’s second question here is rendered: ‘Will you agree to be *sorðinn* (*serðask*—used sexually by another man . . .) for the sake of getting the axe?’ Meulengracht Sørensen goes on to remark of the whole passage, ‘The insinuation is, of course, that if the king insisted on his condition, it could be suspected that he had obtained the axe in a similar way.’ In ch. 2 and ch. 10, then, Haraldr, by his questions makes the suggestion that *Snegl*-Halli is prepared to allow himself to be *sorðinn*; in both episodes Halli answers the questions in the negative and skilfully turns the slur back on the king. The episode shows again that the king is able to take as good as he gives. It is not impossible that the episode in ch. 10 is based on some hackneyed joke or cliché rather

than being the author's own. But in either event, it is secondary to the episode in ch. 2. It was presumably written later than that episode which, in turn, is based on various traditional elements. The absence of the episode in ch. 10 in the version of *Snegl* represented by Morkinskinna, Hulda and Hrokkinskinna is, as suggested above (p. 194), in all likelihood the result of a shortening process; the redactor of that version omitted it because of its repetitiousness and its obscenity. He has also abbreviated his version to exclude other indecent material.

As in the previous section, I conclude in speculative vein. It has been suggested above that 'to be *sorðinn* by Agði' could mean something like 'to pay one's respects to Agði' or 'to make an offering to Agði'. If this is right, one might well wonder precisely to what object, if any, such tokens of deference were directed. It has been noted above (pp. 198–99) that there are various grave-mounds or cairns on Agdenes with which Agði might have been associated. But there are other possibilities. In view of his apparent reputation for sexual activity, it seems possible that he might have been represented by some object symbolising a phallus and then perhaps most aptly a standing stone. We certainly read of a phallus-cult on a promontory somewhere in Norway in *Vølsa þátr* (*Flat* II, 331–36; cf. *KL* s. v. *Falloskult*). We have already seen how Norwegian seamen of recent times paid their respects to certain features, visible from the sea, which symbolised sexual organs, although perhaps mainly female sexual organs. (Here we may also note a stone named *Jøgelkunta*, 'Giantess's Cunt', near Lillehammer, admittedly far from the sea, to which young boys were encouraged to pay their respects; cf. Lie 1939.) There was, of course, widespread veneration of stones of various sorts in the folk-belief of Scandinavia and they could have importance in many respects (cf. *NG* 219–29, 339–58). As a random example, we may instance a stone on a point in Lake Anten (Västergötland), 'hr. Gunnars sten', which must be saluted by those desiring success in fishing on the lake (*NG* 350). Here we think of the so-called *bautasteiner*, which Norwegian word (a revival of Old Norse *bautasteinar*) is used in modern Scandinavian archaeological terminology for a stone, without inscription, set up on end in the earth in prehistoric times (cf. *KL* s. v. *Bautastein*; *Hávamál* 1986, 108). Such stones, common not least in Norway, may have a height of up to five metres. They appear singly or in groups, often in combination with grave-mounds or cairns, and like them sometimes on promontories (cf. the place-name *Bauteneset* (Voksa, Møre og Romsdal); *KL* I, col. 393). Also like grave-mounds, *bautasteiner* can be found near well-trafficked

routes (cf. p. 199 above; *Hávamál*, strophe 72). According to Skjelsvik (*KLI*, col. 393), they were often named after persons and there was one in western Norway called simply *Mannen*. For various reasons, not least etymological, *bautasteiner* have been interpreted as phallic symbols. In Öland, for example, women sought relief from infertility by stroking certain *bautasteiner* (*Rs* 42; cf. *NG* 348). Here we note that there is at least one *bautastein* on Agdenes, in the vicinity of Værnestangen–Rishaug–Laukhaug (cf. *NtT* 44–46; cf. p. 199 above and note 4). Agði might, then, have been represented by a *bautastein*. But there is another possibility. We have noted the large cairn near to the shore at Raudstein about 6 km west of the tip of Agdenes (cf. *NtT* 90–93, 117). The word *Raudstein* has a parallel in Östergötland (Grebo parish, near Linköping) in Sweden in the name of a still existing farm, *Rödsten*. On the land of this farm we find a composition of three painted stones in the form of a distinct phallus (described by Cnattingius in *Rs*). The main, upright stone is painted red, a flat stone on top of it is white and the third stone, uppermost, is black. The whole, sometimes personified as ‘Rödstensgubben’, has its place in the middle of a burial cairn. By tradition the symbol has importance for the farm’s well-being and, even in the present century, has been regularly painted for superstitious reasons, to prevent misfortune visiting the farm. The custom can be shown to go back at least as far as the medieval period and quite possibly to the Iron Age. In his discussion, Cnattingius adduces parallels from northern Cameroon where such fetishes had connections with fertility rites and were reddened with the blood of sacrificial animals. There is, of course, no such phallic stone at Raudstein on Agdenes now. And there may be various other explanations for the name (e. g. it might well refer to a stone naturally coloured red). But there was certainly a custom in Norway up to quite recent times of painting venerated stones white (*NG* 221; *KLI*, col. 393). The sacrifices described by Dudo for a favourable wind, etc. (cf. pp. 183–84) involved the smearing of blood of human sacrifices. Some sort of phallic object might have apotropaic power protecting the entrance to the fjord against hostile forces, supernatural or otherwise (cf. *ARI*, 288–90). At the same time, such an object may have acted as some sort of marker or navigational aid (cf. Kjerringa in Agdenesbukta). It is not, therefore, inconceivable that a red stone at Raudstein might have symbolised Agði. But it should be stressed again that we are here very much in the realms of speculation and conjecture.

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### CHRISTINE ELIZABETH FELL

Christine Fell, Emeritus Professor of Early English Studies in the University of Nottingham and past President of the Viking Society, died on 2 July 1998. Her final illness was quick and sudden, although she had suffered poor health for some years.

Christine Fell was born in Louth, Lincolnshire, in 1938. Appropriately for a future scholar of Anglo-Saxons and Vikings, she had family connections on both sides of the Humber, and on her early retirement in 1997 she went to live in her beloved Slingsby in North Yorkshire. Fell took a B.A. in English at Royal Holloway College, London, in 1959, followed by an M.A. at University College, London, in 1961, supervised by Peter Foote. Her dissertation was an edition of *Dunstanus saga* (published in 1963), and part of her training was to spend a year in Copenhagen working on the relevant manuscripts. From then on her career was marked by a strong interest in the cultural interactions of the English and Scandinavian worlds, and by close contacts with Scandinavian scholars. Fell embarked on her academic career at Ripon Training College in 1961, moving on to the English Language Department in Aberdeen in 1963, and to the English Department at Leeds in 1965. She came to Nottingham in 1971, and remained here for the rest of her career, progressing to Reader in 1976, and to Professor of Early English Studies in 1981.

In the Department of English Studies Fell was concerned to preserve the range of teaching in Old and Middle English, Old Norse, history of the English language and place-name studies. Securing a 'New Blood' lectureship in Viking Studies in 1985 was only one of her many coups. During her headship of the department (1990–93) she also developed Nottingham as one of the few British universities practising both teaching and research in runology, and in 1992 she initiated a five-year Leverhulme-funded research project on the language of English place-names, which continues and is now funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board. Her views on the value of studying Old Norse-Icelandic in departments of English, alongside the culture of the Anglo-Saxons, were expressed in her usual trenchant and witty style in her paper 'Norse studies: then, now and hereafter' to the Viking Society Centenary Symposium in 1992 (published in *Viking Revaluations*, ed. Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins, 1993, pp. 85–99).

Fell's publications reflect her personality: scholarly, enthusiastic, witty, challenging, occasionally barbed, succinct and highly influential. Her early work was varied, though with a strong emphasis on Anglo-

Scandinavian contacts, summed up in the title of her contribution to the *Proceedings of the Eighth Viking Congress* (1981), ‘Anglo-Saxon saints in Norse sources and vice versa’. Gradually, her interest in words began to dominate, and she carved out a niche in what she called ‘historical semantics’, teasing out the meanings of words, with an emphasis on context rather than etymology, and using the latest available research tools to investigate the full range of occurrences. She was a great user of the Toronto Microfiche Concordance of Old English, and supporter of the Dictionary of Old English, and often said that similar work would not be possible for Old Norse until it too had such tools. She used this method on a number of subjects close to her heart, as in her classic article on ‘Old English *beor*’ in *Leeds Studies in English* (1975), and her definitive statements on the meanings of both the Old English word *wicing* (the Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture for the British Academy, 1986), and ‘Modern English *viking*’ in the *Festschrift* for Kenneth Cameron (*Leeds Studies in English*, 1987). Although her interests were increasingly Anglo-Saxon, Fell never lost sight of the value of studying Old English and Old Norse side by side, as in her Presidential Address to the Society on the word *unfrið*, published in *Saga-Book* XXI:1–2 (1982–3), 85–100. Fell had both the talent and the inclination to make her erudition available to a wider community and her translation of *Egils saga* (1975) is probably the best of a number of competing translations of that work, for students and the general public alike. She was associated with the Jorvik Viking Centre in York, for which she provided a soundtrack in both Old English and Old Norse, and wrote the best-selling booklets *Jorvikinga saga* and *Toki in Jorvik!*

Fell also had a notable career in administration, both within the university and nationally, for she believed strongly that academics should become involved in the making of decisions that affected them. She did this with her usual energy and enthusiasm, disregarding the undoubted detrimental effects on her health. Christine Fell’s achievement was recognised in her lifetime when she was made Knight of the Order of the Falcon in 1991, and appointed O.B.E. for her contribution to Early English Studies in 1997. But it is her silver-haired humanity that sticks in the mind, for Chris was the kindest and wisest of friends:

Pat telk fyrst  
 es flestr of veit  
 ok alþjóð  
 eyru sækir,

hvé mildgeð  
mönnum þótti,  
kvinna vísust  
ok viðfrægust.

Þar stóð mér  
morgum betri  
hoddfjondum  
á hlið aðra  
tryggr vinr minn,  
sás trúa knáttak,  
heiðþróuð  
hverju ráði.

J. J.



## LOTTE MOTZ

Lotte Motz, *née* Edlis, was born on 16 August 1922 in Vienna, where she also attended school, but at the time of the Nazi takeover she was forced to leave the Gymnasium along with other Jewish students. The death of her father at that time also affected her deeply. Finally, in 1941, with her mother and two younger brothers, Stefan and Herbert, Lotte was able to escape to America. She adapted quickly to her new circumstances and new country, and always considered herself American, even though she was to spend long periods of time away from the United States. While completing High School and attending College at night she worked at various odd jobs. She eventually became a full-time student at Hunter College, City University of New York, where in 1949 she graduated with Honours and a B.A. in German. She also wrote short stories and poetry which appeared in the College's literary publication. She then did a year of graduate work at Stanford University and completed her graduate studies at the University of Wisconsin, where she obtained a Ph.D. in German and philology in 1955. Her years in Madison were happy, and it was there that she met and married another graduate student in the German Department, Eugene Norwood, though the marriage was short-lived. Several years later she married Hans Motz, an eminent physicist at Oxford University who was also originally from Vienna. She moved to Oxford in 1969, and while she found the city beautiful, her desire to teach became increasingly frustrated there, and she disliked the role of faculty wife. It was then that her scholarly career began.

In 1971 she returned to America with Anna, her daughter by her second marriage, and obtained an academic position in the German Department at Brooklyn College. Later she taught German at Hunter College. When in 1984 she became ill with a lung condition she had to give up her cherished teaching. This was one of the major disappointments of her life. Lotte returned in the same year to Oxford, where Anna was now a first-year undergraduate, and although she did not teach again she continued with her scholarly activities.

Lotte Motz's field was Old Norse and Germanic mythology and religion, but in her later years her research increasingly spanned an even vaster field, covering most of Indo-European religion. In her four books and some seventy papers she concentrated more and more on the role of female mythological figures, and nobody has written more fully and inspiringly on Germanic giantesses. Two of her books, namely *The*

*Beauty and the Hag* (Vienna, 1993) and her most ambitious work, *The Faces of the Goddess* (Oxford, 1997), were devoted to the female in mythology, in its Germanic context in the former work, and in various archaic cultures in the latter; in both she challenged the notion of a unitary mother-goddess archetype. Her second strong interest was in the relationship between gods—or families of gods—in Germanic religion, and in that of their functions and cults to the strata of society, and she was probably the first scholar in our field to take a serious step beyond the Three-Function theory developed by Georges Dumézil nearly four decades ago. These views were developed in her fourth book, *The King, the Champion and the Sorcerer* (Vienna, 1996) and in her article ‘The Germanic Thunderweapon’, *Saga-Book* XXIV:5 (1997), 329–50. Her research in this direction was sadly interrupted by her death, and it is left to others to take up the often provocative thoughts with which she has presented us.

Lotte’s productivity was all the more impressive in that her scholarly career began relatively late in her life. She was a genuine scholar, with a strong desire to find the truth. She was rich in creative insights and was also a gifted writer. An exceedingly kind and generous person, she had a great capacity for friendship and loyalty. She also had a strong sense of justice and the courage to follow her convictions (though this sometimes cost her dearly), and she was liberal and tolerant in her views.

To those who knew her only in the years after her illness, it may come as a surprise to learn that Lotte had a passionate love of nature. In her younger years she had been physically active and strong, especially enjoying skiing, hiking, swimming and even climbing. Her illness was therefore especially difficult for her, but she accepted it with grace and courage, and went on with her life as best she could, maintaining her social life right up to the evening before her death. In the early hours of December 24, 1997, after meeting with many of her friends and family, including her granddaughter Hannah, she died unexpectedly and peacefully in her sleep.

Lotte herself said that she wanted the words of Chaucer describing the Clerk of Oxenford to be on her gravestone:

And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche.

HERBERT EDLIS, ANNA MOTZ, RUDOLF SIMEK

## REVIEWS

THE POETIC EDDA: VOLUME 2: MYTHOLOGICAL POEMS. Edited with Translation, Introduction and Commentary by URSULA DRONKE. *Clarendon Press*. Oxford, 1997. xiv + 443 pp.

For lovers of the Poetic *Edda*, this volume will be a prized possession, enabling scholars and amateur enthusiasts alike to enter with ease into the daunting world of Eddic mythological poems. Its treatment of each poem is as follows. First, to satisfy the scholar, it makes available the best original (semi-diplomatic) text: clarified where muddled, repaired when damaged, marked off when hopeless. Then there is the translation: clear and poetic in its own way, yet Fritzner-tested and alert to Icelandic idiom. Afterwards, the introduction: synopsis, analogues and palaeographical support, all written engagingly and flexibly, with a structure tailored to the needs of each poem. Lastly, the commentary: a line-by-line discussion and detailed vindication of all that has been said. This is the second volume in the Oxford edition of the Poetic *Edda* (the first, *Heroic Poems*, appeared in 1969). Two volumes remain in the series: Vol. III, in which Mrs Dronke, with the help of Professor Ingeborg Glier, will edit the Sigurðr poems of the Codex Regius (R) in relation to the German Siegfried tradition; and Vol. IV, in which the remaining mythological poems will be co-edited with Dr Clive Tolley (midwife to the present edition). The present volume consists of five mythological poems from the Poetic *Edda* in the following order: *Völuspá* (with also a text and brief commentary of *Baldrs draumar* appended), *Rígsþula*, *Völundarkviða*, *Lokasenna* and *Skírnismál*. All poems are drawn from R (AM 2365 4to, c.1270–80), with the exception of *Rígsþula* (to be discussed below), and also of *Baldrs draumar*, which is preserved only in AM 748 I 4to (A) (c.1300–25), along with six other Eddic poems including the first few lines of the prose prologue of *Völundarkviða* and stanzas 1–27 of *Skírnismál*.

Mrs Dronke includes the five main works in her edition because they ‘are among the greatest of Norse poems’ and ‘all relate in some way to the period from the ninth to the eleventh century, when Norsemen were in most familiar contact with the Irish and the Anglo-Saxons’ (Preface, p. vii). Both this western European perspective and the German vantage-point necessary for the forthcoming third volume reveal the tendency of Mrs Dronke’s editions of Eddic poems. It is clearly her choice neither to judge the poems primarily in their manuscript circumstances, nor to start here by finding reasons for the copying of four of them in R in late thirteenth-century Iceland, but rather to explore through textual criteria whatever preliterate origin each poem may have had. The subjective order of poems in this series is in keeping with these wider aims.

In *Völuspá* (‘The Sibyl’s Prophecy’), the stylisation of a *séance*, a sibyl reveals to us from her own and other spirits’ knowledge the origins and future course of the world. Through a rolling landscape of visionary tableaux, we see the Norse divine society grow by trial and error, until, apparently in an echo of the fall of the year, Loki causes Hǫðr to shoot Baldr and the world crashes to its end in *Ragnarøk*, a peculiarly Icelandic combination of Armageddon, volcanic

action, meteor-strikes and the Great Flood. Yet this is a heathen poem: a new world is reborn pristine from the sea and Baldr returns to make up with Hǫðr, not long after which the seeress leaves us. Mrs Dronke's text of this poem follows the order of stanzas in R and prints the likely interpolations in smaller type (stanzas (st.) 5/5–10, 10–16 (two catalogues of dwarfs' names) and 30/9–12). Her translation here, as elsewhere in this edition, adheres deftly to the rich texture of the original, often with an alliteration of its own; the pace of the original is preserved, here as elsewhere, by the setting of the translation in parallel half-lines; and the effect is to echo the sublimity of the poet's imagination through the otherwise less charged words of Modern English. For example, 'There stood full-grown, / higher than the plains, / slender and most fair, / the mistletoe. / There formed from that stem, / which was slender-seeming, / a shaft of anguish, perilous: / Hǫðr started shooting' (st. 31/5–8 and 32/1–4).

The homework behind this bright display begins with Mrs Dronke's introduction, which loses no time in facing up to a fundamental problem. Three separate versions of *Vǫluspá* survive: 62 stanzas in R; a shorter version in two leaves within *Hauksbók* (H; AM 544 4to, fols. 20–21, c.1330–50); and Snorri's quotation of 28 stanzas and his *précis* of others in parts of *Gylfaginning* (written c.1220–30). There is no basis for determining the best text of *Vǫluspá* without achieving an understanding of its structure. At the same time, no conception of the structure is possible without first evaluating the texts. Mrs Dronke therefore follows common sense in stating that 'the two studies, poetical and textual, must develop alongside each other' (p. 25). Some scholars may not be able to accept this twin-track approach, but it works, to the extent that there would never be certainty even if the manuscripts could be judged purely on their own criteria before the edition entered its semantic stage. Mrs Dronke lays out her interpretation of *Vǫluspá* in three sections (with excursus): structure; sequence of ideas; manuscripts. The structure of this poem, firstly, she defines in keeping with the text in R: with a 'grand architecture' of opening and closing sections treating respectively the creation (st. 1–20) and gathering destruction (st. 43–62) of the world; and with a central third (st. 21–42), which appears to be jumbled in the H text, and which Mrs Dronke defines as a progress to Ragnarǫk through allusions to three carefully chosen myths (the Æsir–Vanir cult-war, the giant-builder, and the death and post-mortem of Baldr). There is also the potentially confusing matter of sibylline voices in this poem. In Mrs Dronke's reading, the first speaker (with *ek*, the 'I'-pronoun) teaches us the occult knowledge of past and present, yet reports the news of, and even acts as a channel for, a second voice (with *hón*, the 'she'-pronoun, that of a spirit sibyl from another time) in order to deliver the second sibyl's present and previously experienced visions of the future; both sibyls appear to speak as one (with *ek*) when they announce the fate of Baldr (st. 31/1–4); yet in a striking reversal of roles towards the end of the poem (st. 55/5–6), the first sibyl claims to see further than the second, continuing nonetheless to report the second sibyl's visions of the reborn world beyond Ragnarǫk. A third sibyl, Heiðr, is remembered by the second as being involved in the Æsir–Vanir cult-war (st. 22), but

has no voice in the poem (unless she be identified with the second). A scheme of this kind might strike us as a hopeless muddle. Snorri, who levels the sibylline pronouns into *ek* and their verbal tenses into a standard present, probably thought so. Yet the poem claims to render a *séance*, not the minutes of a committee. We might be surprised by the otherwise different H version of this poem, which, wherever it runs parallel with R, matches its complex alternation of *ek* and *hón* pronouns point for point. Mrs Dronke believes that the poet got to know the topos of mediumistic practice from other Norse sibylline poets. In Section II of the introduction, on the poet's sequence of ideas, Mrs Dronke illuminates the meaning of the poem through four subsections: the sibyl's prologue (st. 1–2); the establishment of the Norse cosmos (st. 3–20, with titans, gods, gold and industry, dwarfs and men, man's relation to the World Tree and his subjection to the decrees of three Norns); the progress towards dissolution and the full impact of Ragnarøk (st. 21–53; see above); finally, the world's rebirth from the sea followed by a dazzling vision of a heathen heaven and hell (st. 54–62). Section III provides the palaeographical arguments on which most of this reading of *Völuspá* relies. First, there is an itemisation and dating of manuscripts. Second, there follows an outline summary of Mrs Dronke's view of this poem's textual history: the oral *Völuspá* c.1000; first written text, \*R I, c.1200; thence \*R II, a copy with interpolations (consisting mainly of dwarf-catalogues); thence two separate copies, \*H I, c.1225 and R, c.1270; from \*H I, a new copy \*H II; thence the H text, c.1340. The third part of Section III contains the exposition and analysis of six carefully defined textual problems (I–VI), of which Problem VI, on *Hauksbók*'s effective rearrangement of R *Völuspá* 21–43 with omission of st. 28–33 (the deaths of Baldr and Hǫðr), argues well that the author of \*H II was, in Mrs Dronke's words, 'in the unenviable position of having to reconstruct a text of the poem from no more than its beginning and end sequences and a box of unnumbered and incomplete slips for its centre' (p. 83). The fourth and fifth parts of Section III are to do with corrections to the R text and variants for the dwarf-names in *Völuspá* 10–16. Section IV is an excursus on the Christian context of *Völuspá*, including an invaluable comparison of this work with the Sibylline Oracles of late antique Greek and Latin poetry. Here Mrs Dronke postulates Irish and Anglo-Saxon connections whereby the Icelandic poet, still a heathen, could have known of Christian sibylline literature, and whereby he could have used sermons and apocryphal Christian stories to turn Loki into the Judas of Baldr's sacrifice, and so convert the Norse cosmic cycle into an eschatology more closely resembling that of the Christian Apocalypse.

*Rígsþula* ('The Rigmarole of Rígr'), the next poem in this edition, survives in effectively 49 stanzas on the two sides of a vellum leaf enclosed by blank paper leaves in Codex Wormianus (c.1350), which also contains a text of Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál* (a cataloguing text which Mrs Dronke takes to have been the magnet for this poem). The wording of *Rígsþula* is clear, but some of its lines have been confused with others by earlier scribes, and the ending (conjectured here to be 12 stanzas) has plainly disappeared with one or more missing vellum leaves. Mrs Dronke's text, repaired on aesthetic criteria, well

conveys the vigour and social optimism of the original. Rígr, a unique blend of the gods Heimdallr and Óðinn, sets out along the shore, staying three nights in each of three abodes named ‘house’, ‘hall’ and ‘manor’ which belong respectively to Ái and Edda (‘Great-grandfather’ and ‘Great-grandmother’), to Afi and Amma (‘Grandfather’ and ‘Grandmother’) and to Faðer and Móðer. In the marital bed between each set of hosts Rígr fathers a son: dark Þræll in the first generation, ruddy Karl in the second, blond Jarl in the third. Not conservative reaction but social (one must avoid the word ‘racial’) improvement is the corollary of this otherwise conventional ascending scale. Each boy, whether Thrall, Carl or Earl, is born with a physical delineation suggesting his identity with the class which, having married a girl of his own background, he then goes on to engender. Mrs Dronke’s translation is effective in bringing out the earthy names of the lowlier children: ‘Bawler and Byreboy, / Clump and Clegg’ (st. 12), for example, for Þræll’s offspring; or ‘Husbandman and Householder, / Steepbeard and Squire’ (st. 24) for Karl’s. Jarl is taught runes by Rígr, who gives the boy his name; in time, Jarl’s youngest offspring Konr Ungr (‘Young Noblekin’, i. e. *konungr* ‘king’) teaches himself runes, overtakes his father in them and himself receives the name *Rígr* (based on the Irish for ‘king’). The poem runs out just as Konr Ungr, now at a loose end and taking shots at birds in a wood, is told by a crow that the Vikings Danr and Danpr have ‘more excellent patrimony’ (*æðra óðal*) than he does. Is there more social advancement to come? Mrs Dronke speculates that Konr Ungr would renounce the crow’s implied incitement to conquer and would go for a royal daughter Jörð (‘Earth’) instead; but there is no way of knowing. The text and translation of *Rígsþula* is followed by an introduction which, in its first section, draws attention to the complexity of this unusual genealogical poem. Three themes are isolated and discussed: the progress of man; the peripatetic guest, as both king and god; the widespread topos of three estates. The long-lasting popularity of *Rígsþula* is shown through the boisterous domestic comedy (its strongest suit), which attests to the loving maintenance of this work over centuries. Mrs Dronke, before analysing the text and metre in the second section, appears to place the refinement of this originally Irish-Norse confection of ancient myths and up-to-date social observation in Anglo-Scandinavian Yorkshire in the early eleventh century (pp. 202–08).

*Völundarkviða* (‘Wayland’s Poem’), the third poem in this edition, is a battered but passionate piece of work. Völundr and his two brothers, apparently Lappish huntsmen, chance one day on three swan maidens, marry them and live in ignorant contentment for nine years, until their wives, drawn back to flight by their destiny as migratory birds, fly off without a word. Unlike his brothers, Völundr stays defiantly behind and becomes a craftsman fashioning rings in a lonely bid to lure back his beloved. Into this desolation sneaks the greedy Níðuðr, king of the region, whose warriors follow his commands in chaining Völundr and those of their queen in hamstringing this strangely supernatural figure; all so as to provide the court with treasures. In a remote island smithy, scene of his ensuing labours, Völundr takes revenge for his captivity, first by beheading the king’s sons and sending pieces of them, now worked up as

trinkets, back to their parents; then by seducing Þoðvildr, the king's daughter. At the same time Vǫlundr's recovery of a ring from this girl enables him to fly like a shaman through the air—and out of range of Níðuðr's bowmen once he reveals the truth of his actions to the bereaved but newly encumbered king. The poem ends with a heart-to-heart between father and daughter. As Mrs Dronke points out in Section I of her introduction, the two narratives, swan-maiden and Þoðvildr-stories, 'confront each other like mirrors'; it may be the poet of *Vǫlundarkviða* who has joined them together. In her text Mrs Dronke sorts out much scribal confusion in nomenclature, while paring her alliterative translation down so as to render the original's succinctness ('Sat on the bear-skin, / counted rings' st. 11), though not in American English ('Let's go and see the rings', for example, for *Gongom baug síá*, st. 23). Having swept us through the story in Section I of her introduction, Mrs Dronke discusses in Section II no fewer than nine analogues of this tale, including the swan-maiden's marriage, the smith's captivity and revenge, the smith's escape-flight and the magical ring. Section III gives us a brilliantly written account of the traces and versions of the main Vǫlundr-story, what forms this legend takes and what relationship may be surmised between *Vǫlundarkviða* and the Old English *Deor* (that both derive from the same source, an Anglo-Saxon poem; pp. 276–80). Less convincing, perhaps, in 'Weland as Christian *figura*', is Mrs Dronke's view of the Christian allegorical uses to which Weland could have been put, or of the use by Alfred of his name to render that of 'Fabricius', an ancient paragon of virtue, in the West Saxon translation of Boethius's *De consolatione Philosophiae* (surely Alfred mistook *Fabricius* for 'craftsman' after Latin *faber*?). Yet Mrs Dronke is probably right to see the Weland-story as spreading out from Germany. However, not everyone will agree with her (pp. 287–89) that it was Ohthere, the Norwegian skipper who called on Alfred in the 880s, who brought the Weland-poem from Wessex to Haraldr Finehair's court in Norway, whence it came to Þjóðólfr of Hvinir, who could not otherwise have alluded to Níðuðr in his *Haustlǫng* (c.900). Or that it was Ohthere who took Weland to Hálogaland, his home, where a local poet, adding the Lappish colouring, used it as a basis for *Vǫlundarkviða*. These theories are however boldly delineated. Section IV contains Mrs Dronke's reconstruction of this poem's impaired text and anomalous metre; and an excursus traces the surprising influence of *Vǫlundarkviða* through Gräter's 1812 German translation, in Hoffmann's ensuing tale of Cardillac, a Paris goldsmith and nocturnal murderer (*Das Fräulein von Scuderi*), and in Hindemith's later use of this figure in his opera.

*Lokasenna*, in contrast to *Vǫlundarkviða*, survives in such good shape that its almost bell-like clarity might be used in an argument for dating this poem well inside the Christian period. In her introduction, however, Mrs Dronke avoids the issue, probably on grounds of space, and refers us instead (p. 355, n. 14) to her discussion on the date of *Lokasenna* in her essay 'The Scope of the *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*' (*Úr Döllum til Dala: Guðbrandur Vigfússon Centenary Essays*, ed. Rory McTurk and Andrew Wawn, *Leeds Texts and Monographs* n. s. 11, 1989, 93–112). Her alliterative translation of *Lokasenna* manages to keep the colloquialism of the original, varying the registers in such a way as to

convey not only the *chutzpah* of Loki, whose role in this poem is to crash Ægir's party and then insult one god after the other ('Still you intend, Frigg, / I should itemize more / of my malignancies?', st. 28); but also the decorum of Iðunn ('Against Loki I shall not utter / words of opprobrium / inside Ægir's hall', st. 18); Freyja's wry pointedness ('Tracherous is your tongue! / I think for you too in time / it will chant mischance!', st. 31); and Njǫrðr's patrician sense of order ('But this is an outrage, that an emasculate god / has got entry here, / and this fellow's borne babies!', st. 33), a tone which Loki mockingly echoes ('Stop now, Njǫrðr, / keep your proper sense of proportion!', st. 36). Mrs Dronke's introduction, in three brief sections, first presents two analogues from Indian mythology (after Georges Dumézil); then expertly delivers not a *précis* of the poem, as elsewhere, but an explanation of the social need for satire, giving the lie to the post-Christian idea that laughing at one's gods is incompatible with worshipping them ('When Loki mocks the gods, he does not mock their divinity, he mocks the human characteristics they have acquired through the millennia of being handled by human hands', p. 350); and finally, Mrs Dronke cites two instances of popular satire, one the *Passatella* of latterday peasant Lucania, the other the notorious *Syrpuþing* from early eleventh-century Krossavík in Iceland, in order to show the facility of unlearned minds to construct mocking repartee without the help of Latin literature (inevitably, classical models have been suggested for *Lokasenna*). Mrs Dronke's suggestion at least, if not her argument in this volume, is that Loki's verbal sword-play reflects the ribald atmosphere of festivals in late heathen or early Christian Iceland—probably the latter; Loki, before Þórr arrives to eject him, does a good impersonation of a confessor ('such a matter must be mentioned by us / if we are completely / to count our blemishes', st. 52).

Without doubt *Skírnismál* ('Skírnir's Lay') is the most mysterious work to be handled in this edition. In editing the poem at last, Mrs Dronke has deepened her Magnus Olsen-inspired view as published in the J. R. R. Tolkien *Festschrift* of nearly forty years ago ('Art and Tradition in *Skírnismál*', ed. N. Davis and C. L. Wrenn, 1962). When the temperamental god Freyr spies Gerðr, a giantess, in another world, he falls into a passion for her. Freyr then sends Skírnir, an old servant (surely a Leporello to his Don Giovanni), to arrange a meeting, after a conversation which Mrs Dronke counts as 'the subtlest dialogue sequence in Norse comedy' (p. 387). Armed with Freyr's lethal sword and riding the god's horse, Skírnir jumps a ring of fire and presents his errand, including a number of gifts, in order to achieve Gerðr's consent 'that you may say for your part / Freyr is not the most loathsome man living' (st. 19). The girl rejects the offer, but Skírnir threatens her with a runic curse (st. 26–36), one which, should he ever invoke it, would turn her into a sickly but sexually insatiable madwoman, trapped forever as a freak in a three-headed ogre's underground fun-house. Gerðr is persuaded and Skírnir delivers her instructions for a time and place back to Freyr, whose angry complaint in the last stanza about Gerðr's only condition, a nine-day period of abstinence, reverberates beyond the end of the poem. What kind of work do we have here? Given that *Skírnismál* is composed entirely in direct speech, Mrs Dronke must be right to open her introductory



synopsis in Section I with the boldness of a theatre brochure: 'Programme notes and stage directions' (p. 386). *Skírnismál* is effectively a play for the stage, as both Bertha Phillpotts and Terry Gunnell recognised (the latter in a book published unfortunately too late to be fully discussed in this one). Spoilt rage for Freyr, fatalism for Skírnir, spirited defiance from Gerðr: these and other traits of the *dramatis personae* are not the editor's fanciful imaginings, but actors' attitudes invited by the subtleties of *Skírnismál*'s dialogue, all of which Mrs Dronke elucidates in her commentary. Four analogues of the plot are laid out in section II of the introduction. From Norse mythology, there is the mating of sky and earth (new here, and rather hard for me to accept, is the representation of Gerðr as a sea-giantess who 'refuses to rise from the depths' for Freyr; p. 391). Then the Old English *Charm for Unfruitful Land* illustrates a blight on the fields and its remedy. There is the love-spell, from the Bergen runestaves and from other European sources, and fourthly the role of Skírnir ('the sun's ray personified', p. 399). Section III concerns the vexed question of *Skírnismál*'s date, in which Mrs Dronke suggests that it is drama-stimulated 'popular demand that has kept the "old sacred marriage" myth extant for us in mythological, not allegorical, terms' (p. 401). In Mrs Dronke's concluding view, this poem would be of the late tenth century, a work composed orally in heathen Norway, fostered in Iceland and first transcribed along with most other Eddic poems in the twelfth or thirteenth century. Gro Steinsland's theory, that *Skírnismál* was composed to reflect rites of Norwegian kingship in the twelfth century, is thus rejected (Where is the king in this poem? Cf. Steinsland's *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi*, Oslo, 1991; reviewed in *Saga-Book XXIV:1* (1994), 27–30); as is, by implication, the recent *Schluss* of Klaus von See, whose committee of editors in Frankfurt have assigned this work to the twelfth or thirteenth century on the somewhat narrow basis of vocabulary statistics (*Skírnismál. Modell eines Edda-Kommentars*, ed. von See, B. La Farge, E. Picard and M.-C. Hess, Heidelberg, 1993; see now the still more recent commentary by von See and others on this and other Eddic poems, reviewed by Peter Orton in the present number of *Saga-Book*). In Section IV, finally, the differences between the R and A texts of *Skírnismál* are properly shown, to the advantage of R, even while Mrs Dronke acknowledges that 'we are perhaps fortunate in having two scribes of such different temperaments to sharpen our approach to the text' (p. 403).

In all, this is an edition of great power and potential influence. There are a few misprints, but although the work will doubtless be judged adversely by some, and is expensive, from now on it is likely that most English-speaking readers of the Poetic *Edda* will wish to take *Edda II* for their authoritative text of *Völuspá* and the other poems. For most of us, interpreting the Poetic *Edda* is not an exact science. For Mrs Dronke, who has never claimed to offer more than a guide to the original, the aim in this edition is clearly to honour *Völuspá* and other Eddic poems as antique works of art, not to dismiss their meaning as irretrievable or to treat the Poetic *Edda* as a branch of saga-studies. If, as a result, Mrs Dronke's edition is regarded as old-fashioned, a product of the humanism so mistrusted by today's research teams, perhaps it is worth remembering

that her readings are supported by detailed arguments themselves based on an astonishing range of evidence to which she has been led by an instinct sharpened through nearly half a century of study. Given the length and breadth of this experience, there is modesty in the rubric 'A Reading of the Poem in the R Text' with which Mrs Dronke starts off the central section of her introduction to *Vǫluspá*, the greatest and most difficult of these poems (p. 30). Given the great learning of this book, it is unlikely that her achievement will be equalled for some time.

RICHARD NORTH

KOMMENTAR ZU DEN LIEDERN DER EDDA, BD. 2: GÖTTERLIEDER (*Skírnismál, Hárbarðsljóð, Hymiskviða, Lokasenna, Brymskviða*). By KLAUS VON SEE, BEATRICE LA FARGE, EVE PICARD, ILONA PRIEBE and KATJA SCHULZ. *Universitätsverlag C. Winter*. Heidelberg, 1997. 575 pp.

A new commentary on the poetic Edda, of which this is the second volume, has been in progress since 1992 under the sponsorship of the University of Frankfurt. The first volume, *Skírnismál. Modell eines Edda-Kommentars* (1993; reviewed in *Saga-Book*, XXIV:4 (1996), 265–68) contained an experimental commentary on a single text, *Skírnismál*, now superseded by the commentary on that poem in the present volume; but the authors' statement of general aims and methods is not repeated here, so Volume 1 remains indispensable.

As volume succeeds volume, it is to be expected that the authors' accumulating knowledge of the corpus, and the publication of new secondary literature, will manifest themselves in a broadening appreciation of the network of connections among the different poems. Evidence of this can already be seen when we compare this volume's commentary on *Skírnismál* with that of the preceding volume; there are many differences and expansions, for example in §9 of the preliminary commentary (*Einleitungskommentar*), p. 63, where a new section on parallels between *Skírnismál* and *Hyndlolióð* appears.

The Edda poems are linked together by a huge number of such parallels of theme, motif, (named) character and incident, so that the corpus constitutes a commentary on itself, especially when taken with Snorri Sturluson's incorporation, systematisation and clarification of much of its content in his prose Edda. There are, however, some inconsistencies, as well as offshoots into the unknown, which baffle the reader. The instincts of the authors of this commentary are plainly to tie up such loose ends. Their paragraph on the notorious problem in *Skírnismál* represented by Gerðr's reference to her *bróðurbani* (16.6, pp. 94–95)—an anonymous and otherwise completely obscure figure—considers first the suggestion that the term effectively identifies the shepherd whom Skírnir encounters on the border of Giantland as Gerðr's brother and implies that Skírnir has killed him (or is thought to have done so by Gerðr). This interpretation, which depends upon a great deal that is unstated, does not offer strong competition to the alternative view, which the authors seem to prefer, that *bróðurbani* is a much more general term than its first element might imply,

meaning not ‘brother’s slayer’ but ‘mortal enemy’ (*Todfeind*), or ‘arch enemy’ (*Erzfeind*). What one misses from the discussion here is the kind of information the reader needs to form an opinion of the merits of this interpretation; space should, I think, have been found to quote and discuss unambiguous examples from elsewhere of the use of *bróðurbani* in this generalised sense. A question of principle is involved here: a commentary should, I believe, aim to offer immediate and substantial assistance to the reader, if possible in the shape of hard facts, or alternatively in the form of an argued case.

There are other places where we find the same inappropriate reticence in presenting specific linguistic information, for example in the commentary (p. 548) on the seeming contradiction in *Brymskviða*, 15.3–4, where the god Heimdallr is apparently described as one of the Vanir (*vissi hann vel fram, sem vanir aðrir*, possibly ‘He could see into the future, like the other Vanir’) immediately after he has been called one of the Æsir (15.1–2 *Heimdallr, hvítastr ása*). The problem is well known; it is even identified and discussed (though not at all helpfully) in a note in E. V. Gordon’s edition of the poem in *An Introduction to Old Norse*, 2nd rev. ed. by Arnold Taylor (Oxford, 1957), p. 242, where the suggested translation is ‘He could see into the future, even as could the Vanir’. The commentary under review agrees with this interpretation, but is not much more informative than Gordon–Taylor on the linguistic basis of the interpretation of *annarr* that is being put forward here; we are told that there are ‘other examples of such constructions’ which indicate that *sem . . . aðrir* is to be understood in the sense of ‘as otherwise the . . .’ (‘wie sonst die . . .’); but the reader is left to chase up illustrations of this usage in a number of commentaries and glossaries (Gering–Sijmons, Wisén, Kuhn, Fritzer). While one appreciates that questions raised by the texts cannot always be answered in commentary as fully as one might wish, the discussion here does not inspire confidence, not because the case is inherently weak, but because in the absence of actual quotations from other Old Norse texts in support of the suggested interpretation, the reader is forced, unnecessarily, to trust the judgement of the authors.

The discussion and evaluation of the various parallels between the different poems of the poetic Edda calls not only for good judgement but also for a sense of proportion. Most medievalists have at some time faced the problem of deciding whether a parallel is specific enough and sufficiently closely defined to form the basis for conclusions about the literary history of the texts in question. Where do the authors of this commentary draw the line? In the case of *Skírnismál*, §9 of the preliminary commentary, dealing with the position of the poem in literary history (pp. 61–64), identifies *Lokasenna*, *Helgakviða Hiǫrvarðssonar* and *Hyndlolióð* as showing (in their different ways) notable similarities to this poem; and for *Brymskviða*, §9 (pp. 523–26), *Hymiskviða* and *Rígsþula* are identified as close analogues. No significant parallels between *Skírnismál* and *Brymskviða* are identified in either section; and yet it is easy to write a joint summary of the two poems which makes it look as though they had a great deal in common. Both deal with an encounter between gods and giants; in both a weapon vital to the gods (Freyr’s sword; Þórr’s hammer) plays an important part in the story; in both, the god is assisted by a servant acting as

a go-between (Skírnir; Loki) who travels to Giantland after borrowing a magical conveyance from one of the Vanir (Freyr's horse; Freyja's feather coat); both servants encounter a 'gatekeeper' figure sitting on a mound (*Sk.* 11.2 *hírðir, er þú á haugi sitr*; *Prk.* 6.1 *Þrymr sat á haugi*) on the margins of Iðunheimr; and in both poems a marriage deal is struck. The fact that these parallels are not brought out here reveals something about the emphasis of this commentary which is partly a reflection of a special feature of the Edda corpus: persons and places are almost always given names in these poems, and it is these names, with the identities and locations to which they are attached, which inevitably suggest themselves as the skeleton of any Edda commentary. An encyclopedic, content-based perspective on the material becomes almost inevitable, pushing structural and thematic parallels of the kind I have mentioned out of the frame; but this tendency is reinforced by the authors' determination, expressed rather forcefully in Volume 1 (p. 10), to place the extant poems in the times and places that produced them, and to eschew structuralist or other methods of reconstructing whatever archaic versions may lie behind them.

There are other more obvious drawbacks to this general neglect of the Edda poems' past. One is that the commentary will probably find no room for purely thematic or stylistic parallels with other corpora of Old Germanic poetry which might have important literary-historical implications. For example, I notice what might be called a 'jewel in the crown' motif in both *Þrymskviða* and the Old English poem *The Husband's Message* (see G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, eds, *The Exeter Book*, *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, III (New York and London, 1936), 227). In st. 23 of the Norse poem, Þrymr surveys his agricultural and material wealth with a complacent eye: his gold-horned cows, black oxen and an abundance of jewels (*meiðma*) and other precious trinkets (*menia*); the only thing he feels he lacks is Freyja's company (*einnar mér Freyio / ávant þikkir*). Compare this with *The Husband's Message* 44–47, in which an Anglo-Saxon nobleman, having achieved prosperity in exile, now needs only the company of his wife—possibly fiancée—to complete his happiness: *nis him wilna gad, / ne meara ne maðma ne meododreama, / ænges ofer eorþan earlgestreona, / þeodnes dohtor, gif he þin beneah*, 'He is not lacking in pleasures, nor in horses nor treasures nor festive joys, nor in any of the noble treasures on earth, prince's daughter, if he possess you.' It would be interesting to see an assessment of the significance of such parallels between the two corpora, especially in view of the evidence presented here of loanwords from Old English used by the Edda poets (see, for example, §8(c), p. 59).

It would, of course, be possible to find criticisms of any work of this scope and ambition. This is a stimulating book, and the learning, energy, thoroughness and good sense of the authors is apparent on every page. The editing and production of this volume matches the high standard set in the first. I noticed some overlap between the coverage of the General Bibliography at the front of the book and the various §1(b) entries (works on particular poems); for example, A. G. Van Hamel's 1932 *Neophilologus* article and Stephen A. Mitchell's 1983 *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* article appear not only in the General Bibliography (pp. 25, 33) but also in the §1(b) bibliography of works devoted to

*Skírnismál* (p. 46). This causes no one any inconvenience, but is presumably an oversight. Finally I, for one, would be grateful if the authors of subsequent volumes reverted to the practice, established in Volume 1 but here abandoned, of italicising the abbreviated titles of individual Edda poems, so that cross-references between texts are more conspicuous on the page.

PETER ORTON

DIALOGUES WITH THE VIKING AGE: NARRATION AND REPRESENTATION IN THE SAGAS OF THE ICELANDERS. By VÉSTEINN ÓLASON. Translated by ANDREW WAWN. *Heimskringla, Mál og Menning Academic Division*. Reykjavík, 1998. 297 pp.

An analysis of the *Íslendingasögur* that focuses squarely on the literary accomplishments of the saga authors, and one that is also offered in the English language, has not been widely available since Peter Hallberg's *The Icelandic Saga* of 1962. In this sense, and even in this case, there is little with which to compare Vésteinn Ólason's *Dialogues with the Viking Age*. Unlike Theodore Andersson's *The Icelandic Family Saga* (1967) or Jesse Byock's *Feud in the Icelandic Saga* (1982), *Dialogues* is less concerned with finding the structural heart of the *Íslendingasögur* and more with demonstrating the vast range of narrative possibilities that the genre accommodates. Multiformity in uniformity is, in a key sense, Vésteinn's chief finding and in the process of revealing this we are introduced, perhaps for the first time for many English readers, to a great many sagas that are often neglected, or set on the periphery of the well-worked canon. Few, one might reasonably suspect, will had have the opportunity of reading an analysis of, for example, *Valla-Ljóts saga* or *Ljósvetninga saga* presented in terms of regional politics, narrative style and abiding saga themes, and juxtaposed with analyses of the better known classics. *Dialogues* not only provides this instructive balancing of critical attention, but does so with a keenly informed sense of medieval Icelandic history and of contemporary critical debate.

The central proposition behind *Dialogues with the Viking Age* is, as the book's English title suggests, that our readings of the sagas are filtered through a sequence of dialogues. Broadly speaking, these are between the modern age and the thirteenth century, and the thirteenth century and the tenth. As such, the way in which we derive meanings and satisfaction from the *Íslendingasögur* is predicated on an imaginative reconstruction of a dialogue one step removed from us—a reconstruction which is always going to be partial. Motivating the thirteenth-century recovery or reinvention of the *söguöld* is, says Vésteinn, a sense of loss. This loss, he says, encompasses the loss of a whole world and is central to the saga author's anxious awareness of a threatened or vanished independence. The aim of *Dialogues* is to reveal the many ways that this grief can be expressed in the transformations of a widespread cultural anxiety into literary art.

The book divides into four parts. Part 1, Introduction, surveys the historical and cultural background to medieval Icelandic literary production. Although

this chapter is expressly aimed at those relatively new to the sagas, many experienced scholars will find it a useful guide, not least for its measured and sensible approach to complex areas. The essence of Vésteinn's argument begins to emerge in Part 2, Narrative and Narrative Art. Through a lengthy analysis of saga scenes and plots, the diversity of forms among the *Íslendingasögur* is revealed both in terms of the individual artistry of saga authors and their common currency of narrative formulae and established traditions. It is thus that the authorial voice is located as one that is discreetly deployed in the unfolding of the saga narrative, invariably characterised by 'laconic coolness' but also precociously suggestive of much later novelistic tendencies toward omniscience and audience manipulation. This latter tendency is regarded as a marker of a developing literary maturity among saga authors, reaching a high point as the thirteenth century closes but, with the exception of *Grettis saga*, beginning to lose its anthropocentric focus as the more freely imaginative products of the fourteenth century become characteristic.

This classificatory strand to Vésteinn's argument is further developed in Part 3, Saga Worlds. With the collapse of the Commonwealth, the saga author becomes increasingly concerned to analyse the repositioning of Icelandic society and the new ethical demands it brings to bear upon the individual. As equally preoccupied with honour as the sagas of the Commonwealth era, the post-independence saga seeks to question this traditional value in terms of Christian morality and the secular pursuits and operations of power and social control. Illustrating this gradual shift in perspective is the mid thirteenth-century *Egils saga*, which 'valorises the free farmer-chieftain', and the post-independence *Njáls saga*, which exhibits a 'nostalgia' for the past but simultaneously looks for an accommodation of heroic values in the present.

Part 4, The Sagas in the World, draws together these insights against the broad background of saga reception and criticism. Vésteinn's clear point here is that though the sagas may resemble other genres, both of the medieval and the modern worlds, they are in fact *sui generis*. Those who seek to find a key to understanding them in terms of modern prescriptions will have short-lived success, and those who give priority to literary archetypes, moralities, allegories or other hidden codes will undervalue the human dramas and the crux of the matter of saga narrative.

This is a valuable contribution to saga scholarship and is bound to become a key text in the evaluation of the merits of the *Íslendingasögur*, not least for its clarity of expression, the impressive range of material covered and the helpful and thoroughly informed endnotes drawing attention to the weft and warp of scholarly debate. The clean prose of Andrew Wawn's English translation is a fitting adjunct to Vésteinn's understated erudition and mature judgement as a literary critic.

MARTIN ARNOLD

GUÐAMJÖÐUR OG ARNARLEIR: SAFN RITGERÐA UM EDDULIST. Edited by SVERRIR TÓMASSON. *Háskólaútgáfan*. Reykjavík, 1996. xii + 348 pp.

This enterprising collection of essays charts the post-medieval reception of Eddic prose and poetry in Iceland. The origins of the collection can be traced to an international collaborative project, initiated by Lars Lonnröth in 1989, which sought to investigate responses to Eddic poetry and prose in post-medieval Scandinavia. The geographical scope of this investigation was later extended to include France, Germany and Britain, and essays relating to those and other countries appeared in another volume arising from the same project: Andrew Wawn (ed.), *The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga* (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1994), reviewed by Robert Kellogg in *Saga-Book XXIV:5* (1997) 376–79. (The papers in Else Roesdahl and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (eds), *The Waking of Angantýr: The Scandinavian Past in Norse Culture* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1996), offer interesting perspectives on the same subject area.) Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Norse Muse in Britain 1750–1820* (Trieste: Edizioni Parnaso, 1998) is the most recent volume whose origins can be traced to the Lönnroth project.

The present volume serves not only to survey the Icelandic territory bordering on that investigated by Anthony Faulkes in his study of Magnús Ólafsson's *Laufás Edda* in *Two Versions of Snorra Edda from the 17th Century* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 13–14, 2 vols, 1977–79), and in *Magnúsar-kver: The Writings of Magnús Ólafsson of Laufás* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 40, 1993), but also to examine Enlightenment- and Romantic-Age responses. Seven of the nine papers concentrate on the period 1600–1900, and are prefaced by the editor's discussion of reception of *Snorra Edda* from the oldest extant fourteenth-century manuscripts down to the *Laufás Edda*. A brief endnote points to the continuity of Icelandic poetic engagement with Eddic prosodic traditions in the twentieth century. The volume concludes with short (and in some cases rather rough-hewn) English summaries of the articles.

Sverrir Tómasson concludes his discussion of the *Laufás Edda* as a pioneering handbook for poets in Iceland by reflecting on the work's international reception. Responding to foreign interest in Eddic lore and learning, Magnús translated his *Edda* into Latin and Danish whilst nevertheless asserting its untranslatability. Sverrir wryly notes (pp. 86–87) the continuing force of this paradox in modern Iceland, amongst those who believe that foreign readers should familiarise themselves with traditional Icelandic poetic art, but who also claim that such knowledge is ultimately beyond the grasp of all but native initiates. In 'Eddulist og barokk í íslenskum kveðskap á 17. öld', Margrét Eggertsdóttir reveals how traditions of Eddic prosody and diction nourished seventeenth-century Icelandic poets as they developed a distinctively Icelandic baroque style in sacred and secular verse. Bergljót Kristjánsdóttir shows how the poet Steinunn Finnisdóttir (c.1640–1710) responded to native medieval poetic tradition every bit as imaginatively and resourcefully as her male counterparts. Steinunn was one of just fifteen 'menntakonur' listed by Jón Grunnvíkingur in his early eighteenth-century survey of Icelandic literary

history alongside three hundred scholarly men. Steinunn's *rímur*, which give expression to her vision of a society more attentive to the role of women, draw on both oral and written Eddic tradition. Viðar Hreinsson's 'Tvær heimsmýndir á 17. öld. Snorra Edda í túlkun Jóns Guðmundssonar lærða (1574–1658)' draws attention to a singular *Snorra Edda* scholar whose insights are far removed from the traditions of forensic and systematic investigation encouraged in seventeenth-century European academies. Outlawed early in his life for witchcraft, opposed in a University of Copenhagen appeal case by the learned Ole Worm, Jón lærði Guðmundsson made the *Edda* his own, locating its figures and features within his own world-view. This sought to reconcile the old northern gods with biblical history, Icelandic geography and local folklore. Like some fleet-footed Swedenborgian allegorist he finds parallels between moral decay in pre-Ragnarök Ásgarðr and post-Reformation Iceland. With the publication of Einar G. Pétursson's *Eddurit Jóns Guðmundssonar lærða* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 46, 2 vols 1998), the time has surely come for Icelanders and foreign scholars alike to learn more about the scholarship of Jón lærði. In a crisply written essay 'Varðhaldsenglar Eddu: Eddufræði í skáldskap og bókmenntaumræðu á upplýsingaröld', Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir considers the ways in which late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Icelandic poets, increasingly influenced by Herderian and Ossianic romanticism, responded to Eddic tradition, in preface and poem alike, in the light of the dizzying variety of intellectual currents swirling around them: academic and folkloristic, written and oral, native and foreign, conservative and revolutionary, nationalist and internationalist, Graeco-Roman and Old Northern. Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson's two essays, on the Fjölnismenn and on Benedikt Sveinbjarnarson Gröndal, develop this theme illuminatingly. We are shown how Eddic tradition helped to tune the voices of nineteenth-century Icelandic poets of nature and nationalism. The initiation ceremony for new students at the Bessastaðaskóli in 1828 concluded when, amidst the flickering candles and oil lamps, a senior student broke the portentous silence to pronounce the fateful words 'Óðinn sé með yður'. The Eddic enthusiasms of teachers such as Sveinbjörn Egilsson helped to ensure that the northern divinities were indeed constant reference points for Jónas Hallgrímsson, Tómas Sæmundsson, Konráð Gíslason and their fellows for the rest of their literary lives, albeit that *Edda Sæmundar hinns fróða* steadily assumed more importance than that of Snorri.

Unlike European intellectuals in post-medieval times, for whom the Eddas offered exciting access into a seductively unfamiliar world, Icelanders living at the same time were able to engage with a well-cultivated native tradition. In a moment of sublime self-deception, the seventeenth-century poet Kolbeinn Grímsson claimed that 'Edda hefur mér aldrei kennt / orða snilld né kvæða mennt' (286). The essays assembled in this handsomely produced paperback volume show how few post-medieval Icelandic writers and scholars could put their hands on their hearts and make such a claim.

ANDREW WAWN



THE NORN LANGUAGE OF ORKNEY AND SHETLAND. By MICHAEL P. BARNES. *The Shetland Times Press*. Lerwick, 1998. xiii + 58 pp.

One would expect a book on Norn by Michael Barnes to be authoritative and interesting, and this volume is both. Though the term 'Norn' is sometimes taken in a broad sense, covering any form of speech of Scandinavian origin spoken anywhere in the north of Scotland, including the Western Isles and Caithness, it is here defined (as the title makes clear and as is indeed more usual) more narrowly, being restricted to the form that the Norse language took in the Northern Isles.

The greater part of the book is devoted to the history of Norn. Our attention is very fairly drawn to the uncertainties that prevail both as to the precise period of its introduction to the Isles and as to the exact provenance of the earliest Scandinavian settlers. Barnes favours a date of around 800 AD for the arrival of the first of these and thinks that 'the safest, if most conservative, conclusion is that the vast majority of the settlers came from Western Norway', though he sees no good cause to be more specific than that. Even more obscure is the question of who the previous inhabitants of the islands were and what happened to them. Barnes accepts the view that they were probably Picts and cautiously concludes that, whatever the reasons, 'Scandinavian culture and language appear to have become totally dominant by the middle of the eleventh century'.

A section on 'The Decline of Norn' surveys the written remains, both runic inscriptions and documents in the roman alphabet, and evaluates their significance. In particular, to what extent is it likely (or possible) that the language thereof was subject to outside influences, perhaps attributable in some cases to islanders who had had their scribal training in Norway, or even to Norwegians? The possibility of some (albeit slight) Scots influence cannot be entirely excluded either.

Such knowledge as we have of spoken Norn also depends (inevitably, in the circumstances) on written sources, in the shape of two versions of the Lord's Prayer, one ballad (the so-called *Hildina* ballad, after the name of its principal character), a word-list of thirty items, and a few 'isolated snatches' that were still remembered at a time when the language as such was no longer spoken. The interpretation of these texts bristles with problems, not the least of which is the fact that the bulk of this evidence derives from one far from ideal source, having been collected by one man, George Low, who knew neither Norn nor any other Scandinavian language, on the occasion of his brief visit in 1774 to Foula, the westernmost and most remote of the Shetland Isles. However, the other extant fragments of Norn have a particular evidential value in that, being of non-Foula provenance, they provide 'a corrective to the impression given by Low's material from Foula'. Further evidence can, of course, be extracted from place-names and surviving Norn lexical elements in the Scots dialects of Orkney and, even more so, Shetland.

While accepting that the 'ultimate cause' of the decline and demise of Norn was the immigration of large numbers of Scots speakers, Barnes is prudently sceptical about the views of those who, given the lack of evidence as to the

course of its decline, have tended to 'fill the vacuum of ignorance with educated guesswork'. An assessment of three rival interpretations of the death of Norn leads him to the view that some speakers of the language may well have survived until about 1750 in parts of Orkney and perhaps even as late as the end of the eighteenth century in Shetland.

The paucity of available linguistic material is such as to rule out any full treatment of the phonological or grammatical structure of Norn. However, indications as to some of its principal characteristics are incorporated here and there throughout the book.

A most useful feature of this volume is a selection of annotated texts (some of them illustrated by photographs). These include runic inscriptions, two Norwegian documents (of 1299 and 1369 respectively) and one in Danish (dated 1560), all of which exhibit some insular features, together with the Orkney version of the Lord's Prayer, extracts from the *Hildina* ballad, and a variety of conversational phrases and other fragments.

All in all, then, we have here a comprehensive, balanced and lucidly expressed survey of Norn and one which will be accessible to the general reader as well as to the scholar.

GLANVILLE PRICE

DUDO OF ST. QUENTIN: HISTORY OF THE NORMANS. Translated with Introduction and Notes by ERIC CHRISTIANSEN. *Boydell and Brewer*. Woodbridge, 1998. xxxvii + 260 pp.

Dudo's *History* is often described as the principal early source for the medieval duchy of Normandy. In one sense of course it is: begun allegedly at the request of Duke Richard I (died 996) and completed by c.1020, it purports to describe the origins of the Scandinavians who settled in Normandy in the early tenth century and the rule of the first three dukes. Yet what we have, in fact, is a piece of extremely learned, not to say remarkably pretentious, literary fiction. Most of what Dudo wrote was either his own invention or the product of skilful plagiarism or reworking of other events. Thus almost all of the campaigns ascribed to Rollo, the alleged founder of Normandy, took place a generation before his arrival in Francia, and even the account of his marriage to a daughter of Charles the Simple was actually derived from that of another Viking, Godefrid, with a daughter of Lothar II in 882. The overall structure of the work is highly schematic, with the virtues of Rollo being contrasted with the misdeeds of his precursor Hastings, and the wisdom and good sense of Richard I, whose virtues are repeatedly praised in the most extravagant terms, with the naivety and misguided piety of his father (and Rollo's son) William Longsword—of which unworldliness we have, needless to say, no independent evidence. Dudo consistently exaggerated the significance and power of the tenth-century Normans, and above all the identity of Normandy as a unified political structure, whereas it is unlikely that either Rollo or William ever controlled much more than the Seine valley, and, in William's case, the Pays de Caux also.

Dudo's contention that Richard I was 'governing the realm of Normandy like a king, subject to none but God alone' (ch. 93) was very different from the perception of his Frankish contemporaries, to whom the Count of Rouen (the ducal title was an eleventh-century innovation) was neither a very important, nor necessarily an independent, player in the complicated politics of the late-Carolingian French kingdom.

Given the complexities of Dudo's Latin, and especially that of the numerous poems which decorate the work, as well as the rarity of Jules Lair's edition of 1865 (the only 'modern' one available), Eric Christiansen's translation is especially welcome. This is the more so because of his very full annotation, valuable not just for its examination of the historical background but also for its analysis of the sources used (or rather plagiarised) and the scansion of the poetry—to which medieval Latinists will be much indebted. But on the significance of the text itself as a source for the Scandinavian settlement of Francia, Christiansen is trenchant. While Steenstrup, Eleanor Searle and others have seen Dudo as drawing upon early Scandinavian oral material which prefigures the sagas, he brusquely dismisses the 'saga red herring'. If Dudo's work played a role in Scandinavian and Norman legend, it was as a source rather than a means of transmission (one may note ch. 97 for the origin of the 'feigned flight' motif later to be associated with the Battle of Hastings). Certainly very little of what he recounted of the early history of Normandy can be corroborated from other contemporary writers; all that Dudo tells us of Rollo that may be historical 'fact' is the grant of the Lower Seine area by Charles the Simple and his defeat near Chartres c.910, and his version of these events is so embroidered as to be largely fiction. Even what little we know of Ragnald (the form in which his name was there given) from Flodoard of Rheims, namely his attacks into the Vermandois in 923–25, is missing from Dudo's account.

The last, and longest, book of Dudo's *History*, dealing with the rule of Richard I, is more problematic, and some historians have claimed to uncover undercurrents of 'reality' amid Dudo's florid account of the tribulations of Normandy during Richard's youth and his disputes with the last Carolingian kings and Duke Hugh the Great. Can we, for example, identify from Dudo a second wave of Norse settlement in the 960's—marked by Richard's marriage to Gunnor, from whose children the later ducal kin and (if we believe the genealogies given in the twelfth century by Robert of Torigni) several of the most important aristocratic families in the duchy were descended? Was Scandinavian speech still the norm in Bayeux when the Norse inhabitants of Rouen had become sufficiently acculturised to be primarily French-speaking? Yet even with regard to this later part of the text we must be cautious. For example, place-name evidence suggests that the Bessin was very thinly settled by Scandinavians, which must make us sceptical about Dudo's claims for the Norse language at Bayeux. Although there was some historical basis for the events recounted in Book IV (thus the German invasion of 946 and the Scandinavian attacks on Spain in the 960's are independently attested), Christiansen's notes show very clearly how Dudo manipulated whatever truth there may have been in his account, both on the basis of his literary sources, notably the *Aeneid*, and

in the skilful reworking of other more contemporary history to embroider the Norman story. Christiansen remains resolutely sceptical as to the alleged Scandinavian survivals in Dudo's account and later tenth-century Normandy, pouring scorn, for example, on the idea that Dudo can be cited to show Duke Richard receiving a Norse funeral. His work, along with that of Leah Shopkow, provides a very convincing case for Dudo the literary inventor, not Dudo the historian. (Shopkow goes so far as to suggest that the 'Bernard the Dane' who plays such a prominent role under William Longsword and in the minority of Richard I never existed at all, and was purely a creation of the author.) Christiansen remains firmly in the critical tradition of Henri Prentout, and against those such as Steenstrup, and (more recently) Breese, Searle and (to some extent) van Houts who have sought to disentangle the Scandinavian origins of the later duchy from Dudo's account. (For references, see Christiansen, pp. 238–48.)

But dubious as Dudo may be as an historical source (in the strictest sense) for early tenth-century Normandy, his work is nonetheless very significant. Dudo himself was, it should be remembered, not a Norman but from the Vermandois; an outsider brought in to create a history for the early eleventh-century duchy, a history which did not really exist, and which thus needed to be invented—a 'charter myth' to legitimise a duchy which was in the process of developing, politically, economically and territorially, *after* 1000. Dudo did this within the intellectual parameters of the late Carolingian world. Christiansen's exhaustive study of his sources shows just how far he was indebted, not just to Vergil (the obvious classical model for a 'charter myth'), and to late-Antique theories of versification, but also to Carolingian hagiography, especially the Lives of Eligius of Noyon and Lambert of Liège, and the work of Heiric of Auxerre, as well as to Erigena and other ninth-century theologians. The significance of Dudo's *History* to the Scandinavian diaspora may thus be very limited, but its importance as a testimony to the intellectual tradition of early medieval Francia is manifest.

However, while Christiansen's scholarly apparatus puts us in his debt, some criticism of his publishers is in order. Reading this text is made infinitely more difficult by the lengthy footnotes being placed at the end of the book rather than at the foot of the page; a practice that is, given modern technology, surely no longer justifiable on grounds either of editorial convenience or of cost.

G. A. LOUD

ENGLISH-NORWEGIAN—NORWEGIAN-ENGLISH DICTIONARY OF ARCHAEOLOGY. By ELIZABETH S. SEEBERG. *Department of Archaeology, Numismatics and History of Art, University of Oslo*. 2nd and revised edition. Oslo, 1993. 268 pp.

The first edition of this archaeological dictionary was published in 1988, and this revised edition includes 'certain changes, additions and corrections', of which Norwegian Stone-Age nomenclature and the revised subdivision of the Neolithic period are mentioned in particular. The purpose of the revised dictionary remains the same as its predecessor's, providing a guide to 'The archaeo-

logical terminology of Great Britain and the North up to and including the Anglo-Saxon period and the Viking Age', particularly for Scandinavian archaeologists writing in English. However, Seeberg has also included medieval church terminology, 'an extremely important aspect of Norwegian archaeology', and she also expresses the hope that 'English archaeologists reading Norwegian literature may find the book useful'.

The bulk of the book (pp. 7–212) is an alphabetical list of English archaeological terms, with their Norwegian equivalents, and a brief definition of the term (in English). To give a typical entry as an example:

E pot boiler, cooking stone    A piece of stone or flint heated in the fire and  
N kokestein                            dropped into the pot containing food to be cooked.

The rest of the book (pp. 213–68) is an alphabetical list of the Norwegian equivalents with page references back to the list of English definitions. As the Norwegian terms in this list of definitions are not arranged alphabetically, it can take a moment or two to find the relevant item, but the clear and well-spaced layout of the dictionary means that this is generally not a problem.

The order of the dictionary, with English terms first and Norwegian second, is perhaps rather surprising given the dictionary's apparent emphasis on Scandinavian archaeologists *writing* in English; the layout instead rather suggests an audience of Scandinavian archaeologists *reading* English. Indeed, given the fact that the language of the dictionary is English, it might have been more appropriate to aim the work at an audience of English archaeologists working on Scandinavian archaeology. In some places, the text appears to be clearly directed to an English audience. For example:

E brooch                            Of the two N terms given here, the less commonly used,  
N spenne, brosjje            *brosje*, should perhaps be preferred to the more common  
   *spenne*, which also means buckle.

Seeberg emphasises that the purpose of her dictionary is to provide brief definitions of terms to avoid the confusion caused by using ordinary dictionaries and also to assist the interested amateur, who may be bewildered by technical terms. In this aim, she is generally successful, writing clearly and concisely, and also pointing out common mistranslations and misuses of archaeological terms. In some places, particularly concerning English terms that have recently come into use, Norwegian equivalents are not supplied, as these have not yet been agreed upon by archaeologists. Seeberg is careful to emphasise that the 'purpose of a dictionary is to record and define correct terms, and to point out incorrect ones in use. The onus of arriving at sound translations of newly established terms must rest on the archaeologist.' However, the definitions supplied with the untranslated words assist the would-be translator. Seeberg's own background is in the translation of archaeological literature, and this dictionary will perhaps be most useful to people involved in similar work, but it also provides an extremely useful work of reference for archaeologists and for scholars from other disciplines reading archaeological literature.

KATHERINE HOLMAN

ICELAND. Revised Edition. FRANCIS R. MCBRIDE, compiler. *The World Bibliographical Series*, vol. 37. *Clio Press*. Oxford, Santa Barbara, Denver, 1996. xxvii + 345 pp.

As its title indicates, this is the revised edition of the 37th volume in an international series of bibliographies which, up to 1996, had reached 189 volumes, covering countries from Alaska to Zimbabwe and even cities like Berlin and London. The previous edition was prepared by John J. Horton and was published in 1983 (hereinafter 'Horton'). The present one contains 'something old and something new', a number of entries being transferred from the earlier edition to the new one. It is difficult to see the benefit of such a procedure as opposed to a straight supplement. Readers will still have to use the earlier edition and, on McBride's own admission, the omission of material to be found in Horton would have enabled him to add nearly 200 items to the present volume. Such a procedure could also raise awkward questions as to the criteria employed in making the selection of what material to retain. It is sad to see, for instance, that the Foote/Wilson classic *The Viking Achievement* was not selected for a repeat outing.

The present edition contains 970 entries (compared with 971 in Horton) covering all aspects of Icelandic life and culture, including arts, sciences, politics, education, food and drink, sport, the media. Each entry is accompanied by a short commentary—at times learned, at times witty, at times ironic—with useful references to other relevant material, which would bring the total number of items cited well into four figures. There are three indexes—by author, title and subject. This represents an improvement on Horton, who has but one index covering all three approaches. It is useful to have persons as authors and persons as subjects separated. Icelanders are, again, entered under patronymics. There is a map of Iceland at the end and a short, informative introduction on recent developments in the country.

As McBride remarks in his introduction the 'aim of this bibliography is to provide guidance . . . to the English-speaking reader who has a serious interest in Iceland but who is not seeking specialized highly technical information'. This, of course, to some extent limits the usefulness of the bibliography to many of the readers of *Saga-Book*. For the enquiring lay reader the most useful sections would, I imagine, be 'Literature, Old Icelandic', items nos 648–724; 'History'—General, nos 225–32, and Medieval, nos 233–62 (subdivided into the periods 800–1100 and 870–1262); 'Language'—Old Norse, nos 343–49, and Dictionaries, nos 375–82 (though most of the latter are Modern Icelandic); 'Archaeology', nos 213–24; 'Religion, pre-Christian', nos 383–95 (with some material in the later period, nos 396–409). The old laws are dealt with in nos 471–74 (these were subsumed under more general headings in Horton). Readers could extend their searches, for example, to 'Museum and Library Services', nos 907–15, for material on special collections, and 'Catalogues and Bibliographies', nos 954–70. These remarks presuppose that Viking Society members are primarily interested in medieval Iceland, but there is, as I have hinted, much more information contained in this work for those wishing to learn about the modern land and its people. The list of travel accounts is

particularly interesting, including one, in the modern section, by an Amerindian (no. 172), though most of the material in the early section can be found in Horton. It might be of value to note that William Morris's *Journals of Travels in Iceland* (no. 152) has recently (1996) been reprinted by Mare's Nest, of London, with an introduction by Magnus Magnusson.

McBride states, in his introduction, that he hopes that 'other beneficiaries' would be librarians. Unluckily, they would not be helped by the statement that *Saga-Book* is a quarterly journal, when it is truly an annual (save for a brief period between 1987 and 1995 when two parts were issued for each year). To be fair, he has been misled (like many a librarian) by *Saga-Book*'s quirky habit of breaking its volumes down into parts (usually four). At least he has removed the misleading reference to the International Saga Conference from the entry in Horton.

It is good to see that sport, as I mentioned above, has not been ignored in these bibliographies. In fact, the section has now grown from 13 items to 22 (nos 876–97). One item which could be added to future editions is *Iceland*, compiled and produced by Alexander D. I. Graham, in the *European League and Club Histories* series, distributed by Soccer Books Ltd, of Cleethorpes. The present writer's copy covers 1912–94, but it has now been updated to 1998, according to the latest catalogue.

Now for the bad news. I do not think that Magnus Magnusson, as a 'transplanted Iclander' (see no. 863), ever uses the accents in his name. In fairness to McBride, this is a hangover from Horton, as is 'Eiríkur [for Eiríkr] Magnússon'. Item no. 424, however, is wrongly indexed under Magnus Magnusson; the author is Magnús S. Magnússon. Harald Sigurðsson and Haraldur Sigurðsson, in the author index, are the same person and should be indexed under the latter form. Sólrún B. Jensdóttir Harðarson and Sólrún B. Jensdóttir are identical too. She seems to use the latter form of her name now. (The forename Sólrún has lost its accent on the vowel of the final syllable in no. 279.) *Landnámabók* appears as *Landnamabók* in no. 686 and *Riddarasögur* as *Riddarsögur* in both no. 706 and in the subject index, but is given in its correct form in no. 962. Three remarks on McBride's commentaries: in no. 386 he seems to be under the impression that Snorri wrote the Eddic poems; 'Barðar's settling' in no. 677 appears to contain a double genitive (the eponymous hero's name is Bárðr); in no. 147 'exchange' is misprinted as 'exhange'. Another hangover from Horton is the loss of the pun in the title of Mary McCrerrick's book on Iceland (no. 18), which should read 'The Icelanders and their *Ísland*' (not 'island' as in the text).

There are a number of misfilings in the various indexes. This is understandable and by no means disastrous. Where indexes are arranged in columns, the reader's eye, as it goes down, will probably still catch the required items. It would be invidious to list all such misfilings, but they include Éilís Ní Dhuibhne-Almqvist cited in the garbled form 'Duhibhne-Almqvist, Ellis Ní'. She ought, in any case, to be indexed under Ní, which is the female form of Ó/Mac. The entry under 'Prince of Wales (HRH)' (no. 217) should, I think, be expanded to 'Charles, Prince of Wales (HRH)' to distinguish him from other past (and future) Princes of Wales. Ásta Sigurðardóttir's forename is misprinted as

'Astu'. In the title index, Thorstein Mansion-Might appears as 'Thortein Mansion Might'; *Tölfræði handbók* should be one word; and *The Waking of Angantýr* has the wrong accent on the vowel of the final syllable. Finally, in the subject index, 'Banking' has been repeated. The first entry is the rogue one as it contains one (wrong) entry only. There is one entry only under 'Bibliography', though the relevant section for 'Catalogues and Bibliographies' will reveal a number more. The entry, in any case, seems somewhat redundant, as there is a section devoted to the subject, where readers can look without using a separate index. Under 'Edda', nos 666 and 681 belong more properly to the subheading 'Poetic Edda'. Louis MacNeice appears as 'MacNiece' in the subject index, but is correctly spelt in the author index and in no. 166.

In this review I have tried to concentrate on the material which I feel would be most relevant to readers of this journal. There is, however, as I have indicated, a great deal more to the bibliography than this, including much material on modern Icelandic literature, not least children's books; also art, architecture and music; women (in both medieval and modern times); politics; and a wide coverage of the sciences. Within its limits, and notwithstanding assorted blips of various kinds, I would say that it provides, along with the earlier Horton volume, a very useful and comprehensive guide to Iceland for the general reader. It is a pity that it was not published as a supplement to Horton, rather than as a 'new edition'. This would have allowed of a much more comprehensive coverage.

J. A. B. TOWNSEND



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