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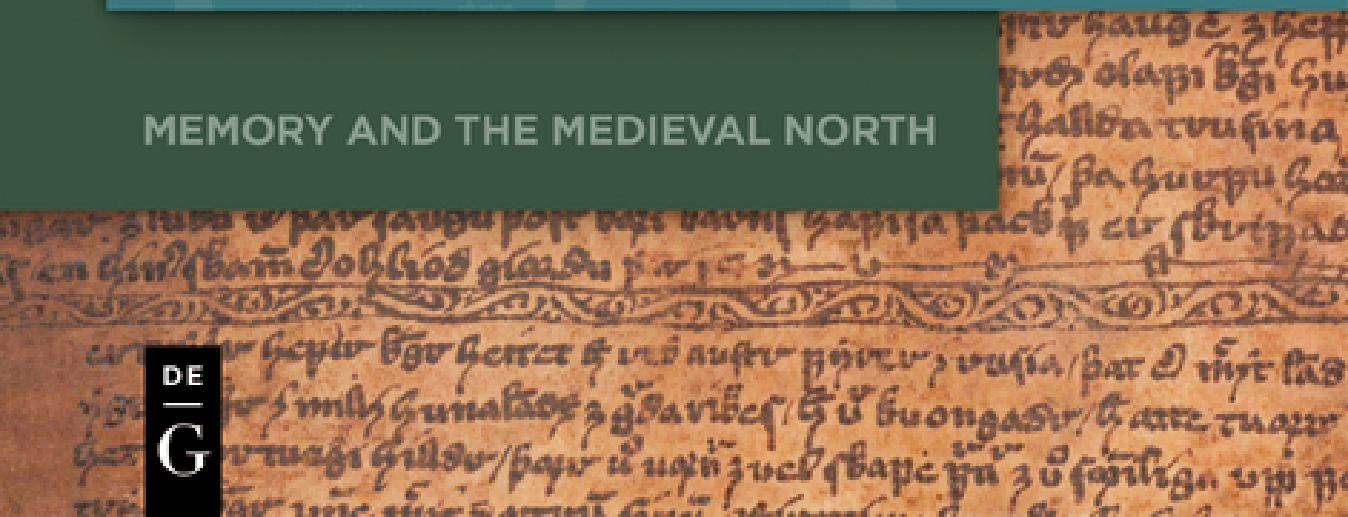
Alisa Valpola-Walker

THE LEGENDARY SAGA AS A MEDIUM OF CULTURAL MEMORY

A STUDY OF LATE MEDIEVAL ICELANDIC MANUSCRIPTS

MEMORY AND THE MEDIEVAL NORTH



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Memory and the Medieval North

Edited by
Jürg Glauser, Pernille Hermann, Stephen A. Mitchell
and Lena Rohrbach

Volume 4

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List of Abbreviations

DI *Diplomatarium Islandicum: Íslenzkt fornbréfasafn, I–XVI*. 1857–1972. Eds. Jón Sigurðsson et al. Copenhagen: S. L. Möllers; Reykjavík: Félagsprentsmiðja H. F.

ÍÆ Páll Eggert Ólason. 1948–1976. *Íslenzkar æviskrár: frá landnámstímum til ársloka 1940, I–VI*. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka bókmenntafélag.

LM Einar Bjarnason. 1952–1955. *Lögréttumannatal, I–IV*, Sögurit 26, Reykjavík: Ísafoldarprentsmiðja.

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Note on Manuscripts, Editions, and Translations

AM 589a–f 4to and AM 586

Throughout this book, I have chosen to quote from AM 589a–f 4to and AM 586 4to directly because there are, on occasion, significant differences between their text witnesses and the printed editions. When I do so, I have provided the folio and line numbers, as well as references to the corresponding chapters and pages in editions. Where editions are not divided into chapters, I have provided only page numbers. The editions used are outlined in Chapter 2 for AM 589a–f 4to and Chapter 6 for AM 586 4to. Wherever possible, the editions cited are either based on AM 589a–f 4to and AM 586 4to or provide some variant readings from them.

In my transcriptions, I have expanded abbreviations silently but maintained the scribes' original orthography and punctuation. Square brackets indicate places where the manuscript is damaged and unreadable. For shorter gaps (of one or two words) I have tried to replicate the scribes' orthography, but longer gaps are filled in using the cited editions. Occasionally, I have added words in square brackets where something seems to have been missed by the scribe.

Due to the manuscripts' lacunæ, there are some places where I have quoted from other manuscripts or the editions themselves. The lacunæ and, where relevant, the manuscripts I have quoted in their place are listed in Appendix 1 for AM 589a–f 4to and Appendix 2 for AM 586 4to.

The manuscripts are currently held in the collections of the Árni Magnússon Institute in Reykjavík. At present, colour images are available on handrit.is of AM 589d 4to, AM 589e 4to, AM 589f 4to, and AM 586 4to. Black and white photographs of all parts of AM 589a–f 4to and AM 586 4to are available in the digital collections of the Institute for Nordic Studies and Linguistics (NorS Sprogsamlinger) at the University of Copenhagen.

Citation of other Manuscripts and Texts

For quotations from texts and other primary sources not in AM 589a–f 4to or AM 586 4to, I have referred to published editions, again providing chapter and page numbers. For each new Old Norse-Icelandic text mentioned, I have provided a brief overview of its earliest manuscripts and main recensions in the footnotes, and, where relevant, have indicated places where the referenced information varies. When I refer to a new manuscript, I have provided the date when it was probably produced. All manuscript dates and details of contents are derived from

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handrit.is in the first instance. Where a manuscript is not listed there, I have used the dates provided by the Dictionary of Old Norse Prose.

Translations and Names

Throughout this book I have quoted from primary sources in their original language with English translations provided. Translations are my own, except in cases where another translation is cited. Throughout, I have used Icelandic personal names and place names.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Legendary Sagas

When medieval Icelandic society was integrated into European Christendom and the church's technology of writing came into contact with the island's rich oral traditions, a variety of written forms were produced to help preserve and shape knowledge of the past that had long been transmitted by word of mouth. As Pernille Hermann (2022, 37) demonstrates, Icelandic writers saw literacy as a "fence against forgetting [. . .] that could help them minimize the process where memories would disappear slowly". Of the forms they experimented with to preserve those memories, the saga was the most popular and adaptable: it was capable of switching between prose and verse, of adopting features from various written genres while maintaining the character of orally told tales, and, although it was positioned as a historical form of writing, it had space for considerable authorial intervention and creativity. Its great flexibility produced a huge corpus of diverse texts that were compiled and copied over the course of many centuries, from the inception of the form in the twelfth century all the way into the twentieth.

Among the most popular sagas were those set in Scandinavia's most distant past: the time of legendary heroes who performed exceptional feats but navigated a world that had not yet encountered Christianity. In modern scholarship, these texts are known as the *fornaldarsögur* (or legendary sagas), although this term does not seem to have been used by medieval Icelanders themselves (Clunies Ross 2010, 76–80).[1] And just as the Icelandic saga in general was a highly adaptable literary form, so too was the *fornaldarsaga*: the extant texts that deal with this period vary in their use of poetry, their structure, mood, and character types. They form a corpus with blurry edges that arguably has as much variation within it as it does when compared to other saga subgroups, and, as a result, much scholarly discussion has scrutinised the term '*fornaldarsaga*' and the texts brought under its designation (e.g. Mitchell 1991, 8–43; Quinn 2006b). The division within the corpus, advocated for by Helga Reuschel (1933) and then Kurt Schier (1970, 72–91), between the *Heldensagas* (heroic sagas), *Wikingersagas* (Viking sagas), and *Abenteuersagas* (adventure sagas), based on tone and the character of the protagonist, has had enduring appeal. Similar bipartite divisions between the tragic/comic and the heroic/adventurous sagas have also been suggested (Mitchell 1991, 43; Torfi Tulinius 2002, 20).

1 Throughout this book I follow the categorisations of saga subgroups described in Clunies Ross 2010, 31–36.

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The focus of this book is on the latter subgroups – the *Abenteuersagas* or 'comic-adventurous' sagas. My aim, however, is not to delve into the 'problem' of taxonomy but rather to approach the legendary sagas' variability from a cultural memory perspective. Before discussing my approach further, I will outline some of the prevailing views about these sagas that are worth reassessing.

1.2 The 'Comic-Adventurous' Sagas

The 'comic-adventurous' *fornaldarsögur* are seen by many as representing a sharp break from saga 'tradition'. The other subgroups (the *Helden-* and *Wikingersagas* or the 'tragic-heroic' sagas) are generally considered the more 'traditional' in the corpus and have come to be viewed as a type of historiography that preserved traces of 'genuine' pre-Christian legends. This is due to overlaps in their content with material recorded elsewhere, such as in eddic verse, *Snorra Edda*, and the legendary portion of Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*, as well as in sources from further afield like *Beowulf*. Significant examples are *Völsunga saga* and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (e.g. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2012; Rowe 2012). The writing down of texts such as these has been placed within the Europe-wide *origo gentis* tradition, as the Icelandic equivalent of, for example, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*. It has been argued, moreover, that they had significant genealogical value for their patrons (e.g. Sverrir Jakobsson 2003; Gottskálk Jensson 2009; Lassen 2012). By contrast, the 'comic-adventurous' sagas are seen by many as the products of a wholly different school of saga writing that, instead of casting ancient legends in a new historiographical form, produced works of escapist fiction that bear only a superficial resemblance to such legends (O'Connor, 2017, 94–96). Their perceived fictional status is so strong that some have even labelled them the *lygisögur* (lying sagas), although the use of this term as a generic marker has fallen mostly out of favour due to its pejorative connotations (Driscoll 2004).

Central to the 'comic-adventurous' sagas' 'fictional' reputation is their close relationship with the translations of continental romance, known in modern scholarship as the translated *riddarasögur* (knights' sagas or chivalric sagas).[2] The translations, such as those of the Arthurian Matter of Britain and Marie de France's *lais*, had a widespread influence on Icelandic literary production following their introduction in the thirteenth century. Saga compilers borrowed motifs, settings, and plot structures from them to produce both what scholars define as a

2 For an overview of the translations, see Glauser 2005, page number missing.

new saga subgroup – known as the 'indigenous' *riddarasögur* – and this seemingly 'new' branch of the *fornaldarsögur*. Their influence was so great that it is often hard to distinguish between these two groups; they are seen by some as having hybridised over time and are sometimes referred to in general as 'romances' (e.g. Kalinke 2005). The translated *riddarasögur* are also often credited with popularising a new fictional mode of writing because they were not based on oral tradition (Mundal 2012, 190). Attention is drawn instead to the prominence of 'fantastic lore' (Vésteinn Ólason 2007, 19) in these texts, featuring, as they do, a diverse cast of non-human characters capable of nature-defying acts of magic (e.g. Hume 1980; Mundal 2006). These sagas have also been marked out (and derided) for their derivativeness – their repeated use of a set stock of motifs that weaken any sense that they might have been considered works of history (Driscoll 2004, 197–198).

Further evidence for their 'non-traditional' status is found in their divergence from 'objective' saga style (Glauser 2005). Whereas saga prose had traditionally attempted to erase any trace of authorial agency, the narrators of the 'romance' sagas intrude in their stories to comment on events and construct an exaggerated "rhetoric of historicity" (O'Connor 2017, 95) by making outlandish claims about sources and bolting on genealogical framing. This rhetoric has, for the most part, been understood as part of a wider parodying tendency that poked fun at traditional saga style. Critical in this interpretation are a series of passages that Marianne E. Kalinke (2005) terms the *apologiæ*, in which saga narrators address their audiences directly to defend the veracity of their accounts.[3] The vast majority of scholars have interpreted these passages as jokes. Because most of the sagas they accompany are so farcical and manifestly untrue, the argument goes, the *apologiæ* must have been intended to either satirise traditional saga style and signal a conscious departure from it or to construct a (very thin) veneer of historicity to justify the telling of an obviously fictional story.[4] Kalinke (2005, 318–319), for example, argues that they "bespeak the author's awareness of the fictional and alien character of the literature they were propagating".

1.3 Reassessing the 'Comic-Adventurous' Sagas

The ground is, however, well laid to re-evaluate these sagas, which is what I intend to do here. My aim in this book is to take the characteristics which have

3 For a list of *apologiæ*, see O'Connor 2005, 126–128.

4 For a full survey of these views, see O'Connor 2005, 102–103.

been used to separate the 'comic-adventurous' *fornaldarsögur* from 'tradition' and instead use them as windows into the changing significance of the legendary past in the late medieval period.

1.3.1 History, Fiction, and the Fantastic

Central to my arguments is the proposition, put forward by Ralph O'Connor (2005; 2022), that their *apologiæ* and 'rhetoric of historicity' should be taken at face value rather than as an attempt to poke fun at saga tradition. According to O'Connor, those inclined towards the latter view rely on a problematic definition of fiction, meaning any narrative that has been invented. Instead, he adopts Dennis Howard Green's (2002, 11–17) narrower definition of fiction as a literary mode that is predicated on an agreement between author and audience that what is narrated does not represent events that really happened. O'Connor argues that there is no evidence for such an agreement in any saga subgroup: sagas were assumed to represent history, and those deemed otherwise were liable to being dismissed as lies (*lygisögur* or *skröksögur* (false sagas)), a condemnation of quality as well as truth value. The 'romance' sagas' claims to history should, he argues, be taken as evidence for their compilers' adherence to the traditional historical mode rather than (paradoxically) being used as evidence for their divergence from it. These sagas should be understood, not as fiction, but as historiography "in a broader sense" (O'Connor 2005, 88), in which there was room for *considerable* authorial invention but which was confined by a historical framework – a framework that was, admittedly, much broader than anything we would recognise as history today.

Recent reassessments of the 'fantastic' provide further cause to take these sagas' claims to representing 'history' seriously. Scholars have increasingly come to embrace the 'mixed modality' of the more conventionally historical saga subgroups and acknowledge that what modern audiences might describe as 'fantastic' was part of the language medieval Icelanders used to understand the world and their place within it (e.g. Ármann Jakobsson 1998–2001; Mayburd 2017; O'Connor 2017, 90–94). Carl Phelpstead has, for instance, suggested that the varied levels of 'fantastic' content across the different saga subgroups might reflect the flexibility of medieval views on plausibility. He writes that "what a medieval Icelander would find implausible (fantastic) in a Scandinavian context might be much more plausible when located elsewhere" (Phelpstead 2012, 41). As O'Connor (2022, 295) notes, moreover, many of the *fornaldarsögur*'s 'fantastic' elements "replicate, extend or otherwise work with then-current ethnographic, geographical, and natural-historical learning" – for example, commonly held medieval

knowledge about monsters on the fringes of the world. With these insights, the question of saga 'plausibility' and 'history' moves from making blanket statements about the truth value of a whole subgroup, to instead drawing attention to how compilers negotiated the plausibility of their narratives through, for example, their use of settings and *apologiæ*.

1.3.2 Cultural Memory and Intertextuality

These approaches open up the possibility of reading the 'comic-adventurous' *fornaldarsögur* as works of historical writing that, although different in several ways and unlike our own understanding of history, were in keeping with the conventions of the saga as a specific historical form. Developments in the field of cultural memory studies offer conceptual tools which, I believe, can help to understand the significance of their 'difference'. That is, what that 'difference' might reveal.

The concept of 'cultural memory' was developed by Egyptologist Jan Assmann (1995) from the work of Maurice Halbwachs (1992) on 'collective memory'. Assmann conceived of two types of 'collective memory': he saw 'communicative memory' as non-institutionalised and passed between a few generations, and 'cultural memory' as existing over long periods of time in highly formalised media (such as texts, icons, and rituals), which are produced by a small class of specialised elite memory carriers. Cultural memory, Assmann (1995, 132) argued, is identity-forming and used by societies (specifically its elites) "to stabilize and convey that society's self-image". One of the central tenets of memory studies is its orientation towards the present: remembering is not an act of pure preservation, but one of selective reconstruction dependent on what knowledge is available and relevant at the time of remembering. The focus of cultural memory studies is, therefore, not on the relationship between memories and the 'real' events they attempt to represent, but between memories and the communities that produce them. Cultural historian Alon Confino (2011, 41) puts it very simply: "the historian of memory considers who wants whom to remember what and why, and how memory is produced, received, and rejected".

For the Icelandic sagas, it is the context of their creation which is interesting from a memory perspective, and Jürg Glauser (2000) has demonstrated how the sagas reconstructed the past in ways that were relevant to the thirteenth- and fourteenth- century elites who were responsible for their production. This was the era of civil war, the collapse of the Commonwealth (1262–1264), and the subsequent reorganisation of Iceland's political structures, events that motivated the writing down of a 'useful past' to aid the individuals and groups vying for power

and help society at large deal with the instability of their time (Clunies Ross 1993; Vésteinn Ólason 1998). Situated within the grand narrative of history provided by the church, the different saga subgroups that emerged in this period divided history into different phases, from the legendary past and Viking Age of the *fornaldarsögur*, through the settlement age described in the *Íslendingasögur* (sagas of Icelanders), and up to the Sturlung Age of the *samtíðarsögur* (contemporary sagas). With many of their characters connected genealogically, they formed a "'great narration' of the Icelanders' pre-history, their exodus, immigration and settlement, and their change of faith" (Glauser 2000, 212). Once committed to vellum, they formed a resource from which Icelanders of the thirteenth century onwards could draw on to remember the past and construct their communal identities – whether national, regional, or familial.

But bearers of cultural memory (or 'sites of memory'), like the sagas, are not static repositories of information about the past; to have significance within a community, they must be continually reaffirmed or contested through performance, repetition, or reference.[5] And indeed, as cultural memory studies have developed beyond Assmann's original conceptualisation, the dynamic and performative nature of memory has come to the fore. As Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (2009, 2) write, cultural memory has come to be understood as "an ongoing process of remembrance and forgetting in which individuals and groups continue to reconfigure their relationship to the past and hence reposition themselves in relation to established and emergent memory sites". This significantly expands the scope of memory-oriented saga studies, inviting attention not just to how and why the sagas were written in the 'first' place but also to how and why they were remembered and forgotten: how they were, for instance, disseminated, 'canonised', or rewritten.

The view of memory as an ongoing dynamic 'process' turns the problem of the 'comic-adventurous' sagas' literary 'derivativeness' into an opportunity to tap into debate and dialogue about the legendary past. The repeated use and adaptation of particular motifs, the intermixing of romance and 'traditional' character types, structures, and styles are promising candidates for the study of what Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (2005, 265–271) describe as the "memory of literature". That is how, via intertextuality, texts metaphorically 'remember' each other and thus variously reaffirm or contest previous representations of the past.

5 The term 'sites of memory' or 'lieux de mémoire' was used by French historian Pierre Nora (1996–1998) to describe the focal points that shape individual memory and around which group identities coalesce.

This approach to cultural memory was pioneered by Renate Lachmann (1997, 15), a critic of Russian literature, who argued that literature is the "mnemonic art par excellence" of culture. To outline how this works, she begins with the classical legend of the poet Simonides of Ceos and the origin of individual memory, as retold by Cicero and Quintilian. They explained how, after a building collapsed around a banquet, Simonides was able to identify the mutilated bodies because he could remember the order they had been sitting in. Their identities were inscribed into a structure, the seating plan, and remembering that structure gave Simonides access to his memories of the individuals. Cicero described this process as a kind of 'inner writing' comparable to writing on a wax tablet. The seats of the deceased were like the words or images inscribed on a tablet which stand in for and give access to the information that is to be remembered.

Lachmann goes on to explain how the same principles can also apply to literature on two interrelated levels: that of the literary system and the individual text. Firstly, a particular culture's literature, much like Simonides's seating plan or Cicero's wax tablet, is a structure or 'memory space' into which memories are inscribed. On this level, the individual texts function like the signs on the tablet or the seats in the seating plan. The system as a whole – the body of literature –is the tablet or the plan. But, on the other level, those individual texts are themselves also their own wax tablets: they have their own internal structures (plots, settings, characters) that, like the signs on the tablet or the seats in the seating plan, represent and help recall what is to be remembered – such as stories, places, and people.

Intertextuality connects these two levels and mimics the process of individual memory. Each text within a body of literature does not generate meaning in a vacuum, but rather (in part) through dialogue with other texts within that system – dialogues that emerge, as Wolfgang Iser (1997, xvi) writes in his foreword to Lachmann's monograph, from "the points of intersection at which different contexts clash, collide, overlap, interpenetrate, or are telescoped into one another". As a result of those intersections, texts 'remember' other texts. They draw into themselves those other 'memory spaces' and, in doing so, reorganise them, change them, and confer new meanings on them. In Lachmann's words, each text "inscribes itself in a memory space made up of texts, and it sketches out a memory space into which earlier texts are gradually absorbed and transformed". Through these 'rememberings', they also reconfigure the wider memory space of the literary system as a whole – the wax tablet on which each individual text is like a mark.

The comparison Lachmann makes between intertextuality and memory is more than just a neat metaphor. Rather, it is a way we may attempt to understand how cultural memory – a society's conception of itself – develops across time and

space. As discussed above, in medieval Iceland, the written word was, like Simonides's seating plan and Cicero's wax tablet, viewed by those involved in textual production as a structure within which to store memories of the past. Embedded within the early sagas they compiled were other structures of memory. They refer, for instance, to memories encoded in geographical features, genealogies, burials (e.g. Bennett 2014; Callow 2006; Clunies Ross 1993), and even sometimes – as Hermann (2022, 168–186) has recently shown – in seating arrangements. The incorporation and consequent reconfiguration of these 'memory spaces' into the saga narratives did not just produce aesthetic effects – it is evidence of, in Lachmann's (1997, 16) words, the "process by which a culture continually rewrites and retranscribes itself". Honing in on that process draws attention to the fact that literature is not just "a representation of cultural memory, rather it enacts the operations of memory, thus opening up a means of access to observing how and perhaps why culture comes about" (Iser 1997, xiii). Therefore, to better understand how and why Icelanders' literary representations of the legendary past changed to resemble 'romance', it is worth foregrounding those representations' intertextuality and their constructive relationships with the memory space that they formed a part of.

As Kate Heslop (2018, 259) notes, premodern literature is generally well-suited to such analysis "with its profusion of variations and rewritings". Hermann (2013, 338) points out, moreover, that much work has been done specifically to enable saga studies in this vein, since they would take off from the same place as traditional philological analysis, which is concerned, among other things, with identifying textual borrowings.[6] The possibilities of this kind of study are laid out further by Geraldine Barnes's (2014, 190) work on the 'indigenous' *riddarasögur*, in which references to learned and historical texts "invite audiences to join authors in an elaborate minuet of intertextuality". Promising too are the developments in the related field of genre, which, rather than a seemingly neutral taxonomical tool, has increasingly been understood with "a more reflexive model in which texts are thought to use or to perform the genres by which they are shaped" (Frow 2015, 27). Many saga scholars have, accordingly, shifted away from the project of categorising sagas into genres to focus instead on how individual sagas 'use' or 'refer to' genres (Hermann 2013, 338–340; Sif Ríkharðsdóttir 2020). Particularly relevant here are studies on the productive interaction between the *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur* (e.g. Ármann Jakobsson 1999; Ferrari 2012), which open further doors for understanding how these texts engaged in an intertextual dialogue about the past.

6 On the application of Lachmann's work to skaldic kennings, see Glauser 2018, 241–242.

By using intertextuality to analyse literature as a medieval Iceland's cultural memory, the 'comic-adventurous' *fornaldarsögur*'s 'fictional' qualities – such as their derivativeness, proximity to romance, playfully self-conscious narration, and use of 'fantastic lore'– would not be used as reasons to deny them the status of 'legendary histories', but could instead be used as windows into the potentially radical revision of that history, which might reveal something about the people who produced and promoted them.

1.3.3 Material Philology and Cultural History

However, if one is to use modern literary theory to make connections between medieval texts and their contexts – to try and understand "how and perhaps why culture comes about" (Iser 1997, xiii) – caution must be exercised. In a manuscript culture such as late medieval Iceland, it is impossible to speak of a 'text' and the 'author' in the same way that modern critics like Erll, Nünning, and Lachmann do. Medieval texts were, by nature, variable and multi-authored: they were borne out of living and fluid oral cultures and were subject to continual rewriting at the hands of scribes and compilers who adapted and re-curated them each time they were copied down (Cerquiglini 1999; Quinn 2010, 15–17; Lukas Rösli and Stefanie Gropper 2021, 10–14).

Since the 1990s, embrace of this complexity has fuelled the emergence and popularisation of 'new' or 'material' philology.[7] Rather than attempting to identify the 'best' version of a text or reconstruct a hypothetical 'original' (as was a goal of 'traditional' philology), proponents of 'material' philology have advocated for the study of individual text witnesses as works in their own rights. From a cultural memory perspective, this means approaching each witness of a saga not as an artefact of something which has been forgotten, in a kind of "mourning for the text" (Cerquiglini 1999, 34), but rather it necessitates seeing scribes as active agents who, through their copying, revising, and rearranging practices, variously reaffirmed or altered the versions of the past which they had inherited (Rohrbach 2018, 214). The unit of analysis for studying the 'memory of literature' in a manuscript culture such as Iceland, should, consequently, not be the abstracted 'text' or 'work', but rather the 'text witness', which is to be understood within its specific codicological and historical contexts (Johansson 2012, 367).

Taking this approach opens the doors for a more historically grounded study of cultural memory in literature. Manuscripts are, as Stephen Nichols (1997, 12)

7 See further Nichols 1990; Driscoll 2010; Rohrbach 2018.

writes, "necessarily a collaborative effort bespeaking the social, commercial, and intellectual organization of a specific moment in time", and therefore can give very specific insight into the communities that produced them. For a great many 'romance' sagas, that 'moment' was the fifteenth century, when they seem to have been particularly popular. Rather than the civil wars and the collapse of the commonwealth, which are sometimes considered the context for the *fornaldarsögur*'s inception (e.g. Torfi Tulinius 2002), the fifteenth century when they were copied in large numbers was, in Ármann Jakobsson's (2012, 29) words, "the age of plagues, the 'English age', the heyday of the Catholic church, and the age of rivalling magnates fighting over land and property". Several scholars have connected this political backdrop to the 'indigenous' *riddarasögur*, and recent interventions by Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2014) and Hans Jacob Orning (2017) have also demonstrated the potential the *fornaldarsögur*, and specifically their manuscripts, have as windows into the concerns and ideologies of this period's elites.[8]

These two studies warrant further discussion as they have a great deal in common with my own project – the specific boundaries of which are sketched out in the final part of this introduction. Both Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir and Orning adopt a 'whole-book' approach in their analysis of late medieval *fornaldarsögur* or 'romance' manuscripts. The former looks exclusively at AM 152 fol (1500–1525) while the latter offers a comparative analyses of AM 343a 4to (1450–1475) with AM 471 4to (1450–1500) and Holm perg 7 4to (1300–1325). Both show how the parallels and tensions between sagas in one codex can produce meanings that are not evident when the same sagas are read in isolation. Moreover, both take the view that, in Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir's (2014, 89) words, "all preserved medieval texts, including legendary sagas and romances [. . .] foreground contemporary issues and are thus valuable evidence through which historical attitudes can be recovered".[9] She concludes that the texts in AM 152 fol "promote certain ethical and moral values, and ways to organize society, especially the dominance of certain groups over others, based on factors such as social class, nationality or ethnicity, region and gender" (120). Similarly, for Orning (2017, 33), the legendary sagas are "a reflection" of their production context which, despite, or perhaps because of, their 'fantastic' nature, can reveal the tensions that were at play within that context. The conclusions he draws relate to the manuscript patrons' relationship with Norway, their aristocratic political manoeuvrings, and their views on how society should be ordered.

8 Studies which relate the *riddarasögur* to their late medieval contexts include Barnes 2000; Bagerius 2009. Specific attention is paid to their manuscripts by Glauser 1983; Kjesrud 2010.

9 On Orning's (2017) methodology, see 32–39.

But it is my belief that adding a memory lens would allow us to go beyond these historically-grounded readings to explore not just how sagas and their manuscripts reflected socio-political contexts, but also how they may have actively shaped them. As Gabrielle Spiegel (1990, 77) wrote in her response to the postmodern challenge to history: "texts both mirror *and* generate social realities, are constituted by *and* constitute the social and discursive formations which they may sustain, resist, contest, or seek to transform". Both studies discussed above move, at points, towards this kind of analysis: Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2014, 90) suggests that AM 152 fol, which "promotes [. . .] values" (120), "could also have had the effect of shaping individual and group identities, which were possibly multiple, shifting over time and competing". Moreover, Orning (2017, 220), for whom manuscripts primarily 'reflect' contexts, also hints that in places "reality emulated fiction".

The study of cultural memory offers a possible way of schematising this relationship more specifically. In fact, one could argue, it is the most use to which these conceptual tools can be put. From a historian's perspective, studying memory does not "offer any true additional explanatory power. Only when linked to historical questions and problems [. . .] can memory be illuminating" (Confino 2011, 47). As argued above, viewing literature as a culture's memory can be a way of trying to understand how a culture forms and reforms itself – it is about observing, and understanding the nature of, cultural change. But culture, and a culture's memory, are not separate from other fields of social experience, such as politics and religion. Cultural memory does things *in* society: it is wielded by and in response to those in power, it shapes individual and group identities, it sets moral and ethical agendas, and, as I will argue in this book, it can sketch out the boundaries of what a society understands to be possible. Thus, to quote Confino (2011, 45) again, "in their most innovative rendition, memory studies wish to explore whether, and in what way, the presence of memory is not so much a manifestation of the society around it, but a shaper of politics, society, and culture, and of beliefs and values". Therefore, my aim in adopting a memory lens to study *fornaldarsögur* manuscripts is to observe how they functioned as agents *within* their contexts instead of merely its artefacts.

1.3.4 Media, Literacy, and Orality

The question remains of *how* the *fornaldarsögur* operated within their contexts? The answer to such a question cannot be found in theories of intertextuality alone, even when adapted to acknowledge scribal agency in saga authorship and when those sagas are situated within their codicological and historical contexts.

This is because, as discussed already, Icelandic sagas were not equivalent to modern fiction, but neither were they works of straightforward 'history'. Moreover, as has also already been alluded to, sagas were deeply embedded in the oral sphere: literate and oral cultures co-mingled for many centuries after the introduction of the written word in Iceland (Gísli Sigurðsson 2018; Johansson 2017). In order to interrogate the relationships between these texts and their contexts, it is necessary, therefore, to first attempt to answer another question: what exactly was the saga? Or more specifically, the *fornaldasaga*? This is a question about media, another topic that has received increasing interest in the study of both cultural memory and Old Icelandic texts (e.g. Heslop 2018; Glauser 2023).

As was evident in Assmann's original conceptualisation, cultural memory cannot exist without media. Iser (1997, xii) writes, moreover, that "cultural memory is collective memory, which cannot be genetically transmitted, and which thus has to find its own form". That form, which for Iser and Lachmann was the modern literary text but which here is the Icelandic saga, is what facilitates contact between information about the past and its audiences; in Kate Heslop and Jürg Glauser's (2018, 20) words, it "stands between two other positions and performs certain functions in the ensemble composed of all three". Media places constraints on communicative acts and signals what significance those communications have. It is a frame or guide to both creation and interpretation, setting boundaries that relate, for example, to that communication's truth-value.

But much as a culture's literature is a dynamic memory space that is constantly reforming itself, a culture's media are also "caught up in a dynamics of their own" (Erll and Rigney 2009, 3). Media are "always 'emergent' rather than stable, and technologies for meaning-making and networking emerge in relation to each other and in interaction with each other" (Erll and Rigney 2009, 3). Thus, in order to understand a particular representation of the past, we must consider its medium and how it operates within a "framework of collective processes of signification" (Erll and Nünning 2005, 284) – how it relates to other forms of media that existed before and alongside it. Heslop (2022, 4) has recently demonstrated the rich possibilities of situating skaldic verse within such a rich media landscape, or, as she terms it, as nodes within a "network of medial practices".

For the Icelandic saga, the crucial 'technologies' at play were, on the most basic level, the spoken and written words. As mentioned above, many other forms of media are referred to in the Icelandic sagas – such as geographical features and genealogies – which functioned (to return to Cicero and Lachmann) as the signs on the wax tablet that give structure to memories. My concern here is less with the signs than the shape of the tablet itself – that is, the individual saga – and since the saga emerged out of a confluence of oral and written methods of remembering, its relationship to orality and literacy must be investigated.

This was a major topic of scholarly debate in the earlier twentieth century, contributions to which were concerned, above all, with the question of whether the written sagas were indebted more to oral traditions or continental European book culture. These have come to be known as the 'Freeprose' and 'Bookprose' stances respectively.[10] But what once were two opposing positions have become considerably more nuanced, and studies of living oral traditions have revealed them to be something of a false dichotomy (Clunies Ross 2010, 41–43). Saga compilers, as well as subsequent scribes, are now seen more frequently as participants *in* oral tradition as opposed to its passive recorders (as was the traditional 'Freeprose' position): they drew on much of the same material as the oral tellers but cast it in a new medium.

This investigation into saga origins, which has immense implications for understanding the sagas as media, was concerned, above all, with the more 'traditional' saga subgroups – particularly the *Íslendingasögur*. But the 'comic-adventurous' *fornaldarsögur*, although produced by a more firmly 'bookish' culture, were also embedded in a profoundly oral media landscape. Such is evident in their narratorial asides which, as well as offering truth defences, refer to both the oral and written spheres: they discuss other written texts as well as oral traditions, and they address audiences who have either *lesit* (read) or *hlýtt* (listened) to their narratives. In terms of content, the *fornaldarsögur*'s close relationship with the oral sphere is well attested too. As is often noted, compilers drew much of their content from oral traditions, whether those were legends or 'folklore' – the latter being more often the case for the 'comic-adventurous' *fornaldarsögur* (e.g. Mitchell 1991, 32–43; Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 2003). It seems likely, moreover, that the *fornaldarsögur* were received, at least in part, aurally too. Such is the case in the infamous scene in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* where the legend of Hrómundr Gripsson provides entertainment at a wedding in Reykjahólar in 1119 (*Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, 1952, ch. 10, p. 18). This story seems to have been based on the teller's own memory rather than a written text, and, as Judy Quinn (2020, 78) observes, its audience was restricted to the "political elite". But over time, saga manuscripts became an integral element in storytelling practices that reached a broader cross section of society. This was widespread in the late eighteenth century in the custom known as the *kvöldvaka* (evening wake) where *sagnaskemmtun* (saga-entertainment) was used to keep people awake while they completed their evening tasks. Two eighteenth-century Icelandic scholars described it like this:

10 For a summary of these debates, see Clover 2005, 239–253; Clunies Ross 2010, 38–48.

> Ja end i Dag fortælles de mundtligen i Island, især i Tuusmørket; men naar Lyset er tændt, beskikkes giærne en Dreng, som godt kan læse, eller en anden af Giæsterne, dertil; og hvis Huusbonden er en Elsker af Historier, laaner han hos Naboerne eller andre gode Venner, saa mange Sagar, som han kan være forsynet med for heele Vinteren; og herved bliver den Arbeidende munter og vaagen. (Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson 1772, ch. 68, p. 47)

> Even today stories are told orally in Iceland, particularly in the twilight; when the lamp has been lit, someone, often a boy who can read well or one of the guests, is chosen to read, and if the head of the household is a devotee of sagas, he will borrow from his neighbours or other good friends a sufficient number of sagas to last him the winter; and in this way the workers are kept contented and wakeful. (Driscoll 1997, 40)

The existence of a similar practice in the fifteenth century is suggested by numerous references the narrators of 'romance' sagas make to aural reception (Glauser 1983, 78–100; O'Connor 2005, 159). In particular, this one in the 'indigenous' *riddarasaga Rémundar saga keisarasonar*:

> Nu þa godir menn leggit nidr gny ok glaum hark ok [har]eysti ok hlydit huat sa segir er undir bokene situr þui betra er at heyra godar dæme saugur ok faugur æfintyr fra agiætum monum saugd helldr en onytsamligt skial ok skrum fram flutt med oheyrilig [um hlatri] sem margir heimskir menn gora uili þer ok ei þat gora þa er lokit starfi þess er undir bokeni situr þui at henni er [eigi gaman] utan allir þegi utan sa er soguna segir þui þat er skemtiligt ok hyggiligt at heyra godar saugur fra agiætum monum (AM 579 4to, fol. 18^{v} ll. 4–9; *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, 1909–1912, ch. 4, pp. 11–12.)[11]

> (Now, good people, leave off your din and gloom and listen to what the one who is reading is saying, for it is better to hear good exempla and beautiful tales told of celebrated people, rather than the worthless gossip and boasting, delivered with unseemly laughter, with which many foolish people carry on. Please do not do that; then the effort of the one who tells the story is wasted, for it is no fun unless everyone is silent but the one telling the story. For it is entertaining and intelligent to listen to good stories about celebrated people.) (adapted from O'Connor 2005, 159).

Of interest here is not only the fact that a physical book formed the basis of saga-storytelling, but the suggestion that such entertainment had, in O'Connor's (2005, 159) words, "not only to contend with background-noise but also to compete with other, less respectable and (perhaps) more popular, forms of entertainment". Thus, although committed to vellum, these sagas were part of the oral sphere too and in competition with other kinds of oral communication.

Consequently, these sagas can be described as 'vocalised' texts, a concept developed by Paul Zumthor (1984) and popularised by the Old English scholar Ur-

11 Broberg's edition of *Rémundar saga keisarasonar* is based on AM 539 4to (*c.* 1600–1700) with variants from AM 579 4to labelled as the K-text.

sula Schaefer (1992). In Heslop and Glauser's (2018, 31) words, "*[v]ocality* denotes a view of medieval narrative culture as one that, although existing in manuscript form, and therefore literate, contains substantial elements from pre- or extra-literate communicative and medial formations". In such cultures, "the role of the human voice continued to be fundamental to every process of reading" and "left unmistakeable traces in the preserved texts, so that the performativity of medieval literature is inevitably inscribed in the manuscripts" (Heslop and Glauser 2018, 31). Vocality allows for the simultaneity of different media in one communicative act and thus makes space for texts like these to be both written and oral.

But beyond just labelling the sagas as 'vocalised' texts, if we are to try and understand *how* they acted as agents in the production of cultural memory and, consequently, played a wider role in society as 'shapers' of politics, belief, and values, it is necessary to interrogate that vocality and the nature of their relationships with coterminous oral and literate traditions. What makes this avenue of enquiry particularly intriguing is that the compilers of the 'comic-adventurous' *fornaldarsögur* (and indeed 'indigenous' *riddarasögur*) also seem to have been interested in the media status of their texts: through their 'rhetoric of historicity' and playful addresses to the audience, they display, what Glauser (2010, 313) describes as a pronounced "media-theoretical discourse". Analysing that discourse may be revealing about what the 'saga' really was – or what sagas were understood to be by those responsible for creating them. In particular, it may shed further light on the question of saga 'history', since so many of the self-conscious asides found with the 'comic-adventurous' sagas are concerned with the question of historical truth. As noted above, medieval Icelanders certainly had space within their concept of 'history' for things which modern critics typically associate with fiction, but, as Else Mundal (2012, 185) writes, the presence of the *apologiæ* shows that "there was a limit to what people in an Old Norse audience would believe", thus there must have been limits to what they accepted as 'history'. What those limits were warrant investigating.

Such an approach runs parallel to that advocated for by media theorist W. J. T. Mitchell, for whom 'medium theory' (2004) arises from the media themselves. Rather than positing generalised rules about media from the 'outside', 'medium theory' is "an immanent vernacular, closely tied to the practice while reflecting on it from within. When approaching media, it asks: 'Who's behind it? What do they want?' without [. . .] a mystical notion of the mass media system as a massive, living totality" (Mitchell 2008, 18).[12] While no 'mass media system' was

12 Heslop (2017) also adopts Mitchell's approach in her study of media in Old Norse heroic legend.

at play in medieval Iceland, I believe Mitchell's approach here is still relevant. Over the course of the many centuries in which sagas were produced, the form's media status – such as the nature of its vocality and its perceived truth-value – undoubtedly changed. As noted above, media are dynamic and 'emergent' rather than stable. Therefore, if we are to attempt to answer a question as large as 'what exactly was the saga?', a good place to start would be what those sagas, on a case-by-case basis, say about themselves.

1.3.5 Research Questions

The very general question I set out at the beginning of this introduction was why are the *fornaldarsögur* so varied? And, more specifically, why are those known as the 'comic-adventurous' *fornaldarsögur* so 'fictional', 'fantastic' and 'derivative'? I then outlined how tools from cultural memory and media studies may help to not only understand those differences and why they came about, but may also help develop some further insight into the status and function of these texts in late medieval Icelandic society.

Viewing intertextuality as the 'memory of literature' invites us to ask, for example: how did saga compilers respond to the versions of the legendary past they had inherited? What was so appealing about the translated *riddarasögur* that they chose to write legendary histories that looked so much like romances? Why did they reuse so many of the same motifs? How and why did they fit material that we would call 'fantastic' into those histories? And, if they were so concerned that their sagas might, as a result, be perceived as unbelievable, such that they would need an *apologia*, why write them down?

Tuning into the sagas' status as 'mediums of cultural memory' raises further questions about the memorial function of the form itself: what kind of memory medium was the Icelandic saga, specifically the legendary saga? What were its boundaries as a (potentially) historical form of writing? What kind of relationship did it have with literate and oral cultures? And other written and spoken 'texts'? Why did this form appeal to literary patrons in this period? And, what role did it play more broadly in late medieval Iceland?

1.4 The Manuscripts under Study: AM 589a–f 4to and AM 586 4to

To begin answering these questions, this book looks at just two manuscripts: AM 589a–f 4to (hereafter 589a–f) and AM 586 4to (hereafter 586), which were written by the same two scribes in the late fifteenth century (Loth 1977).[13]

They present a particularly interesting case for this kind of study. They contain mostly 'comic-adventurous' *fornaldarsögur* and 'indigenous' *riddarasögur* that are well suited to intertextual analysis, as well as numerous references to their own written status and aural reception, making them interesting from a media perspective too. Perhaps most intriguing is their unique constellation of *apologiæ*. These passages are, O'Connor (2005, 263) notes, "textually extremely unstable" and vary across their manuscripts in whether or not they are included, how long they are, and which texts they are associated with. In 589a–f, the *apologiæ* are mostly clustered around *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (589f), which has a prologue, an epilogue, and a mid-saga interjection.[14] There is also an epilogue following *Ektors saga* (589d).[15] There are a further two *apologiæ* in 586: the prologue to *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans* and the prologue to *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*.[16] A focus on these specific manuscripts allows us to closely observe what the *apologiæ* were 'doing': as significant interventions on behalf of the scribes, they reveal something about how those scribes responded to the texts they were tasked with writing down. By providing opportunities to observe the relationship between saga and *apologiæ,* they provide fertile ground for exploring the boundaries of saga 'history'.

The rest of the compilation would suggest, nevertheless, that 589a–f and 586's scribes compiled their manuscripts with some care and seem to have been interested in, and perhaps concerned about, the historical credentials of their work. This is evident in the relationship between *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* and its 'prequel' (as the saga which was copied before it in the manuscript is sometimes termed), *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* – Sturlaugr starfsami being the father of Göngu-Hrólfr. Despite their genealogical connection, these two sagas are contradictory and record

13 Overviews are provided in Chapter 2 and Chapter 6.

14 The same prologue is associated with *Sigurðar saga þögla* in AM 152 fol (1500–1525); see further Lavender 2018, 81–93. The epilogue is incomplete in 589f but preserved in full in AM 152 fol (also associated with *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*), and the mid-saga interjection (which appears in both 589f and AM 152 fol) is in its longest form in 589f.

15 *Ektors saga*'s epilogue appears in a shorter form with the same saga in AM 152 fol.

16 The prologues also accompany both sagas in AM 343a 4to (1450–1475), and that with *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* appears with the same saga in AM 577 4to (1450–1499).

different information regarding the place and manner of Sturlaugr starfsami's death. This, along with the evidence of *Sturlaugs rímur*, has prompted the suggestion that *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* was originally composed by someone with knowledge of a shorter, now lost version of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* (Björn K. Þórólfsson 1934, 399–402; Sanders 2006, 877). However, in the late fifteenth century when the scribes of 589a–f decided to copy the two texts sequentially, only the longer version seems to have been available, in this case AM 335 4to (1390–1410) (Zitzelsberger 1969b, 308–309). While they made some effort to iron out easily fixable inconsistencies between their two sagas, such as the number and names of Sturlaugr's children and the destination of his quest for the aurochs's horn, they nevertheless produced a manuscript containing two texts that differ in regards to some significant details.[17] It seems likely, moreover, that these scribes also used AM 335 4to as their exemplar for two short narratives in 586 (*Af þremr kumpánum* and *Af þremr þjófum í Danmörk*), although further philological analysis would be needed to confirm this. If this was the case, that leaves two sagas and several other short narratives that are in AM 335 4to, which the scribes of 589a–f and 586 had access to but chose not to include in their own codices.[18]

Further evidence for the scribes' selectivity is provided by two other genealogical pairs of sagas that they copied sequentially (the exemplars of which are unknown): 589e's *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra* and *Ála flekks saga* (Áli being the grandson of Hálfdan), and 586's *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* and *Vilmundar saga viðutan* (Vilmundr being the grandson of Bósi). It is clear that these scribes did not just copy whatever texts they had at their disposal; they clearly put some thought into what to include, how to arrange it, and how their audiences might respond. This makes the two manuscripts they produced promising candidates for the kind of whole-book analysis, which has been proved fruitful by, among others, Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2014) and Orning (2017). At present, it is not possible to identify patrons for 589a–f and 586 like these scholars do for their objects of study, and, by consequence, draw some conclusions about individual motivations. However, in my analysis of the manuscripts, I will argue that the text witnesses they contain share a number of recurrent patterns and viewpoints, relating, for example, to kingship, gendered aristocratic modes of behaviour, and the practice

17 In other witnesses of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* the destination of Sturlaugr's quest is 'incorrectly' given as Ireland (for example AM 152 fol, fol. 99^{v}, l. 39) whereas in 589f's version it is Bjarmaland (589f, fol. 15^{v}, ll. 16–17), as is told in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*.

18 The other texts in AM 335 4to are a Norse version of an Old Testament passage about Samson; three short narratives now titled *Af sjö listum og sjö dyggðum og sjö leikum*, *Um heilræði er einn arabískur maður kenndi syni sínum*, *Frá skógfaranda manni og einum ormi*, and *Af versificatori er gjörðist portari*; *Gibbons saga*; *Drauma-Jóns saga*; and the beginning of *Af rómverska dáranum*.

of magic. The arguments I will make about the presence of these themes are, by nature, subjective and speculative, but it seems unlikely that whoever put these codices together in the late fifteenth century did so at random without some thought as to what they were trying to achieve by doing so. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2014, 94) writes that AM 152 fol's large size and ornamentation make it "a prestigious, élite codex that was probably intended to encode certain ethical values and serve an ideological function". As will be discussed in Chapter 2, 589a–f and 586 were made much more frugally. However, with the former (the more complete of the two today) taking up a total of 141 leaves, it is clear that they would have nonetheless required a significant investment to produce.[19] Moreover, since that investment seems to have been channelled into content rather than aesthetics, that content is worth investigating in more detail, even if there are no named scribes or patrons to assign the agency of their creation to.

Moreover, although their creation contexts are unknown, some information is available about 589a–f and 586's later transmission histories because of work done by Agnete Loth who introduced the 1977 facsimile edition. She identified a number of names in the manuscripts' margins that were added from about a century after their initial production and suggested several individuals who they may have referred to. Although these names cannot help identify precise patrons, they do help localise the manuscripts to a degree and give insight into transmission and reception, which are of great relevance to a historically grounded study of cultural memory (Confino 2011, 47).

1.5 The Structure of this Book

This book is divided into two halves, taking its structure from two of the approaches Erll and Nünning (2005, 264–80, 284–86; Hermann 2013, 335–40, 344–46) suggest for studying cultural memory in literature: the "memory of literature" and "literature as a medium of cultural memory".[20]

The first half is concerned with unpicking the 'memories' encoded in 589a–f through a literary, intertextual analysis focussed on its representation of the legendary Scandinavian past. Although both manuscripts contain *fornaldarsögur*, I have chosen to focus on just 589a–f here because they are both relatively large compilations, and it would not be possible to provide a detailed analysis of both.

19 By comparison, AM 152 fol is made up of 200 leaves.

20 The third angle they suggest, "memory in literature", is relevant to the concerns of Chapter 7 which discusses the sagas' discourses on media and memory.

Of the two, I regard 589a–f as more interesting because of its unique version of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* and because, as will be discussed in Chapter 8, it may have circulated more widely than 586.

In Chapter 3, I examine the texts in the first five parts of the manuscript (589a–e) and outline the interpretation of the past constructed across them. I take Lachmann's intertextual framework as a broad starting point and also draw on insights from recent scholarship on saga genre and hybridity. This provides a backdrop to the texts which I believe are the most interesting in the manuscript – *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* – which I examine closely in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 respectively. Here, I look at more specific instances of intertextuality: cases where we can identify clear borrowings of motifs or names, where explicit references are made to other texts, and when particular narratives about the past are summoned through the use of certain settings. I pay particular attention to *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s *apologiæ*, which, I argue, are key to understanding the peculiar nature of this saga's representation of pre-Christian history.

This discussion leads into the concerns of the second half, where I explore the historical significance of the legendary past in both 589a–f and 586. I draw attention to the medium in Chapter 7, using text-internal evidence to hone in on how the scribes understood their own role and that of the form within which they worked. The manuscripts' vocality and relationship to 'folklore' forms a key part of the discussion.

This lays the foundations for Chapter 8, where I relate the legendary past depicted in 589a–f and 586 to the fifteenth-century historical context in which they were produced. Part of this chapter is devoted to the manuscripts' sixteenth- and seventeenth-century transmission histories, since they provide some hints at who may have been responsible for their production. I then make some suggestions about the significance of the manuscripts' sagas for their patrons, with a particular emphasis on the potential political implications of their 'vocality' and close relationship with oral tradition. The discussion about transmission also reveals something about these sagas' reception, and so I make some suggestions about how the manuscripts may have continued to shape cultural memory as they were circulated and read during the centuries that followed and may have played a role in the development of early modern discourses on folklore and magic.

This study is an attempt to take a closer look at the workings of cultural memory, literacy, and orality in late medieval Iceland and shed some light on how the legendary saga functioned as a site at which they interfaced. It takes as its starting point the belief that the legendary sagas made up not a coherent corpus of texts, but rather a series of contributions to the complex and dynamic 'space' that was Icelandic cultural memory. My aim is to explore these manuscripts, and the specific text witnesses they contain, as interventions in that space and mediums of

cultural memory, which played an active role in the evolution of communal histories and identities in fifteenth-century Iceland. I do not aim to provide sweeping general conclusions about the function of the legendary past during this period. Rather, I follow Erll's (2011, 171) contention that "[c]onceiving of 'literature as a medium of cultural memory' requires a rigorous contextualization of literary works" and a "realization that the literary production of cultural memory is an ongoing process, characterized by a dynamic interplay between text and context". Accordingly, through my own contextualisation of these two manuscripts, on literary, media, and historical levels, I aim to provide one snapshot of a complex memory culture that was constantly in flux.

2 Overview of AM 589a–f 4to

589a–f, which is now split into six parts, was most likely originally one large book, possibly two. After Árni Magnússon received it at the end of the seventeenth century, it was separated into six parts labelled a–f (Loth 1977, 7 and 9). They are now comprised of 141 leaves and have 12 lacunæ across them.

2.1 Texts and Editions

The extant contents of the six parts, along with their current folio numbers and (in the footnotes) corresponding editions, are:

a. *Kirialax saga* (1^{r}–21^{v})[21]
b. *Samsons saga fagra* (1^{r}–4^{v})[22]
c. *Valdimars saga* (1^{r}–8^{v})[23]
d. *Klári saga* (1^{r}–17^{r})[24]
   Ektors saga (17^{v}–49^{v})[25]
   Stúfs þáttr hinn meiri (49^{v}–50^{v})[26]
e. *Þorsteins þáttr bœjarmagns* (1^{r}–5^{v})[27]
   Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana (5^{v}–13^{v})[28]
   Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra (14^{r}–19^{v})[29]

21 *Kirialax saga*, 1917. Kålund uses 589a as his base text and fills the lacunæ with AM 532 4to and AM 489 I–II 4to (1440–1460).

22 *Samsons saga fagra*, 1953. Wilson uses AM 343a 4to as his base text and provides some variants from 589b as the B-text.

23 *Valdimars saga*, 1962. Loth uses 589c as her base text.

24 *Clarus saga*, 1879. Cederschiöld uses AM 657a–b 4to (1340–1360) as his base text and gives some variants from 589d as the C-text.

25 *Ectors saga*, 1962. Loth uses AM 152 fol as her base text and provides some variant readings from 589d.

26 *Stúfs saga*, 1912. Björn Magnússon Ólsen uses AM 533 4to (1450–1499) as his base text and provides variant readings from 589d.

27 *Saga af Þorsteini Bœarmagni*, 1825–1837. This edition uses AM 510 4to (1510–1560) as the base text with variants from some other witnesses, although not 589e.

28 *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, 1927. Lagerholm uses AM 343a 4to as his base text and provides some variants from 589e as the C-text.

29 *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, 1830. Rafn uses AM 152 fol as his base text and provides some variants from 589e labelled as his C-text.

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Ála flekks saga (20^{r}–23^{r})[30]
Hákonar þáttr Hárekssonar (23^{v})[31]
f. *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* (1^{r}–13^{r})[32]
Göngu-Hrólfs saga (13^{r}–36^{v})[33]

2.2 Codicology and Palaeography

The leaves of all six parts are roughly the same size, measuring between 187–200mm x 157–166mm. They are thick and dark (particularly so around the edges) and have not been trimmed. In addition to the many missing individual leaves and whole gatherings, there are holes in numerous pages: some pre-existed the addition of the text while others clearly resulted from centuries of being kept in poor conditions where they were probably read by firelight (for example, see 589f, fol. 16). The text is written in one column throughout, and although spaces were left for initials and rubrics, they were (for the most part) never filled in.[34]

There is very occasional ornamentation; for example, in the space between the end of *Þorsteins þáttr bœjarmagns* and beginning of *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* on 589e, fol. 5^{v} and the first word of *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra* (589e, fol. 14^{r}, l. 1). There are many places where the text is no longer legible, which mostly seem to have resulted from general wear and tear. There are, however, two places where the text seems to have been intentionally erased. The first is the beginning of *Stúfs þáttr* (see Fig. 1). The text begins after the erasure with “stufr uar mikill madr” (Stúfr was a great man). In other witnesses, this line is preceded by: “Madur het Stvfur, hann var sonur Þordar kattar, en hann var sonur Þordar Jngvnnar sonar ok Gvdrvnar Osvivvs dottur” (A man is named Stúfr, he was the son of Þórðr köttr, and he was the son of Þórðr Ingunnarson

30 *Ála flekks saga*, 1927. Lagerholm uses 589e as his base text and fills the lacuna with AM 181k fol.
31 *Hákonar saga Hárekssonar*, 2009. Overgaard and Lanjala provide side-by-side editions of the text’s three medieval fragments (with 589e labelled the B-text), and use AM 347 4to (1690–1710) to fill the gaps.
32 *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969. Zitzelsberger uses AM 335 4to as his base text and provides extensive variant readings from 589f in the apparatus on pp. 48–303.
33 *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830. Rafn uses AM 152 fol as his base text and provides some variant readings from 589f as the C-text.
34 In a few places, initials and chapter numbers in Roman numerals have been added (for example 589d, fol. 20^{v}, l. 15), but this is rare.

and Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir) (*Stúfs saga*, 1912, p. 1).[35] The second erasure in 589a–f is of the last few words of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (see Fig. 2). The text prior to the erasure reads "huat er huer uann edr giordi [med] frægd edr uizku" (what each person won or did through fame or wisdom). In other witnesses, the text which follows is "fjólkýngi eðr svikum, eðr hvar höfðíngjarnir ríktu" (magic or treachery or where chieftains ruled) (*Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 38, p. 363). The most significant marginalia in 589a–f will be discussed in Chapter 8, but, in addition to the usual pen trials, the main types are personal names, hymns, and text titles.[36]

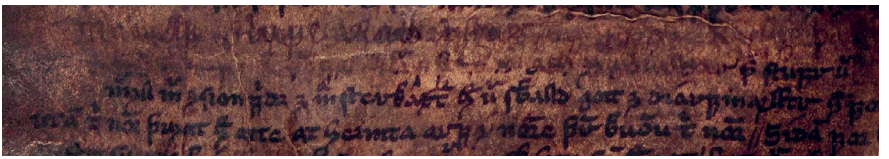

Fig. 1: AM 589d 4to, fol. 48^{v}; erasure at the beginning of *Stúfs þáttr*. Source: handrit.is. Printed with permission. Copyright © of the Árni Magnússon Institute, Iceland.

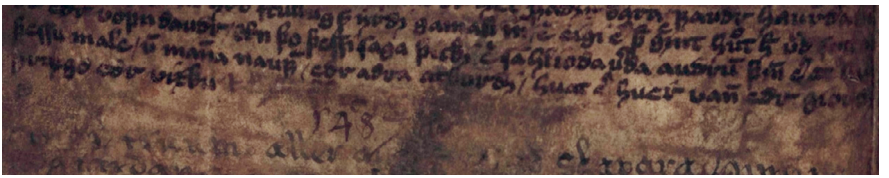

Fig. 2: AM 589f 4to, fol. 36^{v}; erasure at the end of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*. Source: handrit.is. Printed with permission. Copyright © of the Árni Magnússon Institute, Iceland.

According to Loth (1977, 17), the two scribes who wrote the manuscript are closely related in their orthographic and linguistic habits and, judging by the places where they shared the writing of lines, they must have been working in close quarters. She describes Hand I as having a "soft, round character, with broad curled downstrokes", whereas Hand II is "rather angular" and "distinctly stiff and print-like" (Loth 1977, 17). Other than in 586, no examples of the two hands have been identified in other manuscripts or charters, making it impossible to identify the scribes (Loth 1977, 23).

35 I would like to thank Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson for his help with trying to determine what text was originally written where these two erasures now are; unfortunately, we were not able to come to any conclusions.

36 A full overview is provided by Loth 1977, 19–22.

3 The Legendary Past in AM 589a–e 4to

The gaze of 589a–e is fixed on the very highest echelon of secular medieval society – the figure of the king and his immediate followers. Its eight sagas are all coming-of-age stories following the young princes of various European lands as they undergo a variety of trials before being able to assume royal offices of their own. The three *þættir* interspersed between them, which feature protagonists of somewhat humbler origins of more recent history, similarly follow individuals who advance themselves by offering their services to a king. But although there are distinct parallels between the journeys these texts' heroes go on, each one constructs a distinctly different narrative world that represents a particular time and place in history.

My aim in this chapter is to outline the interpretation of the past constructed across them using Lachmann's (1997) framework of cultural memory and intertextuality, while also taking cues from recent studies on the generic hybridity of Icelandic sagas. Because so many texts are discussed in this chapter, my focus is not on specific intertextual references, but rather on the more general interaction between content derived from the translated *riddarasögur* and that which might be described more generally as inherited Nordic tradition about the legendary past. The former can be restricted to a relatively confined corpus of written texts, whereas the latter is considerably more amorphous and includes material beyond just those texts which are designated *fornaldarsögur*. This encompasses legend, myth, and folklore, much of which would have been transmitted orally and entered the written record in various places, such as in *Snorra Edda*, Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*, other sagas, or in the records of later folklore collectors (Mitchell 1991, 49–73; Mitchell 2014). I treat material together that some scholars might separate into myth, legend, and folklore, but which I believe can be understood as manifestations of the same broad tradition.[37] Since I deal with this material on a very general level – motifs and character types rather than whole narratives – its variation over time (i.e. between the fifteenth century when these two manuscripts were produced and the eighteenth century when many folk stories were recorded) should be minimal enough to not affect its general designation as deriving from, or referring to, 'tradition'. My aim in this chapter is to draw attention to how this material is positioned in relation to the chivalric world of the translated romances across 589a–e's sagas. Since cultural remembering is an in-

37 For an overview of this distinction, see Frog and Ahola 2021. In treating this material together, I am following scholars such as Bek-Pedersen 2014; DuBois 2014; Gunnell 2014; Mitchell 1991, 49–73; Mitchell 2014.

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herently identity-forming project, my specific interest is in how these two narrative fields are brought together to construct identities or, more precisely, elite identities.

To explore this interaction in the sagas of 589a–e requires a kind of double vision, paying attention firstly to each text's individual intertextuality and, secondly, to their specific resonances with others in the same codex. In what follows, I discuss each text separately in the order that they appear in the manuscript. Rather than a temporal organising principle, they seem to be arranged according to a vaguely generic one: the texts in the half before *Stúfs þáttr* are generally grouped among the 'indigenous' *riddarasögur* while those after it are mostly considered *fornaldarsögur*.[38] I begin with the first half of the compilation which, I argue, constructs an idealised elite culture. I then show how the manuscript's second half situates the legendary north in relation to that culture. I do not discuss the two *þættir* that bracket this half – *Stúfs þáttr* and *Hákonar þáttr Hárekssonar*. While their interest in kingship resonates with the other texts, they seem to have been included because of the specific regional and political appeal they had to the manuscript's commissioners, which I discuss in Chapter 8.

3.1 The Chivalric Half

3.1.1 *Kirialax saga*

The first text in 589a–f is heavily dominated by references to translated texts and contains very few to anything resembling legendary tradition. It tells of the young hero Kirialax, son of Laicus, King of Athens, as he travels to the most important sites of European history before settling down in Byzantine Constantinople, where he marries the daughter of the "stolkonungr" (589a–f, fol. 20^{v}, l. 5; *Kirialax saga*, 1917, p. 74) (throne-king) and then assumes the title himself.[39] As a result of both this journey and the events bracketing it (which detail his father's and his own marriage negotiations), a pattern of ideal elite masculinity is sketched out that sets a standard by which the rest of the manuscript's heroes can be compared.

38 *Ála flekks saga* and *Valdimars saga* are both marginal cases although generally listed among the 'indigenous' *riddarasögur*.

39 In this saga, the *stólkonungr* rules under the auspices of the Byzantine Emperor (*keisari*), here Leo hinn ellre (the Elder), otherwise known as Leo I (457–474). See further Cook 1985, 322; Divjak 2009, 249–252; Barnes 2014, 180.

Two central tenets of this ideal are non-violence and the pursuit of knowledge. Such is evident in the description of Kirialax's travels where the noble goal of learning is offered as a more desirable elite vocation than war and conquest. The intertextuality of this journey is wide and includes a vast swathe of learned texts in addition to translated *riddarasögur*.[40] One of the most important points of reference that runs throughout is Alexander the Great (known in Iceland via the translated *Alexanders saga*) who travelled to many of the same places as Kirialax and is mentioned several times by the narrator.[41] Comparison between them is encouraged when, like Alexander, Kirialax visits Troy while awaiting the onset of a battle in Friggia (Phrygia) and sees the graves of the Trojan Ektor (Hector) and his killer, the Greek Akillas (Achilles) (Divjak 2009, 125–138; Kålund, 1917, p. xix). For Alexander, the ruin represents his ancestors' greatest victory and foreshadows the extensive imperial campaign that follows (*Alexanders saga*, 1925, ch. 1, pp. 15–16). By contrast, Kirialax's visit to the city is a moment of historical reflection rather than inspiration, in which the narrator offers two different accounts of Ektor's death, neither of which are particularly flattering explanations of the Greek victory.[42] Rather than seeking to emulate the conquering ethic of his ancestors like Alexander had, Kirialax learns about the past; he dispassionately examines the site and moves on, returning to Friggia to fight a battle which ends in reconciliation rather than conquest.

Similar transformations occur in the other places he visits. The description of Jerusalem is based on a text written during the crusades of the twelfth century, but, as Alenka Divjak shows, the narrative's emphasis is on Kirialax's own spiritual advancement and lacks the "crusading spirit" which pervades most saga accounts of such journeys (Divjak 2009, 193–219). As in Troy, his visit to paradisiacal India evokes that of Alexander but, again, the saga is less interested in having its hero dominate than it is in India's many sights, scents, and exotic inhabitants, one of whom (a Griffin) makes it clear that Kirialax is not welcome and prompts his rapid departure (Divjak 2009, 220–240). By the end of his journey, Kirialax has become, as Barnes (2014, 71) writes, a master of the world "through the explorer's gaze rather than the conqueror's sword". He looks upon the Pillars of Hercules, which are so great "sem uarla hafi matt mannligr kraptr þui orka" (589a, fol. 19^{v}, ll. 21–22; *Kirialax saga*, 1917, p. 72) (that human power hardly could have made

40 For a detailed discussion, see Divjak 2009, 118–261. For a list of places where a source is directly named, see Cook 1985, 306–307.

41 *Alexanders saga* is the Norse translation of Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis*. Its earliest manuscript is AM 519a 4to (1270–1290). It is sometimes counted among the translated *riddarasögur*: Clunies Ross 2010, 31–32; Glauser 2005, 374.

42 On the sources of the two interpretations, see Cook 1985, 315–317; Divjak 2009, 134–136.

them). Humbled by the majesty of God, he returns home, overwriting the imperial successes of the pagan Alexander with his own more modest and non-violent scholarly ones.

This same ethic comes through in the events before and after the journey, in which marriage agreements are used to acquire power. These are usually preceded by demonstrations of martial skill that solidify both parties' status as equals and create opportunities for them to demonstrate courtly restraint. Kirialax's father Laicus embodies these ideals in his pursuit of Mathidia, princess of Syria: after being rejected by her father, he attacks and captures her brother Eggias. However, he chooses to spare Eggias's life and thus ingratiates himself with Mathidia's family. At the wedding, Eggias extolls the virtues of his captor, telling his father's court that Laicus fought "eigi sem grimmr uikingr helldr sem hæuerskr haufdingi" (589a, fol. 3^{v}, ll. 1–2; *Kirialax saga*, 1917, p. 8) (not as a cruel Viking, but as a well-mannered chieftain). Kirialax's own marriage negotiations are even more well-mannered: they take the form of a tournament and result in Kirialax's acquisition both of his desired wife and the title of *stókonungr*.

An explicit comparison is made between the code of behaviour these men follow and that depicted in the translated *riddarasögur*, with the former positioned as superior. Direct reference is made to the British King Arthur in a narratorial aside after Kirialax's wedding: while Kirialax had been travelling the world and negotiating his marriage, it is said that Arthur, an imperial conqueror, had been plundering "á Italiam og uann under sig, alla nordur álfu heimsinns. Og setti uyda jfir landid sinna kappa og haufdingia" (AM 532 4to, fol. 58^{r}, ll. 7–9; *Kirialax saga*, 1917, p. 89) (in Italy and gained for himself all the northern hemisphere and appointed across the land his champions and chieftains).[43] Another comparison is made implicitly when the saga's attention turns to the next generation. In typical Arthurian fashion, an unknown knight named Kvintatus arrives unannounced on Christmas Eve, and Kirialax's son Vallterus challenges him to a joust (Barnes 2014, 180).[44] Kvintatus has great skill but little pride and, after they have each knocked

43 Arthur and Emperor Leo are also said to be contemporaries in *Breta sögur* (*Breta sǫgur*, 2014, pp. 76, 78, and 86). *Breta sögur*, an adaptation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, is extant in two fourteenth-century redactions: a shorter one in AM 544 4to (Hauksbók, 1290–1360) and longer one in AM 573 4to (1325–1375). Black's edition is based on the shorter version.

44 It is common in the translated *riddarasögur* for significant events to happen on or around Christian feast days. For example, see *Ívens saga*, 1999, p. 38; *Möttuls saga*, 1999, ch. 2, p. 8; *Erex saga*, 1999, ch. 14, p. 258. Holm perg 6 4to (1400–1425) contains the oldest witness of *Ívens saga* and a fragment of *Möttuls saga*. Paper copies were made of the latter when it was complete in the seventeenth century (AM 179 fol, 1625–1672, and AM 181β fol, 1638–1652). Kalinke's editions of these sagas are based on Holm perg 6 4to and AM 179 fol respectively. *Erex saga* is extant in full

the other from their horse, they become compatriots with Vallterus proclaiming that "margir menn meigi fá, frábærann riddaraskap, og at giorfi, og filgir þar med hræsne, og metnadur, kappgirne, og jfirbod [. . .] Enn þessi riddari, er so kurteys, og suo lytilátur, hæuerskur og hlutdeilinn" (AM 532 4to, fols 63^{v}, l. 20 – 64^{r}, l. 6; *Kirialax saga*, 1917, p. 99) (many men might gain surpassing knighthood and accomplishment and boasting and pride, energy and authority accompany such traits [. . .] But this knight is so courteous and so humble, well-mannered and considerate). As Barnes (2014, 179–180) argues, this concluding storyline "recasts the Byzantine court in the style of Camelot", leaving audiences with "the image of a harmonious brotherhood of knights", displacing Arthur as the sole figurehead of a knightly roundtable.

This recasting is furthered by the saga's liberal use of courtly lexis, which has its roots in the translated *riddarasögur*. Kirialax is the picture of courtly perfection: as well as mastering the liberal arts, he practices "skiot ok skylmingar turniment ok taflspeki sund ok sigur fimi ok allz kynz riddarligar listir" (589a, fol. 5^{r}, ll. 6–7; *Kirialax saga*, 1917, pp. 13–14) (shooting and fencing, the tournament and the skill of board-game-playing, swimming, the skill of winning victory, and all kinds of knightly skills).[45] The same can be said of his two sons who begin "ad skióta og skilmast, og ad ryda j Turniment" (AM 532 4to, fol. 59^{v}, l. 4; *Kirialax saga*, 1917, pp. 91–92) (to shoot and fence and ride in tournaments) as soon as they are of a suitable age. Their participation in the culture of the translated *riddarasögur* is signalled also by the numerous lavish feasts and extravagant courtly entertainments they enjoy.[46] When Kirialax marries Florencia, for example, "ǫll strætinn hlioda med sætum Saung hliödum, allra handa Saungfæra" (AM 532 4to, fol. 56^{r}, ll. 9–11; *Kirialax saga*, 1917, p. 86) (all the streets filled up with the sound of sweet song and all kinds of instruments),[47] and they were served "fleire enn einn fáuys

only in two seventeenth-century paper manuscripts: Holm papp 46 fol (*c.* 1690) and AM 181b fol (also based on Holm perg 6 4to when it was complete), which Kalinke's edition is based on.

45 Compare *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, 1999, ch. 17, p. 50; *Gvímars saga*, 1979, ch. 1, pp. 121–122. The earliest manuscripts of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* are fragments from the fifteenth century, and the earliest full version is the seventeenth-century paper manuscript AM 543 4to (1600–1699), which Jorgensen's edition is based on. The only extant version of *Gvímars saga*, a translation of Marie de France's *Guigemar*, is in Lbs 840 4to (1737). However, the translation is likely considerably older. See further Kalinke 1980.

46 For example, see *Erex saga*, 1999, ch. 6, pp. 234–36; *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, 1999, ch. 3, p. 32; *Strengleikar*, 1979, pp. 4–6. With the exception of *Gvímars saga* in Lbs 840 4to, the *Strengleikar* are preserved in only one medieval Norwegian manuscript (De la Gardie 4–7, 1250–1270), which formerly also included the fragment AM 666 b 4to. On the *Strengleikar* manuscripts, see Aðalheiður Guðmundsson 2014, 120–124.

47 *Saungfæra* is likely a scribal error which should read *hljóðfæri*.

madur, fáe greint, Og hier med vijn piment og claret: og grasadur miǫdur" (AM 532 4to, fol. 57^{r}, ll. 11–12; *Kirialax saga*, 1917, pp. 87–88) (more than a foolish man can recount, and in addition wine, spiced wine and claret and herb-flavoured mead).[48]

There are, by contrast, only a handful of allusions in *Kirialax saga* to anything resembling traditional *fornaldarsaga* material. The first occurs in a contextual narratorial aside where two figures are mentioned who also appear in Norse legend: Þíðrekr (Theoderic) and Atli (Attila).[49] The information about them, however, derives from less sympathetic Latin historical traditions: the narrator explains that Þíðrekr had just conquered Rome, converted the city to Arianism and killed Symmachus, Boethius, and the pope, while Atli has captured Ursula, an English princess, and had her beheaded.[50] The second reference to the north occurs when Kirialax is in Sicily, and we are told that "komen af nordr halfu heimsens uikingr sa er egenius het" (589a, fol. 15^{v}, ll. 26–27; *Kirialax saga*, 1917, pp. 57–58) (from the northern half of the world came that Viking who is called Eugenius) to launch a hostile attack on the island's king. In these two asides, we get glimpses of the barbaric, politically volatile, pagan world that exists to Kirialax's north.

3.1.2 *Samsons saga fagra*

The next saga in the compilation is an Icelandic prequel to *Möttuls saga* (adapted from the French poem *Le lai du cort mantel*), which makes a jump back in time from the Arthurian age of Kirialax to provide an origin story for the magic mantle that ends up at Arthur's court. In this text, as in *Kirialax saga*, the world of Scandinavian legend is diametrically opposed to the courtly culture associated with the translated *riddarasögur*.

Samsons saga fagra falls in two clear parts. The first deals with the English prince Samson, son of an earlier King Artús (Arthur), whose courtship of the Irish princess Valentína is obstructed by the conniving thief Kvintalín who attempts to

48 The scribe seems to have made some spelling mistakes here (which I have amended), writing 'priment' instead of 'piment' and 'clarent' instead of 'claret'.

49 Both appear together in *Þiðreks saga af Bern* and *Guðrúnarkviða in þriðja*, while Atli (brother of Brynhildr) features in several other eddic poems and *Völsunga saga*: *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, 1905–1911; *Edda*, 1983, pp. 199, 206, 212–216, 228–230, 232–233, 237–239, 240–263, 270; *Vǫlsunga saga*, 1965, chs. 26–40, pp. 44–73. *Þiðreks saga af Bern*'s oldest manuscript is Holm perg 4 fol (1275–1300), which Bertelsen's edition is based on. *Völsunga saga* is preserved in only one medieval manuscript (NKS 1824b 4to, 1400–1425). The eddic poems cited here appear only in the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda (GKS 2365 4to, 1260–1280).

50 On the sources, see Divjak 2009, 173–174, 185–193.

capture her. Valentína is rescued by the widowed Ólympía of Bretland (Britain or Wales), a character seemingly inspired by the Arthurian fey (Lockley 1979, lv–lix), and finds refuge at her castle. In his attempts to find her, Samson (who is also tricked by Kvintalín) finds refuge with Ólympía too and is reunited with Valentína. Ólympía then gives Kvintalín an opportunity to redeem himself, sending him on a quest to bring them a precious cloth made by four *álfkonur* – the mantle of *Möttuls saga*. The second part of the saga provides context for this quest. It centres on the life of a certain Sigurðr, son of Goðmundr of Glæsisvellir, who, via friendship, violence, and trickery, grows up to become the King of Jötunheimar and owner of the mantle. At Sigurðr's wedding, Kvintalín manages to steal the mantle (killing Sigurðr) and returns to England to present it to Samson. The saga ends with a series of peaceful marriage alliances.

The saga's two-part structure juxtaposes two geographically distinct narrative worlds in the north of Europe: the saga's England and Bretland are inflected by the Matter of Britain whereas the far north evokes the *fornaldarsögur* (Lockley 1979, clxxix–clxxxviii; Torfi H. Tulinius 1990, 147–149). The former locations share in *Kirialax saga*'s courtly culture, as is evident from the protagonists' non-Norse names and chivalric character descriptions. Samson is "mikill og sterkur fryedur synum kurteis og [j allri medferd], vinsæll og trulindur og skarz *madr* mikill" (AM 181b fol, fol. 6^{v}, ll. 2.27–29; *Samsons saga fagra*, 1953, ch. 1, p. 1) (tall and strong, handsome to look at, courteous and mannerly, popular and faithful, and a very well-dressed man),[51] who learned "jþrottir [. . .] ok riddara skap" (AM 181b fol, fol. 6^{v}, ll. 2.50–51; *Samsons saga fagra*, 1953, ch. 1, p. 2) (sports [. . .] and knightly skills) from a knight named Salmon. His sister Grega is "bædi fogur og kurteis lærd og mentud a flestar handirder þær ed jungfrum voru tydar" (AM 181b fol, fol. 6^{v} ll. 2.34–36; *Samsons saga fagra*, 1953, ch. 1, p. 1) (both fair and courteous, learned and well-versed in most of the skills that young ladies used to practice), and Valentína is much the same. This society's elite take part in courtly pursuits, such as "tafl og burtreyder skot og skylmingar" (AM 181b fol, fol. 9^{r}, ll. 2.24–25; *Samsons saga fagra*, 1953, ch. 9, p. 19) (board games and jousting, shooting and fencing), and Samson is captured by Kvintalín while pursuing "einn fagrann hiort j einu riodri, suo ad alldri sa hann annann slykann" (AM 181b fol, fol. 9^{v}, ll. 1.23–25; *Samsons saga fagra*, 1953, ch. 10, p. 19) (a fair hart in a glade, such that he had never seen the like), in a hunt similar to that which occurs in *Erex saga* and the translated *lais Guiamar* and *Grelent* (*Erex saga*, 1999, pp. 222–224; *Strengleikar*, 1979,

51 The scribe seems to have made an error when writing the word 'fryedur', which is particularly unclear. There also seems to be a scribal error in l. 28 where elsewhere is written 'j allri medferd'.

pp. 14 and 286; Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2014, 129). As in Kirialax's Constantinople, the elite of this court prefer peaceful conflict resolution to open violence: the saga opens with a disagreement between Arthur and the Irish King Garlant, which is quickly resolved, and the kings "hieldu þeir sidan vel syna sætt og kurteisliga" (AM 181b fol, fol. 7^{r}, ll. 1.27–28; *Samsons saga fagra*, 1953, ch. 1, p. 3) (kept their agreement thereafter well and courteously).

The northern world of the saga's second half is, by contrast, distinctly 'uncourtly' and instead of chivalric men and women is inhabited by "troll ok ouettir" (589b, fol. 3^{r}, ll. 31–32; *Samsons saga fagra*, 1953, ch. 16, p. 31) (trolls and monsters). This half begins with an encyclopaedic description of the far north that fuses legend, traditional geographical knowledge, and Latin learning to provide a counterpart to *Kirialax saga*'s learned tour of the south (Simek 1986, 259–264). It describes the relative positions of Glæsisvellir, Risaland, Jötunheimar, Greenland, and Svalbard, as well as some of the non-human tribes that live there. This marginal region is ruled by the *jötnar* who are familiar from myth: their King Skýmir seems to be an invention of the saga compiler, using the homonym of the mythlogical Útgarða-Loki (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, 2005, pp. 37–43; Lockley 1979, lx),[52] but King Goðmundr of Glæsisvellir is a figure that recurs in several texts and seems to have been associated with his own specific traditions (Grant and Hui 2020; Lockley 1979, pp. lxxv–lxxxiv). This world of giants is more barbaric than the south: child exposure is an accepted practice and so Sigurðr is abandoned and fostered by two peasants.[53] In stark contrast to Samson who is a "skarzs madr mikill" (AM 181b fol, fol. 6^{v}, ll. 2.29; *Samsons saga fagra*, 1953, ch. 1, p. 1) (a very well-dressed man), Sigurðr grows up "[illa] settr at klædum, hempa uar gior af honum af ulfallda hare ok ofen sem beckflota haukulskuor á fotum ur bolrefs skinni lodnu kylfu i hendu" (589b, fol. 4^{r}, ll. 7–8; *Samsons saga fagra*, 1953, ch. 18, p. 35) (poorly clothed. A robe was made for him out of camel hair and woven like a bench cover [with] over-shoes on his feet made out of hairy fox skin, [and he] carried a club).[54] He goes on to become a Viking raider who uses grotesque violence to deal with conflict: after killing the son of Skýmir, he appears to agree to a truce, but

52 *Gylfaginning* is preserved in three vellum manuscripts which do not differ significantly: De la Gardie 11 (Codex Upsaliensis, 1300–1325); GKS 2367 4to (Codex Regius, 1300–1325); and AM 242 fol (Codex Wormianus, *c.* 1350), as well as one paper manuscript, Traj 1374 4to (Codex Trajectinus, *c.* 1595), which is believed to be a copy of a now-lost medieval vellum closely related to the Codex Regius. Faulkes's edition is based on the Codex Regius version.

53 On child exposure, see Jochens 2015, 85–89.

54 This page is very damaged so I have transcribed it with the assistance of Wilson's edition. The scribe wrote 'uhonum' instead of 'honum', which I have corrected. See Wilson's notes on this error.

when the king reaches out to shake his hand, Sigurðr "reidde hann upp stafinn ok rak uid eyra skrymi suo hausinn klofnade. enn augun hrutu burt ur honum" (AM 343a 4to, fol. 13^{r}, ll. 19–20; *Samsons saga fagra*, 1953, ch. 22, pp. 42–43) (picked up the staff and drove it into Skýmir's ear so that his skull split and his eyes flew out of his head).

The barbaric north does, however, encroach on the courtly south in the character of Kvintalín – the son of a miller and a *gyðja* (sea-ogress) – and a stone-dwelling dwarf named Grelent, a stock *fornaldarsaga* character.[55] Kvintalín is not at home in the royal courts but rather "lá ute i skogum" (589b, fol. 1^{r}, l. 1; *Samsons saga fagra*, 1953, ch. 3, p. 7) (resided out in the woods), where he lures noble women to him by playing a magic harp. Kvintalín is a threat to Samson's society: by stealing women and imperilling their favoured model of class-exclusive dynastic politics, he threatens not only Samson's union with Valentína, but the stability of their entire class. And as Torfi H. Tulinius (1990, 148) observes, it is precisely that which makes him an outcast in the south (his comfort with violence and skill in woman-theft) that makes him an adept navigator of Jötunheimar. There, he enacts a mythological story pattern to steal the mantle: he disguises himself as Sigurðr's bride, evoking *Þrymskviða*'s account of Þórr's journey to the court of the *jötunn* Þrymr (Lockley 1979, xcvi; *Edda*, 1983, pp. 111–115).

The magic mantle that Kvintalín brings back to Samson's circle neatly symbolises their success in protecting themselves from the threat which the thief poses. In *Möttuls saga*, the mantle (which reveals women's infidelity) is a destabilising object: one after the other, the women of Arthur's court try it on and are all found morally wanting. In *Samsons saga fagra*, the mantle is given additional powers: it "birti fals epter konum þeim sem falsat hofdu bændr sina edur meyiar þær sem odyggiliga hofdu heima setit" (AM 343a 4to, fol. 12^{v}, ll. 15–16; *Samsons saga fagra*, 1953, ch. 20, p. 40) (illuminated the deceit of women that had been untrue to their husbands, or maidens who had not loyally stayed at home). Later it is added that "ef þiofur klædizt stickiunni þa fiell hun a jord" (AM 343a 4to, fol. 13^{v}, ll. 10; *Samsons saga fagra*, 1953, ch. 24, p. 44) (if a thief dressed in the cloth it fell to the ground). The mantle threatens to reveal those who pose a danger to the stability of the nobility – unfaithful women who imperil lines of descent and thieves that steal their resources. In this saga its testing serves the inverse function to that in *Möttuls saga*: when Valentína tries it on and it fits her perfectly, it does not bring shame on herself and Samson, but rather evidences the moral superiority of her class in comparison with the mythologically-inflected woman-thief who had attempted to kidnap her.

55 This is a common saga motif, variations of which appear in myth. See Boberg 1966, 109–110.

However, the mantle's origins in Jötunheimar complicate the saga's otherwise dualistic relation between courtly society and the myth and legends associated with the far north. As Clunies Ross (1994, 103–143) has shown, the primary source of conflict in Norse myth is the state of "negative reciprocity" between the *jötnar* and the gods, in which the transfer of resources goes, for the most part, in one direction: from the intellectually inferior *jötnar* to the quick-witted *æsir*, the power of the latter being dependent on their extraction of resources from the former. By placing Samson's elite in opposition to the *jötnar* and making them dependent on a powerful magical object that the *jötnar* possess, Samson's aristocracy are implied to be the *Æsir*-equivalent of this saga world. The folkloric Kvintalín is an additional intermediary and a convenient scapegoat through which the unsavoury aspects of the *Æsir* can be separated from the likes of Samson and Ólympía, whose chosen method of neutralisation is diplomacy rather than violence. But by the end of the text, their society is, nevertheless in possession of (and arguably dependent on) a magic object that was made in Jötunheimar.

3.1.3 *Valdimars saga*

The next text takes place in Saxland at an unspecified point in time. It begins with the hero of the saga, prince Valdimarr, watching as his sister Marmória is abducted by a *flugdreki* (dragon) at his coming-of-age tournament. Valdimarr travels to Risaland in pursuit of her where a family of *risar* (giants) – Alba, her brother Nissus, their father Aper, and grandmother Nigra – help him save Marmória from the clutches of queen Lúpa (who had taken the dragon form) along with her step-children, Blabus and Florida. The successful rescue mission is followed by a series of marriages.

Valdimarr and his sister are participants in the same *riddarasaga*-inflected courtly culture as Samson and Kirialax. In addition to having jousting mark Valdimarr's entry into manhood,[56] this is signalled by their stereotyped introductions: Valdimarr "[uar stor ok] sterkr ok uænn ok aungum likr at iþrottum eigi at eins um s[axland helldr] fannzt eigi hans liki i nordr hallfuni" (589c, fol. 1^{r}, ll. 3–4; *Valdimars saga*, 1962, ch. 1, p. 53) (was tall and strong and beautiful and [there was] no one alike in skills not only throughout Saxland, rather his equal could not be found in the northern hemisphere),[57] while Marmória "bar suo skiæra asionu at

56 There is a comparable scene in *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, 1999, ch. 4, pp. 32–34.
57 This page is very damaged.

eingen þessa heims fegurd matte likiazt uid hennar liosa likama" (589c, fol. 1r, ll. 5–7; *Valdimars saga*, 1962, ch. 1, p. 53) (had such a shining appearance that no one in this world may compare in beauty with her brightness). The force which threatens their society is their stepmother Lúpa (a stock villain in Icelandic folklore) whose shapeshifting,[58] skill in "trolldomi" (589c, fol. 4^{r}, l. 11; *Valdimars saga*, 1962, ch. 1, p. 63) (magic),[59] and position as the leader of a group who "uar trollum likara en menszkum monum" (589c, fol. 3^{v}, l. 6; *Valdimars saga*, 1962, ch. 1 p. 61) (were more like trolls than men) clearly align her with evil. Like Kvintalín, she threatens the stability of the elite by stealing one of their most important resources – an unmarried woman.

But whereas in *Samsons saga fagra*, giants represent the antithesis of courtly culture, in this text a (heavily adapted) mythological paradigm is instead used to bring them in its service. This saga's happy ending comes about not because of the courtly morals of an Arthurian character like Ólympía, but because of the unconditional support shown to Valdimarr by the mythologically- and folklorically-aligned family of *risar* (giants). This is spearheaded by Alba who is a derivation of the traditional story pattern known as the 'Helpful Giantess' or 'Affair with the Giantess', which finds expression in the myths about Þórr's visit to the court of the giant Geirröðr and Óðinn's sexual liaisons with giantesses such as Gunnlöð (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda, I*, 1998, pp. 3–4 and 24–30).[60] As both pseudo-mothers and lovers to their chosen heroes, 'Helpful Giantesses' such as these, as well as their

58 Stories about evil stepmothers seem to have been circulating at least as early as the beginning of the thirteenth century when Karl Jónsson wrote in *Sverris saga* that the eponymous king's journey through Värmland was like "i fornu*m* sogu*m* er sagt at verit hæfði. þa er k*onun*ga born urðo fyr*ir* stiup-mæðra skopu*m*" (*Sverris saga*, 1981, ch. 7, p. 7) (what is said in old sagas about kings' children who were put under step-mothers' curses). See further Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 2003, 79 and 227–247; Boberg 1966, 140. *Sverris saga* is extant in manuscripts from the early fourteenth century in two groups: A, which is represented by AM 327 4to (1290–1310) only and which is quoted here, and B, which includes all other versions, the oldest of which is AM 47 fol (1300–1325), where this line also appears.

59 As Nicholas Meylan (2014, 35) writes, the term *trolldómr* is "inherently condemnatory and was used in contexts where magic was vigorously denounced".

60 This section of *Snorra Edda*, *Skáldskaparmál*, varies in detail and arrangement more than the Prologue and *Gylfaginning* in its medieval manuscripts, but not to the extent that it is necessary to discuss here. Faulkes's edition is based on the Codex Regius version but the same stories are recounted in the Codex Upsaliensis and Codex Wormianus versions: Snorri Sturluson, *The Uppsala Edda*, 2012, pp. 88 and 94–96; Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, 1924, pp. 53–55 and 65–68. McKinnell (2005, 147–171 and 181–184) provides an overview of these narratives and a psychological reading. Their saga reflexes have been the subject of much discussion: e.g. Ellis 1941; Gallo 2006; Jóhanna Katrín Friðrikdsóttir 2013, 73–76; Kroesen 1996, 57–71; McKinnell 2005, 172–180 and 184–195; Roby 2020.

various saga counterparts, have been argued to play an important role in their male hero's psychological development (e.g. Hansen 2009). But here, the significance of the paradigm goes beyond the individual: by bringing about Marmória's safe return, Alba plays a larger role in protecting the stability of the society from which Marmória comes. Thus Alba is the total opposite of *Samsons saga fagra*'s Kvintalín; rather than disrupting noble lines of descent, she is committed to reinforcing them. Direct comparison between her family and Kvintalín is suggested by the reappearance of the magic-harp that Kvintalín had used to lure in noble women but which is used by Nissus to lure Florida and Marmória away from Lúpa to safety.[61] The difference between the texts goes even further: it is not merely one *risi* family that aids Valdimarr, but they also enlist the support of the "allra trolla þing" (589c, fol. 7^{r}, ll. 18; *Valdimars saga*, 1962, ch. 2, p. 73) (assembly of all trolls), who travel to the final battle on stone boats,[62] bringing with them "margan tuihaufdadan iotun" (589c, fol. 7^{r}, ll. 21–22; *Valdimars saga*, 1962, ch. 2, p. 73) (many two-headed *jötnar*). Whereas in *Samsons saga fagra* the giants of myth and folklore had threatened courtly society, here they flock in large numbers to protect it.

The reformulation of this traditional paradigm does require some changes: although the *risi*-family resemble the *jötnar*, they have different intertextual connections. Whereas the *jötnar* derive from myth, the earliest appearances of the term *risi* are in translated works where they denote figures of non-Scandinavian origin (Grant 2019, 84–90). Those of *Valdimars saga* are also made distinct by the introduction of noble blood into their family line: Aper reveals at the end of the saga that Alba's mother was the daughter of Gallo, King of Småland, but "sokti modir min hana á þann hatt sem lupa sokti marmoriu" (589c, fol. 8^{r}, ll. 20–21; *Valdimars saga*, 1962, ch. 3, p. 76) (my mother captured her in the same way that Lúpa captured Marmória). By dint of her semi-noble birth, Alba does not belong in woods and caves like her grandmother, but at a royal court – a position she is returned to as a result of her alliance with Valdimarr. With these adaptations, the 'Helpful Giantess' paradigm is refitted for courtly society, and space is made for traditional mythological material to fit within it, albeit in a purely supportive role.

61 Lockley (1979, xciii–xciv) argues both drew on an orally-circulating motif.

62 For other examples of stone boats in Icelandic texts, see Boberg 1966, 118. A stone boat belonging to a *tröllkona* appears in the Icelandic folktale 'Skessan á steinnökkvanum', which also features a *þríhöfðaður þuss* (three-headed ogre): *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri, I*, 1862, pp. 427–431.

3.1.4 *Klári saga*

The focus of the next text remains in Saxland but turns its attention to integrating another problematic aspect of mythological femininity into the world of romance – the *valkyrja* (or Valkyrie).

Klári saga is a bridal-quest narrative that follows Klárus, prince of Saxland, as he attempts to woo and marry Serena, the princess of Frakland (France). Serena is a *meykongr* (maiden-king), a stock 'indigenous' *riddarasaga* character.[63] The sagas in which this figure appears generally follow a standard pattern: the male hero pursues her hand in marriage; she violently spurns his advances and humiliates him; he retaliates, humiliating her in return, until finally she agrees to marry him. Although potential foreign sources for the motif have been mooted (Schlauch 1934, 92–94; Kalinke 1990, 106–108), Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2012, 231–238) has shown how its essential elements – such as the adoption of a male social position and the desire for autonomy in choosing a marriage partner – can be found in various other mythological and legendary figures, such as the shield-maidens/*valkyrjur* Hervǫr, Brynhild/Sigrdrifa, Sigrún, and Sváva, with the narrative pattern reaching its full form (at least in the extant textual record) in the figure of Þornbjörg/Þórbergr in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*.[64]

Klári saga is more explicitly concerned with the subject of gendered elite identity than most *meykongr* narratives. Klárus's quest for Serena is presented as a scholarly task: having mastered the seven liberal arts, Klárus's father seeks out a new tutor for his son – *meistari* Pérús from Arabia.[65] Pérús informs Klárus about the princess Serena and instructs him to compose a poem about her. When this proves too difficult, Klárus decides to woo her instead, setting out on a journey he describes, as Barnes (2014, 75) notes, as a "foruitnis ferd" (589d, fol. 3^{v}, l. 1; *Clarus saga*, 1879, ch. 5, p. 4) (journey of curiosity), akin to Kirialax's world travels. His efforts are thwarted when Serena humiliates him at a feast by conniving to have him spill egg on his clothes. As Kalinke (2008, 19) points out, the skill which Serena accuses him of lacking as a result, *hoftypt* – a Middle Low German loan word referring to education and decorum – is the same skill which Pérús, as

63 The saga's prologue claims it was translated from a Latin text found in France by bishop of Skálholt Jón Halldórsson (1322–1339), but Shaun Hughes (2008) has convincingly argued that it is more likely that Jón composed the text himself.

64 *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* is preserved in full in two redactions: the main manuscript of the shorter version is Holm perg 7 4to and that of the longer is AM 152 fol. On the difference in the characterisation of Þornbjörg/Þórbergr in the two redactions, see Kalinke 2012b, 204–209.

65 There are three other short stories about Pérús, two of which appear in 586: *Af meistara Pero ok hans leikum*, 1882.

typtumeistari, had been enlisted to teach. Serena's great crime, therefore, is not merely that she has humiliated Klárus, but that she has revealed his lack of class-specific knowledge.

The tables are turned in the punishment that Pérús subjects her to following her and Klárus's eventual marriage: in addition to physical abuse, he disguises himself as a "dolg eigi litinn ok helldr osinniligan" (589d, fol. 12^{v}, ll. 17–18; *Clarus saga*, 1879, ch. 16, p. 17) (ogre [who is] not small and rather villainous) who Serena believes to be her husband and puts her through a kind of class-based humiliation, robbing her of her expensive clothes, embarrassing her with his outrageous manners, and having her beg strangers for alms. Serena earns her status as good wife and courtly lady not by cultivating knowledge (the domain of men) but by demonstrating obedience to her husband (Kalinke 2007, 71). The saga ends by stating its moral outright, declaring the pacified Serena to be a "lios dæmi huersu audrum godum konum byriar at hallda dygd med sina eiginbændr edr unnasta" (589d, fol. 17^{r}, ll. 24–26; *Clarus saga*, 1879, ch. 19, p. 24) (clear example of how it behoves other good women to maintain virtue with their husbands or fiancés). By contrast, the induction into elite manhood which Pérús provides for Klárus is one where intellectual, physical, and sexual control are bound together.

Here, as in the previous two sagas, we see a figure derived from legendary/mythological tradition – a later reflex of the *valkyrja* – brought into contact with courtly culture. The result is to reinforce the ideal models of elite femininity and masculinity found in the texts discussed above (Bagerius 2009, 127–130; Glauser 1983, 202–207; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, 116–126). For women, the edges of the autonomous *valkyrja*-figure who wishes to choose her own husband are softened, and, for men, elite and explicitly foreign manners and knowledge are shown to be essential tools of domination. Serena's defeat and punishment represent the triumph of courtly society over the subversive femininity that the *valkyrja* represents; in the story of her taming, this aspect of myth is shown to be incompatible with the new, distinctly foreign, elite order.

3.1.5 *Ektors saga*

The final saga in the first half of the manuscript provides an historical perspective on the courtly culture explored in the texts so far and, like *Kirialax saga*, contains very little material derived from legend or folklore. It takes place in the eastern Mediterranean, several generations after the fall of Troy, and recounts the deeds of one of King Priam's descendants, Ektor (son of King Karnotius of Tyrkland (Turkey)) and his band of six knights: Vernacius, Florencius, Fennacius, Alanus, Trancival, and Aprival. Although the saga is very long, its seven-part episodic

plot is quite simple. Following a conversation about their valiant ancestors, the knights go out to test their "riddaraskapar" (589d, fol. 20^{r}, l. 27; *Ectors saga*, 1962, ch. 4, p. 90) (courtly prowess) and achieve comparable renown, with each episode following one of them.[66] The final two episodes take the heroes to Mesopotanea (Mesopotamia), which is ruled by another of Priam's descendants, Troilis, who captures Aprival. The knights then wage war against Troilis and capture his son Eneas. Troilis's daughter, Trobil, travels to Tyrkland to negotiate his release, and agrees to marry Ektor in return. The saga concludes with each of the knights marrying other noble women and becoming kings themselves.

The principal effect of *Ektors saga* is to overwrite the legacy of Troy's destruction with a military victory. This legacy was well known across Europe from *Daretis Phrygii De Excidio Troiae Historia*, which was adapted into the Icelandic *Trójumanna saga* in the thirteenth century.[67] *Ektors saga* is positioned as a continuation of that narrative in its opening scene. In a play on one in *Trójumanna saga*, Ektor's mother is visited in a dream by the historic Ektor (Hector), and he tells her to name her son after himself (Barnes 2014, 92; *Trójumanna saga*, 1963, p. 9).[68] However, the young prince Ektor does not just take up his namesake's legacy: when his father dubs him as a knight he is also given a shield owned by Ektor's killer – the Greek Akillas (Achilles). And it is both these heroes, and two others, whose memory he and his compatriots summon before setting out on their individual quests: "fyrst hinn sterka ektor ok sidan agium ok akillam her med nefndu þeir hinn sterka herculem" (589d, fol. 20^{r}, ll. 10–11; *Ectors saga*, 1962, ch. 4, p. 89) (first the strong Ektor and then Ajax and Akillas, as well as the one they named the strong Hercules). Thus the dynasty-consolidating marriage between two branches of Priam's descendants with which the saga concludes, not only "strengthens the ongoing course of Trojan history" (Barnes 2014, 93), but it also updates it, constructing a new vision of the classical world in which violence is directed not towards those within the elite (i.e. the Greeks), but those outside it (the various monsters encountered by the knights on their quests).

66 The text is quite damaged on this page. Glauser (1983, 149–158) provides a structural reading of these episodes.

67 *Trójumanna saga* is mentioned directly by the narrator in the saga's epilogue, which I discuss in Chapter 7. It is extant in three redactions that vary in detail. The α-redaction is represented by the fragment AM 598 II α4to (1490–1510) and later paper manuscripts; the β-redaction is represented by AM 573 4to (1330–1375), the fragment AM 598 II β4to (1300–1350), and several Swedish transcripts of the now-lost Ormsbók; and the third redaction is AM 544 4to (Hauksbók), which contains a shortened version.

68 This reference is to the Hauksbók version.

And indeed, it is not within the mould of the classical Ektor or Akillas that this new generation is cast. Although classical in setting, the saga is indebted above all to the Arthurian *riddarasögur* for its centripetal structuring and much of its detail (Kalinke 2012a). It is furnished with the same descriptive formulas found in the sagas before it: Ektor is a typical chivalric hero who is well versed in the liberal arts, can understand "allar tungur þær er um heiminn gangu" (589d 4to, fol. 18^{r}, l. 17; *Ectors saga*, 1962, ch. 1, p. 83) (all the languages around the world), and has a castle built with "dyrligra steinna" (589d, fol. 18^{r}, ll. 21–22; *Ectors saga*, 1962, ch. 1, p. 84) (precious stones). And, much like those in *Kirialax saga*, during the lavish wedding with which the saga concludes, it is said that "allz kynz hliodfærum pipar ok harpar sungu" (589d, fol. 47^{v}, l. 21; *Ectors saga*, 1962, ch. 26, p. 184) (all kinds of instruments, pipes and harps sung),[69] and the guests were served "piment ok klaret" (589d, fol. 48^{r}, l. 1; *Ectors saga*, 1962, ch. 26, p. 184) (spiced wine and claret). Moreover, as Kalinke (2012a) shows, each of the knights' adventures are variations on Arthurian motifs: Vernacius's encounter with a magic spring resembles that of *Ívens saga*'s Kalebrant (1999, pp. 38–44); Florencius's duel with a giant, for which he equips himself with a shield that is inlaid with gold and gemstones is a standard Arthurian affair with several parallels (Kalinke 2012a, 71–73); Fennacius's encounter with the dragon mirrors that in *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* (1999, ch. 36, p. 98); Alanus's violent confrontation with some robbers in the woods conflates two similar ones in *Erex saga* (1999, ch. 7, pp. 238–240 and ch. 10, pp. 248–250); and Trancival's tale features a grateful lion inspired by *Ívens saga* (1999, pp. 80–88).

A handful of *fornaldarsaga*-inspired motifs are also woven into this Matter-of-Britain framework. They appear, for the most part, among the saga's many villains: Vernacius fights *jötnar* and *berserkir*; the Tristram-legend-inspired dragon killed by Fennacius is given a *fornaldarsaga* colouring with the addition of a backstory and hoard that liken him to legendary dragons like Fáfnir; and the two sorcerers who Alanus must overcome are described using Scandinavian vocabulary for magic (Kalinke 2012a, 82): they are "blot menn mikler ok fraumdu seid" (589d, fol. 28^{v}, l. 10; *Ectors saga*, 1962, ch. 9, p. 117) (men who performed great sacrifices and *seiðr*). There is also one instance where a figure familiar from legendary texts assists one of the knights: Fennacius is successful against the above-mentioned dragon because he covers himself in a salve given to him by a dwarf whose daughter he earlier saved from an attempted rape – a variation of the

69 The scribe seems to have made an error here (which I have amended) writing what appears to be "piarpar ok hararpar". Note that the description of the wedding in Loth's edition (based on AM 152 fol) is less detailed than that in 589d and the other fifteenth-century witness, Holm perg 7 fol.

'Helpful Dwarf' motif that appears in numerous medieval Icelandic texts (Boberg 1966, 109–110).[70]

The overall effect of situating this round table in the ruins of Troy is to create an origin for the courtly culture that is colourfully depicted in *Kirialax saga* and to further the displacement of Arthur which had begun there. As is recorded in *Breta sögur*, the Britons were themselves descended from the Trojan Brutus, an ancestor of Aeneas (*Breta sǫgur*, 2014, pp. 2–18). Therefore, the result of placing the courtly culture associated with those Britons earlier on in Troy, is to present it not as an innovation of Arthur, but as an older, fundamentally Trojan legacy. It means that the culture which extends from Kirialax's Constantinople to Samson's pre-Arthurian Britain and Valdimarr and Klárus's Saxland are not derivations of an Arthurian ethos, but developments of a shared Trojan heritage.

3.2 The Legendary Half

In the manuscript's second half, legendary/mythological material becomes dominant. It is introduced by two *þættir* which take place during more recent periods of Scandinavian history. The first (*Stúfs þáttr*) is, as mentioned, not particularly relevant to the concerns of this chapter, but the second deals with the same tensions as the texts explored so far and warrants further discussion.

3.2.1 *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*

Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns is, as Rowe (2003, 100–102) observes, a hybrid not just of *riddarasaga* and *fornaldarsaga* material, but it also adopts a pattern from the *konungasögur* – the "didactic Óláfr-*þáttr*" – to create what is essentially a missionary story about Jötunheimar. It follows a retainer of Óláfr Tryggvason, Þorsteinn bæjarmagn (whose name, 'mansion-might', refers to his large size), as he is sent by the king on three dangerous missions. First, he goes to *undirheimar* (the underworld), following a young boy named Bjalfi who rides on a *krókstaf* (crooked stick) to a royal feast where he steals a magic ring and table cloth and gives them to King Óláfr. Next, Þorsteinn comes upon a dwarf in a forest whose son has been stolen by an eagle. Þorsteinn saves the boy and is rewarded with an enchanted wool shirt and piece of flint. In the third episode, Þorsteinn travels to Jötunheimar where he meets Goðmundr of Glæsisvellir, a *risi* who rules a depen-

70 See also discussion about dwarfs in Chapter 5.4.2.

dency under the auspices of the tyrannical *jötunn* King Geirröðr. The bulk of the *þáttr* details Þorsteinn's efforts to help Goðmundr overthrow Geirröðr and take over rule of Jötunheimar. It concludes with Þorsteinn's brief return to Óláfr's retinue and his marriage to Guðrún, the half-human daughter of a *jötunn* jarl named Agði, after which he (with Óláfr's permission) receives a jarldom from Goðmundr and settles in Jötunheimar himself.

Þorstein's three 'otherworld' adventures all derive from attested folkloric traditions. The story about the boy riding on a *krókstaf* has been convincingly connected by Eldar Heide (2018, 227–232) to an oral elf-queen legend recorded in Iceland in the 1840s, while Þorsteinn's encounter with the dwarf and his son is another example of the 'Helpful Dwarf' motif.[71] The third episode also has its roots in pre-Christian myth and legend (Heide 2018, 220–227; Power 1985, 163–166). It has features in common with the mythological stories concerning Þórr's journeys to the courts of Geirröðr and Útgarða-Loki and closely corresponds to a tale told about Thorkillus (Þorsteinn) in Saxo Grammaticus's twelfth-century *Gesta Danorum* where Guthmundus (Goðmundr) and Getherus (Geirröðr) appear as two giant brothers who rule side-by-side realms (Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*. The History of the Danes, 2015, pp. 599–621).[72] As mentioned above, Goðmundr makes appearances in several other Icelandic legendary texts, one of which (*Helga þáttr Þórissonar*) features a pair of magic horns that also appear in this *þáttr*, hinting at a shared underlying oral tradition (Lockley, 1979, lxxix).

The reformulation of this material chimes with the two mythological paradigms for human-giant relations discussed above. Geirröðr's *jötnar* are explicitly pagan and grotesque: Agði looks "blár sem hel" (589e, fol. 3^{v}, l. 20; *Saga af Þorsteini Bœarmagni*, 1827, ch. 7, p. 189) (blue as Hel), and it is said that "[hann uar] fiolkunnegr ok menn hans uaro tröllum likari en monnum" (589e, fol. 3^{r}, ll. 3–4; *Saga af Þorsteini Bœarmagni*, 1827, ch. 5, pp. 184–185) (he was a sorcerer and his men were more like trolls than human beings). He and his compatriots frequently appeal to Óðinn and Þórr, are violently opposed to Christianity, and the entertainment they favour is a barbaric perversion of typical courtly games, which involves a flaming seal's head rather than a ball. By contrast, Goðmundr is civilised and physically beautiful: he tells Þorsteinn "unum uer illa uid at þiona iotnum" (589e, fol. 2^{v}, l. 22; *Saga af Þorsteini Bœarmagni*, 1827, ch. 5, p. 183) (we are not happy about being ruled by *jötnar*); is said to be "i gullskotnum klædum á bleikum heste" (589e, fol. 2^{v}, l. 5; *Saga af Þorsteini Bœarmagni*, 1827, ch. 5, p. 182) (wearing clothes that were woven with gold and riding a light-coloured horse); "uar

71 See pp. 40–41 above.

72 See p. 32 above.

huitr á skinnzlit" (589e, fol. 3^{v}, l. 21; *Saga af Þorsteini Bœarmagni*, 1827, ch. 8, p. 189) (was fair of complexion); and although he is not a Christian himself, he repeatedly states that he will respect Þorsteinn's faith.

And while the centripetal quest-based structure gives the *þáttr* the feeling of Arthurian romance and recalls the adventures of Ektor's knights, it is not courtly society that the 'Helpful Giant' Goðmundr is enlisted to support, as was the case for *Valdimars saga*'s Alba. Rather, the *risi*'s role is to further the missionary agenda of King Óláfr who, ultimately, is the one responsible for overthrowing Geirröðr. Such is clear from the appeals Þorsteinn makes to "konungs hamingiuna" (589e, fol. 1^{v}, l. 7–8; *Saga af Þorsteini Bœarmagni*, 1827, ch. 2, p. 177) (the king's luck);[73] the thanks and elaborate gift that Goðmundr sends to King Óláfr after Geirröðr has been killed; and the concluding marriage between Þorsteinn and Guðrún, which extends Óláfr's Christian sphere into the land of giants. The effect of this mythologically-infused missionary story is to integrate Jötunheimar into the Christian world – to give it an enduring relevance which need not be maligned by the polemical treatment given to the *jötnar* themselves.

3.2.2 *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*

The manuscript's next three texts take us back to the pre-Christian legendary age and focus on regions that are peripheral to the main Scandinavian kingdoms, depicting them as culturally and politically backward compared with those of the manuscript's first half.

The first of these texts, *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, is set on the far eastern edge of the Viking sphere – the kingdom of "Rusía" (Russia) – where the princesses Brynhildr and Bekkhildr, daughters of King Hertryggr, have been abducted. One day a traveller from Hálogaland named Ásmundr joins Hertryggr's retinue and is quickly dispatched to defend his realm against an attack by Egill from Småland. Instead of going to war, however, the two champions become sworn-brothers and travel together to Jötunheimar in pursuit of Hertryggr's daughters. On their travels, they meet a *kerling* (old woman) named Arinnefja who prepares gruel for them to eat. While it is cooking, each of them tells their *ævisaga* (life-story) and it is revealed that Egill and Arinnefja had previously met. The following morning, Arinnefja tells the sworn-brothers that the princesses were taken by her brothers, two *jötnar* named Gautr and Hildir.[74] With the assis-

73 On Óláfr's 'luck', see Lal 2014.

74 It is worth noting that, as a female, Arinnefja is not a *jötunn* herself (Grant 2019, p. 92).

tance of Arinnefja and her partner Skröggr, the brothers then save Hertryggr's daughters and marry them. Egill marries Bekkhildr to become King of Rusía, and Ásmundr marries Brynhildr. She bears Ásmundr one child, who is later killed by the legendary Starkaðr inn gamli, before dying young herself.[75] Ásmundr then acquires a ship named Gnoð, giving him the nickname Gnoð-Ásmundr, before meeting his end at the hands of Óðinn.[76]

Ásmundr is a hero rooted in legendary tradition, whereas Egill is an innovation of it; this is revealed in their *ævisögur*. Ásmundr's is, in essence, a miniature *fornaldarsaga* and seems to be based on material of some antiquity (Lagerholm 1927, xxiii–xxxi). It tells of his sworn-brotherhood with prince Aran of Tattaríá, then Aran's death and Ásmundr's dealings with his restless corpse, as well as his competition with Aran's uncles for rule over Tattaríá. As Åke Lagerholm (1927, xxiv–xxxi) demonstrates, the story has correspondences with several other texts, suggesting it was put together from material circulating in oral traditions. The most striking parallel is an episode in the *Gesta Danorum* about an undead Aran that relates to two sworn-brothers named Asmundus and Asuitus (Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*. The History of the Danes, 2015, pp. 335–339). Egill's character, by contrast, seems to be an innovation of the saga compiler. It is made up of several stock motifs and its central episode – which details Egill's capture and escape from a giant – seems to have been inspired by the twelfth-century Latin *Dolopathos sive de Rege et Septem Sapientibus* (Gottskálk Jensson 2003, 193–194; 2021, 64–71).

In the creation of a new hero to accompany Ásmundr, a romantic gloss is given to the legendary world that he represents. Such is evident in the scene when they meet, which begins as a hostile encounter between two large forces but turns into a duel between the two individuals. They fight for several days before Ásmundr decides they are equally matched and agrees to enter a sworn-

75 Starkaðr appears in several sources: *Heiðreks saga*, 1924, ch. 1, p. 2 (H-text) and ch. 1, pp. 90–91 (U-text); *Saga Gautreks konungs*, 1830, chs. 3–7, pp. 15–37; Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*. The History of the Danes, 2015, pp. 379–447, 471, 493, 531, 533, 547, 553, 559–573. *Heiðreks saga* is extant in three redactions, most commonly referred to as the R, H, and U versions. The oldest witness, AM 544 4to (Hauksbók), is of the H-text, which is followed by the R-text in GKS 2845 4to (1440–1460), and the U-text in UppsUB R 715 (*c*. 1650); the story about Starkaðr appears in the H and U versions. *Gautreks saga* has a shorter and a longer redaction. The earliest full manuscripts of the shorter (which does not include the Starkaðr story) date from the seventeenth century, and the earliest witness of the longer redaction (cited here) is AM 152 fol. On Starkaðr, see further Hui 2018b, 82–84 and 143–148.

76 At the end of *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra*, it is said that the eponymous hero went on to become the sworn-brother of Gnoð-Ásmundr, although, as Lavender notes in his translation, no mention is made of Illugi in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*: *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra*, 2015, ch. 6, pp. 16–17.

brotherhood, and "takazt þeir þa i hendr ok sueriazt i fostbrædralag eptir fornum sid" (589e, fol. 6^{v}, ll. 21–22; *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, 1927, ch. 4, p. 16) (then they shook hands and swore an oath of brotherhood following the ancient custom). The pair are said to enact an ancient pre-Christian ritual of *fóstbrœðralag* (sworn-brotherhood), which finds more detailed expression in, for example, the famous scene in *Gísla saga Súrssonar* (1929, ch. 6, p. 7) where a patch of turf is raised and blood is shared.[77] But this scene also resonates with those that occur earlier in the manuscript in more courtly settings, such as in the concluding scenes of *Kirialax saga* where Vallterus becomes the companion of the visiting knight Kvintatus. The specificities of this scene are different. The knights of *Kirialax saga* joust on horseback whereas Egill and Ásmundr are considerably less restrained: they wrestle on the ground without their weapons and Ásmundr even threatens to bite Egill's throat. Moreover, while the latter are said to follow *fornum sið*, Vallterus and Kvintatus simply "leggia nu hendur synar samann" and "huer minnest til annars" (AM 532 4to, fol. 64^{r}, ll. 18–20; *Kirialax saga*, 1985, p. 100) (put their hands together [and] each kissed the other). But despite these differences, their resonances nevertheless position the traditional oath that Ásmundr and Egill swear (the bloody details of which are not described) as a northern equivalent to the knightly fraternity on display at the manuscript's Mediterranean courts.[78]

There are other echoes between this saga and those of the manuscript's first half. The disruption to the status quo which sets the narrative in motion (the abduction of Hertryggr's daughters) echoes the opening of *Valdimars saga* and resonates with the fear of woman-theft evident in *Samsons saga fagra*. This saga also concludes in the same way those do: with an order re-establishing wedding that ties together several different kingdoms in a peaceful alliance. There is an echo of the wedding entertainment motif as well: "matti þar sia margan hofmenn ok margskonar hliodfæri" and "uar þar eingi hlutur sparadr af þeim beztum hlutum sem fa kunne i þeim londum" (one could see many courtiers and many kinds of musical instruments [and] there was nothing spared of the best things which could be found in those lands) (589e, fol. 13^{r}, ll. 17–18; *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, 1927, ch. 17, p. 78). But, since this is still the world of Scandinavian legend, the music is complemented by traditional oral storytelling: "þeir asmundr ok egell saugdu fra ferdum sinum ok til sannenda um saugu sina segir

77 *Gísla saga Súrssonar* is extant in two main redactions conventionally named the shorter and longer versions. The shorter is represented by AM 556a 4to (1475–1499) and the longer by paper copies (AM 149 fol, 1690–1697; NKS 1181 fol, 1775–1800) of a lost medieval vellum. This scene appears in both versions.

78 The chivalric colouring given to a 'traditional Viking oath' is much more overt in *Örvar-Odds saga* (Larrington 2008).

suo, at þær være þar badar skinnefia ok arennefia ok saunnudu saugu þeirra" (AM 589e 4to, fol. 13^{r}, ll. 19–21; *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, 1927, ch. 8, pp. 78–79) (Ásmundr and Egill told of their journey and it is said that to prove the truth of their story, both Skinnefja and Arinnefja were there and vouched for their story).

Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana's romanticising of legend is evident in its other adaptations of *fornaldarsaga* material. There are several references to *Völsunga saga*, which have been pointed out by Rowe (2013, 211), such as the names of Hertryggr's daughters, the appearance of a dwarf-smith named Reginn who fixes Egill's sword, and Ásmundr's death at the hands of Óðinn, which is similar to that of *Völsunga saga*'s Sigmundr (*Vǫlsunga saga*, 1965, ch. 11, p. 20). The reference to Ásmundr's death (and to his son's at the hands of Starkaðr) situates the saga firmly in the world of legend, while the treatment of Brynhildr, Bekkhildr, and Reginn demonstrate how different this legendary world is. Although Brynhildr is introduced as a shield-maiden type figure who is well-versed in "riddara iþrottir" (589e, fol. 5^{v}, l. 19; *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, 1927, ch. 1, p. 4) (knightly skills), she is unlike her feud-inciting namesake and plays an entirely passive role as the object of a quest. The figure of Reginn is similarly changed: in *Völsunga saga* he is a maleficent figure who threatens the stability of the elite, whereas in this saga he is nothing more than a dutiful and largely insignificant smith.

The limits of this society's courtly development are, however, illustrated by the heroes' journey to Jötunheimar, which uses the same mythological paradigm of the 'Helpful Giantess' that occurred in *Valdimars saga* but is more limited. Like Alba, Arinnefja is a critical agent in bringing about the return of the princesses to human society, but, unlike her, Arinnefja is herself a daughter of a *jötunn*. Because of this, she must undergo a violent severance from her *jötunn* nature. As Larrington (2015, 66–69) demonstrates, this is the project of her *ævisaga*, in which she undergoes extreme physical trials that transform her from *flagðkona* (troll-woman) to *kerling* (old woman) and prepare her for a new alliance – this time with men. The alliance is symbolised by the act of healing which she performs when she finishes her story: having realised who Egill is, she offers to reattach his hand. She then integrates herself culturally into the heroes' world: at her brothers' wedding (which she goes on to disrupt), she seats herself next to Brynhildr and Bekkhildr, and "hafdi allan setning á þeirra hattum" (589e, fol. 12^{r}, ll. 20–21; *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, 1927, ch. 15, p. 72) (directed them in their manners). As a result, she is rewarded with upward social movement and given rule of Jötunheimar after her brothers have been killed. But while Arinnefja and her daughter are welcome guests at the concluding wedding, they are not included in the marriage alliances created there; with the parting gift of meat and butter, they return to Jötunheimar on friendly, but nevertheless

subordinate, terms. As Orning (2009, 734) notes, these friendly relations seem like they are only expected to last a generation, and the marriage alliances are perhaps a precaution against threats that may come from Jötunheimar in the future.

The legendary world constructed as a result is one which is on the brink of change. It is not the dark world plagued by feuding and obstinate women that we find in *Völsunga saga*, nor is it an offshoot of the courtly world that is depicted in *Kirialax saga*. Rather than being ruled by a *stólkonungr*, it is made up of rulers of small holdings on the peripheries of Scandinavia. It is vulnerable to threats from the outside and dependent for its stability on the assistance of a figure from the magically-empowered margin. This assistance is not founded on any kind of political alliance (as in *Samsons saga fagra* and *Valdimars saga*) or colonisation (as in *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*) but is entirely dependent on the personal relationship between Egill and Arinnefja. Nevertheless, with the creation of this alliance, the fragmented legendary world in which the sworn-brothers move takes a step closer towards that of Kirialax. The saga ends with the suggestion of further movement in that direction: with the murder of his son being Starkaðr's "sidazta oskæparverk" (589e, fol. 13^{v}, l. 20; *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, 1927, ch. 18, p. 81) (last crime), the sea-king Ásmundr represents the end of the old order, and his Óðinnic death creates space for the introduction of something new.

3.2.3 *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*

In the next two sagas, which are paired genealogically, attention moves to another two locations within the Scandinavian sphere of influence, Denmark and England, where legendary material dominates.

The first, *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, begins with the Danish King Hringr being killed in a hostile attack by a pair of Vikings named Sóti and Snækoll. One of Hringr's men survives the attack and helps his two surviving children, Hálfdan and Ingibjörg, escape to Bjarmaland. After some time, the siblings go travelling but become lost at sea and run aground in Helluland. Here, they come across two *tröll* who have captured a pair of human twin brothers and their sister: Sigmundr, Sigurðr, and Hildr. Hálfdan kills the *tröll* and saves the siblings, and together they set sail again. They then encounter three further *flagðkonur*, one of whom – the half-human Brana – reveals that she had helped Hálfdan in his earlier encounter. Brana and Hálfdan then kill the entirety of Brana's trollish family and Hálfdan lays with her for several nights, after which she instructs him to travel to England without her and seek the hand of the princess Marsibil. He does as she advises but, following some interference by a king's man named Áki,

Brana travels to England herself to assist him. Hálfdan then returns to Denmark to reclaim his father's kingdom from Sóti who, in response, curses him to forget Marsibil. Brana appears once again and reminds him about his engagement, and Hálfdan travels back to England to marry.

Like several of the texts already discussed, *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*'s plot is dominated by a variation on the traditional 'Helpful Giantess' or 'Affair with Giantess' motif. The role this giantess plays is, however, quite unusual, because Hálfdan is not a brave warrior or valiant knight like the heroes of *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*. Rather, he is a largely helpless young man whose successful transition from exiled prince to powerful king is entirely the result of the efforts of Brana, who intervenes at every moment of crisis to ensure his success. She helps him kill all the *tröll* and *flagðkonur* he encounters; she tells him who he should marry and gives him the tools he needs to succeed (magic herbs, an enchanted mail coat and ring, and a ship she builds herself); when he misplaces his trust in Áki and fails to protect his sister from attempted rape, Brana intervenes with an icy wind that freezes him stiff; and when Áki tries to burn Hálfdan alive, Brana carries him out of the fire herself, berating him with the proverb, "seinnt er hafglapa at snytra" (589e, fol. 18^{v}, ll. 28–29; *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, 1830, ch. 13, p. 585) (slowly does a fool become wise). As Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2013, 76) writes, his many missteps make Hálfdan "one of the most undeserving 'heroes' of Old Norse literature". He is not successful because of his personal qualities, but because he was lucky enough to be 'fostered' by Brana.[79]

The society in which he moves is, moreover, politically unstable and distinctly uncourtly. Its heroes are a far cry from both those of Völsung legend, as the helpless Sigurðr and Sigmundr remind us (Rowe 2013, 206), and the courteous masculinity exhibited by those in *Kirialax saga*. There are faint glimmers of courtly culture present. For example, Ingibjörg is "prydd aullum kuenligum listum suo uar ok skiær hennar ásiona sem skinanda gull" (589e, fol. 14^{r}, ll. 4–5; *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, 1830, ch. 1, p. 559) (adorned with all womanly skills and her appearance was as bright as shining gold). These glimmers are stronger in England where the noble women Marsibil and Alfífa entertain themselves by walking in their private *lundr* (grove);[80] the former is first spotted by Hálfdan while "hun kemdi sier med gullkambi" (589e, fol. 17^{v}, l. 26; *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, 1830, ch. 10, p. 579) (she combed her [hair] with a golden comb); and Hálf-

79 As McKinnell (2009, 213–214) notes, there are several characters who meet unlucky ends that highlight the importance of luck in this saga.

80 On *lundr* as a romance signifier, see Hallberg 1982, 24–25

dan and Áki joust using horses with French names – Lóngant and Spóliant (Kruse 2009, 92).[81] However, this sprinkling of courtly lexis never develops into fully-blown romance convention: Hálfdan does not woo Marsibil but instead uses Brana's magic herbs to induce a pseudo-lovesickness, and his joust with Áki does not end with an agreement of friendship as we might expect – it is simply one blind motif in a protracted antagonism that concludes with Áki's death. And it is in Áki, an attempted rapist, that we find expressed the same threat to the elite (focalised through its women) that was embodied by *Samsons saga fagra*'s Kvintalín, *Valdimars saga*'s Lúpa, and *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*'s Gautr and Hildir. But instead of the monstrous margin, in this saga the threat emanates from within the English elite itself. Finally, although the saga concludes with a three-way wedding that recalls those discussed above, a mere "halfan manud med miklum pris" (589e, fol. 19^{v}, l. 34; *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, 1830, ch. 17, p. 590) (half a month of much splendour) stands in for courtly *strengleikar* and foreign delicacies that are found elsewhere.

3.2.4 *Ála flekks saga*

The next text provides a similarly tumultuous image of legendary England. It begins with Hálfdan and Marsibil's son, King Rikarðr, deciding to have his own son exposed. The abandoned baby is adopted by a poor couple named Gunni and Hildr who name him Áli, but when they bring him some years later to the king's hall, his background is revealed and he returns to live with his royal parents. One day, Áli is cursed by a malevolent *ambátt* (bondwoman) named Blátönn (Blue-tooth) because, she says, Áli "hefir mik alldri kuatt med gódum ordum" (AM 181k fol, fol. 1^{r}, ll. 2.53–54; *Ála flekks saga*, 1927, ch. 4, p. 89) (never greeted me with good words). Blátönn sends him to the forest to become the husband of her sister, the *tröllkona* Nótt. In the forest, Áli meets Nótt's daughter Hlaðgerðr (who has a human father) and she helps him escape. Áli wanders the forest until arriving in Tartaría where he marries its queen Þornbjörg.[82] The couple are followed to their bower by a *þræll* (slave) named Glóðarauga, the brother of Nótt and Blátönn, who turns Áli into a wolf. He is eventually returned to human form by Gunni and Hildr but then has a dream about Nótt in which she curses him again, giving him wounds that can only be healed by her other three brothers, Leggr,

81 I have corrected the scribe's misspelling of *gullkambi* as "gullkamdi".

82 Þornbjörg is a *meykongr*, but Kalinke (1990, 102) describes her as a 'nonfunctional' one because she acquiesces to marriage immediately.

Liðr, and Jötunoxi. Þornbjörg travels to find them, tricks Jötunoxi into killing Nótt and then burns the three of them alive in their hall. The healed Áli then goes to the kingdom of a certain Eiríkr to save Hlaðgerðr from being burnt alive and gives her to the king in marriage. Finally, Áli returns to England and marries Þornbjörg for a second time, taking over the English throne when his father dies.

Uniquely among the manuscript's sagas, *Ála flekks saga* lacks any reference to courtly lexis.[83] Its overall structure seems to derive from oral stories: as Jonathan Y. H. Hui et al. (2018a) have demonstrated, it largely conforms to the folktale type most commonly known as the 'Snow White' story and is the oldest known written version of the tale. The details that furnish this core are, moreover, far from courtly. As discussed in relation to *Samsons saga fagra*, the motif of child exposure and adoption by an older peasant couple is common in medieval Icelandic literature. The family of trolls who plague Áli are also stock figures who are given very typical descriptions: Nótt, for example, lives in a cave and wears an immodest "skinnstacki" which "tok eigi á lendar á bakit" (AM 181k fol, fol. 1^{v}, l. 2.14; *Ála flekks saga*, 1927, ch. 12, p. 93) (skin-cloak [which] did not reach her buttocks at the back).[84] The werewolf episode is a motif familiar from legend and has its roots in pre-Christian beliefs about shapeshifting.[85] Precursors to the dream-wounds are harder to pin down: characters acquire wounds in dreams in a few sagas, but the scene in *Ála flekks saga* has a much closer parallel in the Irish story *Serglige Con Culainn* (Einar Óláfur Sveinsson 1957), which means, as Hui et al. (2018b, 9–10) note, it was probably based on a source (either oral or written) with some connection to the tradition of Cú Chulainn's dream and certainly not from the literary field of romance.

The overall impression of legendary England is, as in *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, one of instability; far from fulfilling the courtly ideal, it has more in common with the barbaric world of *Samsons saga fagra*'s far north. It is a society where superstitious kings practice child exposure, princes are brought up in poverty where they are "illa klæddum" (AM 181k fol, fol. 1^{v}, l. 1.20; *Ála flekks saga*,

83 As Hui et al. (2018b, 4) note, the one exception is the mention of Áli greeting his father 'kurteisliga' (589e 4to, fol. 20^{v}, l. 21; *Ála flekks saga*, 1927, ch. 11, p. 105) (courteously).

84 See further Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2017; Boberg 1966, 118.

85 Although, as Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2007) shows, it seems to have been also influenced by the werewolves of translated literature (such as *Bisclaretz ljóð* in *Strengleikar*), the motif would, I think, have been more familiar to audiences as a standard of the Scandinavian legendary world – the most notable examples appearing in *Vǫlsunga saga*, 1965, ch. 8, pp. 10–12; *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 1960, chs. 18–20, pp. 54–62; *Edda*, 1983, pp. 130–139. Although a version of *Hrólfs saga kraka* seems to have circulated at least as far back as the fifteenth century, the oldest extant manuscripts date from the seventeenth.

1927, ch. 5, p. 90) (poorly-dressed),[86] and rulers are vulnerable to hostile Viking attackers from outside as well as the jealous malice of their own trollish subjects. Combined with the less than flattering portrayal of the English elite which we find in the saga of Áli's grandfather, the overall effect of this saga is to distance England (and, to some extent, Denmark from where Hálfdan originally hailed) from the courtly society found in the manuscript's first half.

3.3 Conclusion

The manuscript begins by outlining a kind of courtly culture comparable to that depicted in the translated *riddarasögur*. The epitome of this culture is, in *Kirialax saga*, placed in a Constantinople that is contemporaneous with the British King Arthur, and the origins of it are traced back to classical Troy in *Ektors saga*. For elite men, the key tenets of this culture are the cultivation of learning and an adherence to a principal of non-violence amongst the elite. Power is obtained primarily through diplomacy and marriage rather than conquest. In the other sagas of the first half, the relationship between this courtly culture and legendary tradition is explored; but rather than the heroes of legend, it is its marginal figures who feature. Some of these figures are incompatible with courtly society and must be overcome by it: the *jötnar* are the antithesis of elite masculinity whereas the *valkyrja*-figure represents the inverse of the pliant courtly woman. There is room, however, within this culture for other figures inspired by legend to play supportive roles. *Valdimars saga*'s Alba brings the narrative fields of legend and romance into contact while maintaining their hierarchical relationship, establishing the latter as the natural and desirable improvement of the former. In *Samsons saga fagra*'s story of the magic mantel, Jötunheimar is also suggested to be a wellspring of magical power that might be utilised in service of courtly society – an idea which is given religious authorisation by *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*.

These texts provide a framework through which to interpret the sagas of the manuscript's second half. In *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, we witness a courtly culture in the making on the Scandinavian periphery. This saga's heroes are drawn from legend but are a step removed from it: Ásmundr seems to be a hero of some antiquity who, with the addition of his sworn-brother Egill, takes on some characteristics of the knights of the manuscripts' first half. Nevertheless, these two heroes navigate an unstable political landscape, rule minor territories, and the peace they establish at the saga's conclusion seems to

86 Compare to the description of Sigurðr quoted on p. 32.

be temporary. The England of *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra* and *Ála flekks saga* is, however, even further from the chivalric ideal, and its inhabitants are a far cry from both the honourable heroes of the south and those of Scandinavian legend. This unstable society, where one small error can result in a chain of life-threatening and chaos-inducing curses, has more in common with *Samsons saga fagra*'s Jötunheimar than *Ektors saga*'s Troy. Thus the stage is set for the manuscript's final two *fornaldarsögur* where the Trojan courtly culture depicted in the first half goes on to find expression in Scandinavia itself.

4 *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*

In the final two sagas of 589a–f, legendary Scandinavia is reimagined to fit within the world of the manuscript's first half. In the first, *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, the north is positioned as part of a Europe-wide Trojan heritage, and the move away from legendary-heroic traditions which had begun in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* is taken a step further. The plot of this saga is relatively straightforward and falls into three main parts. The first describes Sturlaugr's bridal quest and the consequences it has in Norway: Sturlaugr's duels with Kolr and Franmarr and his falling out of favour with King Haraldr. The second part describes his journey to Bjarmaland where he is sent by the king to find an aurochs's horn. The final part details the swearing and completion of a series of Yule oaths by Sturlaugr and his sworn-brothers after they have relocated to Svíþjóð (Sweden).

In my analysis of both this saga and the one after it, I have continued to use Lachmann's intertextual framework with a particular focus on the interaction between *riddarasaga* and legendary material, in addition to considering more specific instances of intertextuality. To do so, I have found it helpful to adopt some of Lachmann's more precise terminology, specifically the distinction she makes between three types of intertextual relationship, which she terms "participation", "troping", and "transformation". She describes the first type, "participation", as "the dialogical sharing in the texts of a culture that occurs in writing" (Lachmann 1997, 17). This is intertextuality as remembering, or reaffirming representations of the past presented in other texts. The second type of intertextuality, "troping", is characterised by the rejection of received narratives; it is a "turning away from the precursor text" (Lachmann 1997, 17). I understand texts which 'trope' to be ones which set themselves up in opposition to their precursors – texts on which they must necessarily draw but which construct a version of history that the new text wishes to supplant. The final type, "transformation", sits somewhere between the two: it "conceals the other texts, veils them, plays with them, renders them unrecognizable, irreverently overturns their oppositions" (Lachmann 1997, 17). This kind of intertextuality is often the result of excerpting parts of texts so that, although being remembered, they are detached from their original contexts and thus fundamentally changed. Transformation is similar to troping in that there is a degree of alteration involved. The key difference between the two lies in the attitude towards the referent: whereas the text that tropes is antagonistic and sets itself up in opposition to its referent text, the text which transforms absorbs the referent into itself in order to reconfigure it and thus also participates in it to some degree.

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As Lachmann notes (1997, 17–18), the different kinds of intertextual relationships are not mutually exclusive. The process of transformation necessitates some degree of both participation and troping – of both accepting parts of a narrative and (whether explicitly or not) rejecting the whole from which they came. In much the same way, acts of participation and troping must also involve a degree of transformation; there is always some recontextualization required which creates new meaning, and the act of rejecting a text also (somewhat paradoxically) serves to remember it in a new (transformed) form. The fluidity of Lachmann's different types is further borne out by the following two chapters, in which I will avoid designating intertextual relationships to wholly one type or another but rather discuss how they tend towards them.

Despite being somewhat vague, I have found these terms useful for identifying the internal conflicts that are at play within the 'memory of literature', and each of them is the focus of one of this chapter's three sections. I first look at how *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*'s very first line participates in the narrative of Norse origins outlined in the Prologue to *Snorra Edda*. I then explore how it 'tropes' the traditional heroic ethics of *Völsunga saga* and *Jómsvíkinga saga* in its first and third parts. Finally, I demonstrate how several intertextual references are brought together in a transformative manner in the central journey to Bjarmaland, which affects a move towards the creation of a 'new' kind of legendary hero who can supplant those that the saga elsewhere rejects. This lays the foundations for the fuller delineation of that hero in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, the subject of Chapter 5.

4.1 The Myth of Trojan Origins

Sturlaugs saga starfsama begins with an intertextual reference that anchors the events which follow within a pre-existing historical framework:

> <A>ll[*ir*] me*nn* þ*ei*r [e*r*] sannf[ro]d[*ir*] eru at u*m* tide*n*di uita þat at G*r*ick*ir ok* Asiam*e*nn bygdu N[or]drlond. h[ofz] þa tu*n*g[a] su e*r* sida[n] dreifdiz u*m* oll lond. F*o*rmadr þ*e*ss folks hiet Odin[*n*] er [m*enn*] telia ætt t*il* (*Sturlaugs saga starfsama.* Version A, 1969, p. 8).[87]
>
> (All people who are truly informed about events know that the Greeks and men of Asia settled the Northlands. The language which originated there later scattered around all countries. The chief of this people was called Óðinn, from whom people trace their lineage.)

87 For quotes that occur during 589a–f's ninth lacuna, I have reproduced Zitzelsberger's transcriptions of AM 335 4to. The [] indicate a 'conjectural editorial addition' in places where the manuscript is unclear and the < > indicate additions where there is deliberately unwritten space. See further Zitzelsberger 1969a, 3–7.

This is a reference to the myth of Trojan origins, which appears in several extant medieval Icelandic texts.[88] Through a play on the similar sounding words *Æsir* and Asia, the Norse pre-Christian gods were, in this myth, euhemerised and their otherworldly abode Ásgarðr given an earthly location in Tyrkland (Turkey). The myth had already been alluded to by Ari Þorgilsson in his genealogy at the end of *Íslendingabók* (written between 1122 and 1113) (Ari Þorgilsson, *Íslendingabók*, 1968, p. 27),[89] and according to Arngrímur Jónsson's sixteenth-century Latin translation, the Óðinn-Asia connection was also made by the compiler of the no-longer-extant *Skjöldunga saga* later in the twelfth century (*Danasaga Arngríms lærða*, 1982, ch. 1, p. 3; Faulkes 1987–1989, 26).[90] But it was in the Prologue to the early thirteenth-century *Snorra Edda* that the narrative took on its fullest form: Óðinn is said to be descended from Þórr, the grandson of Priam, high king of Trója (Troy) and the prophetess Sif.[91] He travels north from Tyrkland to conquer large amounts of territory and establishes three of his sons as kings of Austr Saxaland (East Saxony), Vest-

88 These are the Prologue to *Snorra Edda*, *Heimskringla*'s *Ynglinga saga*, some versions of Óláfr Þórðarson's *Third Grammatical Treatise*, *Sörla þáttr*, *Völsungs rímur*, *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, and *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*. The *Snorra Edda* Prologue manuscripts are discussed below in n. 91. The earliest known manuscript of *Heimskringla* only survives as a fragment (Lbs fragm 82, 1258–1264), but it is known from several seventeenth-century copies made by Ásgeir Jónsson (AM 35 fol, AM 36 fol, and AM 37 fol) before the rest of the manuscript was lost. There are also several other incomplete manuscripts from the fourteenth century which include some variant readings. Of the *Third Grammatical Treatise*'s three medieval witnesses, the myth is evoked in the oldest witness, AM 748 I b 4to (1300–1325), and the Codex Wormianus version, but is omitted in AM 757b 4to (1400–1500). *Sörla þáttr* appears only in GKS 1005 fol (Flateyjarbók, 1387–1394). *Völsungs rímur* are preserved only in AM 604g 4to (1540–1560). *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* and *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinnsonar* are preserved in manuscripts from the fifteenth century, including 586.

89 *Íslendingabók* is only preserved in two seventeenth-century paper manuscripts (AM 113a fol, 1651; AM 113b fol, 1625–1672) copied from a now-lost medieval exemplar.

90 *Skjöldunga saga* is believed to have been originally written in the late twelfth century. The rough contents of the saga are known from Arngrímr Jónsson's sixteenth-century Latin paraphrase, although this has a substantial lacuna. Scholars have estimated some of the rest of the saga's contents based on extant texts that probably used it as a source: Bjarni Guðnason 1982, xix–li.

91 The Prologue is extant in the same four manuscripts as *Gylfaginning* (see p. 32, n. 52) but in more varied versions. The version in Codex Upsaliensis is the shortest, those in the Codex Regius and the Codex Trajectinus are slightly longer, and that in the Codex Wormianus is considerably expanded: Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, 2005, pp. 3–6; *Edda*, 1924, pp. 1–9; *The Uppsala Edda*, 2012, pp. 6–10. For a full discussion, see Faulkes 2005, xxviii–xxxi. Whether or not Snorri wrote the Prologue himself is disputed. An argument against his authorship is made by Klaus von See 1990.

fal (Westphalia), and Frakland (France), and then travels even further north to give two more of his sons the titles of king in Nóregr (Norway) and Svíþjóð (Sweden).[92]

By tracing Scandinavian origins back to Troy, the myth participates in a popular medieval historiographical trend of claiming descent from the survivors of the Trojan war, which ultimately derived from Virgil's *Aeneid* (Faulkes 1987–1989, 27–30; Malm 2018, 98). The most relevant examples can be found in the twelfth-century history of Britain by Geoffrey of Monmouth (*History of the Kings of Britain*, 2007, pp. 7–29) and the late-tenth or early-eleventh century Norman history by Dudo of Saint-Quentin in his *Historia Normannorum* (*History of the Normans*, 1998, p. 16). Dudo's take on the myth seems to have been known in early thirteenth-century Denmark, since at the beginning of his *Gesta Danorum* Saxo Grammaticus 'corrects' Dudo's mistaken attribution of Danish origins to the Trojan Antenor, citing the key figure as Dan instead (Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*. The History of the Danes, 2015, pp. 19–21; Lassen 2012, 47). But it was the British myth, transmitted in *Trójumanna saga* and *Breta sögur*, which seems to have been known best in Iceland (Faulkes 1987–1989, 30–31). The Icelandic version was produced by merging a classical prehistory that was inspired by these texts with existing genealogies that traced the ancestry of prominent Icelandic families through Scandinavian royal lines back to Óðinn, the progenitor of not only the Scandinavian dynasties but also those of Wessex, Kent, and Deira (Faulkes 1977, 177; 1987–1989, 30–31). By bringing together the continental fixation on Troy with these native genealogies, the myth capitalised on an existing perceived ancestral connection between Scandinavia and England and went one step further, giving that shared heritage an ultimately classical origin and thus situating it within a larger continent-wide aristocratic family tree.

Scandinavia's belonging to a wider European community is emphasised by the Prologue's concluding comments (which also appear in the *Third Grammatical Treatise* and are echoed at the beginning of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*) that, as a result of Óðinn's northwards travels and the resettlement of the *Æsir*, the peoples of northern Europe speak related languages which developed from the original tongue spoken in Troy: "umb Saxland ok allt þaðan um norðrhálfur dreifðisk svá at þeira tunga, Asiamanna, var eigintunga um ǫll þessi lǫnd" (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, 2005, p. 6) ("throughout Saxony and from there all over the northern regions it spread so that their language, that of the men of Asia, became the mother

92 The principal elements of the myth are present in all versions of the Prologue, although the religious framing is very different in Codex Wormianus.

tongue over all these lands") (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, 1995, p. 5).[93] Rather than dramatically contrasting the classical world, pre-Christian Scandinavian language and culture are presented here as "an offshoot of the pre-Christian culture of the Mediterranean" (Faulkes 1983, 26). This has more specific implications in this manuscript, since (as discussed in Chapter 3.1.5) the "pre-Christian culture" of Troy is colourfully depicted in *Ektors saga*. Thus, the myth of Trojan origins is here rerouted to situate Scandinavia within not only a general European community, but to position it specifically as an inheritor of the international courtly culture that is constructed in 589a–f's first half.

The other implication of evoking the myth is to make space for Norse paganism within Christian history. Before turning to Asia, the Prologue to *Snorra Edda* situates itself in the context of universal history: it begins with the creation of the world, gives an abridged account of Noah and the Great Flood, and then explains how early humans forgot God and developed a kind of natural religion through observation of the world around them (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, 2005, pp. 4–5). According to *Gylfaginning* and a passage in some versions of *Skáldskaparmál*, because humanity had forgotten the true God, when the powerful *Æsir* travelled north from Troy people believed that they were gods and the historical events that had happened in Troy were turned into their myths.[94] The Prologue is the only extant Icelandic text where such an in-depth interpretation of Norse paganism is attempted, but it has precedents in medieval humanist thought on classical philosophy (Faulkes 1983, 5; Lönnroth 1969, 7–8). It has been described as the 'noble heathen' approach or the view of paganism as an 'imperfect Christianity' and is one of three main ways that medieval writers interpreted pre-Christian religions (the *interpretatio Christiana*); the other two being euhemerism and demonology.[95] As Lars Lönnroth (1969, 5) notes, they are not mutually exclusive, and the Prologue intermixes both the 'noble heathen' and 'euhemeristic' approaches with only the demonic interpretation lacking – although the layers of illusion in *Gylfaginning* certainly hint at that interpretation too (Clunies Ross 2018, 125; Faulkes 1983, 30; Malm 2018, 100; Viðar Pálsson 2008, 143–145). By adopting this framework for Norse paganism, the Prologue author was able to present the religion of his ancestors as (in Faulkes' words again) "a groping towards truth by pagan thinkers" (Faulkes 1983, 31), rather than a devilish delusion.

The Prologue makes explicit the relationship between the paganism of northern and southern Europe by connecting religion to language. It states that the pa-

93 For the equivalent text in the *Third Grammatical Treatise*, see Óláfr Þórðarson, *Málhljóða og málskrúðsrit*, 1927, ch. 5, p. 39.

94 Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, 2005, pp. 54–55; *Edda*, 1998, pp. 5–6; *The Uppsala Edda*, 2012, p. 86.

95 Summarised in Viðar Pálsson 2008, 142–146.

gans “gáfu þeir nafn með sjálfum sér ǫllum hlutum ok hefir þessi átrúnaðr á marga lund breyzk svá sem þjóðirnar skiptusk ok tungurnar greindusk” (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, 2005, p. 4) (“gave a name among themselves to everything, and this religion has changed in many ways as nations became distinct and languages branched”) (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, 1995, p. 2). This resonates with the Genesis 10 account of the Table of Nations in which the development of different languages was the natural consequence of the scattering of Noah’s sons following the Great Flood (Dronke and Dronke 1977, 157; Holtsmark 1964, 57; Wellendorf 2018, 96).[96] Recourse to this biblical narrative, which is echoed in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*’s paraphrase, bolsters the theological explanation of Norse paganism described above and, by positioning it as a variation on the same continent-wide misunderstanding of the true faith, solidifies the cultural connection between north and south that it goes on to establish by tracing descent to Troy.

4.2 Rejecting Heroic Tradition

Much of the intertextuality in the saga’s main narrative is, by contrast, characterised more by ‘troping’ than ‘participation’. As Christopher Sanders (2006, 876) has noted, it borrows motifs from other sagas in a way that makes light of both traditional heroic ethics and the conventions of courtly literature; he writes that “the saga adopts a satirical attitude to, or at least pokes fun at, some classically ‘heroic’ and, to a lesser extent, ‘romance’ poses”, which results in the audience being “invited into a game world”. For Sanders, the saga’s intertextuality is principally a mechanism of its humour, but, since intertextuality is how texts dialogue with each other, their implications can be drawn out further than just humour.

4.2.1 *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* and *Völsunga saga*

The events of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* begin with two parallel bridal quests for the same woman: both the young Sturlaugr and old King of Þrándheimr Haraldr set out to woo Ása, the daughter of Jarl Hringr. Sturlaugr is prompted by his father, Ingólfr, who complains that his son has spent long enough playing like a child and should either do something to distinguish himself or acquire a wife. Sturlaugr is a *kolbítr* (coal-biter), a lazy youth who lounges around by the fire – a

96 The Codex Wormianus version is more polemical and evokes the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11) to explain the diversification of language and paganism (Lassen 2018, 111–114).

common figure in Icelandic sagas (Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2005, 95–96). Ingólfr suggests his son woo Ása and when Sturlaugr asks her father Hringr, he refers the decision to his daughter. She declines the proposal because of Sturlaugr's lack of heroic achievements, decrying "fy*rir* hui mu*n*[d]a ek eiga þan*n* man*n* e*r* jafnan uin*n*r heima buue*r*k m*ed* mod*ur* sin*n*i e*n* ge*r*ir ecki t*il* fr*a*ma" (*Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, p. 9) ('Why should I marry this man who always does dairy work at home with his mother and does nothing to further himself?'). Ása's father is then approached by King Haraldr, who has recently found himself a widower, and he also asks for her hand.

The basic pattern of two competing suitors, one old and one young, has parallels in *Völsunga saga* and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*. In the latter, the widowed King Gautrekr wishes to marry the young Ingibjörg, daughter of Þórir, but has a younger competitor – a prince named Óláfr. Like Hringr, Þórir refers the decision to his daughter, and she decides there is more security in marrying an older, already successful king than the promising, but as of yet unaccomplished, young prince. Gautrekr and Ingibjörg marry and Gautrekr defends his kingdom from the rejected suitor's attack without difficulty, proving that "þessi inn gamli er óragr" (*Saga af Hrólfi konúngi Gautrekssyni*, 1830, ch. 2, p. 62) (this old man is uncowardly).[97] The equivalent scene in *Völsunga saga* sees Sigmundr pursue Hjördís, daughter of King Eylimi, in competition with a younger man named Lyngvi (*Vǫlsunga saga*, 1965, chs. 11–12, pp. 19–20). As in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, the older suitor wins out, but in this case he does not live long: Óðinn intervenes to put an abrupt (but nevertheless heroic) end to his life. In both texts, the woman's deliberation and active consent is important for demonstrating the superior qualities of the old kings in comparison to the younger suitors. At the core of both unions is what Björn Bandlien (2005, 19–41) describes as a "heroic" conceptualisation of love, in which the man's heroic deeds and the woman's acknowledgement of them are central. He identifies "heroic love" in the eddic poems of the Codex Regius, writing that "[w]omen's support and love spring from "objective" norms for heroic behaviour" and that "[l]ove is almost a social imperative in the sense that women *must* love the best man" (Bandlien 2005, 39–40).

But the bridal quest of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* does not conclude with a union based on heroic love. Haraldr is presumably fearful that Ása will not respond favourably and so forces Hringr to arrange the betrothal without consulting her. Kalinke (1990, 33) writes that "Harald's comportment as suitor shows that he cannot be the hero: that role belongs to Sturlaugr". This is true to some extent,

97 This quotation is from the longer redaction. For the equivalent scene in the shorter redaction, see *Hrólfssaga Gautrekssonar*, 1891, ch. 2, pp. 3–6.

since Sturlaugr does end up successful, but he does not win Ása's hand by performing the heroic deeds which she seems to expect. Instead, he takes advantage of Haraldr's cowardice. This is enabled by the arrival of yet another hopeful suitor named Kolr who challenges Haraldr to a duel, the winner of which will marry Ása. Haraldr's first champion is killed and so, at a loss, he agrees to transfer his betrothal to Sturlaugr if he is willing to take on Kolr in his place.[98] Sturlaugr agrees and quickly marries Ása, who has no say in the matter at all. Although the reversal of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*'s bridal quest functions to undermine the character of Haraldr, it does not, by contrast, demonstrate the superior worth of Sturlaugr, at least not within the parameters of heroic love: all the heroic deeds he goes on to perform (his journey to Bjarmaland and rise to petty-kingship in Sweden) have no bearing on the acquisition of his wife who recedes from the plot quickly after the marriage has been effected. By turning what elsewhere is a narrative structuring principle into a brief introductory motif, *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* rejects love as a measure of worth, setting up the rest of the narrative to be a distinctly different kind of story to either *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* or *Völsunga saga*.

Sturlaugs saga starfsama contains several other references to *Völsunga saga* in the form of borrowed motifs. The first is an adaptation of the scene in which Sigmundr burns Siggeir alive in his hall to avenge the killing of Völsungr, and Signý (Siggeirr's wife and Sigmundr's sister) walks into the flames out of guilt for her part in his killing (*Vǫlsunga saga*, 1965, ch. 8, pp. 12–14). The equivalent scene in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* sees the humiliated Haraldr rally four hundred men in an attempt to burn down Hringr's hall while he and Ása are still inside. Immediately upon arriving at the scene, however, Sturlaugr realises that Hringr and Ása have already escaped "nedan ur iordu i riodri einu" (589f, fol. 6^{r}, l. 14; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 17, 142) (from below the earth into a clearing in a forest). Not only is the cowardly King Haraldr afraid of entering combat, but his inability to enact vengeance against those he holds responsible means he is barely even a shadow of the Völsung ideal.

The remainder of the motifs borrowed from *Völsunga saga* relate to Sturlaugr. The first occurs when he visits the old seeress Véfreyja who advises him on how to defeat Kolr. Like Sigurðr is said to have lain with Brynhildr with a sword between them when he was disguised as Gunnarr (*Vǫlsunga saga*, 1965, ch. 29, p. 50), Sturlaugr and Véfreyja spend the night together with a "stokk" (589f, fol. 3^{v}, l. 2; *Sturl-*

98 Alaric Hall (2005, 8) sees a parallel between Sturlaugr's duel with Kolr and that which Angantýr and his brothers fight with Örvar-Oddr and Hjálmarr in *Heiðreks saga*.

augs saga starfsama. Version A, 1969, pp. 13, 93) (log) between them.[99] As Sanders (2006, 881) writes, "[t]he scene is comically well-informed in itself, but the extra effect of ostensibly aiming to ensure chastity with the help of a log (possibly a tree-trunk) probably produced an extra laugh". There is another play on *Völsunga saga*'s 'wooing by proxy' later in the saga when Sturlaugr's ally Frosti disguises himself as Sturlaugr to trick the Finnar princess Mjöll into marrying him (Sanders 2006, 882). As soon as she has proffered the information which he seeks, Sturlaugr has no qualms about burning the two of them alive in their marriage bed, making a mockery of Brynhildr's tragic death on Sigurðr's pyre (*Vǫlsunga saga*, 1965, ch. 33, p. 61). The third borrowing relates to the earlier generations of the Völsungs: when Sturlaugr and his sworn-brothers are in Hundingjaland, they are imprisoned in a stone, evoking the scene in *Völsunga saga* where the same fate befalls Sigmundr and Sinfjötli (*Vǫlsunga saga*, 1965, ch. 8, pp. 10–12; Sanders 2006, 881). But whereas the Völsung men are saved by Signý, who secretly drops a sword in their prison before it is sealed, the sworn-brothers free themselves with a halberd that Sturlaugr received earlier from a troll woman named Hornnefja; the heroic Signý is here replaced with a grotesque and dehumanised troll-woman who (as will be discussed below) is violently murdered as a joke.

Like Haraldr, Sturlaugr is no Völsung. But rather than serving to demonstrate his failings, the *Völsunga saga* motifs that relate to him are deployed in a way that positions Sturlaugr as distinct from them; they do not evoke a standard by which we ought to measure him, negatively or otherwise. They maintain the Völsung ideal as a frame of reference, but the lack of consequence that they have for the hero renders that frame of reference all but irrelevant as a metric by which to assess Sturlaugr's value.

4.2.2 *Jómsvíkinga saga*

A similar treatment is given to *Jómsvíkinga saga*.[100] After the sworn-brothers have completed the mission to recover the aurochs's horn and Sturlaugr has become a petty king in Sweden, he and two of his sworn-brothers swear oaths (*heitstreinging*) at a Yule feast. As Zitzelsberger (1969a, 5) notes, this is clearly based on a scene in *Jómsvíkinga saga* where the Jómsvíkings (a troop of warriors who have their base at Jómsborg) are invited to a Yule feast in Denmark by King

99 This motif also appears in *Edda*, 1983, p. 207; *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, 1999, ch. 66, p. 162.
100 The oldest manuscript of *Jómsvíkinga saga* is AM 291 4to (1279–1299), which is followed by the slightly abbreviated Holm perg 7 4to (1300–1325). The saga is also interpolated into Flateyjarbók's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, and a longer redaction is extant in AM 510 4to.

Sveinn who convinces them to plan an attack on Earl Hákon of Norway (*Jómsvíkinga saga*, 1969, ch. 27, pp. 160–164).[101] King Sveinn first makes an oath to attack Æthelred of England, and then an oath is made by Sigvaldi, leader of the Jómsvíkings, to attack Hákon, and his brothers-in-arms all agree to support him. One of them, Vagn, additionally vows to kill Þorkell leira and get into the bed of his daughter Ingibjörg without the permission of her kin. For the Jómsvíkings, the vows make real their bonds of loyalty to each other, a loyalty which, according to Alison Finlay (2014, 75), the saga compiler wanted to promote more than any one individual hero. In her reading, the *heitstreinging* scene is integral to this because it highlights the failings of Sigvaldi whose individualism is the weak link that ultimately destroys the group's integrity and results in their defeat in battle.

On the surface, *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* also seems concerned with the topic of brotherly loyalty. Sturlaugr's many sworn-brothers are introduced at the beginning of the saga, and after completing his duel with Kolr, he acquires yet another colleague – Kolr's brother Franmarr, who he initially fights before eventually deciding they are equally matched and they swear oaths of allegiance to each other, merging their respective gangs of sworn-brothers into one. But although the brothers are high in number and support Sturlaugr when necessary, the saga shows little interest in glorifying the bonds between them: they are interchangeable and undeveloped characters who appear sporadically to further the plot when necessary, and they are rarely shown interacting with each other let alone making the kinds of commitments made by the Jómsvíkings.

Unsurprisingly, the *heitstreinging* scene in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* is far from serious and does not highlight their brotherly loyalty. Sturlaugr makes the first oath: he vows to discover the origins of the aurochs's horn within three years or die. Franmarr then makes a vow which echoes that of *Jómsvíkinga saga*'s Vagn: that he will go to the bed of Ingibjörg, daughter of King Yngvarr in Garðaríki, and kiss her, or else die. Sighvatr vows to follow the two in their endeavours. The scenes describing the fulfilling of these vows are loosely and comically narrated: they feature macabre and grotesque humour and have absolutely nothing in common with the great battle narrated in *Jómsvíkinga saga*. Rather than a heroic act, Sturlaugr's vow concerns the acquisition of information which does not have any practical purpose beyond his own entertainment. The fulfilment of Franmarr's vow is, as Sanders (2006, 881) says, "maintainably absurd": after making several failed attempts to get close to Ingibjörg, he stumbles upon sworn-brother Guðormr as he retreats from a fight with his intestines hanging

101 Ólafur Halldórsson's edition of *Jómsvíkinga saga* is based on AM 291 4to, with lacunæ filled in by the Flateyjarbók version.

out. Guðormr elicits the sympathies of one of Ingibjörg's chambermaids when she goes outside to relieve herself, and Ingibjörg decides to nurse him back to health. While she is preoccupied, Guðormr manages to sneak Franmarr into the chamber where he is able to steal a kiss from the princess and thus fulfil his vow.

Jómsvíkinga saga's *heitstreinging* scene is used as an opportunity for humour. But rather than undermining the worth of Sturlaugr, it is, as with the references to *Völsunga saga*, the values of the source text which are challenged: unlike the ill-fated Jómsvíkings, Sturlaugr is triumphant in all his endeavours and is said to have "[u]ann maurg frægdaruerk" (589f, fol. 13r, l. 8; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 29, 299–300) (performed many feats) before dying peacefully of old age. *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*'s relationship to these texts and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* can, therefore, be described as one of "troping": references are made to them in order to undermine the heroic values they expound and decentre the version of the past which they depict. The referent texts are summoned and pushed aside, used to evoke a frame of reference which, the saga tells us, is not worth trying to live up to.

4.3 The Journey to Bjarmaland

In the most substantial episode of the saga, the journey to Bjarmaland, several intertextual references are brought together to create something to replace these texts. The journey is initiated by Haraldr: after Sturlaugr has caught him failing to burn Hringr and Ása alive, he challenges Sturlaugr in rage to find an aurochs's horn which he once lost – a challenge he is certain will be a death sentence. At this point he also gives Sturlaugr his byname, *starfsami*, meaning hard-working, with the intention of condemning him to a life of toil. Sturlaugr accepts the mission and goes to consult Véfreyja who advises him to seek the counsel of her sister Snælaug, wife of the King of Hundingjaland in the far north of Scandinavia.

But before that, Sturlaugr and his sworn-brothers must navigate an encounter with three *tröllkonur*. First, Áki strikes a bargain with one named Torfa while he is keeping watch at night, then Franmarr does the same with her sister Hrimilldr. Sturlaugr then awakes and meets a third troll-woman named Hornnefja. She requests to see Sturlaugr's sworn-brother Hrólfr nefja because she has heard "at hann se hue [rium] manni nefliotari" (589f, fol. 7^{r}, ll. 27–28; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 18, 166) (that he is the most ugly-nosed of all men).[102] In return, she gifts Sturlaugr a halberd that is as small as a pin but capable of cutting everything

102 The beginning of l. 28 is damaged.

against which it is struck. Sturlaugr then wakes Hrólfr nefja and dresses him in a goatskin, rubs soot on his face, thrusts a stick into his mouth, places an ox's horn on his head, and has him sit up high on a rock. When Hornnefja sees him, she is in awe and declares that "[þat er] satt at segia at allgaufugligur madr ertu ok eigi hefir uerit ofsögum fra sagt þess[um] manni er suo itarligr" (589f, fol. 7^{v}, ll. 17–19; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 19, 174) (It is true to say that you are a very noble man and no unfair things have been said about this man who is so fine).[103] She swells in size as she reaches up towards him, but Sturlaugr stabs her with the halberd and ends her life, returning to his ship and sailing away with a fresh breeze.

There is no specific identifiable source for this scene, but encounters with this kind of 'Hostile Giantess' are common in the *fornaldarsögur* (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, pp. 65–73). As several scholars have argued, these encounters act as mechanisms through which to test and reinforce gender norms. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2017, 340) writes, for example, that with their strange appearance, lack of intelligence and unrestrained sexuality, *tröllkonur* "are the antithesis of what we believe to be normal, both in appearance and behaviour". They embody subversive feminine characteristics which make them deserving of the violence that is perpetrated against them, and their defeat highlights the superior intelligence and martial skill of the sagas' male heroes and positions those heroes as bastions of the social order (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, pp. 65–73; Kress 1993, 119–127; Bagerius 2009, 145–147). This scene in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* was, as Sanders (2006, 882) suggests, probably intended to be humorous. But humour is not neutral. As Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2015, 223) argues, it is a mechanism of power used in the construction of gender norms; to laugh at another is to exert power over them. Her discussion relates to the *meykongr* trope, but the same can be said of Hornnefja: when the audience laughs at her, they position themselves on the side of Sturlaugr, justifying his violence and endorsing the social norms which it reasserts. But although this scene is stereotyped, *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*'s *tröllkonur* are somewhat unusual. When compared to other 'Hostile Giantesses', those in this saga are particularly docile, and Hornnefja is a victim of Sturlaugr's self-interest rather than a legitimate antagonist. The humour in this scene has, therefore, another effect: by turning what elsewhere might have been a legitimate obstacle into an unthreatening laughingstock, the result is to not only shame Hornnefja but also neutralise the subversive

103 The end of ll. 17 and 18 are damaged.

power of the *tröllkona*-figure. As with the borrowings from *Völsunga saga* and *Jómsvíkinga saga*, Sturlaugr again proves himself to be a hero for whom conventional obstacles mean little.

The same power dynamic is played out in Sturlaugr's next interaction. After sailing away from the inlet, he and his sworn-brothers arrive in Hundingjaland. Sturlaugr, Áki, and Franmarr go ashore and approach a large hall where "stodu þar menn i dyrum ok uar hakan groin i bringu þeir giolltu sem hundar" (589f, fol. 8^{r}, ll. 6–7; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 19, 181–182) (there stood men in the doorways and their chins stretched to their chests. They yelped like dogs). The sworn-brothers immediately kill these dog-like guards and enter the hall where Snælaug sits on a dais. Áki recognises her as a member of his kin and places both hands round her neck to kiss her in greeting, enraging her husband, King Hundólfr, who summons his guards with trumpets blaring. Snælaug quickly manages to give the sworn-brothers the information they need about the location of the aurochs's horn before a troop of guards storm into the hall and drag them to the forest where they are imprisoned in stone. As discussed above, Sturlaugr is able to free them using the halberd he had received from Hornnefja, and they escape back to their ship.

Whereas the troll-women were drawn from Icelandic tradition and could be seen to represent 'nature', the threat the sworn-brothers face in Hundingjaland is a Latin import which represents, as Katja Schulz (2004, 248–252) notes, an alien form of civilisation. The creatures who guard the hall seem to be same as the *hundingjar* that are described in the lists of wondrous races found in Hauksbók and the encyclopaedic manuscript AM 194 8vo (1387). According to the Hauksbók version, "þar ero menn þeir enn er haka er groen við bríngu niðr. þat heita Hundíngiar. Þeir ero sua við menn sem olmer hundar" (*Wundervölkerverzeichnis der Hauksbók*, 1990, p. 467) (There are people whose chins stretch down to their chests. They are called the *hundingjar*. They are to men as savage as dogs).[104] A pictorial depiction of such creatures can be found in AM 673a I 4to (1190–1210), a fragment of the Icelandic *Physiologus*, a Norse adaptation of a widely circulated Latin text, which was itself translated from Greek (see Fig. 3; Halldór Hermannsson 1938, 14). The *hundingjar* are unique to the Icelandic lists but, as Simek (1992, 80) has shown, their roots can be found in the work of Isidore of Seville and mix together characteristics of the *Cynocephali* (men with the heads of dogs) and the *Blemmyes* (men whose eyes and mouth are on their chests). In Latin geographical traditions, these wondrous races were placed in the unknown world, usually on its eastern and southernmost fringes. As a specifically Latin learned figure, the

104 The information given in AM 194 8vo about the *Hundingjar* is the same.

Fig. 3: AM 673a I 4to, fol. 2[r]; fragment of the Icelandic *Physiologus*, featuring a pictoral depiction of the *hundingjar*. Source: handrit.is. Printed with permission. Copyright © of the Árni Magnússon Institute, Iceland.

hundingjar provide a counterpoint to the myth of Trojan origins evoked at the beginning of the saga, demonstrating that Scandinavia is within Europe rather than outside it. They suggest that Sturlaugr is not just as a typical troll-killing *fornaldarsaga* hero, but also a civilised European one.

The construction of this northern border continues in the episode which follows: the raid on the temple in Bjarmaland. After escaping the stone prison, Sturlaugr sets sail again and makes his way to Bjarmaland, sailing down the Vína river (Northern Dvina) to the pagan temple Snælaug spoke of.[105] The temple is described with a level of detail quite unique in the otherwise hastily narrated saga:

> en er þeir koma þar uar þar suo hattad dyrum sem fyrr uar sagt ganga þeir at þeim dyrum sem uoru i ut nordr á hofinu þui þær uoru opnar þeir sa fyrir innan þroskulldin uar gróf full af eitri ok þar næst ein stor sla ok felld i ofan suerdzegg ein i dyrunum uar murat um huerfis grófina suo at eigi matti spillazt umbudir af ofar gangi eitrsins [. . .] hann litr nu inn i hofit ok ser huar þor sitr aluegligur i aunduegi ok frammi fyrir honum eitt bord silfr laugat þar uar urar horn á bordi fyrir þór þat uar suo fagurt sem á skinanda [gull sæi] fullt uar þat af eitri tafl ok taflbord sa hann þar hanga huortueggia af lysi[gulli] gert skinandi klædi ok

105 On this river, see Jackson 2019, 112.

gull hringar uoru þar upp festir á steingur .xxx. kuenna uoru [inni] i hofinu ok uar su ein er af bar ollum, hun uar suo stor sem risar bla sem hel di[gr] sem naut uidrlita mikil suart eyg ok munnuid ok suipud illa, þo uar sia kona vel buin [hon] þionar fyrir bordi þors (589f, fols 8^{v}, l. 22 – 9^{r}, l. 5; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 21, 199–206).[106]

When they came there they saw that the doors were as had been said. They went to the set of doors which was on the northern side of the temple because they were open. They saw inside the threshold there was a pit full of poison and there next to it a large beam and fitted on the underside a sword's edge. Inside the doors there were walls around the pit so that the furniture would not be destroyed by an overflow of poison [. . .] he looks now in the temple and sees where Þórr sits seriously in the high seat and in front of him was a table laid with silver. There was the aurochs's horn on the table in front of Þórr which was beautiful as if it were shining gold. It was full of poison. He saw chess and a chessboard hanging there, each was of bright gold. Shining clothes and gold rings were fastened to poles. Thirty women were inside the temple and there was one who surpassed them all. She was as large as a *risi* and blue as Hel, stout as a great ox, black-eyed and wide-mouthed and evil-looking. Nevertheless the woman was well dressed. She attended Þórr's table.

The thirty women prophesy to the protagonists using the eddic *fornyrðislag* meter:

komenn er sturlaugr [hinn] starfsami
horn at sækia ok hringa fiolgd,
her er i huse haufd blot mikit
gull ok gersemar grimt er oss i hug.
(589f, fol. 9^{r}, ll. 5–7; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 21, 206)

Sturlaugr inn starfsami has come to fetch the horn and a multitude of rings. Here in the building there is gold and treasures for a major sacrifice; our mood is ugly. (*Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, 2017, p. 783)

This is followed by a single stanza spoken by the lead priestess:

skal hann i heliu, huilldar niota
ok margskonar meina kenna,
þa mun sturlaugr hinn starfsami
med góma kuern gradinn i stykki,
(589f, fol. 9^{r}, ll. 8–10; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 21–2, 207).

He shall enjoy rest in Hel and experience many kinds of injuries. Then Sturlaugr inn starfsami will be torn to shreds with the hand-mill of the gums [TEETH]. (*Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, 2017, p. 784)

106 The beginnings of several lines on 9^{r} are damaged.

There is also an idol to Óðinn in the temple: it is stated shortly after this description that "hrolfr hliop inn yfir hellurnar, ok snyr hann þegar fyrir þor ok odin" (589f, fol. 9^{r}, l. 21; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 22, 211) (Hrólfr jumped over the slabs, and turned in that direction, in front of Þórr and Óðinn).

As a site of sacrifice and idolatry, the temple in Bjarmaland would have been interpreted by medieval audiences as one of demonic worship. In contrast to *Snorra Edda*'s sympathetic interpretation of paganism as a benign delusion, in the demonic interpretation the Norse gods were understood as devils in disguise and pre-Christian religions were considered forms of devil worship.[107] Although this interpretation is not applied explicitly to the temple in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, as Clunies Ross (2018, 121) notes, "[s]uch ideas form the conceptual background to a great deal of Old Norse literature" and the imagery used parallels the accounts of idolatry found in, for instance, the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason in which Óðinn and Þórr appears as devils.[108] As Schulz (2004, 225) and Zitzelsberger (1969b, 307) both note, strikingly similar imagery also characterises Adam of Bremen's famous description of the pagan temple at Uppsala in his eleventh-century *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (Adam of Bremen, *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, 1917, book 4, ch. 26, pp. 257–260).[109]

The perspective on paganism represented by the temple is, therefore, vastly different to the sympathetic account outlined in the *Snorra Edda*'s Prologue. This complicates the saga's otherwise participatory relationship with that text, the aim of which had been, in part, to defend the art of skaldic poetry and the mythologi-

107 On this interpretation in Icelandic texts, see Lassen 2018, 107–111.

108 For example, in Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* where the devil appears in disguise as both Óðinn and Þórr, and Óláfr is said to destroy an idol to the god Freyr: Oddr Snorrason, *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, 1932, chs. 43–44 (A-text) and ch. 33 (S-text), pp. 131–136; ch. 47 (A-text) and ch. 35 (S-text), pp. 147–148; ch. 59 (A-text) and ch. 47 (S-text), pp. 173–174. Another example is the story of Gunnar helmingr, which forms part of what is now known as *Ögmundar þáttr* in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, in which an idol to Freyr at Uppsala is inhabited by a demon: *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta, II,* 1961, ch. 174, pp. 10–17. Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* is preserved in two redactions, the longer A-recension (AM 310 4to, 1250–1275) and the shorter S-recension (Holm perg 18 4to, *c.* 1300), both of which are cited here. A two-leaf fragment of the saga's end is also preserved in De la Gardie 4–7 and represents a further branch of transmission, the U-recension. The oldest manuscript of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* is Flateyjarbók, which is followed by AM 61 fol (1400–1450), which Ólafur Halldórsson uses as his base text; *Ögmundar þáttr* is preserved in both. For an overview of texts where Óðinn is presented as a devil, see Lassen 2006, 126–131.

109 Although the parallels are compelling, it's impossible to say whether Adam's history was used as a direct source, as Zitzelsberger is inclined to believe. A short excerpt (*Hamborgar historía*) is extant in Icelandic translation in AM 415 4to (1310) and in Flateyjarbók. However, there is no direct evidence for the transmission of the temple description to Iceland.

cal narratives underpinning its complex system of kennings, central to which was the figure of Óðinn. Although *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* reasserts the Prologue's interpretation of the deity as a hero of Troy and progenitor of Scandinavian dynasties in its opening line, by placing an idol to him in this demonic temple, it stops short of wholeheartedly embracing the mythology which that Prologue had been designed to defend. Instead, it lays out what *Snorra Edda* had only gone as far as implying: that the pre-Christian religion of the north, and its god Óðinn, was a creation of the devil.

But the intertextual resonances of the Bjarmaland episode make sure that Sturlaugr (and the Scandinavian kingdom from which he has travelled) is kept distinct from this brand of paganism. The probable source for the episode, *Óláfs saga helga*, provided both the destination for Sturlaugr's quest and what happens when he arrives there: the temple raid (Glazyrina 1994; Schulz 2006, 902).[110] After the priestesses have spoken their verses, Sturlaugr leaps over the stone slabs that guard the entrance and seizes the aurochs's horn. He is attacked by the main priestess, but when she is distracted by a swarm of men entering the temple (presumably the sworn-brothers), he stabs her with Hornnefja's halberd and kills her. He then escapes back to his ship, pursued by the Bjarmar, and Franmarr calls for the wind promised to him by Hrimilldr, allowing the sworn-brothers to sail away. Later in the saga it is said that Sturlaugr returns to the far north and razes both Hundingjaland and Bjarmaland to the ground – in case audiences were in any doubt about his dominance.

The overall shape of the narrative is the same in the source text although the details are very different. In *Óláfs saga helga*, King Óláfr Haraldsson sends the brothers Karli and Gunnsteinn to trade in Bjarmaland. On hearing about this, Þórir hundr plans his own trip. The two parties first trade peacefully with the Bjarmar but, once the trading peace is brought to an end, Þórir goes back with his men to raid and Karli and Gunnsteinn follow him. They make their way to a clearing with an unguarded high fence which both Þórir and Karli climb over to find an enclosure containing a pagan idol and treasure which they raid. The pair are then pursued by the Bjarmar but return safely to their ships and sail away, eventually reconvening to discuss the sharing of the booty. They are unable to come to an agreement, and eventually Þórir kills Karli. Þórir describes the temple as follows:

110 There are several sagas about Óláfr Haraldsson, but the Bjarmaland episode is only given in full in what is known as Snorri's *Separate Saga* and in the *Heimskringla* version (quoted below). On the relationship between the two texts, see Whaley 1991, 52–57.

> Í garði þessum er haugr, hrœrt allt saman gull og silfr ok mold. Skulu menn þar til ráða. En í garðinum stendr goð Bjarma, er heitir Jómali. Verði engi svá djarfr, at hann ræni. (Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla, II*, 1941, p. 230).
>
> (Inside this enclosure is a mound, with gold, silver and earth all mixed together in it. Men are to attack it. But inside the enclosure stands the god of the Bjarmar, who is called Jómali. Let no one be so bold as to plunder him.) (Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla, II*, 2014, p. 153)

After they have plundered the temple together and Karli and Gunnsteinn have turned to go, it is also said that:

> Þórir veik aptr til Jómala ok tók silfrbolla, er stóð í knjám honum. Hann var fullr af silfrpenningum. Steypði hann silfrinu í kilting sína, en dró á hǫnd sér hǫddu er yfir var bollanum, gekk þá út til hliðsins. Þeir fǫrunautar váru þá komnir allir út ór skíðgarðinum, urðu þá varir við, at Þórir hafði eftir dvalizk. Karli hvarf aptr at leita hans, ok hittusk þeir fyrir innan hliðit. Sá Karli, at Þórir hafði þar silfrbollann. Síðan rann Karli að Jómalanum. Hann sá, at digrt men var á hálsi honum. Karli reiddi til øxina ok hjó í sundur tygilinn aptan á hálsinum, er menit var fest við. Varð hǫgg þat svá mikit, at hǫfuðit hraut af Jómala. Varð þá brestr svá mikill, at ǫllum þeim þótti undr at. Tók Karli menit. Fóru þeir þá í brot. (Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla, II*, 1941, pp. 230–231)
>
> (Þórir went back to Jómali and took a silver bowl that was standing on his lap. It was full of silver coins. He poured the silver into the skirts of his tunic and drew the handle that was on top of the bowl onto his arm, going then out to the gate. The whole company were then come out of the enclosure, then realised that Þórir had stayed behind. Karli turned back to look for him, and they met inside the gate. Karli saw that Þórir had the silver bowl there. Then Karli ran to the Jómali. He saw there was a thick necklace on his neck. Karli swung his axe and struck the band that the necklace was fastened with on the back of his neck in two. The blow was so heavy that Jómali's head flew off. There was then such a loud crash they were all amazed at it. Karli took the necklace. Then they went away.) (Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla, II*, 2014, p. 153)

At the core of this narrative are orally transmitted stories about Viking Age contact with the Finno-Ugric Bjarmar (Power 1984; Andersson 2012, 104–106). However, when incorporated into the saga, this oral knowledge took on a new distinctly literary significance: Bjarmaland provides a counterpoint to the Christian kingdom of the future saint-king. When Óláfr dies at the Battle of Stiklestad, the same Þórir hundr is the sole witness to his first posthumous miracle: as he spreads a cloth over the dead king's body, some of Óláfr's blood gets onto Þórir's hand and heals his wound, and thus "[v]áttaði Þórir sjálfr þenna atburð, þá er helgi Óláfs konungs kom upp, fyrir alþýðu" (Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla, II*, 1941, p. 287) ("Þórir himself bore witness to this incident when King Óláfr's sanctity became known, before the whole people") (Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla, II*, 2014, p. 258). While the journey to Bjarmaland cannot be considered an explicitly

anti-pagan polemic since Þórir hundr is a staunch pagan himself, it is, nonetheless, a violent encounter between two parties in which religious difference is foregrounded, and Þórir hundr, who both plunders the temple and spreads the news of Óláfr's sanctity, is a thread in the narrative that contrasts two religious extremes. On the one hand, he has witnessed (and prevailed over) the heathenism of Bjarmaland and, on the other, been the recipient of the healing power of God channelled through a saint.

In *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, when the same motif is used in precisely the same setting, a hierarchical contrast of religions is also implied. However, rather than an unfamiliar Finnic religion, the Bjarmar of this text follow a demonic version of Norse paganism: the idols which furnish their temple depict Norse gods, and the priestesses who speak in eddic verse evoke the association between femininity, fate, and death which is elsewhere embodied by the mythological *vǫlur* (prophetess), *nornir* (norns), and *valkyrjur* (Valkyries) (Quinn 1998, 45; Quinn 2006c). Thus when Sturlaugr travels to Bjarmaland and encounters devil-worshipping, distinctly Norse pagans when he gets there, he is implied to be something different: a kind of 'noble heathen'. Although, as Lassen (2009, 271) notes, he doesn't go as far as explicitly condemning pagan worship, not only does he not take part in it, but he violently overcomes those who do. The result is a sanitizing of his own heathenism: he may be reliant on the seeress Véfreyja, but that is of little concern when compared with the truly terrifying pagans who live in Bjarmaland. The use of the scene from *Óláfs saga helga* allows Norse pre-Christian religion to be presented in both sympathetic (noble heathen) and polemic (demonic) terms; it clears pre-Christian Scandinavia of its demonic associations and re-associates them with the Bjarmar instead.

As with Sturlaugr's other encounters in the far north, the pagan temple aids in the construction of a border to the north of Scandinavia. In the temple, Sturlaugr overcomes another form of subversive femininity and is again positioned as the defender of the boundary between the civilised and the uncivilised (Lassen 2009, 271). Accordingly, Lassen argues that this scene's principal effect is to highlight Sturlaugr's "høviske opførsel" (Lassen 2009, 271) (courtly behaviour). She notes that, as well as evoking *Óláfs saga helga*, the journey to Bjarmaland has intertextual resonances with Arthurian romance – the journey echoes the Arthurian 'quest' pattern and, as Lassen (2009, 270) notes, the object of the mission (the aurochs's horn) may have reminded audiences of the Holy Grail, known in Iceland via *Parcevals saga*. And indeed, Sturlaugr is shown elsewhere to follow some kind of vaguely 'chivalric' moral code and there are some parallels between his behaviour and those of the knights in the manuscript's first half: the oath he swears with Franmarr after they find themselves equally matched in a duel echoes those of Egill and Ásmundr and Villifer and Kvintatus (pp. 44–45), and, as Sanders (2006, 883) observes, the protagonist's violence is not wholly unabashed:

it is all directed at figures who are marginal or 'monstrous' in some way and do not belong to his own class. The *tröllkonur* and *hundingjar* are obvious cases, but this applies also to the *Finnar* princess Mjöll (who is skilled in magic) and her probably-Sámi husband Frosti whose name aligns him with the far north and is the only sworn-brother Sturlaugr despatches himself.

However, Sturlaugr's proximity to the knights of romance should not be overstated. The only incursion of any kind of 'courtly lexis' in this saga occurs in Hundingjaland, beyond the northern border: as Schulz (2006, 900–901) observes, Snælaug's dais and King Hunding's trumpets evoke the image of a European court more so than any of the saga's other settings, and Hunding's outrage when Áki steals a kiss from his wife is the closest the saga comes to referencing 'courtly love'. The narrator comments afterwards that "ok ma nu ætla huersu grimt honum mun[di] nu i hug at eirn utlendr madr hliop a hals henne ok kysti hana fyrir augum honom" (589f, fol. 8^{r}, ll. 14–15; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama.* Version A, 1969, pp. 20, 185) (one may now imagine how angry he would feel if a foreign man jumped to her neck and kissed her before his eyes). This scene may be a play on an episode in *Parcevals saga* where the naïve youth Parceval (who has not been educated in chivalric manners) kisses a maiden without her permission and angers her lover (*Parcevals saga*, 1999, ch. 2, p. 110).[111] But as with the motifs borrowed from *Völsunga saga* and *Jómsvíkinga saga*, this one has little significance for the narrative. Whereas Parceval goes on to receive his courtly education with Arthur, Áki and Sturlaugr escape King Hunding's vaguely courtly hall with ease and no change of behaviour follows; in fact, the motif is repeated later on in Franmarr's vow to kiss princess Ingibjörg. Although these sworn-brothers may follow some kind of vague moral code and are happy to police the boundaries of the 'civilised' world, they certainly cannot be said to display the kind of 'courtly behaviour' we would expect from a *riddarasaga*-style knight.

Moreover, when he returns to Haraldr, it becomes clear that Sturlaugr has no interest in becoming such a figure. Rather than taking his seat at court like a good knight would, he approaches Haraldr and "rekr hornit .á. naser konungi suo at þegar staukk blod ur nausum hans ok brotnudu ur honum fiorar tennr" (589f, fol. 9v, ll. 14–15: *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 22, 220–21) (then drove the horn at the king's nose so that blood sprung from his nose and broke out four of his teeth). Instead of glorifying his king, Sturlaugr's completion of his quest humiliates him. This brings to the fore the other key function that the 'journey to Bjarmaland' has in *Óláfs saga helga* which is, according to Theodore M. Ander-

111 *Parcevals saga* is transmitted in two branches represented by the fragment NKS 1794b 4to (*c.* 1350) and Holm perg 6 4to, which Wolf's edition is based on.

sson (2012, 106 and 113), to help illustrate the fragility of Óláfr Haraldsson's royal power. Without Óláfr's sponsorship, Þórir hundr successfully acquires great riches in the north, kills the king's chosen agent, and returns to become one of the figures who brings about Óláfr's downfall. In much the same vein, when Sturlaugr proves himself more capable than Haraldr had anticipated, he further undermines any authority that the old king might have had left at this point in the saga. Sturlaugr then leaves Haraldr to make a name for himself in Sweden – hardly the life of toil which the king had threatened him with when have gave him the name of *starfsami*.

The intertextuality of the journey to Bjarmaland is considerably more multifaceted than that outlined in the first two parts of this chapter and both complicates and extends those relations. In one regard, the many monsters Sturlaugr encounters in the north serve to create a border to the north of Scandinavia that complements the saga's participation in the myth of Trojan origins. These encounters also bolster the saga's dismissal of traditional heroic ethics, since the *tröllkonur* and *hundingjar* pose no serious threat to the hero. These "troping" tendencies are extended to the translated *riddarasögur* too: the resonances with Arthurian quests and the reference to Perceval's youth position the knights of the round table as another alternative standard by which we might judge this saga's protagonist. But these texts are hardly dwelled on; they hover in the background, reminding audiences of another kind of hero that Sturlaugr is not. Instead, in his dramatic encounter at the temple, arguably the saga's most central scene, we see a truly transformative example of intertextuality where Sturlaugr steps forward as a hero in his own right and puts forward an alternative kind of heroism to replace that which he elsewhere rejects.

4.4 Conclusion

The interpretation of the past that the saga situates itself within is provided by the Prologue to *Snorra Edda*, which is paraphrased in the opening lines. *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* reaffirms the Prologue's interpretation of pre-Christian Scandinavian history, positioning its heroes as northern counterparts to those of the classical world. In the journey to Bjarmaland, the saga's political geography is sketched out further: by combining native and Latin symbols of marginality in its representation of the far north, and by disassociating Scandinavia from the demonic interpretation of its own paganism, the saga shows that Europe's northern border is above Scandinavia rather than below it. As a result, the figure of Óðinn is given two, geographically distinct, representations: in the first, he is not a figure of myth but part of the grand narrative of universal history and the ancestor of

Scandinavian royal lines, whereas in the second, he is the subject of devil-worship in a heathen temple. By presenting contradictory interpretations of the pre-Christian deity in this way, the saga is able to recover the framing narrative of *Snorra Edda* while simultaneously rejecting the mythological material it was written to defend. It then goes on to also reject one of the most canonical legends associated with those myths, that of the Völsungs, the royal dynasty which, although not descended from Óðinn was (according to the saga) certainly nurtured by him. Through the numerous borrowed and comically adapted motifs, *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* constructs a world where its leaders are either pale imitations of that legend's heroes or totally uninterested in attempting to live up to its ideals. The approach the saga takes to *Völsunga saga* also characterises its handling of material from *Jómsvíkinga saga* and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*. Unlike the reference to the myth of Trojan origins, these sagas are written into the narrative in order to be undermined: *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* defines itself, and its hero, by opposition to them, and the puppet-master Óðinn is nowhere to be found in the lives of these almost-'noble heathens'.

With the rejection of these narratives also comes a wholesale rejection of Norwegian kingship. Not only does Haraldr compare negatively to traditional Scandinavian heroes, but the mission he gives Sturlaugr makes a total mockery of Arthurian quests. In place of the inept old king, the saga promotes an ethic of male domination which is enacted by Sturlaugr, the young son of a farmer, and his team of sworn-brothers who are of similarly humble origins. Although they do not live up to the ideals of the Jómsvíkings and do not exhibit proper courtly manners, they nevertheless represent a coalition based on gender, class, and age which the saga elevates above their various opponents: the cowardly king, the various forms of subversive femininity found in the north, the *hundingjar*, and the devil worshippers in Bjarmaland. Although exaggerated and comic, their journey to Bjarmaland, which is based on that of *Óláfs saga Helga*, does not feature the same kind of mocking which characterises the references to *Völsunga saga*, *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* and *Jómsvíkinga saga.* Instead, by giving Sturlaugr a number of adversaries in his quest for the horn, the saga is able to explore what kind of hero he *is*: a vanquisher of monsters, a protector of the social order, and – perhaps most significantly – an adversary of demonic paganism. It is in this saga's relationship to 589a–f's final text that this self-made hero is brought into the narrative of history articulated by the rest of the compilation.

5 *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*

My analysis of 589a–f's final text, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, uses the same methodology as the previous one, although the types of intertextual relationships cannot be as easily distinguished into Lachmann's three types as was the case for *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Although exhibiting features of 'participation' and 'troping', *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s intertextuality is largely 'transformational': it mixes together numerous different references and creates something new from the contrasts between them. Because of the complexity of these relations and the fact that it is much longer, it is necessary to provide a summary of the saga's plot before in-depth analysis. In each of the sections that follow, I look at a different element of the text: first the bridal quest, then the saga's geography, and finally its representation of paganism. In the final section, I move the focus from the saga's plot to its *apologiæ*, which will lay important foundations for the discussion in this book's second half about the nature and function of the saga as a medium of cultural memory

5.1 Summary of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*

Göngu-Hrólfs saga begins by introducing a Scandinavian warrior named Hreggviðr who is said to have raided so successfully in the east that he became the King of Garðaríki. After several years of rule, a challenger named Eiríkr arrives from Gestrekaland with a gang of *berserkir* – foremost among them is the magically-skilled Grímr Ægir. Eiríkr defeats Hreggviðr and takes over his kingdom. Hreggviðr's daughter Ingigerðr convinces Eiríkr to make a deal with her. She will choose one champion every year to joust against his man Sörkvir on her behalf. If her champion is successful, she will retain her freedom and a third of her father's kingdom, but if after three years her champions all fail, she will marry Eiríkr and surrender her territory to him. Grímr Ægir casts a spell to ensure her failure, making it so that no one can beat Sörkvir without wearing Hreggviðr's armour, which had been buried in his grave mound with him. Planning ahead, however, Ingigerðr stays in her father's mound longer than anyone else after his burial and places a duplicate set of armour beside the real one.

After these events, the saga's attention moves west from Garðaríki to Scandinavia where we are introduced to the protagonist. Sturlaugr starfsami is, according to this saga, a jarl in Hringeríki in Norway where he and his wife Ása have several sons. The youngest is Hrólfr, otherwise known as Göngu-Hrólfr (walking-Hrólfr) because he is so heavy he cannot ride a horse for long and has to walk everywhere he goes. Sturlaugr complains that Hrólfr has done nothing to distin-

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guish himself and should acquire a wife. Hrólfr leaves, promising not to return until he has acquired more territory than his father. He travels first to Sweden where he encounters the hostile farmer Atli Ótryggsson and then the immoral Viking Jólgeirr. He overcomes them both with ease, acquiring a spear from the former and a ship and its men from the latter.

Hrólfr then travels to the court of an old widowed jarl named Þorgnýr in Denmark and joins his retinue. Two mysterious brothers named Hrafni and Kráki also arrive in Denmark and join the jarl's following. One day a swallow drops a hair in Þorgnýr's hand while he is sitting at his dead wife's grave. He is told the hair belongs to Ingigerðr, the princess of Garðaríki, and Þorgnýr decides he wishes to marry her, and sends Hrólfr on a quest to the east to woo her on his behalf. On his way, Hrólfr encounters the conniving Vilhjálmr (who wishes to marry Eiríkr's sister Gyða) and he manages to trick Hrólfr into becoming his servant. They travel to Garðaríki together and Hrólfr secretly performs a series of tasks on Vilhjálmr's behalf that have been set by Eiríkr to test his worth. First, he hunts a white stag through a forest. In order to capture it he must provide assistance to a heavily-pregnant *álfkona* (elf-woman) with her birth, whose mother gives him the stag in gratitude. He is then sent to Hreggviðr's mound to recover the dead king's armour – a mission which Eiríkr intends as a trap. When he gets there, however, Hrólfr finds the dead king is wide awake, guarding his treasures. He greets Hrólfr warmly and offers both his armour and his horse Dúlcifal, before revealing that he had been the swallow that dropped Ingigerðr's hair on Þorgnýr's lap because he wanted to bring Hrólfr to Garðaríki to avenge him and marry his daughter. Hrólfr takes the armour, but instead of surrendering it to the usurper-king, he gives Eiríkr the fake set that Ingigerðr had hidden in the mound earlier. The final task Hrólfr performs is to defend Eiríkr's kingdom from an attack by a *tröll* named Sóti. After completing these tasks, Hrólfr is chosen by Ingigerðr to be her champion that year and he successfully defeats Sörkvir with Hreggviðr's armour. He then whisks Ingigerðr back to Denmark to marry Þorgnýr. On his way, however, he is waylaid by the jealous Vilhjálmr who, eager to have Þorgnýr's gratitude for himself, stabs Hrólfr with a sleep-thorn and cuts his feet off, taking Ingigerðr to the jarl and leaving Hrólfr behind. Hrólfr is saved by Dúlcifal who carries him to the home of Þórgnyr's counsellor Björn who had been usurped by a villainous dwarf named Möndull. Hrólfr threatens the dwarf (who is skilled in healing), and he reattaches Hrólfr's feet to his legs, allowing him to reveal Vilhjálmr's deceit to Þorgnýr.

Möndull then joins Hrólfr's cause and they return to Garðaríki with a large following and fight a several-days long pitched battle against Eiríkr and Grímr Ægir. During the battle, Sturlaugr arrives from Norway to support his son, but he is killed by Grímr Ægir. The brothers Hrafni and Kráki make a reappearance, and

Kráki is killed. Hrólfr makes a second visit to Hreggviðr's grave mound where the dead king gives him a vat of magic drink to revive his army, and eventually Hrólfr is triumphant. After the battle has been won, Hrafni reveals himself to be Haraldr, the son of the recently deposed King of England named Játgeirr. The final portion of the saga details how Hrólfr successfully helps Haraldr back onto his throne and concludes with a triple marriage: Haraldr marries Þorgnýr's daughter Þóra; her brother and Hrólfr's good friend Stefnir marries Haraldr's sister Álfhildr; and, Þorgnýr having died earlier in a hostile attack on his jarldom by a *berserkr* named Tryggvi, Hrólfr marries Ingigerðr and becomes King of Garðaríki. Hrólfr's first son is named Hreggviðr, who is said to have made an ill-fated expedition to the east. His second son is called Óláfr and is said to have become the King of Denmark who fought Helgi the Brave with the support of the legendary Hrómundr Gripsson. His daughters, Dagny and Dagbjört, are said to have healed Hrómundr, and his third son was called Hörðr, father of Kári, father of Hörða-Knútr.

5.2 The Bridal Quest

Göngu-Hrólfs saga's principal intertext is, of course, *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, which is invoked when Hrólfr is introduced as the son of Sturlaugr. The scene which immediately follows invites comparison to a significant part of that text: its bridal quest. In *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, the hero had been convinced to pursue Ása by his father, who had complained that his son had done nothing to distinguish himself. At the beginning of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, Sturlaugr attempts to do the same for his own unpromising son, another *kolbítr* (Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2005, 92–93; Mitchell 1991, 55–56), saying:

> suo litz mer á þig sem litel muni afdrif þin uerda, heyrdi þat meir konu en karlmanni at hafa þui ligt framferdi sem þu hefir, þicki mer likazt at þu kuænezt ok setizt i bu ok gerir þig at kotkarli i afdal nóckrum þar eingen [madr] finni þig ok al þar þinn aldr suo leingi sem audet uerdr (589f, fol. 15^{v}, ll. 24–27; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 4, p. 249)
>
> (It seems to me that your fate will be meagre, the way you behave is more fitting for a woman than a man. It seems advisable to me that you look for a wife and settle down on a farm and make yourself a cottager in some remote valley where no one will find you and live your life for as long as is fated.)

Hrólfr is clearly insulted and replies that "eigi mun eg bua" (589f, fol. 15^{v}, l. 27 (*Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 4, p. 249) (I will not be a farmer) and goes on to proclaim: "eda kvænazt þui konur skulu mer eigi" (589f, fol. 15^{v}, ll. 27–28; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 4, p. 249) (nor will I marry, because women will not [have]

me). He says instead: "skal eg þui i burt uerda ok eigi aftr koma fyrr en eg hefi feingit jafnmikit riki ok þu att eda deyia ella þicki mer þetta kotungs eign ein, er þu hefir med ferdar ok lited til skiptiz med oss brædrum" (589f, fol. 15^{v}, ll. 28–31; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 4, p. 249) (I will go away from here and not come back until I have got a realm as large as yours or else die. It seems to me the property which you have managed is that of a croft-farmer, and it is too small to share between us brothers). Whereas Sturlaugr had accepted the challenge of finding a wife and proved it to be hardly a challenge at all, Hrólfr declares himself more interested in acquiring territory. Although his response differs to that of his father, the expected outcome of the parental goading seems, at first, like it will be the same – that this hero is not interested in impressing women and his saga will not be a bridal quest.

This turns out not to be the case, and instead of rejecting 'heroic love' as *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* had, Hrólfr's reluctance to pursue marriage is used as a vehicle to reassert it. This is facilitated by his proxy bridal quest, which means that although Hrólfr ends up marrying Ingigerðr, he never actively pursues this goal. As Kalinke (1990, 152–153) points out, he is entirely passive in all his (limited) interactions with her and expresses no desire to win the princess's affections for himself. In fact, he seems intent on doing the exact opposite: when she asks him to joust Sörkvir, for example, he tells her "allheimskliga kys þu þui at eg kann eigi at rida eirn saman suo at eg falle eigi ofan er eg þegar hræddr er menn yglazt á mik" (589f, fols 23^{r}, l. 34 – 23^{v}, l. 1; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 20, p. 293) (You choose unwisely for I cannot ride without falling down, I am afraid when men frown at me). But despite this lack of active courtship, Hrólfr's heroic pursuits are enough to make her want to marry him; after the final battle and Þorgnýr's conveniently timed death, "Sagði ingigerdr einardliga at hun uilldi aungan mann [ei] ga nema hrólf sturlaugsson, þui at hann hefir mestu um kostad faudr mins at hefna" (589f, fol. 33^{v}, ll. 22–23; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 34, p. 349) (Ingigerðr said firmly that she wanted to marry no other man than Hrólfr Sturlaugsson, because he had done the most to avenge her father). As Daniel Sävborg (2003, 66) observes, Ingigerðr does not choose Hrólfr out of love but because she admires his commitment to the heroic duty of vengeance. This is the absolute opposite of the perspective on 'heroic love' in the previous saga where Ása's judgement of Sturlaugr's heroic standing had no narrative significance at all.

Göngu-Hrólfs saga diverges further from its prequel in its treatment of material from *Völsunga saga*. As Rowe points out, Hrólfr's proxy-wooing of Ingigerðr echoes that of Brynhildr anyway, but the comparison between the two couples is made explicit by having Hrólfr and Ingigerðr sleep with a sword between them when they travel from Garðaríki to Denmark (Rowe 2013, 210; Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1980, 20). Further references to the legend come in the form of the

sleep thorn which Vilhjálmr stabs Hrólfr with and the drink of forgetfulness that Möndull gives to Björn's wife when he takes his place at Þorgnýr's court (Rowe 2013, 210).[112] The uniquely powerful and intelligent horse Dúlcifal also plays a similarly critical role in the pursuit of Ingigerðr as Sigurðr's horse Grani does in the wooing of Brynhildr (Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1980, 20). But these motifs are not, as in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, taken up to be mockingly brushed aside, rather they are integrated into the saga's bridal quest: Hrólfr's wooing of Ingigerðr is the central task that propels the action forward, and the couple who sleeps either side of the sword in this saga (and here it really is a sword unlike in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*) is the one whose relationship the saga actually follows. In Hrólfr and Ingigerðr, the 'heroic love' of Sigurðr and Brynhildr is given a new lease of life.

However, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s perspective on *Völsunga saga* is not wholly participatory since the romance-inflected world that Hrólfr and Ingigerðr inhabit is strikingly different to the tragic one of their legendary forebears. Not only, as Rowe (2013, 211) notes, is the couple in question given a happy ending, but their path to it diverges sharply from *Völsunga saga* in its use of courtly lexis. In his study of the *fornaldarsögur*, Peter Hallberg (1982, 18–32 and 34–35) has noted that both sagas draw particularly heavily on the 'vocabulary of chivalry'. In *Völsunga saga*, this vocabulary is clustered in the second half, which recounts Sigurðr's dealings with the Gjúkungs, his betrayal of Brynhildr, and the many deaths which follow (Würth 2003, 106–108; Ney 2003, 114–116). These courtly scenes take place in distinctly feminised spaces and involve secretive private interactions which negatively contrast the honourable public ones that are preferred by Sigurðr and Brynhildr (Ney 2003, 116–121; Quinn 2003, 93–97). The heroic code followed by them does not fit within the double-dealing practices of the Gjúkungs, and the pair's tragic deaths result from their refusal to assimilate (Larrington 2012, 253–260).

In contrast, the same world in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* is positively coded and aligned with Hrólfr and Ingigerðr. When Hrólfr is introduced as a *kolbítr* figure, he is positioned as an outcast not because of laziness but because he is uninterested in typical farm life. Instead, he prefers the same pastimes as the elites described in the sagas of 589a–f's first half: "ecki uar hann sidblendin uid alþydu, for hann litt med gledi ok skemtan utan hellzt þotti honum gaman at fara i skotbakka ok uera i burtreidum" (589f, fol. 15^{v}, ll. 19–20; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 4, p. 249) (he did not mix well with the common people, he did not enjoy merriment and entertainment although he did enjoy shooting butts and jousting).

112 Rowe also notes there are two minor characters named Sigurðr who appear in the saga.

When in Denmark, he begins to engage with this courtly culture: Þorgnýr puts him in charge of his own *kastali* (castle) – one of the words Hallberg identifies as a *riddarasaga* import – whereas the jarl himself occupies a more traditional *höll* (hall).[113] But it is in the east that Hrólfr really proves his chivalric worth. The hunt for the white stag may have derived from the translated French *lais* and echoes a scene in *Samsons saga fagra*'s *riddarasaga*-inflected first half. This is followed by the most critical test of Hrólfr's chivalric prowess: his joust with Sörkvir. The beginning of it is described as follows:

> [s]kikar nu huattuegi sinni burdstaung til lags ok ridr huor i mot aud[rum] sem hestarner kunnu hardazt bera þa, leggr þa hvor til annars afli miklu spiot saurkua kom i skiólldin hrólfs ok renndi ut af, En hrólfr stakk hialminum i b[urt] af saurkuir (589f, fol. 23^{v}, ll. 25–28; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 21, p. 295)
>
> (Both now aimed their lances to attack, and charged towards one another as hard as their horses could carry them. They struck each other with great strength. Sörkvir's lance struck Hrólfr's shield and glanced aside, but Hrólfr knocked Sörkvir's helmet away.)

This scene occurs at a critical juncture in Hrólfr's bridal quest, since it is where he and Ingigerðr meet. The Garðaríki princess – who is consistently described as a *jungfrú* (princess or lady), another *riddarasaga* import (Hallberg 1982, 19; Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1971, 107) – is also depicted using romance conventions:

> allra kuenna uar hun friduzt ok kurteisuzt er i uoru gardariki ok þo at uidara uæri leitad, uizku ok malsnilld bar hun yfir huern mann ok allar þær listir kunni hun er kvenn manne somdi ok þa plaugudu dyrir konur at kenna ok nenna, hun hafdi hár suo mikit at [vel] matti hylia allan hennar likama ok suo fagurt sem gull edr hálmr (589f, fol. 13^{v}, ll. 5–8; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 1, p. 238)
>
> (She was the loveliest and most courteous woman in Garðaríki and beyond. She had more wisdom and eloquence than other people. She was capable of all those skills which befitted women and which noble women cultivated to teach and practise. She had hair so long that it could cover her whole body and [it was] as beautiful as gold or straw.)

Like Hrólfr, Ingigerðr also occupies a *kastali* or *friðkastali* (castle of peace), which is "agiætliga innann buit med gulli ok gimsteinum" (589f, fol. 13^{v}, l. 10; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 1, p. 238) (excellently fitted out with gold and gemstones), whereas Eiríkr rules from a *höll*. But, unlike in *Völsunga saga*, it is not the women who cause trouble in this world. Accordingly, no scenes occur inside Ingi-

113 With 17 occurances of the word *kastali*, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* has the highest usage among the sagas surveyed by Hallberg (1982, 34–35) after *Þiðreks saga af bern*.

gerðr's castle, and although it is said of Þorgnýr's daughter Þóra that "uar henne skemma reist ok sat hun þar i [med] sinum þionustukonum" (589f, fol. 16^{r}, ll. 21–22; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 5, p. 251) (a chamber was built for her, and she sat there with her female servants), echoing Brynhildr's own maiden-inhabited *skemma*, we are never actually shown it.[114]

The courtly world of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* is instead characterised by large ostentatious public events. Foremost among them is the romance-style triple wedding at the saga's close (Lönnroth 2003, 41; Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1971, 97–98), which echoes scenes in several of 589a–f's other texts, *Kirialax saga* most of all. To the banquet they invite "burgeisar ok [hi]rdmenn greifar jarlar hertugar ok konungar ok adrir mikits hattar monum" and "kurteiser junkiærar ok hæuersker hofmenn" (589f, fol. 35^{v}, ll. 18–21; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 37, pp. 358–59) (burghers and courtiers, counts and jarls, dukes and kings, and other distinguished men [and] courteous young men and well-mannered courtiers). No expense is spared when it comes to food: "þar u[aru fram] bornir allz konar rettir, medur hinum dyruztum jurtum, allra handa dyra holld ok fugla, af reinum ok hiortum ok uænum uillisuinum, traunur ok giæs hæns ok riúpur med piprudum páfuglum, Eigi uanntadi þar hin dyrligazta dryck, kal ok enskan miod med uilldazta uini, piment ok klaretur" (589f, fol. 35^{v}, ll. 21–25; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 37, p. 359) (they carried in all kinds of dishes with expensive herbs, all kinds of animal meats and birds, of reindeer and harts, and fine wild boar, cranes and goose, chickens and ptarmigans with peppered peacocks. There was no lack of expensive drink, ale and English mead, with the finest wines, both spiced and claret). And the same can be said of the entertainment: "allz kyns streingleika, haurpur ok gigiur, sinfon ok sallterium þar uoro bumbur ok trumbur ok pipur blasnar" (589f, fol. 35^{v}, ll. 26–27; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 37, p. 359) (all kinds of stringed instruments, harps and fiddles, symphonies and psalteries, there were tambourines and drums, and pipes were blown).

Whereas Sigurðr and Brynhildr's refusal to operate within the norms of courtly culture had been a testament to their heroic status, it is Hrólfr's success in navigating that same world which demonstrates his. Although the couple's union is based on a traditional conceptualisation of heroic love, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* positions that tradition as mutually compatible with the courtly world that *Völsunga saga* scorns. The saga's amalgamation of these two worlds is embodied by the intertextuality of Hreggviðr's horse Dúlcifal. He can understand human speech and "skiotr uar hann sem fugl fimr sem ikorni mikill sem ulfalldi, en likaztr lioni at grimleik ok afle" (589f, fol. 13^{v}, ll. 17–18; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 1, p. 239)

114 There is a hole in the page on l. 21 where we would expect the word 'med' to be.

(was swift as a bird, nimble as a squirrel, great as a camel, and resembling a lion in cruelty and power) and "uar af kyni dromedariorum" (589f, fol. 13^{v}, l. 26; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 1, p. 240) (was related to the dromedary). He is, as mentioned, Hrólfr's equivalent to Sigurðr's Grani but he also seems to have been inspired by Alexander the Great's steed Bucephalus (Magoun 1934). In this manuscript context, there is also an echo with *Ektors saga*, in which the eponymous hero is said to ride a dromedary (589d, fol. 19^{r}, l. 4; *Ectors saga*, 1962, ch. 2, p. 86). Connoting figures from both Scandinavian and classical traditions, in addition to the courtly culture constructed in 589a–f's first half, Dúlcifal represents the middle-ground which this saga strikes in its construction of a hero who is traditional at his core but nevertheless successful in an overtly Europeanised setting.

This is drastically different from *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, which had thoroughly rejected both of the narrative fields that *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* embraces. Not only had that saga made a mockery of the Völsungs, but it had also snubbed the king-centred ideology of the translated *riddarasögur*. *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, by contrast, evinces the totally opposite attitude towards kingship. This is evident in the saga's contrary approach to the legendary King Gautrekr, to whom *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*'s Haraldr had been negatively compared. As Kalinke (1990, 147) points out, in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* when the swallow drops Ingigerðr's hair on jarl Þorgnýr's lap, he is sitting at the grave of his dead wife, just as Gautrekr is said to have done in both *Gautreks saga* and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* (*Saga Gautreks konungs*, 1830, ch. 8, p. 39; *Saga af Hrólfi konúngi Gautrekssyni*, 1830, ch. 1, p. 57).[115] It is thus Þorgnýr who is the Gautrekr-equivalent of this saga, but unlike Haraldr, he is not undermined by the saga's hero. Rather, all the heroic acts which Hrólfr performs are by-products of his service to the jarl; his goal is not to marry, but to complete the task assigned to him by Þorgnýr. The saga's villains are his opposite in this regard: rather than serving those with power, they all attempt to take it illegitimately. This is the case for Eiríkr who takes Garðaríki by force, the usurping King Heinríkr who does the same in England, and the *berserkr* Tryggvi who invades Þorgnýr's jarldom while Hrólfr is away. Unlike these illegitimate takers-of-power, Hrólfr elevates himself by defending the status-quo: he is rewarded for remaining ever-loyal to his overlord, ousting two usurpers, and bringing about the return of the rightful dynasties to both. In contrast to Eiríkr, Hrólfr does not impose himself as king, rather it is said that "uar hrólfr þa til konungs teken yfir allt gardariki med radi konungs [dóttur] ok annara rikis manna"

115 The swallow dropping the hair seems to derive from the Tristan tradition although the motif does not occur in any Icelandic versions of the legend. Kalinke (2015, 157) sees this as evidence that Icelanders were familiar with other versions.

(589f, fol. 36^{r}, ll. 32–33; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 38, p. 362) (Hrólfr was adopted as king over the whole of Garðaríki on the advice of the king's daughter and other rulers).

Consequently, the proxy nature of Hrólfr's bridal quest has two purposes. On the one hand, it enables Hrólfr to demonstrate his worth to Ingigerðr without actively pursuing her, and thus rearticulates *Völsunga saga*'s heroic love. On the other hand, it also provides a means through which that heroic love can be recalibrated: the kind of heroism which Hrólfr's union with Ingigerðr represents is characterised by fidelity to his overlord. Consequently, this saga has more in common with the political ideology of the translated *riddarasögur* than that of either *Völsunga saga* or *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*.

The intertextuality of the bridal quest is thus thoroughly transformational. Its courtly world is a sharp departure from that in *Völsunga saga*; as Rowe (2013, 211) writes, *Völsunga saga* "represents what *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* is not–not a tragedy of ancient heroes, not tainted by malevolent pagan gods or incestuous siblings". But as the representation of love and comparison to *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*'s shows, although moving away from it, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* does not totally reject or supplant this source text. Instead, it confuses *Völsunga saga*'s internal oppositions to create something new, participating in both the heroic world of its first half *and* the courtly one of its second. The result is the re-embrace of both the systems of value which Sturlaugr had rejected and their reconfiguration into one integrated whole. With this reconfiguration, the *riddarasaga*-inflected courtly culture that was depicted in 589a–f's first half and which was imperfectly realised in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, and *Ála flekks saga*, finally reaches full fruition in Scandinavia.

5.3 Geography and Kingship

The intertextual relationships which relate to the saga's geography are of a similarly transformational character. These relationships embed the saga in the wider memory space of saga literature and, by providing a point of entry for Hrólfr's recalibrated version of legendary heroism, they are also a means through which the saga reconfigures it. Each of its three main locations – Garðaríki, England, and Denmark – will be treated in turn below.

5.3.1 Garðaríki

Garðaríki is the Norse name for the kingdom of the Kievan Rus that emerged in the ninth century amidst a considerable amount of 'Viking' activity along the eastern European river routes, known as the *austrvegr* (eastern way).[116] Tatjana N. Jackson (2019, 171–172) has distinguished three distinct phases in the representation of the *austrvegr* and Garðaríki in Icelandic sources. The first is that of Viking raids, while the second and third deal with the diplomatic relations between the Christian kings of Scandinavia and Garðaríki. *Heimskringla*'s *Ynglinga saga* provides an example of the first. It tells of King Yngvarr's unsuccessful raids in the Baltic: "Yngvarr konungr gerði frið við Dani, tók þá at herja um Austrvegu [. . .] Var þá landherinn svá drjúgr, at Svíar fengu eigi mótstǫðu. Féll þá Yngvarr konungr, en lið hans flýði" (Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla, I,* 1941, p. 61) ("King Yngvarr made peace with the Danes and then began to raid around the *austrvegr* [. . .] The native army was so numerous that the Svíar could put up no resistance. Then King Yngvarr died and his army fled") (Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla, I,* 2014, p. 34). Examples of the other two stages are found in other sagas in *Heimskringla*. For example, in the early eleventh century, it is said that Óláfr Tryggvason spent a portion of his youth in Garðaríki at the court of Valdamarr (Vladimir the Great) (Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla, I,* 1941, pp. 231–232). Later, Óláfr Haraldsson took refuge at the court of Jarizleifr (Jaroslav the Wise) following his defeat at the Battle of Helgeå in 1026, because his Swedish wife Ástriðr was the sister of Jarizleifr's wife Ingigerðr (Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla, II,* 1941, pp. 339–344). Both phases are represented in the *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s opening account of Hreggviðr:

> þa er hreggvidr konungr uar á ungum alldri la hann i hernadi, hann hafdi siglt i ana dynu er fellr um gardariki ok heriar þadan a austrriki á ymesligar þiodir ok feingit iafnan sigr ok mikit fe ok fáséna gripe, þessi á er en þridia edr fiorda stærst i heiminum at uppsprettu ár þessarar leitadi ynguar hinn uidfaurli (589f, fol. 13^{v}, ll. 11–14; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 1 pp. 238– 239)[117]
>
> (When king Hreggviðr was young in age he raided [and] he sailed on the River Dvína that flows through Garðaríki, and from there raided various nations to the east and always had victory and took from them many a rare treasure. This river is the third or fourth largest in the world and it was this river's source that Yngvarr víðförli sought.)

116 On the possible origins of the toponym, see Jackson 2019, 65–69.
117 I have corrected the scribes misspelling of *siglt* as "silgt".

This is a direct reference to *Yngvars saga víðförla*, which was probably written by the Þingeyrar monk Oddr Snorrason in the early thirteenth century (Hofmann 1981). It details the eastwards travels made by a certain Yngvarr to Garðaríki and beyond in the eleventh century, at the core of which was a historic expedition commemorated on over twenty runic inscriptions in Sweden (Shepard 1985). The details of this expedition were, however, a mystery to medieval Icelanders (as they are for us today), and so Oddr freely invented his protagonist's genealogical connections and furnished the sparse oral core with material from Christian learned sources, giving it the flavour of hagiography.[118] According to his saga, Yngvarr was the grandson of King Eiríkr of Sweden and thus related to the historic Ingigerðr. After leaving Sweden in search of a kingdom of his own, he visits her and Jarizleifr's court in Garðaríki before venturing further east in search of the source of an unnamed river. On his journey he encounters pagan cities and several deadly marvels but falls ill and dies on his return. His son, Sveinn, follows in his footsteps, bringing a bishop to preach the true faith in the kingdom of the formerly pagan Silkisif and consecrate a church there.

Yngvarr víðförli and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s Hreggviðr represent the two stages of eastern contact which Jackson identifies: Hreggviðr is a raider representative of the earlier stage, whereas the pious Yngvarr is a visitor in a friendly kingdom comparable to later kings. Göngu-Hrólfr provides a link between these two poles. When he and his men travel eastwards for the final battle, they travel along the same river as Hreggviðr and Yngvarr and take part in Viking activity like the former: "laugdu þeir upp i ana dynu ok heriudu þegar á bædi bord, þeir brendu bygdir en ræntu [fe] þui er þeir nádu" (589f, fol. 28^{r}, ll. 33–34; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 28, p. 317) (they sailed up the river Dvína and raided there on both banks, burned settlements, and plundered all the goods they could obtain).[119] However, in the saga's conclusion, Hrólfr instead enacts the Scandinavian-eastern relations familiar from Jackson's later stages – he becomes a king in the east not by conquest, but via marriage to the (aptly-named) Ingigerðr. As a result, a new layer of history is added between the two poles presented at the beginning of the narrative, in which a Viking hero of the legendary age engages in the kind of international diplomatic relations typical not only of the courtly knights depicted in 589a–f's first half, but also Scandinavia's later Christian kings.

118 For a recent discussion on the saga's sources and authorship, see Lönnroth 2014.
119 The beginning of line 34 is damaged.

5.3.2 England

The same pattern characterises Hrólfr's interactions with England. The historic relationship between Viking Age Scandinavia and England was, in much the same way, one of raiding. Memories of this relationship are recorded in a group of texts which Rowe (2009, 2) sees as evoking the "myth of the Viking empire", which extended from Scandinavia to England and centred on the legendary figures Haraldr hilditönn and Ragnarr loðbrók. Rowe sees the origin of the Viking-empire myth in the no-longer-extant *Skjöldunga saga*. Arguably, such a myth is also evoked in the various accounts of the historic Göngu-Hrólfr (otherwise known as Rollo) who conquered Normandy at the end of the ninth century and founded the dynasty that went on to conquer England in 1066.[120] Whereas some *fornaldarsögur* (such as *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*) evoke the empire myth, others depict a mutually beneficial, if somewhat unequal, relationship between the English and Scandinavian rulers. Such is the case in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* where Hrólfr offers the English military aid and unites their royal houses in marriage alliances. Rowe (2009, 3–7) sees the template for these "non-Viking-empire *fornaldarsögur*" in Snorri's *Heimskringla*, in which sympathies lie with the Scandinavians who assisted the English rather than those who invaded. But whereas Snorri's anti-Norwegian-empire bias meant he presented the English kings as superior to the Scandinavian ones, by placing the English royal house in a network of alliances that centre on and are indebted to Denmark, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* adopts his preferred pattern for Anglo-Scandinavian relations without the damning portrayal of expansionist politics. Instead, it maintains the notion of Scandinavian ascendancy found in the "Viking-empire *fornaldarsögur*" but reimagines that empire as a peaceful aristocratic community that was founded on diplomacy rather than conquest. This is, of course, the total opposite of the invasions of Normandy and England that are associated with the historic Göngu-Hrólfr and his descendants,

120 The historic figure is mentioned in *Orkneyinga saga*, *Heimskringla*'s *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, *Landnámabók*, and some of the Icelandic annals: *Orkneyinga saga*, 1913–1916, ch. 4, p. 5; Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla, I*, 1941, p. 123; *Landnámabók I–III*, 1900, pp. 31, 96, 152, 210; *Islandske annaler*, 1888, pp. 14, 175, 247, 460. The earliest fragments of *Orkneyinga saga* (AM 325 I 4to, 1290–1310; AM 325 III α–β 4to, 1290–1350) do not preserve the beginning where this information is recorded; this section of Sigurðr Nordal's edition is based on AM 332 4to (1688–1705), a copy of a now-lost medieval manuscript. *Landnámabók*'s information about Göngu-Hrólfr appears in both the Sturlubók (AM 107 fol, 1640–1660) and Hauksbók (AM 371 4to, 1302–1310) versions, which are both cited here. The annals I have cited are (in the order and with the titles used by Gustav Storm): *Annales Reseniani* (AM 424 4to, 1690–1710), *Skálholts-Annaler* (AM 420a 4to, 1362), *Lögmanns-annáll* (AM 420b 4to, 1362–1390), and the *Oddveria Annall* (AM 417 4to, 1550–1600). On the historic Göngu-Hrólfr, see further Hartmann 1912, 43–54.

which means that although the events of this saga supposedly took place at a much earlier time, its hero is considerably more modern in his international relations than his namesake.

5.3.3 Denmark

The patterning of Hrólfr as a precursor to later kings comes through clearly in the saga's closing description of Denmark. After the triple wedding, the saga provides descriptions of the three main settings. The description of Denmark is the most detailed and weaves together two intertextual references. The bulk of the information is taken from *Knýtlinga saga*, which provides a detailed account of Denmark's internal geography after Knútr IV (Knútr the Saint) is appointed king (Hartmann 1912, 72–75; Lavender 2018, 93–99). *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* uses that saga's information about Denmark's geographic divisions, main towns, and islands, but omits what would have been anachronistic details about its episcopal sees and the numbers of ships under the king's levy. The passage in *Knýtlinga saga* begins as follows:

> Danmǫrk er mikit ríki ok liggr mjǫk sundrlaust. Inn mesti hluti Danaríkis heitir Jótland. Þat liggr it syðra með hafi. Þar er inn synnzti biskupsstóll í Danmǫrk í Heiðabœ, ok er í þeim biskupsdómi hálft fjórða hundrað kirkna, en þrír tigir skipa ok hundrað konungi til útboðs. Annarr bikupsstóll er á Jótlandi, þar er heitir í Rípum. Í því biskupsríki eru fjórar kirkjur, ok tuttugu ins fjórða hundraðs, en tólf tigir skipa konungi til útboðs. (*Knýtlinga saga*, 1982, ch. 32, pp. 150–151)[121]

> (Denmark is a large kingdom and very disjointed. The greater part of Denmark is called Jutland and lies to the south by the sea. The most southerly episcopal see in Denmark is situated there, at Hedeby, where there are three hundred and fifty churches and one hundred and thirty ships under the king's levy. Another episcopal seat in Jutland is at a place called Ribe and in that bishopric there are three hundred and twenty four churches and one hundred and twenty ships under the king's levy.)[122]

121 The fullest version of the saga (representing the A group, which is quoted here) is a later transcript (AM 18 fol, *c*. 1700) made by Árni Magnússon based on a fourteenth-century manuscript that was subsequently lost in the 1728 fire, with its large lacuna (another result of the fire) filled by the edition prepared for publication (AM 20k fol, 1740–1760) based on the then-complete transcript. The earliest manuscripts of the B group are the fragment AM 20b II fol (1300–1325) and AM 180b fol (1490–1510). Both versions feature the description of Denmark.

122 This translation is adapted from *Knytlinga saga*. The History of the Kings of Denmark, 1986, ch. 32, p. 59.

The parallel passage in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* reads:

> Danmaurk er mikit riki, ok miog sundrlaust, ok er þar iotland mestr hluti rikis, þat ligr et sydra med hafinu, iotlandz sida er kaullud uestan fra uanndels skaga ok sudr til ripa, i iotlandi eru margir haufud stadar, hin synnzte er i heidabæ, annar i ripum þridi i árose (589f, fol. 36^{r}, ll. 12–15; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 37, pp. 360–61)[123]
>
> (Denmark is a large kingdom and very disjointed. Jutland is the largest part of the kingdom; it lies south by the sea. Jutland Side is the name of that part lying on the west coast from Skagen and south to Ribe. In Jutland, there are many important towns, Hedeby is the most southerly; another is Ribe, a third Aarhus)

Knýtlinga saga begins where *Skjöldunga saga* probably ended (with the reign of Haraldr Gormsson), and describes the unification of Denmark and its development into a powerful Christian kingdom. Its description of Denmark concludes with the words: "Þessi lǫnd ǫll, eru nefnd, liggja undir Danakonungs ríki, ok eru þau bæði víð ok fjǫlmenn. Þessi lǫnd váru at fornu margra konunga ríki" (*Knýtlinga saga*, 1982, ch. 32, p. 152) ("All these territories listed here, which in the old days were many separate kingdoms, now belong to the Kingdom of Denmark") (*Knytlinga saga*. The History of the Kings of Denmark, 1986, ch. 32, p. 60). The legendary past is used to demonstrate the successes of Knútr and his recent forebears. The parallel description in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* also concludes with a reference to the (here contemporaneous) legendary age: "hafdi riki skiolldunga i þat tima, en þo haufdu adrir konungar ok jarlar, eigi minna riki at rada i danmaurku, helldr en þeir þott skiolldungar bære hæsta tigr fyrir nafns sakir ok ættar" (589f, fol. 36^{r}, ll. 25–27; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 37, p. 361) (the Skjöldungar had the kingdom at that time, and even though other kings and earls had realms no smaller than theirs in Denmark, the Skjöldungs were held in greater respect on account of their title and kin). By placing the description of Knútr's kingdom in the same period as the Skjöldungs, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* reacts against the teleological account of kingdom formation found in its source, making the point that even though it may not have been ruled by the likes of Knútr the Saint, legendary Denmark was still the domain of powerful rulers whose legacies laid the foundations for the triumphs of later generations. It affirms *Knýtlinga saga*'s pro-Danish sentiment but draws it back in time to reduce the political difference between the distant and recent pasts.

123 I have corrected the scribe's misspelling of *vestan* as "vastan".

5.3.4 Foreshadowing Christianity

The foreshadowing of conversion is an important feature of these intertextual relationships; they liken Hrólfr not just to kings, but to secular figures notable for their opposition to heathenism. Knútr IV was, of course, a saint, and Yngvarr víðförli achieves saint-like status in his saga with the construction of a church in his memory. For Oddr Snorrason's other biographical subject, Óláfr Tryggvason, the Scandinavian-eastern connection also had powerful Christian resonances since the kingdom of Garðaríki was the first place he converted after visiting Constantinople (Oddr Snorrason, *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, 1932, ch. 13 (A-text) and ch. 9 (S-text), pp. 42–43).[124] The places he is said to have gone on to convert (the British Isles and Scandinavia) are, broadly, the same places that are drawn together in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s concluding marriages. As such, not only does Hrólfr's journey to Garðaríki evoke that of Yngvarr and his marriage to Ingigerðr prefigure the future diplomatic and spiritual affinity between Scandinavia and the east, but it also hints at a reading of his reimagined Viking empire as a foreshadowing of the future spiritual community that would be created by later Christian kings.

Audiences are invited to look forward to this future, and specifically to Óláfr Tryggvason, by another explicit intertextual reference:

> suo er sagt at milli gardarikis ok tattararikis ligr ein ey er hiedensey heitir hun er eitt iarlsriki, þat er fornra manna saugn at heden hiarandason tæki fyst land uid þessa ey er hann silgdi til danmerkr af indialandi eptir til uisan gaundlar sem segir i hedninga uigum ok eyin hafi af honum nafn tekit sidan (589f, fol. 22^{r}, ll. 32–35 – fol. 22^{v}, l. 1; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 17, p. 284).[125]
>
> (It is said that an island lies between Garðaríki and Tattararíki called Heðinn's Isle, an earldom. It is the story of ancestors that Heðinn Hjarrandason made this island his first stop when he sailed to Denmark from India, following the advice of Göndul, as it says in the battle of the Heðningar and the island has taken its name from him ever since.)

This is a reference to the legend of the *Hjaðningavíg*: the everlasting battle between Högni and Heðinn over Högni's daughter Hildr. The legend is recorded in *Snorra Edda*, both in the prose and, in some manuscripts, the quotation of Bragi Boddason's *Ragnarsdrápa* (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda, I*, 1998, pp. 72–73; *Edda*, 1924,

124 Yngvarr is explicitly likened to Óláfr Tryggvason: Oddr Snorrason, *Yngvars saga víðförla*, 1912, p. 10. On the spiritual resonances of the east in saga literature more generally, see Haki Antonsson 2008, 169–171; Sverrir Jakobsson 2006, 953–943.

125 I have removed what seems to be an error: the addition of what looks like "het" between "heden" and "hiarandason". According to Rafn, AM 152 fol here reads "Héðin konúngr Hjarandason" (*Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 17, p. 284).

pp. 82–85; *The Uppsala Edda*, 2012, p. 234). It is also reworked in the later *Sörla þáttr*, which is preserved only in Flateyjarbók. *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* seems to refer to something more like the latter, since it is the only version extant which describes Heðinn's encounter with Göndul.[126] In this version, the battle takes place on the Orcadian island of Hoy and is eventually brought to an end when one of Óláfr Tryggvason's retainers acts as a channel for the grace of God to break the curse that had initiated the battle (Rowe 2002, 62–63). As with the reference to *Yngvars saga víðförla* and *Knýtlinga saga*, the reference to this reworked version of the *Hjaðningavíg* legend reminds audiences of the future which is to come during the time of Norway's great missionary king.

In this way, the intertextual relationships of the saga's three main settings are also thoroughly transformational. As argued in the first part of this chapter, Hrólfr's proxy bridal quest had redefined heroism for the courtly world. The settings within which that quest takes place give that heroism a space within wider historical narratives. The references to *Yngvars saga víðförla*, *Knýtlinga saga*, and *Sörla þáttr* anchor it within the same grand narrative of Christian history which was summoned at the beginning of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, but rather than looking back to creation and the loss of humanity's relationship with God, they invite audiences to look forward to its return during the time of Scandinavia's future kings. In Hrólfr's travels, a narrative is written which connects these two historical moments: he leaves Norway to turn the Viking world of his father's generation into one ruled by Christian-style kings whose tastes and politics align them more with Kirialax and Ektor than legendary heroes like Sigurðr Fáfnisbani and Ragnarr loðbrók.

5.4 Representing Paganism

When it comes to the pagan religion of the legendary age, a similar phenomenon is, to a certain extent, evident. *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* participates in the same demonic interpretation that was evident in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* and similarly associates it with the saga's villains. But not all of the saga's mythological references are associated with this interpretation and instead represent a drastic departure from conventional representations of the pre-Christian past.

126 *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* and *Sörla þáttr* do not agree on where in the east Heðinn travelled from. In the former it is India and in the latter Serkland (*Sörla þáttr*, 1860, p. 278).

5.4.1 The Demonic Interpretation

The demonic interpretation is invoked by the above-mentioned references to *Yngvars saga víðförla* and *Sörla þáttr*. In the former, all manner of monsters (with roots in both learned and native tradition) lurk beyond the eastern border of the known world, including the devil himself (Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1989, 6–7). In the latter, the Norse gods (who reside in the far east) are not divine beings but vindictive euhemerised kings and queens who deal in dark magic (Quinn 2006a). *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s references to these texts complement *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*'s Bjarmaland episode by extending its geographical fringe to the east.

Unlike the previous saga, however, the demonic interpretation which is found on the saga's fringes also appears in an intensified form in its centre. The principal villain, Grímr Ægir, is a medley of mythological associations and clearly aligned with evil. The first part of his name, Grímr (mask), is listed both as one of Óðinn's monikers and a dwarf name (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, 2005, p. 21; *Dverga heiti*, 2017, p. 695).[127] The second part, Ægir, is that of the sea deity who is said to be both a *jötunn* and a friend of the gods (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda, I*, 1998, pp. 1–5; *Edda*, 1924, pp. 50–55 and 71–74; *The Uppsala Edda*, 2012, pp. 86–90 and 154–162). Grímr Ægir is reportedly from Hlésey where he was found, reared, and instructed in the art of magic by the *völva* (prophetess) Gróa, who has the same name as the *völva* of myth who attempts to remove a whetstone from Þórr's head (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda, I*, 1998, pp. 22–24; *Edda*, 1924, p. 64; *The Uppsala Edda*, 2012, p. 94).[128] Grímr Ægir is very clearly a demon: the saga states that "hans edle uar olikt anara manna natturu" (589f, fol. 14^{r}, ll. 13–14; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 2, p. 241) (his nature was unlike any other man's) and when he dies at battle at the end of the saga, his shapeshifting body is revealed to be an immaterial illusion that "bradnadi i sundr sem snior i elldi [ok uard] at dufte einu" (589f, fol. 33r, ll. 2–3; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 3, p. 245) (melted away like snow in a flame and turned into nothing but dust).

Göngu-Hrólfs saga goes further than its prequel in differentiating its hero from the demonic interpretation of paganism that Grímr Ægir represents. In contrast to the priestesses who had been confined to the far north and only posed a danger when Sturlaugr sought them out, Grímr Ægir roams freely around the

127 *Dverga heiti* is preserved in AM 748 I b 4to and AM 757a 4to (1390–1410).

128 In *Skáldskaparmál*, the Ægir of the framing narrative who Bragi tells about the gods is also said to be from Hlésey: Snorri Sturluson, *Edda, I*, 1998, p. 1; *Edda*, 1924, p. 50; *The Uppsala Edda*, 2012, p. 86. A sorceress named Gróa also appears as the title character of *Grógaldr*, an eddic poem which is most likely of late composition and preserved only in paper manuscripts from the seventeenth century: *Svipdagsmál. I. Gróagaldr*. 1867.

saga's main settings. As such, he is more alike in character to the mythologically disguised devils that Óláfr Tryggvason is said to have defeated in the various accounts of his life. A few of these instances are mentioned in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s prologue: "finzt þar ok dæmi til at sumir likamir hafa hræring haft af ohreins anda iblæstri, suo sem uar eyuindr kinrifa i olafsaugu trygguasonar edr einar skarfr edr freyr, er gunnar helmingur drap i suiariki" (589f, fol. 13^{r}, ll. 22–24; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 1, p. 237) (there are also some examples of bodies which have moved under the inspiration of an unclean spirit such as Eyvindr kinnrifa in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* or Einarr skarfr or Freyr, who was killed by Gunnar helmingr in Sweden). The Einarr skarfr mentioned here is, as Lavender (2018, 89) observes, otherwise unknown. The other two names refer to instances where Óláfr Tryggvason killed demons in disguise: one who took human form – Eyvindr kinnrifa in Hálogaland – and the other who inhabited the idol to Freyr that was encountered by Gunnar helmíngr in Sweden.[129] By killing Grímr Ægir, Hrólfr is, therefore, more than just implicitly distinct from devil worshippers as Sturlaugr had been. Instead he is, like Óláfr Tryggvason, explicitly the devil's opponent, and the 'Viking empire' he establishes is, like Óláfr's Christian community, predicated on that opposition.

The defeat of Grímr Ægir also has a geographical element. Like the priestesses, Grímr Ægir is associated with the far north, specifically with Jötunheimar where he is said to go raiding. Jötunheimar is never depicted in this saga, but its name evokes potent memories about the *jötnar* from other texts, including those already encountered in 589a–f. By being alluded to but never actually shown, the northern margin is denied full representation; it is relegated to the narrative fringe as well as that of the saga's physical geography. It means that when Hrólfr defeats Grímr Ægir, he does not merely neutralise a threatening force that lurks on the margin of human society, but he also eliminates those with the capacity to travel to it. As a result, the mythological and demonic margin is rendered totally separate from the saga's centre, and Hrólfr is the one responsible.

129 Slightly different versions of the Eyvíndr kinnrifa narrative can be found the different versions of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*: Oddr Snorrason, *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, 1932, ch. 45 (A-text) and ch. 34 (S-text), pp. 137–143; Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla, I*, 1941, pp. 322–323. The latter only appears in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta, II*, 1961, ch. 174, pp. 10–17. See also Clunies Ross 2018, pp. 122–123.

5.4.2 Ambiguous Figures

But the saga's representation of pre-Christian religion is far from clear cut, and there are several other figures drawn from myth who do not fit within the conventional *interpretatio Christiana*. First, is Hreggviðr. Grave-dwellers like him are a common feature of Icelandic literature and folklore. They seem to have had distinctly negative connotations and likely would have been interpreted by most as demons (Ármann Jakobsson 2011, 286). Their precise nature is impossible to pin down, but Ármann Jakobsson (2011, 289–291) distinguishes between two broad types: watchmen and roaming ghosts. Hreggviðr belongs to the former group, which is made up of selfish figures motivated to remain in the world by some material goal, such as holding on to their property or (like Hreggviðr) protecting dynastic interests, who often conjure storms and clouds of stench to prevent saga heroes from approaching their graves. But Hreggviðr stands apart from convention. On the surface, he looks like grave-dwellers elsewhere: his mound is surrounded by a large storm and smell which it takes Hrólfr a whole night to pass through. But once he has done so, Hreggviðr informs him that, "eigi uelld eg gerrninga hridum ne fylum edr audrum undrum" (589f, fol. 21^{v}, ll. 1–2; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 16, p. 280) (I did not cause the magical storm, nor the stench or other wonders). He tells Hrólfr that he is a welcome visitor, gladly surrenders his weapons and his horse to him, and then reveals that he was the swallow that dropped Ingigerðr's hair on Jarl Þórgnyr's lap with the intention of luring Hrólfr to Garðaríki to defeat Eiríkr and marry Ingigerðr. As Kalinke (1990, 153–154) observes, this revelation means that Hrólfr is passive in his bridal quest in a double sense: he acts on behalf of Þorgnýr but, since the jarl's mission turns out to have been triggered by Hreggviðr, Hrólfr is actually unknowingly pursuing his own bridal quest which is being orchestrated by the dead king.

Hrólfr's second visit to the grave features another intertextual reference that further highlights Hreggviðr's centrality in the saga's events. As Hrólfr approaches his mound, it is said that, "hann ser huar hregguidr konungr sitr ute undir haugin [um ok h]orfdi i mot tunglenu ok kvad" (589f, fol. 31^{v}, ll. 20–21; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 32, p. 333) (he saw where King Hreggviðr sat out under the mound, gazing at the moon and spoke) (see Table 1).

This scene bears a close resemblance to a scene in *Njáls saga* when Skarpheðinn and Högni approach the grave of Gunnarr and also find him facing towards the moon singing, encouraging the men of the next generation to enact vengeance on his behalf (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, 1954, ch. 78, p. 193; Hermann Pálsson

Table 1: Verse spoken by Hreggviðr in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* with English translation.

Gledz hregguidr af godri faur hrólfs hins hugdiarfa hinngat til landa, mun rekkr sia ræses hefna á eireiki ok ollum þeim	Hreggviðr rejoices in the good journey of Hrólfr the bold-hearted to these lands. That warrior will take vengeance for the ruler upon Eiríkr and them all.
Gledz [hreggvidr] af grims dauda, þordar ok þar med þriota lifstunder mun flokkr sia fiand[a mi]na fyrir hrólfi hniga uerda	Hreggviðr rejoices in the death of Grímr, and the hours of Þórðr's life are diminishing as well. That group of my enemies will come to fall before Hrólfr.
Gledz hreggvidr þa hrólfr fær ungrar meyar ingigerdar m[un] holmingardi hilmir styra sturlaugs son ok standi kuædi	Hreggviðr will rejoice when Hrólfr marries the young maiden Ingigerðr. The prince, son of Sturlaugr, will govern Novgorod; let the poem cease.
589f, fol. 31^{v}, ll. 21–25; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 33, pp. 333–34	*Gǫngu-Hrólfs saga*, 2017, pp. 299–301

and Edwards 1980, 11).[130] By comparing Hreggviðr to the classically-heroic Gunnar, the dead king is placed in the category of good; his intervention in human affairs is for a noble rather than maleficent cause. John D. Martin (1998) has gone as far as to argue that Hreggviðr represents one side of a larger supernatural battle that is taking place beneath the saga's surface layer of action. In this battle, forces of good (Hreggviðr) struggle against forces of evil (Grímr Ægir) and the saga's human characters are caught up in the middle and used as their proxies.

Hreggviðr does not work alone in this battle; his most critical assistant is the dwarf Möndull, a character with roots in pre-Christian myth (Ármann Jakobsson 2008, 188–189 and 192–193). Like the dwarfs of eddic poetry and *Snorra Edda* who crafted the magic objects that sustained the Æsir's power, Möndull (whose name means 'handle of a quern') is a skilled craftsman who declares that "duergs natturu hefir eg at kynstrum ok hagleik" (589, fol. 26^{v}, l. 12; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 25, p. 308) (I have a dwarf's nature in magic and craftsmanship). According to *Völuspá*, at *ragna rök* "stynia dvergar / fyr steindurom" (*Edda*, 1983, p. 12) ("the dwarfs groan before their rocky doors") (*The Poetic Edda*, 2014, p. 10) and, accordingly, Möndull too is associated with the world of rock and stone: during the final battle he dives underground to fight Grímr Ægir beneath the earth's surface. Mythological dwarfs are also notable for their sexual desire for women of other

130 Both Martin (1998, 315) and Lönnroth (2003) also note the parallel with Angantýr in *Heiðreks saga*, 1924, chs. 4–5, pp. 14–33 (R- and H-texts) and chs. 6–7, pp. 102–113 (U-text).

races and, true to character, Möndull is as well. After taking over the estate of Þorgnýr's counsellor Björn, Möndull drugs Björn's wife so she will give in to his advances, then at the end of the saga, he disappears and rumours spread that he has made off with the defeated King Eiríkr's sister.

But although he enters the saga as a troublemaker, Möndull undergoes a change in character when he crosses paths with Hrólfr.[131] After Vilhjálmr cuts off Hrólfr's feet, Dúlcifal carries him straight to the home of Björn where, under duress, Möndull heals him. This is a critical moment for Hrólfr since his legs are an important part of his heroic masculinity: he is so large that he has to walk everywhere he goes and without them, he is completely useless (Lavender 2020, 103–108; Wilson 2016). So when Dúlcifal carries him, legless, to meet Möndull, he is at his lowest, and all his subsequent successes depend on the dwarf's assistance: Möndull helps navigate the storm that Grímr Ægir summons to slow their approach to Garðaríki and then performs his own magic in support of Hrólfr and his army throughout the battle. The dwarf seems, therefore, to be on the same side as Hreggviðr in his conflict with Grímr Ægir (Martin 1998, 320–321). Such is evident in the language used to describe Möndull's magical skills. Grímr Ægir's powers are described as *fjölkynngi* and *galdr*, words which were inherited from the pre-Christian vocabulary of magic and accrued negative connotations in the medieval period (Meylan 2014, 29–36). By contrast, Möndull's powers are described as *konstr* and *kynstr*, terms that (judging by the *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*) seem to have entered the Old Norse lexicon at a relatively late date and mostly appear in later 'romance' sagas, where they denote some kind of occult (although not necessarily maleficent) art or skill.

Thus, although the saga participates in the demonic interpretation of paganism through the figure of Grímr Ægir, it also gives voice to the totally opposite view, suggesting that opposition to him could come from other seemingly pagan figures. Martin (1998, 322) suggests an allegorical interpretation, pointing out that Hrólfr and Eiríkr enact different ways of interacting with supernatural forces: Eiríkr co-opts them for his own gain whereas the ever-passive Hrólfr allows himself to be a channel for them and is rewarded in the end. However, if we work from the assumption that this saga was expected to be fundamentally historical, then its magical elements would have to work on a literal level as well as a metaphorical one. This is difficult to maintain. Not only do Hreggviðr and Möndull have no precedents in extant Icelandic texts, but they are at odds with the narra-

131 It should be noted, however, that Möndull is not as unique as Hreggviðr. Although he is notably different to the dwarfs of myth, there are comparable helpful figures in several other 'romances' (Ármann Jakobsson 2008, 189–201).

tive of conversion that pervades the whole saga corpus – that of two great epochs separated by the moment of conversion. Whereas Grímr Ægir is clearly symptomatic of the old order, before "the powers of Christendom could eradicate the dangerous illusions and manifestations of Satan" (Clunies Ross 2010, 78), Möndull's mysterious *konstr* and the benevolent Hreggviðr do not fit within the usual teleological scheme. Rather than contrasting the new dispensation which the allusions to *Yngvars saga víðförla* and *Sörla þáttr* anticipate, they are critical agents in ushering in that order and banishing Satan's 'dangerous illusions' from Scandinavia.

The saga seems, moreover, to be intent on drawing attention to this controversy – particularly in regards to Möndull. While he does eventually join the side of good, it seems that the dwarf (who says he travelled to Denmark on an unnamed *erendi* (errand)) may have at first been working with Grímr Ægir. Before meeting Hrólfr, he taunts the jarl's captured counsellor about the hero's feeble legless status, implying some knowledge of Grímr Ægir's plans. And even once he is on the side of good, his motives and the nature of his magic are unclear: although his powers are terminologically distinct from those of Grímr Ægir, there are several moments where they perform acts that look unsettlingly alike. For example, when the two come head to head at the final battle, they both shake cloth bags to create storms and shoot arrows which meet in mid-air. They then dive into the earth to continue their battle underground and each enlist the assistance of further unnamed forces: Möndull later says that he only escaped because "fleiri uaro minir [vinir] en hans þar fyrir" (589f, fol. 33^{r}, ll. 17–18; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 33, p. 346) (more [of] my [friends] than his were present there).[132] Moreover, as is mentioned above, in addition to evoking Óðinn, Grímr is also a dwarf name, which further blurs the boundary between the two figures.

The *álfkona* who Hrólfr meets in the forest adds to this uncertainty. She is clearly aware of Hreggviðr's plans: when she gives Hrólfr a gold ring, she says "þess muntu þurfa þa er þu fer til hregguidar haugs" (589f, fol. 20^{v}, l. 15; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga,* 1830, ch. 15, p. 277) (you will need this when you go to Hreggviðr's grave). *Álfar* such as her were prominent figures in Icelandic popular belief: later collections of Icelandic folk stories feature numerous tales about them, including several parallels to *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s magical birth (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 2003, 172). These *álfar* had a disputed theological status and were the subject of learned debate through the early modern period and into the eighteenth century: while some believed they were physical beings made by God, the majority considered them illusions created by Satan (Gunnell 2018). This wider discursive context

132 Although likely an error, it is worth noting that the word *vinir* (friends) is missing in this witness.

will be discussed in Chapter 8.3.2, but it suffices to say here that the addition of an *álfkona* among Hrólfr's allies adds to the general ambiguity that surrounds the supernatural forces underlying his success.

5.4.3 The *apologiæ* of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*

Judging by the content of the *apologiæ* (truth defences) attached to this saga, it seems that this ambiguity caused some anxiety among audiences. Both the mid-saga interjection and the prologue are particularly concerned with defending the possibility of 'good' pre-Christian magic and seem intended to defend against the accusation (which the saga itself hints at) that Hrólfr was reliant on demonic magic. This is clearest in the mid-saga interjection, which occurs after Möndull's act of healing:

> er þar ok uannt i mote at mæla, er hinir fyrri menn hafa samsett, hefdi þeir þat vel matt segia at á annan ueg hefdi at boræt, ef þeir villdi, hafa þeir ok sumir spekingar uerit er mióg hafa talad i figuru um suma hlute, suo sem meistari gallterus i alexandris saugu, edr umeris skalld i troio manna saugu ok hafa eptirkomandi meistrar þat helldr til sannenda fært, en i mote mællt at suo mætte uera, þarf ok eingi meira trunad á at legia, en hafa þo gledi af á medan hann heyrir (589f, fol. 26^{v}, ll. 30–35; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 25, pp. 309–310)
>
> (It is difficult to speak against those things which have been set down by men in the past. They may well have said that it had been another way if they wanted. And there have been some philosophers who have spoken figuratively about such things, such as Master Galterus in *Alexanders saga* and the poet Homer in *Trójumanna saga*, and subsequent masters have turned it into truth and not disagreed that it could have been that way.[133] No one needs to give more credence [than he wants] but nevertheless be happy while he listens.)

Möndull's act of magic is, by modern standards, wholly unbelievable and the inclusion of the narratorial aside suggests that it would have been a step too far for medieval audiences too. As O'Connor has explained, the *apologia* deals with the implausibility by blaming the saga's sources and suggesting previous storytellers had misunderstood what originally may have been figurative rather than literal (O'Connor 2005, 146–147). The chosen defence points towards a concern that extends beyond plausibility alone. The alternative (and perhaps more obvious) interpretation is, as O'Connor (2005, 148) notes, offered in the epilogue of *Mágus saga jarls* where the removing and reattaching of hands and feet is given as an example of the *sjónhverfingar* (optical illusions) worked by the Æsir, thereby

133 On translating the phrase *til sanninda fært*, see O'Connor 2005, 146–149.

evoking the demonic interpretation (*Mágus saga jarls*, 1949, ch. 79, p. 427). It seems likely that the defence which the compiler and/or later scribes of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* chose instead was motivated by a desire to avoid this exact interpretation; they were clearly aware that the episode was stretching the limits of plausibility and so suggested an alternative reading that avoided both the accusation of lies *and* of demonism.

The nature of pre-Christian magic is also one of the saga's potential problems that is addressed in the prologue:

> Er þat ok margra heimskra manna nattura at þeir trua þui einu er þeir sia sinum augum edr heyra sinum eyrum er þeim þickir fiarlægt sinni natturu suo sem ordit hefir um uitra manna rada giordir edr mikit afl edr frabæran lettleika fyri manna suo ok eigi sidr um konstr edr kuklara skap ok mikla fiolkyngi þa þeir seiddu at sumum mönnum æfinliga ogiæfu edr aldr tila, en sumum ueralldar uirding fiar ok metnadar, þeir æstu stundum haufudskepnur, en stundum kyrdu suo sem uar odin edr adrir þeir er af honum námu galldr listir edr lækningar, finzt þar ok dæmi til at sumir likamir hafa hræring haft af ohreins anda iblæstri, suo sem uar eyuindr kinrifa i olafsaugu trygguasonar edr einar skarfr edr freyr, er gunnar helmingur drap i suiariki (589f, fol. 13^{r}, ll. 17–25; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 1, p. 237)
>
> (And it is also in many foolish people's nature to believe only what they see with their own eyes or hear with their own ears, [not that] which to them seems distant from their nature, such as the advice of the wise or the great strength or overwhelming agility of men of old and, no less, the skill or tricks of the mind or great sorcery, which they would use to cast spells to bring some men everlasting bad luck or death, but to some all the world's honour, wealth and esteem. Sometimes, they would stir up the principal elements and sometimes calm them, as Óðinn did and those others who learned magic arts and healing from him. There are also some examples of bodies which have moved under the inspiration of an unclean spirit such as Eyvindr kinnrifa in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* or Einarr skarfr or Freyr, who was killed by Gunnar helmingr in Sweden.)

The kinds of magic mentioned here relate to the manipulation of the elements and healing, both of which appear in the saga as the work of both the 'good' figures and the 'bad'.[134] It states that the different kinds of magic depicted ("konstr edr kuklara skap ok mikla fiolkynngi") could have both positive and negative effects. The word *kuklaraskapr* is not used elsewhere in the saga, but, as discussed, *konstr* and *fjölkynngi* are used to describe the powers of Möndull and Grímr Ægir respectively. It seems likely, therefore, that the inclusion of the prologue was in-

134 For example, the great storm surrounding Hreggviðr's mound, the storm which Grímr Ægir summons to slow Hrólfr's final approach to Garðaríki, and the weather magic used by both him and Möndull at the final battle.

tended to defend the saga's suggestion that 'good' and 'bad' pre-Christian magic were not only possible but that they might have looked exactly the same.

The prologue also refers to the euhemerised version of Óðinn found in *Ynglinga saga*, which positions him as the originator of magical knowledge in Scandinavia. Óðinn does not appear anywhere in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* himself but two different interpretations of the deity are given voice in the figures of Grímr Ægir and Hreggviðr. As mentioned, the first part of the former's name (meaning 'mask') is listed as one of Óðinn's names in *Gylfaginning* and evokes the demonic interpretation of the god as a master deceiver.[135] In contrast, Hreggviðr evokes the interpretation of Óðinn as progenitor, since the role he plays in ensuring the continuation of his dynasty is comparable to that which Óðinn plays for the Völsungs in *Völsunga saga*: both intervene in human affairs via remarkably skilled horses (Grani and Dúlcifal), gift their chosen hero a sword (*Gramr* and the *Hreggviðarnaut* (gift of Hreggviðr)), can transform into birds (an eagle and a swallow), and are associated with poetry. Although Óðinn acts as a helping figure in some other *fornaldarsögur*,[136] nowhere does he play as critical a role as in *Völsunga saga* where, as Lassen (2006, 133) notes, no attempt was made to apply a traditional *interpretatio Christiana* to him. This is the case for Hreggviðr as well, although in his opposition to Grímr Ægir he moves further away from the demonic interpretation than the ambiguous Óðinn of *Völsunga saga*. The prologue may, therefore, have been added (in part) to defend the mutual compatibility of these contradictory interpretations of Óðinn and figures associated with him. This would suggest that, although liable to co-option by the devil, his magical powers were not inherently evil and had the potential to be wielded for good.

Finally, the prologue also defends the plausibility of an *óhreinn andi* (unclean spirit) having the capacity to possess dead bodies, giving the examples of Eyvindr kinnrifa and the possessed idol to Freyr as supporting evidence. There are no examples of such a phenomenon in the saga, as Lavender (2018, 89) notes. Grímr Ægir is certainly an unclean spirit and Hreggviðr a member of the waking dead, but there is nothing to suggest the corporeality of the former nor the demonic possession of the latter. The addition of the prologue nevertheless points towards a difficulty when it came to interpreting Hreggviðr: in the process of summoning

135 For examples of texts where Óðinn appears as such a figure, see Lassen 2006, pp. 126–131.

136 According to Lassen (2005, 98–100; 2003, 213), these are *Saga Gautreks konungs*, 1830, ch. 7, pp. 31–38; *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, 1981, ch. 1, pp. 169–170; *Sǫgubrot af fornkonungum*, 1982, p. 63. *Sögubrot af fornkonungum* (AM 1e β I fol) is a fragment of a text about legendary Swedish and Danish kings, which is believed to be based on the now-lost *Skjöldunga saga*. Rowe (2010) has discussed Óðinn's role in this text in depth. *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* is preserved in one medieval manuscript (GKS 2845 4to).

authoritative examples to justify the plausibility of the benevolent grave-dwelling watchman, it tacitly acknowledges that there were no precedents for him since the only comparable examples available were instances of demonic possession.

The inclusion of the *apologiæ* suggests that the saga's ambiguous supernatural figures caused uneasiness amongst their audiences – so much so that they were felt to bring the credibility of the whole saga into question. This does not seem to have been an accident on behalf of the compiler who was intentionally elusive regarding the nature of Hreggviðr and Möndull, as is clear from the latter's suspicious magical knowledge and the inclusion of the outlandish (and arguably inessential) leg-healing scene. Although its polemical stance on Grímr Ægir is deeply traditional, the saga is also drastically revisionist in its recasting of various figures with problematic theological status as his opponents. In this way, the saga is caught between a desire (or perhaps an obligation) to participate in the narrative of pre-Christian religion as fundamentally demonic, while also evincing a contradictory – and clearly controversial – desire to strongly react against that same narrative and provide an alternative to it.

5.5 Conclusion

Many of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s intertextual relationships are participatory: they situate the saga within the same narrative of historical development as its prequel had through its opening allusion to the myth of Trojan origins. This is apparent not only in the genealogical connection but also in numerous other intertextual references. *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* takes place during the Skjöldung period, in a world where the Norse gods are worshipped and the *Hjaðningavíg* is ongoing. This legendary world is framed by a Christian historical scheme in which the devil's power will soon be vanquished by Christianisation: Óláfr Tryggvason will bring the true faith north-west from Constantinople, Yngvarr víðförli will take it east again to the edge of the known world, and Denmark will become a powerful Christian kingdom in the reign of Knútr the Saint.

For the most part, however, the saga's intertextuality is thoroughly transformational, and its hero is a bridge between these two radically different times. In this saga we see the re-embrace and amalgamation of both the traditions which Sturlaugr had rejected. Hrólfr is a Sigurðr-equivalent suited for the courtly world who has been chosen by an Óðinnic supernatural figure and proves his worth as a hero by loyally following his overlord. By having his proxy-bridal quest stretch across Scandinavia, Garðaríki, and England, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* reconfigures the history of the legendary age. What were once sites of raiding and conquest become friendly allied kingdoms, and Hrólfr's marriage to Ingigerðr lays the diplo-

matic foundations for the Christians that would follow in his footsteps. Over the course of the saga, the far north and east are associated with the demonic interpretation of paganism which, by the end, has been totally pushed out of the places where the saga takes place. What is left is a series of interconnected kingdoms commanded by aristocratic rulers who have no interest in idol worship or pagan magic and instead have the same tastes as the elites found in, for example, *Ektors saga* and *Kirialax saga*. As the last text in 589a–f, we might read *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s reimagined Denmark as a northern counterpart to *Kirialax saga*'s Byzantium and *Ektors saga*'s Troy. They may not refer to each other explicitly, but their firmly pro-king, anti-Viking stances and shared use of courtly lexis position all their protagonists as participants in the same international culture – a culture Scandinavia inherited via the Trojan origins that were described at the beginning of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*.

In many ways, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s representation of the past is counter to that of its 'prequel'. The two texts do, nevertheless, complement each other. As a saga about an otherwise unknown farmer's son which repeatedly makes light of heroic legend, *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* represents a break from tradition and the turning of a blank page for its sequel to build on. It means that although *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* takes place during the time of the legendary Skjöldung dynasty and incorporates into itself material from *Völsunga saga*, the hero that it celebrates is genealogically distinct from both. The information at the saga's end about Hrólfr's children functions to bolt this narrative into another strand of Iceland's prehistory – the legend of Hrómundr Gripsson who (according to *Landnámabók*) was an ancestor of Ingólfr Árnason, Iceland's first settler (*Landnámabók*, 1900, pp. 6, 131).[137] This serves, as Lavender (2018, 106) writes, to "embed *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* in a network of intersecting narratives" and make its reimagined version of the past relevant to Icelandic audiences.[138]

The saga's *apologiæ*, however, lay bare the problems which underlie the saga's transformation of legendary history, since not only does this text try to rewrite the Vikings of Scandinavia's past but it also attempts a quite radical revision of that region's religious history. Although the saga is anchored into the narrative of historical development articulated in the rest of the corpus by its intertextual references and genealogical beginning and ending, the legendary world it constructs contains powerful benevolent supernatural figures who teeter on the edge of plausibility and force audiences to ask difficult questions that cut right to the heart of that narrative.

137 These references are to the Hauksbók and Sturlubók versions. The information at the end of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* conflicts with other textual sources, suggesting there were varied traditions about Hrómundr in circulation (Jesch 1984; Lavender 2018, 101–106).

138 See also Hallberg 1982, 13–15.

By drawing our attention to the boundaries of the saga as a form, not only do the *apologiæ* reveal the controversial nature of this particular text, but they also highlight the limits of the exclusively intertextual approach to cultural memory that has been pursued in these last three chapters. These limits have arguably already been hinted at by the fact that I have referred to many 'oral' intertexts, which suggest there was something going on here other than simple literary borrowing – that something is mediation, the subject of this book's second half.

6 Overview of AM 586 4to

In the second half of this book, I examine the relationship between text and context, seeking to understand not how the legendary sagas in question reconstructed the past, but how they functioned as mediums of memory that shaped how individuals and communities in late medieval Iceland remembered their legendary histories. To do so, I draw on the additional evidence of 586. Before beginning the analysis I will provide a brief overview of this manuscript (its texts, editions, and lacunæ) and then summarise the general trends in how its sagas construct the past, with a particular focus on the *fornaldarsögur* among them.

The layout of 586 is very similar to that of 589a–f: its leaves are roughly the same size, the text is also written in one column, and there is little ornamentation. It contains similar marginalia, although there is less of it, and a few notable erasures: three large sections of *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* (fols 16^{v}–17^{r}, 17^{v}, and 18^{r}) and the end of *Vilmundar saga viðutan* (fol. 25^{r}, ll. 35–36). 586 is considerably shorter than 589a–f: it is now made up of only 33 leaves (in contrast to 589a–f's 141), and it has eight lacunæ.

6.1 Texts and Editions

586's contents along with its current folio numbers and corresponding editions are:

Af þremr kumpánum (1^{r}–2^{r})[139]
Af þremr þjófum í Danmörk (2^{r}–3^{v})[140]
Um bryta einn í Þýskalandi (3^{v}–5^{r})[141]
Af meistara Perus (5^{r}–6^{r})[142]
Af Vilhjálmi bastarði ok sonum hans (6^{r}–6^{v})[143]
Roðberts þáttr (7^{r})[144]
Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans (7^{r}–12^{v})[145]

139 *Af þrimr kumpánum*, 1882. Gering's editions of all the short narratives cited here are based on AM 657a–b 4to, with variants from 586 labelled the F-text.
140 *Af þrimr þjófum í Danmörk*, 1882.
141 *Af brytja ok bonda*, 1882.
142 *Af meistara Pero ok hans leikum*, 1882, chs. 2–3, pp. 223–231.
143 *Af Vilhjálmi bastarði ok sonum hans*, 1882.
144 *Frá ferðum Roðbertz ok hans manna*, 1882.
145 *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*, 1927. Lagerholm uses AM 343a 4to as his base text and provides some variants from 586 as the B-text.

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Bósa saga ok Herrauðs (12^{v}–19^{r})[146]
Vilmundar saga viðutan (19^{r}–25^{r})[147]
Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar (25^{r}–26^{v})[148]
Hrings saga ok Tryggva (27^{r})[149]
Þórðar saga hreðu (27^{r}–30^{r})[150]
Króka-Refs saga (30^{v}–32^{v})[151]
Ásmundar saga kappabana (32^{v}–33^{v})[152]

No copies were made of this manuscript that are comparable to those of 589a–f, so where I have needed to quote text that would have occurred in the lacunæ, I have used the editions. The lacunæ of 586 are listed in Appendix 2.

6.2 The Legendary Past in AM 586 4to

The manuscript's first six texts are short narratives, usually now labelled *ævintýri* – an ambiguous term used to describe both fairytales and *exempla*. The first, *Af þremr kumpánum*, describes three noble men who entertain each other one night in the forest by recounting the most dangerous encounters of their lives. The other tales are more exemplary in character but have a secular focus: they are largely concerned with morality among the laity, both from the upper and lower classes, rather than the deeds of clerics like some *ævintýri* are.[153] In two of them (brought under the title *Af meistara Perus*), we reencounter Pérús of *Klári saga*, and the final two (*Af Vilhjálmi bastarði ok sonum hans* and *Roðberts þáttr*) paint particularly unflattering portraits of the greedy English King William II and his brother Robert.

146 *Die ältere Bósa-saga*, 1893. Jiriczek uses 586 as his base text.
147 *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, 1962. Loth uses 586 as her base text and fills the lacuna with AM 577 4to (1450–1499) and GKS 1006 fol (1600–1700).
148 *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, 1917. Schröder's edition is based on AM 343 4to and provides some variants from 586 as the B-text.
149 *Hrings saga ok Tryggva*, 1965. Loth uses AM 489 I–II 4to as her base text and provides some variant readings from 586; both are only fragments.
150 *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 1959. Jóhannes Halldórsson uses AM 564a 4to (1390–1425) as his base text and provides some variants from 586.
151 *Króka-Refs saga*, 1883. Pálmi Pálsson uses AM 471 4to as his base text and provides variant readings from 586 as the C-text.
152 *Ásmundarsaga kappabana*, 1891. Detter provides side-by-side transcriptions of 586 (M-text) and Holm perg 7 4to (S-text), the latter being more complete.
153 For example, see Hjalti Snær Ægisson 2021.

These moralistic stories arguably balance out the sagas that follow, which have a generally less chivalric outlook than those of 589a–f, and none of them feature the level of courtly lexis found in the likes of *Kirialax saga* or *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*.[154] The heroes of this manuscript are, by contrast, considerably more rough around the edges: those of *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* and *Vilmundar saga viðutan* are not the princes – Herrauðr and Hjarrandi, who are well versed in knightly pursuits – but rather men of slightly lower station who have unrestrained brute strength and would not be at home in the *riddarasaga*-inflected courts of 589a–f (Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1971, 40–42; Vésteinn Ólason 1994, 116–117). In fact, the characterisation of these sagas' heroes has several things in common with 589a–f's villains: Bósi is a killer of noble men who loses the favour of Herrauðr's father (the king) by murdering one of his sons, and instead of procuring his wife Edda by wooing her or demonstrating his heroic credentials, he uses threat. His grandson, Vilmundr, grows up far away from royal society, and when he leaves home, a detailed description is given of his dress which may remind audiences of *Samsons saga fagra*'s Jötunheimar-dwelling Sigurðr: he wears a "biarn-skinz stacki raudum lodnum [. . .] oturskinnz kuf á hófdi [. . .] breidauxe mikla silfurrekna i hennde" (*Vilmundar saga viðutan*, 1962, ch. 9, pp. 155–156) (bear-skin coat, red and furry [. . .] an otterskin cowl on his head [. . .] in his hand was a great broadaxe inlaid with silver) – not exactly a *riddarasaga*-style knight.[155]

But the roughness of these heroes is, as Vésteinn Ólason (1994, 117) notes, mostly restricted to the surface-level, and the overarching political perspective of their sagas is much the same as those of 589a–f. They have a similarly aristocratic focus with clearly-delineated class boundaries, and they elevate comparable (if not identical) conceptualisations of ideal upper-class masculinity and femininity. As in the other manuscript, alliances between members of the elite are promoted, and relationships of sworn-brotherhood are common. The anti-Viking sentiment of 589a–f is evident across these sagas too: power is, as a rule, acquired through marriage to passive and amenable women rather than conquest. An illustrative comparison may be made between *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*'s villainous usurper Úlfkell and the eponymous hero Hálfdan whose chosen methods of power acquisition resemble those of Eiríkr and Hrólfr of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* respectively. Even at the end of *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* when it is said that Bósi went with a large force to Bjarmaland and demanded to be accepted as king, it is

154 Note the relatively few references to the 'sphere of chivalry' in 586's *fornaldarsögur*: Hallberg 1982, 34–35.

155 This occurs during 586's third lacuna so I have quoted from Loth's edition.

also noted that: "suo hellzt mega bæta landzmonum þann mannskada sem þeir hofdu af honum feingit at uera konungr yfir þeim, ok styrkia þa med laugum ok rettarbotum" (586, fol. 19^{r}, ll. 1–3; *Die ältere Bósa-saga*, 1893, ch. 16, p. 61) (so may the people of the land be compensated for the men he had killed, if he was king, and he would strengthen them with laws and justice). He may be no courtly knight, but Bósi is not a wholly unjust usurper.

These sagas also have a similarly ambivalent attitude to legendary traditions. This comes through firstly in genealogical connections: Herrauðr of *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* and the eponymous hero of *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar* are both descended from Óðinn and are integrated into the family trees of *Völsunga saga* and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*. Herrauðr's daughter is Ragnarr loðbrók's first wife Þóra, whereas Hálfdan's mother Ása is said to be the granddaughter of Sigurðr ormr-í-auga, one of Ragnarr's sons with his second wife Áslaug (Sigurðr and Brynhildr's daughter). Additionally, Hálfdan's eventual wife Ingigerðr, princess of Aldeigjuborg, is the foster-daughter of Earl Skúli of Álaborg, supposedly the brother of Heimir who fostered Brynhildr.[156] *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* also makes reference to the legendary Battle of Brávellir and places its title characters within its armies.[157] It also borrows several motifs from its legendary and mythological predecessors; for example, as Lars van Wezel (2006, 1037–1040) shows, Bósi is positioned as a kind of a mock-Óðinn in his three euphemistic information-gathering sex scenes (which would have occurred in the erasures mentioned above). This saga's borrowings are more parodying than 'participatory' (to return to Lachmann's terminology) and, combined with the genealogical information and reference to Brávellir, function to displace dominant legendary narratives and replace them with comic, romance-tinged stories about the restoration of kingship. *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar* is less mocking in its tone, but the genealogical connections – and, as Rowe (2013, 205–208) notes, particularly the comparison between Brynhildr and Ingigerðr – nevertheless function to create an alternative to those legends' tragic trajectories.

And it is precisely this kind of trajectory that *Ásmundar saga kappabana* depicts. This saga is based on a seemingly ancient tradition known as the 'Hildebrand legend', the great tragedy of which is that a father and son must duel each

156 Elsewhere, the closing genealogy of *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar* mentions Göngu-Hrólfr and contradicts the information recorded in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* itself. However, the place where this would occur is now missing in 586 (Lacuna 4), and so we cannot know if the scribes saw this contradiction as a problem and, if so, how they dealt with it. See Lavender 2018, 105–106.

157 On the battle and texts where it is mentioned, see Hui 2018b, 66–68 and 215–217.

other, not knowing of their kinship.[158] In this saga, however, it is two half-brothers who must fight, a situation which came about because their mother had been forced to marry a second time when her father's kingdom was invaded. The morals of 589a–f's courtly societies are totally overturned in this text: power is acquired through conquest, women are taken as prizes, and brothers are forced to fight one another to the death. *Ásmundar saga kappabana* arguably represents the legendary world that heroes like Göngu-Hrólfr, Sturlaugr, and even Bósi have superseded.

586 further taps into the interpretation of history articulated in 589a–f by invoking the myth of Trojan origins. Following an *apologia*, *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* begins with: "hringr hefir konungr heitit er red fyrir eystra gautlandz, hann uar sonar gauta konungs sonar odens er konungr uar i suiþiod [ok] komin uar utan af asiam, ok frægaztar konunga ættir eru fra komnar her a nordrlaundum" (586, 12^{v}, ll. 27–29; *Die ältere Bósa-saga*, 1893, ch. 1, p. 3) (There was a king named Hringr, who ruled over East-Gautland. He was the son of King Gautr, the son of Óðinn, who was the king in Svíþjóð who came from Asia, and the most famous kings in the Northern lands are descended from him). As in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, this functions to position pre-Christian Scandinavia within a wider European community rather than on its outside. This is similarly furthered by the placement of another unambiguously demonic temple in Bjarmaland, which Bósi and Herrauðr raid.[159] The demonic interpretation of paganism manifests in other texts too: for example, in villains like Kolr in *Vilmundar saga viðutan* and Úlfkell in *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*.

But, as in 589a–f, there are helpful magical figures in this manuscript as well. One example is the wife of the impoverished Hríflingr who helps Hálfdan Eysteinsson by healing him: she is said to have "mælti mǫrgum fǫgrum orðum yfir honum" (*Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, 1917, ch. 12, p. 119) (said many fairly spoken words over him), presumably charms, and gifts him with several enchanted objects.[160] But perhaps the most significant example of a helpful magic practitioner is Bósi's foster-mother Busla who, like *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s Möndull, plays what seems to be a controversial role. Both these figures, and the light they shed on the medium, will be discussed further below.

158 See further Halvorsen 1951. On the inconsistencies between the verse and the saga, see Nagy 2018.

159 See further Glazyrina 1994; Hui 2018a.

160 This occurs during 586's fourth lacuna so I have quoted from Schröder's edition based on AM 343a 4to, an independent fifteenth-century witness.

7 The Vocality of AM 589a–f 4to and AM 586 4to

To better understand the relationship between the sagas, their manuscripts, and their historical contexts, it is necessary to foreground the medium – that which facilitates contact between the narrative and its audience. To do so, I have chosen to interrogate how 589a–f and 586 define themselves – their own 'medium theory' (Mitchell 2004). As discussed in the Introduction, my aim is not to make broad claims about 'the saga' as a medium in general, nor about a particular subgrouping, or even one particular text. Rather, my goal is to examine the 'medium theory' that is specific to the particular sources in question (these two collections of unique text witnesses) and to identify what their own "media-theoretical discourse" (Glauser 2010, 313) was: what are they mediating? For whom? And for what purposes?

As discussed in the Introduction, the Icelandic sagas' 'vocality' – their status as both oral and written – is a key aspect of their 'medium theory'. Accordingly, my specific interest in this chapter is in how 589a–f and 586 relate to their own orality and literacy (in terms of both sources and reception) and how they position themselves in relation to other oral and written 'texts'. I begin by discussing in turn how literate and oral traditions are presented in the sagas and their *apologiæ*, how they are brought hierarchically into contact, and how they relate to the courtly elite identity that is constructed across them. I then discuss the *apologiæ* of 589f's *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* and 586's *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* and, via comparison to one of the earliest examples of an *apologia*, argue that they point towards tensions in the mediation of oral sources. I then broaden the scope to consider the wider textual marketplace within which these texts were circulating and discuss how they position themselves in relation to other texts as well as how they relate to their own written status. Finally, I consider the views they express about the capacity of the written word to preserve memories.

7.1 Literacy

Across the two manuscripts, literacy and book learning is afforded high status and aligned with the ideal courtly culture described in Chapter 3. It is a characteristic associated with some of the sagas' heroes: Kirialax is considerably more learned than the rest, but *Klári saga*'s title character is also "til bækur settr" (589d, fol. 1^{r}, ll. 14–15; *Clarus saga*, 1878, ch. 1., p. 1) (set to study) before his pursuit of Serena, and the eponymous protagonist of *Vilmundar saga viðutan* is taught "boknæme" (586, fol. 20^{v}, l. 27; *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, 1962, ch. 8, p. 152) (book-

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learning) by his mother. But since most of the sagas take place in the pre-Christian (and thus pre-literate) past, written texts play a larger role as sources of authority that enhance the sagas' historical and learned credentials. According to its introduction, *Klári saga* was supposedly derived from a written source with clerical associations. It opens by saying:

> Her byrium uær upp [þersa frasaugn] sem sagdi u[irduligr herra] ion biskup haldorsson aigiætrar miningar en hann [fan hana] skrifada med latinu i [Franz] i þat form er [þeir kalla] ritmos en uær kaullum henndingum (589c, fol. 8^{v}, ll. 22–25; *Clarus saga*, 1878, ch. 1, p. 1)[161]
>
> (Here begins this story which was told by the worthy bishop Jón Halldórsson of noble memory, and he found it written in Latin in France in that form which they call *ritmos* but we call *hending*.)

Similar claims are made in some *apologiæ*, such as in the prologue of *Ektors saga*:

> [þ]eir menn er mest stunda á iardliga speki eru iafnliga a stundandi at lesa sem flestar frædi bækr suo at þar af megi þeir þui rauksamligar samansetia þau afreks uerk er unnit hafa agiætir kappar fyri heimi uær hófum fundit i þeim bokum er saman hefir sett eirn agiætur meistare huer er het gallterius hann hefr suo sitt mal at hann segir fyst frett borg þeirri er troia hetir er agiætuzt hefir uerit iaullu asea uelldi ok þa er hun stod med mestum bloma uoru i henne xii konung domar uoru þar ok iafnvel tolf haufut tungur uar þo þeirra sa konungr agiætaztr er priamus het hann uar haufut konungr i borgini hans son uar hinn sterki ektor er sterkaztur hefir uerit um hans daga ok margir adrir þa þeir se hir eigi nefnd ok segium nu fatt af þeim afreks monum ok stundum hellde til anara atburda (589d, fol. 17^{v}, ll. 1–10)[162]
>
> (Those men who are most learned in earthly wisdom are as equally engaging to read as more learned books since they have truthfully composed those [accounts of] great deeds that have been done by great champions for this world. We have found [this story] in those books which have been composed by the great master who is called Gallterus. He claims that he told the first news about that city which is called Troy, which was the greatest of all the Asian domains. When it was most flourishing, it had twelve kingdoms and accordingly there were twelve languages, although that king who was most praiseworthy was called Priam. He was over-king in the city [and] his son was the strong Ektor, the strongest of his day, and many others which here are not named. But now we say little of the deeds of those men, and proceed rather to other events.)

The epilogue extends this appeal to learned authorities further:

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161 The text on this page is very damaged.

162 This version of the prologue is unique to this manuscript and has been edited by Loth separately: *Et indledningskapitel til Ectors saga*, 1970. It also appears in AM 585a 4to, a seventeenth-century copy of this witness.

> [n]u uilium uer sagdi sá er þessi æfintýr hefir saman sett bidia lydin at um bæti mina fáfrædi þui uer haufum hardla fiari staddir uerit þeim tidindum hefir eg sagdi hann fundit i frædi bokum meistara gallteriums en uer truum hann fundit hafa i bokum humerus skalldz er saman hefir sett troio manna saugu ok þa eptir farandi marga adra af hans kyns monum sagdi hann þenna ektor en uid alexandro magno ecki vanntad hafa en maurg ágiæti yfer borit ma nu þat á sliku sia at solar gudin hefir eigi minni uirding lagt á þa menn er eigi hafa skirn hlotid en þa er hann hafa heidrad i þessi uerolldu. En nu þo at sa hafi mikil efni i fært i sinum studium þa megum uer þo eigi undradzt þeira agiæti sakir þess at suo margt kann til at bera á uorum daugum at uer mundum eigi trua ef oss uæri sagt ur fiarlægum staudum ok þui munum uer eigi mistrua nu þesse æfintyr sagdi hann þenna mikla bardaga uerit hafa hin fyrsta dag calendas mánadar iulii ok uoru þa til piningar lausnara heimsins þuiu hundrud uetra siautiger ok siau uetr (589d, fol. 48^{v}, ll. 1–15; *Ectors saga*, 1962, ch. 28, pp. 185–186)[163]
>
> ("Now we want," said the one who composed this story, "to ask of the people that they should improve upon my ignorance, because we are very far from those events. I have," he said, "found [this story] in the learned books of Master Gallterus" – but we believe he found them in the books of the poet Homer – "who composed the story of the men of Troy and then that of many other members of his kin." He said this Ektor was not inferior to Alexander the Great and surpassed many excellent people. Now from this it may be seen that the sun god has not bestowed less honour on those men who have not been baptised than those who have worshipped him in this world. But now, even though he has included a lot of material in his studies, we ought nevertheless not wonder at their greatness because so much is known to have come to pass in our days that we would not believe if it was told to us in distant places and therefore we should not disbelieve this story. He said the great battle had taken place on the first day of July and was three hundred and seventy-seven years after the suffering of the world's redeemer.[164])

By referring to the "frædi bokum" (learned books) of Gallterus (known as the author of *Alexanders saga*) and Homer (supposedly the author of *Trójumanna saga*) these passages position *Ektors saga*, in Barnes' (2014, 207) words, "als eine Übung in *Translatio studii* von der antiken Welt in das westliche Europa und weiter nach Island gestaltet" (as an exercise in *translatio studii* from the ancient world to western Europe and on to Iceland). It is interesting that the scribes of this manuscript have included in their epilogue a 'correction' of the 'original' compiler's claim that the story was based on one by Gallterus, preferring to cite Homer as the saga's inspiration. This coheres with the manuscript's wider designation of Troy as the origin point of European courtly culture and goes further by situating the text itself as a product of that culture: it was inspired not by the French Gallte-

163 This version of the epilogue is considerably longer than that recorded in the Loth's edition, which is based on AM 152 fol, and (to my knowledge) has not been edited separately.

164 Thanks are due to my anonymous peer-reviewer who has improved the translation of the epilogue considerably.

rus (known in English as Walter of Châtillon), but by the classical authority Homer.[165] *Ektors saga*'s prologue also evokes the Troy connection through its reference to the myth of Trojan origins, which (as discussed in Chapter 4.1) finds its fullest expression in the Prologue of *Snorra Edda*. The information recorded about the twelve kingdoms and languages of Troy specifically crops up, as Loth (1979, 364) notes, in Codex Wormianus's extended redaction of the *Snorra Edda* Prologue, while the reference found in *Ektors saga*'s epilogue to the "solar gudin" having placed as much worth in unbaptised men as he has Christians corresponds with the sympathetic interpretation of paganism outlined in the *Edda*'s other versions.[166]

7.2 Orality

Orality, the counterpart to literacy, is afforded two levels of status in these texts. On the upper level is orally composed and/or transmitted poetry. This seems to have been of limited interest to the manuscripts' scribes since there is relatively little in the sagas of 589a–f and 586, but it is mostly spoken by high-status speakers when it does appear.[167] Verses are spoken by the eponymous protagonists of the legendary *Ásmundar saga kappabana* and the *Íslendingasögur Króka-Refs saga* and *Þórðar saga hreðu*. In all, the heroes either recount or foreshadow their own courageous deeds, and none of the verses are quoted for explicitly authenticating purposes, although we can assume they served this function to a degree nonetheless.[168] Poetry is also spoken by otherworldly figures in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*. The verses in *Bósa saga*

165 It is worth noting that the references to both of these authorities in the mid-saga interjection in 589f's *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (quoted on p. X) are unique among the saga's medieval witnesses.

166 Elsewhere 'sólarguð' refers to Apollo, but here we must assume that it was the Christian God that the scribes had in mind. On the different interpretations of paganism in the Prologue's different versions, see Wellendorf 2018, 84–108.

167 There is a total of thirty-nine stanzas across the two manuscripts' 174 leaves.

168 There is one place where we would expect a claim to the authority of verse, that is in the above quotation from the prologue to *Göngu-Hrólfs* saga. The version of the prologue attached to *Sigurðar saga þögla* in AM 152 fol makes a claim to poetic sources in its first line: instead of "forn skrædum" (old scrolls) it refers to "fornkuædum" (AM 152 fol, 69^{v}, l. 2.31) (old poems). It is likely that the reading in 589f is an error: in addition to there being no material evidence for the use of scrolls in medieval Iceland, as O'Connor (2009, 368) notes this line of the prologue seems to be distinguishing between oral and written sources – learned individuals and poems on the one hand, and books on the other. The fact that it has not been corrected, however, may attest to the limits of the scribes' interest in poetry more generally.

ok Herrauðs, spoken by the witch Busla, are particularly unique and will be discussed further below. In *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* they are ominously recited by the priestesses in the pagan temple in Bjarmaland (quoted on p. 67) and in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* by the undead Hreggviðr who celebrates Hrólfr's upcoming victory against Eiríkr (quoted on p. 94). The only other reference to poetry in these manuscripts is in *Stúfs þáttr*, where the title character's verses (none of which are actually quoted) become his ticket into the favour and retinue of King Haraldr harðráði. With the exception of *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* and *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* where women speak prophetic verses, a *fornaldarsögur* commonplace (Quinn 1998), speaking poetry is presented as an admirable heroic practice, albeit one which is not elevated to a particularly high degree.

The other kind of orality represented in these sagas relates to the knowledge transmitted by lower-class or otherwise marginal figures. It is afforded a much lower status and presented as a distinctly opposing field of knowledge to that associated with literacy. This opposition is clearest in *Vilmundar saga viðutan*: both of Vilmundr's parents are from noble families – as well as learning "boknæme" from his mother, his father is said to have taught Vilmundr the courtly pursuits of "sund ok tafl ok at skiota ok at skylmazt med skiolld ok suerd" (586, fol. 20^{v}, l. 26; *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, 1962, ch. 8, p. 152) (swimming and chess and to shoot and joust with a shield and sword). However, they live "i afdal langt i burt fra audrum monnum" (586, fol. 20^{v}, l. 21; *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, ch. 8, p. 152) (in a small valley far away from other people), and this means that Vilmundr develops an understanding of the world which is clouded by superstition. When he asks his parents where he can find the people from the sagas he knows, they tell him that "menn uoru þa allir dauder, en traull uære epter i heiminum sumstadar ok dræpi þau menn ef þau sæi þa, alfar lifa ok eru þeir i iórdu nidri" (586, fol. 20^{v}, ll. 28–30; *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, 1962, ch. X, pp. 152–153) (the men were all dead, but there were still trolls in some parts of the world who kill men if they see them [and] there are *álfar* and they live underground). Consequently, when he meets a princess for the first time he asks her if she is a human, *tröll*, or *álfkona* and tells her that he does not know what a king is, much to her court's amusement. His parents' worldview is not compatible with life at her royal court, and over the course of the saga Vilmundr clears the cloud of superstition that he was brought up with: he befriends the princess's brother and eventually ingratiates himself with the king too, earning himself a title and royal wife. He returns to his father "ok baud honum at fara med ser, ok bua eigi leingr suo fiarre monnum" (586, fol. 22^{v}, l. 8; *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, 1960, ch. 17, p. 176) (and bade him to go with him, and not live so far away from other people), and he too is given a territory to rule by the king.

A similar opposition between the unlearned superstitions of the common people and the upper-class heroes comes through in the famous self-conscious comment made by Vilmundr's grandfather Bósi of *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*. When Busla, Bósi's foster-mother, offers to teach him *galdr* (a kind of pre-Christian magic),[169] the narrator reports that "þose sagdizt eigi uilia at þat uære skrifat i saugu hans at hann ynne nockurn hlut med sleitum þann sem honum skylldi med kallmennzku telia" (586, fol. 13^{r}, ll. 21–22; *Die ältere Bósa-saga*, 1893, ch. 2, pp. 6–7) (Bósi said he didn't want it to be written in his saga that he had achieved anything with trickery which it should be said he had done with manhood). The implication here, as Mitchell (2011, 190) notes, is that Busla's magic and Bósi's heroic masculinity are incompatible – one is fitting content for a hero's saga and the other is not.

A character similar to Busla features in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* as well. When the evil Grímr Ægir is introduced it is said that "ecki uissu menn ætt hans ne kynferdi þuiat groa uólfa hafdi fundit hann i flædar male i hlesey, hun uar modir þordar ok hafdi hann upp fætt ok kennt honum alla fiolkyngi" (589f, fol. 14^{r}, ll. 11–13; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 2, p. 241) (No one knew Grímr's background or his family, for he'd been found on the beach at Hlésey by the sorceress Gróa, who was the mother of Þórðr and had fostered Grímr and raised him and taught him all kinds of *fjölkynngi* (sorcery)). Later in the saga, Grímr Ægir is also said to perform *galdr*, precisely the same skill that Busla had offered to teach Bósi.[170] Another comparable figure is Véfreyja of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, the elderly foster mother of Ása, of whom it is said that "kom henne fatt a uuart" (*Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, p. 9) (little happened to her that was unexpected) and that she taught Ása "kun*n*astu" (*Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, p. 9) (knowledge, or magical lore). Véfreyja does not have as problematic a status as Busla or Gróa, but nevertheless she lives on the fringes of society and is something of a joke: the erotic interest she takes in the protagonist when she "strauk hann allan ok þickizt hann mikit styrkna uid" (589f, fol. 3^{r}, ll. 26–27; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 13, 91) (stroked him all over and he seemed to become very strong) was clearly, as Sanders (2006, 881) says, intended to be funny. In these cases, the orally-transmitted skill-sets of these marginal figures (all lower class and female) are subordinate to the world of the upper-class heroes. The relation between oral traditions and the saga which these examples suggest is one of opposition.

169 On *galdr*, see Meylan 2014, 35–39.

170 "i þui bles grimr med suo miklum galldri" (589f 4to, fol. 14^{v}, l. 20; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 3, p. 244) (at this, Grímr blew with so much galdr).

The same is suggested by the *apologiæ*, which, as well as appealing to written texts for legitimacy, distance themselves from the unlearned traditions associated with the lower classes. This is expressed explicitly in the prologue to *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*:

> [þ]esse saga hefzt eigi af lokleysu þeirre er kater menn skraukua ser til skemtanar ok gamans med ofrodligum setningum heldr sannar hun sig sialf med rettum ættar taulum, ok fornum ordz kvidum er menn hafa iduliga af þeim hlutum er i þessu æfintyre eru skrifader (586, fol. 12^{v}, ll. 24–27; *Die ältere Bósa-saga*, 1893, ch. 1, p. 3)
>
> (This saga is not based on the nonsense which merry people invent for their entertainment and pleasure in unlearned arrangements, rather it proves itself with correct genealogies and old sayings, which people frequently take from those things which are written in this tale.)[171]

Here, the narrator positions their saga as an authoritative account of the past by distinguishing it from the stories told by the common people (O'Connor 2009, 367). There is a precedent for this defence, as O'Connor points out, in the prologue to the S-recension of Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (one of the earliest recorded *apologia*), in which Oddr alludes to a plurality of narratives regarding the missionary king.[172] Oddr writes that "betra er slict með gamni at heyra en stivp meðra saugvr er hiarðar sveinar segia er enge veit hvart satt er. er iafnan lata konungin minztan isinvm frasögn" (Oddr Snorrason, *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, 1932, Prologus (S-text), p. 2) ("it is better to listen to such things with pleasure than to listen to stepmother tales told by shepherd boys, in which one never knows whether there is truth because they always count the king least in their stories") (Oddr Snorrason, *The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason*, 2003, Prologue, p. 35). As Quinn (2000, 40) writes, the implication here is that there were informal, oral narratives circulating about the missionary king among the illiterate populace who, many years after conversion, "continued telling traditional stories without realigning them to reflect Christian values". By contrast, Oddr presents himself as the arbiter of the authoritative account who has sifted through the problematic sources and committed the correct account to vellum (Quinn 2000, 39–40). In O'Connor's (2009, 366) words: "[c]oncern for truth is presented as one of several prestigious features which are the preserve of saga-authors, and which are irrelevant to the world of unlearned storytelling" – the world of shepherds and lower-class women. The same kind of claim is made in the prologue to *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* where the truth value of the saga – a narrative which has been "skrifad-

171 The final clause is translated with the guidance of O'Connor 2009, 363.
172 The beginning of the saga is missing in the A-recension (AM 310 4to).

ir" (written) – derives from its difference to the stories circulated by the unlearned populace.

7.3 The *apologiæ* and the Medium

However, as the preceding chapters have made clear, a sharp divide between oral traditions and the sagas in question cannot be maintained, because these texts contain a large amount of precisely the kind of material that the above examples suggest are in tension with the sagas' aristocratic focus and historical credentials.

In discussing this 'oral material', I follow Thomas DuBois's (2014, 59) definition as that which "has either its sources and/or its transmission within small, informal face-to-face communities outside of officially designated frameworks for the preservation and transmission of knowledge".[173] This does not refer to material that never enters the written record; considering the nature of the sources, such analysis would be impossible. Rather, the metric of assessment is "the degree to which the materials preserved in medieval manuscripts reflect oral sources or oral transmission, despite the obvious and unmistakable fact that they eventually entered, or re-entered, written tradition through their incorporation into the manuscripts we have at hand" (DuBois 2014, 60).[174] Such material can be identified by parallels between texts that do not seem to have direct relationships, and thus likely drew on orally-circulating traditions, as well as through comparison to similar material recorded in later folklore collections.[175]

Examples include the legends that date back to the pre-Christian period, such as those about Goðmundr of Glæsisvellir, Ásmundr berserkjabani (otherwise known as Gnóð-Ásmundr), and Ásmundr kappabani. Then there are the various characters and episodes which do not seem to have been associated with specific legends, but which seem to have been inspired by material circulating in the kind of informal spheres DuBois describes. This relates mostly to the sagas' magical content and the various *tröll*, *álfar*, and other 'small gods' who populate their diverse casts of characters, and which in *Vilmundar saga viðutan* are figured as part of the worldviews of those on the margins of society.[176] But although they

173 See also Frog and Joonas Ahola's (2021, 35) recent discussion of folklore, in which the authors stress the importance of transmission through social networks "without institutional administration".

174 On re-oralisation and the role of literature in shaping Icelandic folklore, see Glauser 1996.

175 An overview of these sources is provided in Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 2003, 134–148.

176 On 'small gods', see Ostling 2018.

are rooted in pre-Christian beliefs and placed in the pre-Christian past in these texts, such beings persisted in many ordinary Icelanders' worldviews throughout the fifteenth century and beyond. As Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (2003, 149) writes, for many people,

> [t]he land was full of powers that were dangerous to handle, except according to customs which were based on ancient precedent. There were supernatural beings in the woods, the mountains and the lakes; the people knew of springs and rivers which had their own various natures, of burial-mounds with the living dead in them, of ghosts of exposed infants, of trees and stones used in sacrifice.

Such beliefs had a contested relationship with Christianity and left only elusive traces on the written record; in texts such as these, they became, in Michael Ostling's (2018, 10) words, "objects of an endless effort at exorcism by which some Christians seek to expunge them beyond the margins and locate them firmly in hell, in the pagan past, or in the foolish minds of babbling 'old wives'".[177] Examples include both the villainous figures violently overcome by the protagonists (such as the *jötnar*, Grímr Ægir, and the sacrificial pagans of Bjarmaland) as well as the other problematic figures (giantesses, dwarfs, and members of the waking dead) who choose to help them. More specific examples include the magical harps played by the nix-like Kvintalín of *Samsons saga fagra* and Kolr of *Valdimars saga*; the stone-boats used by the *allra trölla þing* in the latter; and the *álfkonur* who appear in *Samsons saga fagra* as the creators of the magic mantle and in the episode in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* where Hrólfr helps one with a particularly difficult birth.

Perhaps the most stand-out example is the series of three curses uttered by the aforementioned witch Busla in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, which are known as *Buslabœn* (Busla's prayer) and *Syrpuvers* (Syrpa's verse) (see Fig. 4). In her second curse, Busla incites a variety of these types of 'folkloric' beings against the King Hringr:

> traull ok alfar ok taufranornir,
> buar bergrisar brenne þinar hallir,
> hate þig hrimþursar, hestar stredi þig,
> straen stangi þig, en stormar ære þig,
> ok uei uerdi þer, nema þu uilia minn giorir,
> (586, 14[v] 10–12; *Die ältere Bósa-saga*, 1893, ch. 5, p. 18)

177 Similarly, DuBois (2014, 72) writes: "Christian textual traditions directed clerical writers toward such an interrogation of local lore [. . .] The sagas' inclusion of seemingly pagan elements becomes a sign of a process of surveillance in which the elite were seemingly constantly involved."

(May trolls and elves and magic-Norns, supernatural inhabitants and mountain giants burn your halls. May frost giants loathe you, sallions violate you, straw prick you and storms bewilder you; and harm will come to you unless you do my bidding.) (*Bósa saga*, 2017, p. 34)

Her third and final verse is a runic riddle:

komi her segger sex, seg þu mer naufn þeira,
aull obundin, eg mun þer syna,
getr þu eigi rádit suo at mer rétt þicki,
þa skulu þig hunndar i hel gnaga,
en sál þin saukui i uite
(586, 14^{v}, 15–17; *Die ältere Bósa-saga*, 1893, ch. 5, p. 19)

(Let six warriors come here; tell me all their names without concealment; I will show [them] to you. If you cannot guess, so that it seems correct to me, then let dogs gnaw you to death and your soul sink to punishment.) (*Bósa saga*, 2017, p. 36)

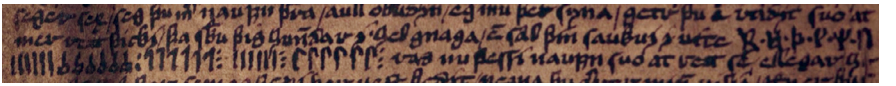

Fig. 4: AM 586 4to, fol. 14^{v}, ll. 16–17; runes at the end of Busla's *Syrpuvers* in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*. Source: handrit.is. Printed with permission. Copyright © of the Árni Magnússon Institute, Iceland.

It is likely that these curses were inspired by material circulating in oral tradition: Mitchell (2011, 54–57) has identified a parallel to the first of those quoted above on a fourteenth-century Bergen rune-stick (N B257) with a similar invocation, and the second has precedents in considerably earlier Scandinavian inscriptions (Thompson 1978, 51–53). This is not to say that the curses were taken wholesale from oral tellers; such would be impossible considering the text-based solution to the final riddle, which, as Claiborne W. Thompson (1978, 55) argues, is inextricably tied to the written medium. Rather, it is to say that, as Vésteinn Ólason (1994) writes, they can be considered "a parody of traditional curses and charms", which drew on material that would have been circulating orally. When dealing with these kinds of written traces of oral tradition, it is helpful to, in DuBois's (2014, 60) words again, "examine these relatively shadowy producers of texts" – i.e. the manuscripts' scribes – "as performers, and view their resultant manuscripts as instances of performance".[178] He writes, these "performers make particular statements about themselves and their understandings of knowledge and

178 On the 'performative turn' in folkloristics, see Lindow 2021; Mitchell 2022, 19–23.

value through the choices they make regarding the use of oral vs. written materials" (DuBois 2014, 61). From this angle, even cases of parody can be considered performances or engagements in tradition, which cast their chosen material in a new (and here mocking) light as well as in a new medium.

But although this 're-performance' of oral traditions is disparaging to a degree, as the preceding chapters have shown, the sagas' heroes are not wholly distinct from the 'trickery' of characters like Busla. This is most obviously the case in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* where the hero's achievements all result from the magical work of the undead King Hreggviðr and the dwarf Möndull. This is also the case in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* where, despite his hesitance, Bósi does come to rely on the witch Busla: the curses quoted above are uttered in his aid, and she helps him a second time at the final battle where she shapeshifts into a *glatunshundtík* (some kind of canine creature) to engage in a mortal combat undersea, never to return again.[179] There are similar instances of helpful magic in the other sagas too. In addition to Véfreyja of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, some examples from 589a–f are the four *álfar* of Jötunheimar who are responsible for crafting the magic mantle of *Samsons saga fagra*; the various magically empowered helpful giantesses of *Valdimars saga*, *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, and *Ála flekks saga*; and the helpful dwarfs of *Ektors saga*, *Þorsteins þáttr bœjarmagns*, and *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*. There is even an act of healing in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* that is almost identical to that performed by Möndull: when Arinnefja reattaches Egill einhendi's hand after preserving it with some *lífsgrös*.

There is, therefore, a contradiction underlying these texts in their relationship to these oral traditions. Their written medium and aristocratic focus means that their compilers were clearly invested in distinguishing their upper-class heroes from the unlearned nonsense told and believed by marginal people like Vilmundr's mother and Busla, but they nevertheless incorporated precisely that kind of material into their texts in ways that are not exclusively demonising or wholly disparaging. This contradiction is best exemplified by the nebulous presence of the *álfar*: in *Vilmundar saga viðutan* they represent unlearned superstition, whereas in *Samsons saga fagra* they are the creators of the elite-sustaining magic mantle, and in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* they are part of the network of otherworldly beings on whom the hero's success depends. Interestingly, these *álfkonur* do in fact live beneath the earth (within a grass-covered mound), just as Vilmundr's superstitious mother had said.

179 Hui (2018b, 233–235) notes that *glatunshundtík* is a *hapax legomenon* that may have some local significance to Gautland where much of the saga takes place.

Here it is worth making another comparison to Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, because a similar contradiction seems to have also been at play. Central to the prologue's truth defence was the saga's Christian purpose: the fact that it centred the king and honoured God, unlike the oral stepmother tales told by shepherd boys. However, much of the saga's information does seem to have derived from informal oral sources, and notably little skaldic poetry survives from the missionary king's reign (Clunies Ross 2014, 67; Grønlie 2017, 46–47).[180] For most of the text, these sources combined with the expectations of the medium are unproblematic. However, there is one significant point where Oddr and/or his redactors waiver. Following the incident where Óláfr takes on Eyvindr kinnrifa, the demon sorcerer mentioned in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s prologue, Óláfr goes to battle against Þórir hjörtr. When Þórir is shot with an arrow and dies, a hart springs from his body and injures Óláfr's dog Vigi. The narrator then intervenes to say:

> En þo at þuilikir lutir se sagþir. fra slicum scrimslum oc undrum sem nu var sagt þa ma slict uist utrulict þyckia. En allir menn vita þat at fiandinn er iafnan gagnstaðligr almaktum guði. oc þeir hinir aumu men er guði hafna En fiandinn suikr með allzconar uelum oc suikræðum oc uekr up sinn ureinan anda. með hinum uestum lutum. þeim imoti er guði þiona oc blindar sionir þeira oc oll vit licamans þa bleckir hann oc tælir með morgum lutum. En þessa luti er ver segiom fra slicum lutum oc dómisogum. þa dómum ver þat eigi sannleik at sua hafi verit. helldr hyggiom ver at sua hafi synnz þui at fiandinn er fullr up flærðar oc illzku (Oddr Snorrason, *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, 1932, ch. 45 (A-text), pp. 142–143).
>
> (The sort of tales about such phantoms and prodigies as have just been related may surely seem less than credible, but everyone knows that the devil is always in opposition to Almighty God, together with those miserable men who reject God. The devil betrays us with all manner of deceits and faithlessness and, with the worst contrivances, sets his unclean spirit against those who serve God. He blinds their vision and fleshly understanding, and he tricks and deceives them in many ways. The matters that we have related with respect to such tales and exempla we do not judge to be true in the sense that they happened, but rather we believe that they appeared to happen because the devil is full of deceit and evil) (Oddr Snorrason, *The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason*, 2003, ch. 45, p. 97).

There seems to have been some uncertainty about how to relate what must have been orally-transmitted stories about the sorcerer Eyvindr kinnrifa in the saga's written medium. As Siân Grønlie (2017, 54) writes, the reason for this hesitation is a question of "orthodoxy: since the devils that roam the earth have purely aerial

180 Although an oral art form that predates the arrival of literacy in Scandinavia, the formalised and elite status of skaldic verse means it has many of the characteristics we would associate with the written word and was associated with the upper echelons of society rather than the informal circles referred to by DuBois. Judith Jesch (2005) has even argued that it can be considered a kind of proto-literacy.

bodies, the grossly corporeal nature of Eyvindr, who can die, and the hart, which seriously wounds Vigi, is theologically problematic". Thus, the episode requires explanation to make sure it is in keeping with Christian interpretations of pagan magic.[181]

Something similar happens in the prose narration of the Codex Regius. In the legendary portion, the narrator famously emerges between the poems to address an absent narrative – that of Kára, which is lost to us presumably because of the attention it pays to the heathen belief in reincarnation. As Quinn (2000, 37–38) suggests, it seems that the compiler saw this belief to be incompatible with the technology of writing, because just as Oddr disregards his alternate accounts as stepmother stories, the Codex Regius compiler brushes these ones off as "kerlingavilla" (*Edda*, 1983, p. 160) (old-wives' tales). In both cases, a narratorial interjection arises as the result of a tension between oral materials and the written medium.

As discussed in Chapter 5.4.2, a similar process seems to be at work in the *apologiæ* of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* too: the mid-saga interjection and a substantial part of the prologue seem to have been aimed at defending the inclusion of the unusual figures of Hreggviðr and Möndull. Something similar may also be happening in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*. Although its prologue does not specifically mention its magical content, that magic's unique character and its great prominence in the narrative likely contributed to the concern expressed by the prologue that the saga was uncomfortably close to the *lokleysa* (nonsense) that unlearned people were known to make up for entertainment. Moreover, the prose passages that introduce Busla's three curses make their controversial nature clear:

(1) þetta kuelld hit sama kom busla i þat herbergi sem hringr konungr suaf i, ok hof upp bæn þa er sidan er kaullud buslubæn, ok hefir hun uid fræg ordit sidan, ok eru þar i maurg ord ok ill þau sem kristum monnum er þarfleysa i munne at hafa, En þo er þetta upp haf á hene (586, fol. 14^{r}, ll. 28–31; *Die ältere Bósa saga*, 1893, ch. 5, p. 15).

(That evening, Busla came to the room where the king slept and began a prayer which was later called *Buslabæn* (Busla's Prayer) and has become widely known. It contains many evil words which are needless for Christian men to speak. But nevertheless, this is the beginning.)

181 The decision to include the story at all seem to have been too much for some: as Carl Phelpstead (2012, 39) notes, when Snorri Sturluson put together *Heimskringla*, for which Oddr's saga was a source, he abbreviated the account of Eyvindr and removed the marvellous fight between stag and dog which follows: Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla, I,* 1941, pp. 322–323.

(2) busla let þa frammi annan þridjung bænarenar, ok mun eg lata þat um lida at skrifa hann þui þat er aullum þarfleysa at hafa hann eptir, en þo ma suo sizt eptir hafa hann at hann se eigi skrifadr En þo er þetta þar upphaf á (586, fol. 14^{v}, ll. 8–10; *Die ältere Bósa saga*, 1893, ch. 5, p. 18).

(Then Busla recited another third of the prayer, and I should pass over writing it, because it is useless to all who repeat it, and it will be repeated less if it is not written down. But nevertheless, this is the beginning.)

(3) hof hun þa upp þat u[ers] er syrpu uers er kallat ok mestr galldur er i follgen ok eigi er lofat at kueda eptir dagsetr, ok er þetta þar i nære enndanum (586, fol. 14^{v}, ll. 14–15 (*Die ältere Bósa saga*, 1893, ch. 5, p. 19).

(Then she started that verse which is called *Syrpuvers* (Syrpa's Verse). The strongest magic is concealed in it, and it is not permitted to recite it after sunset, but this is near the end.)

Although the fact that the curses were copied anyway suggests that these asides are somewhat tongue-in-cheek, they nevertheless show that the verses were problematic and that the decision to commit them to writing may have elicited concern from more conservative members of the audience.

It seems likely, therefore, that the *apologiæ* of both *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* and *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* arose, in part, out of a tension between the sagas' oral 'pre-Christian' content and their written medium, much as it did for Oddr and the compiler of the Codex Regius. And across 586 and 589a–f, it is in these two texts that this material plays the largest role: although, as discussed, marginal figures provide magical assistance in many of the sagas, nowhere is it as major as in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* and *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, and it usually takes place in more marginal 'otherworlds' as opposed to the Scandinavian mainland, such as in Jötunheimar as is the case for Arinnefja's act of healing.[182]

Moreover, in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s prologue (quoted in Chapter 5.4.3), the words that follow the passage about magic and unclean spirits make clear that the *apologia* was added (at least in part) for the benefit of concerned clerics:

er þat ok bezt ok frodligazt at hlyda medan fra er sagt ok gera ser helldr gledi at en angur þui iafnan er þat menn hugza eigi adra syndsamliga hluti á medan hann glediz af skemtaneni, (589f, fol. 13^{r}, ll. 27–29; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 1, p. 237)

182 Martin (1998, 319) notes that *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s magical content takes places "outside the bounds of Scandinavia". The one exception that must be added to this observation is Möndull's act of healing, which takes place in Denmark and prompts the mid-saga interjection.

> (it is best and most sensible to listen while the story is told and feel joy rather than sorrow because it is always [the case] that men [do] not think about sinful things while they are enjoying entertainment.)

It seems that it was not just on grounds of general plausibility that the saga and its magic might have been criticised, but because those tasked with maintaining the morality of the populace might have had larger moral scruples about disseminating the evidently controversial story at all.

7.4 Entertainment

The obvious question that arises next is: why include this material, when it seems liable to bring the credibility of the sagas and their heroes under question? In neither case does it seem that the compilers were dealing with historical traditions in the same way that Oddr or the Codex Regius compiler were. They seem to have included this material not because they felt like they had to or because their audiences expected it but because, for some reason, they wanted to, despite the criticisms it might elicit from the church.

To begin answering this question, it will be helpful to broaden out to the wider textual marketplace within which these sagas were circulating and examine their relationship to literacy more closely. A useful outline of this marketplace is provided by the prologue to *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*:

> [e]f menn girnazt at heyra fornar frasagnir þa er þat fyrst til at hlýda þat flestar saugur eru af nauckuru efne, sumar eru af gude ok hans helgum monnum, ok ma þar nema miken uisdom ok eru þeir þo fleire menn at liten skemtun þicker i heilagra manna saugum, Adrar saugr eru af rikum konungum ok ma þar nema i hæuerska hirdsidu edr hversu þiona skal rikum haufdingium, hin þridi hlutr sagnana er fra konungum þeim er koma i miklar mannraunir ok hafa misiafnt ur rett (586, fol. 7^{r}, ll. 15–19; *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*, 1927, ch. 1, p. 121).
>
> (If people are eager to hear old stories, then it must first be acknowledged, that most sagas have a particular subject matter: some are about God and his holy men, and they can teach much wisdom; there are nevertheless some men, who get little fun from the sagas of holy men. Other sagas are of powerful kings, and they can teach polite manners, or how to serve chieftains. Then the third group of sagas are about those kings who underwent great tests and each passed them in different ways.)

The sagas collected in these two manuscripts would largely fit within the final grouping – which concern kings who underwent great tests – although there is certainly some slippage into the second group for the courtlier among them. The sharpest contrast is provided by the first grouping, the sagas of holy men, or

saint's lives, which are singled out for containing much wisdom as well as their lack of entertainment value.

This is significant for understanding the tension evident in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, because entertainment value and opposition to clerical texts seem to underlie the depiction of Busla. While the expressions of doubt quoted above that precede her curses call to mind the conservatism of more clerically-oriented texts, the narrator's decision to relate them nonetheless positions the saga they are in as something distinctly different – a kind of text that would not censor entertaining material for the sake of propriety. The saga's concluding lines take this a step further, positioning Busla as a kind of mock-saint and the whole saga as a parody of hagiography: "ok signe þa sancta busla alla sem her hafa til hlytt leset ok skrifat edr her nauckut til fengit edr gott at giort A–M–E–N" (586, fol. 19^{r}, ll. 17–18; *Die ältere Bósa saga*, 1893, ch. 16, p. 63) (and bless them, saint Busla, all who have listened, read and written or who have given something or done good A–M–E–N). The conclusion of the saga that follows in the manuscript, *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, also comically recalls some of its own marginal characters, but is even more lewd – so much so that some of it was erased by a later reader (see Fig. 5):

> ok endum uær suo saugu uilmundar uidutan med þui á lyktar ordi af þeim sem skrifat hefir at sa sem leset hefir ok hinir sem til hafa hlytt, ok allir þeir sem eigi eru suo rikir at þeir eigi konungi uorum skatt at giallda, þa kyssi þeir á razen á auskubusku [og takit þat til ydar. allt sligt sem hia for þa Kolr kryppa sard hana og sited j þann frid sem þer fáet af henne] ualete (586, fol. 25^{r}, ll. 32–36; *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, 1962, ch. 24, pp. 200–201).[183]
>
> (And we end this saga of Vilmundr viðutan with these concluding words from the one who has written to that one who has read and those who have listened and all those who are not so rich that they must pay tribute to our king, they should kiss Öskubuska on the arse and take for yourself that which passed when Kolr kryppa fucked her and enjoy what peace that you get from her. Farewell.)

The goal of entertainment is also foregrounded in the passage of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s prologue (quoted on p. 98) where the text's claim to history (to orthodoxy and appropriateness) is subordinated to the more immediate one of entertainment. This goal is also stated outright in the prologue's first line: "Margar fra sagnir hafa menn saman sett til skemtanar monum" (589f, fol. 13^{r}, l. 13; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 1, p. 237) (Many stories have been put together for people's entertainment). In all these instances, 589a–f and 586's sagas are positioned as en-

183 The final line and a half have been erased and the words within the brackets are supplied by Loth's edition.

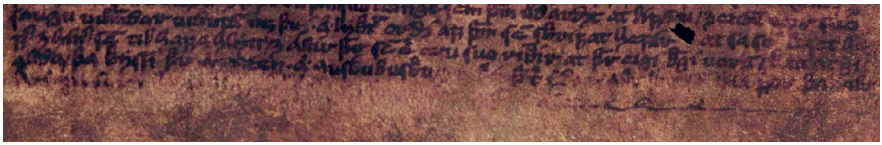

Fig. 5: AM 586 4to, fol. 25^{r}; erasure at the end of *Vilmundar saga viðutan*. Source: handrit.is. Printed with permission. Copyright © of the Árni Magnússon Institute, Iceland.

tertaining narratives that are distinctly different to the kinds of texts promoted by the church and, critically, in tension with the standards expected by it.

Entertainment is also central to the scenes of saga storytelling which we find within the sagas themselves. *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* contains two such scenes. The first is when the sworn-brothers and Arinnefja each tell their life stories so they do not have to sit in silence while she cooks them gruel. She suggests the activity, saying: "uerum eigi hliod [. . .] Mun langt adr en grautren er buen, ok seg þu æfesaugu þina asmundr, En þa skal egell uid taka, En þa mun eg skemta til bordprydi af þui sem yfir mik hefir boret" (589e, fol. 7^{r}, ll. 26–28; *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, 1927, ch. 5, p. 23) (Let's not be silent [. . .] It will be a long time before the gruel is ready, so tell us your life story, Ásmundr. Then Egill will follow. And then I will entertain at the table with what has happened to me). As Gottskálk Jensson (2003, 198) notes, the sagas that the two heroes tell have several of the formal features familiar from written sagas. They are told in the third person and both begin with typical formulas: "ottar het konungr" (589e, fol. 7^{r}, l. 30; *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, 1927, ch. 5 p. 24) (A king was named Óttarr) and "hringr het konungr" (589e 4to, fol. 8^{v}, l. 34; *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, 1927, ch. 9, p. 41) (A king was named Hríngr). Episodes similar to this (but lacking comparable formal features) occur in *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans* and *Af þremr kumpánum*.[184] *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*'s second storytelling-scene comes near the end of the narrative when, "at þessari ueizlu haufdu menn þat til skemtanar um brudlaupit at þeir asmundr ok egell saugdu fra ferdum sinum ok til sannenda um saugu sina segir suo at þær være þar badar skinnnefia ok arennefia ok saunnudu saugu þeira" (589e, fol. 13^{r}, ll. 18–20; *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, 1927, ch. 17, pp. 78–79) (during the wedding, for entertainment Ásmundr and Egill told of their journey, and to prove the truth of their story, it is said that both Skinnefja and Arinnefja were there and they

184 Gottskálk Jensson (2021, 69–71) argues the latter was the inspiration behind the scene in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana.*

vouched for it). Critical in all these scenes is that the saga is conceived of as a specifically oral form of entertainment, which passes time and brings communities together. It is worth noting here that truthfulness, guaranteed by eyewitness testimony, is also a critical feature.

These are not, of course, characteristics of the sagas under discussion here, which, although probably read out loud, are fundamentally written texts produced at some remove from the events they purport to depict. Nonetheless, the passages that conclude both *Ektors saga* and *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* position this written status at something of an arm's length. The latter concludes by saying:

> lukum uær her saugu þeira egils ok asmundar fyrir þui at bokfellit minkar en bleket þycknar augum þyngiazt tungan trenar haundin mædizt pennan sliofgaz ok bila aull ritfæren hafi þeir þauck er skrifad hafa ok suo sa er las ok þeir er til hlyddu ok sa er þessa saugu hefir fyrst saman sett (589e, fol. 13^{v}, ll. 29–32; *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, 1927, ch. 18, p. 83).[185]
>
> (Here we end the saga of Egill and Ásmundr because the parchment runs out and the ink dries, the eyes grow heavy, the tongue becomes stiff, the hand becomes weary, the pen becomes dull, and all the writing materials have given way. Give thanks to those who have written, those who have read, and those who have listened, and the one who first put this saga together.)

In contrast to the stories orally narrated by Egill and Ásmundr, the sagas' indebtedness to the written medium is foregrounded and audiences are reminded that, although the story itself is entertaining, the medium to which it now is indebted, the technology of writing, is a fundamentally tiresome pursuit at odds with the heroics performed and told by the protagonists themselves. A divide between those who appear in the saga and those who write it is also evident in the self-conscious aside made by Bósi, which is quoted on p. 113: it is not Bósi who will write the saga, he is just responsible for what it will contain.

185 Those which conclude *Ektors saga* in this manuscript are very similar (and not included in the edition, which is based on AM 152 fol): "nu nidr falla þessa atburdi uelldz þat þui mest at bokfellit minkar en blekit þyknar augum þyngiazt tungan trenar pennen sliofgazt haundin mædizt ok bila aull rit færin hafi sa þauck er skrifat hefir ok sá er las ok þeir er til hlyddu" (AM 589d 4to, fol. 48^{v}, ll. 15–18) (And now we lay down here these events of this kingdom because the parchment almost runs out and the ink dries, the eyes have grown heavy, the tongue becomes stiff, the pen has become dull, the hand has become weary and all writing tools give way. Have thanks for those who have written, those who have read, and those who have listened).

The idea that writing might be at odds with heroic masculinity is made explicit in *Kirialax saga*. After Kirialax has mastered the seven liberal arts and become exceedingly learned, he faces what seems to be a crisis of his masculinity. His father says that he must "prozt oss hann uerda munu omiukr til ridarligrar atferdar sem roskum ok tignum manne hæfir þa er hann ordin suo frodr a bok ok suo godr gramaticus þa skal hefia hann til kennimanz slektar ok uerdi biskup edr abote" (589a, fol. 5^{r}, ll. 20–23; *Kirialax saga*, 1917, p. 14) (prove to us that he is not weak in knightly conduct, as befits a mature and high-born man, as he has become so learned in books and such a good *grammaticus* that he should be raised to the order of a priest and become a bishop or an abbot). After Kirialax excels at the tournament, his father says "er nu profat um kirialax son minn huat manne hann ma uerda" (589a, fol. 6^{v}, ll. 19–20; *Kirialax saga*, 1917, p. 19) (it is now proven about Kirialax, my son, what man he may become). Later in the saga when attentions shift to Kirialax's own sons, Vallterus and Villifer, who disagree over whether to engage the visiting knight Kvintatus in a duel, Vallterus, who wishes to duel, puts it plainly: "hættu broder sagde hann, þin atferd er lytil mannlig, situr þu so kir sem munkr i Einsetu edur mær til kosta" (AM 532 4to, fol. 123^{r}, ll. 14–16; *Kirialax saga*, 1917, p. 96) ('Beware brother,' he said, 'your behaviour is unmanly, you sit as quietly as a monk in a hermitage or a maiden awaiting marriage'). For the men of *Kirialax saga*, the greatest threat to their masculinity does not come from magic (as it did for Bósi) but from proximity to the monastic life of learning – of being docile, stationary, and akin to an unmarried maiden. Even Kirialax's quest for knowledge is achieved not through reading and study but by going out, seeing the world himself, and heroically risking his life in the process.

This same dichotomy is hinted at in the prologue to *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans* too. After outlining its three types of sagas, the narrator defends the plausibility of the events depicted in its final grouping:

> En þo er þat hattr margra manna at þeir kalla þær saugur lognar sem fiare ganga þeira natturu, ok er þat af þui at ostyrkr madr kann þat ecki at skilia huersu miklu þeir mega orka er bædi eru sterkir ok hafa agiæt uopn er allt mattu bita (586, fol. 7^{r}, ll. 20–22; *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*, 1917, ch. 1, p. 122).
>
> (But nevertheless, it is the custom of many men that they call those sagas lies which are far from their nature, and that is because a weak man cannot understand what great works can be done by those who are both strong and have excellent weapons, which can bite everything.)

Here, belief in the abilities of powerful men and their incredible weapons is positioned as a condition of masculinity, and doubt – a response we know to associate with clerics – its opposite.

7.5 The Written Word and the Preservation of Memory

Although the texts in these manuscripts use written sources to lend authority, they also hint at a view of literacy which is less confident than these claims would first suggest. This is the case in the references to known authors (specifically Gallterus and Homer) in *Ektors saga* and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*. In the epilogue of the former, before naming these figures, the narrator foregrounds the distance between the time of the events described and the time of them being written down, asking the audience "at um bæti mina fáfrædi þui uer haufum hardla fiari staddir uerit þeim tidindum" (589d, 48^{v}, 1–3; *Ectors saga*, 1962, ch. 28, p. 185) (to improve my ignorance because we are very far from those events). The narrator then goes on to reference their written sources, saying that the information in the saga was found in the books of Gallterus, who copied them from those of Homer. The implication is that, although those accounts were written by learned men, direct eyewitness testimony would have provided a better guarantee of authenticity.

In the mid-saga interjection within *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (quoted on p. 97) another potentially long chain of transmission is used to explain the implausibility of the events related. The narrator suggests that Möndull's act of healing may not have actually happened but rather that what once may have been a figurative account had been misinterpreted by later redactors as literal (O'Connor 2005, 146–147). Here, the reliability of the written record is not inherent but rather dependent on the good sense of its interpreters. Caution is also called for by the epilogue to *Ektors saga* in which, as discussed above, a later redactor calls into question the sources apparently used by the person who first put the saga to together. They had believed that the story they based the saga on was written by Master Gallterus, whereas their redactor believes that story was written by Homer. What use is a written authority, audiences are invited to ask, when the identity of that authority is in dispute?

This sceptical attitude towards textuality corresponds with the converse attitude towards eyewitness testimony that is expressed in the other earliest recorded *apologia*, the prologue to Karl Jónsson's *Sverris saga*, which begins in the following way:[186]

> Her hefr up*p* oc segir fra þei*m* tíðindu*m* er nu hava ve*r*it um hríð oc i þe*i*ra M*ann*a min*n*um er fyr*ir* þessi bok hava sagt. En þ*at* er at segja fr*a* Sve*r*ri k*onung*i s*yni* Sig*ur*þ*a*r k*onung*s Har-

186 *Sverris saga*'s prologue is extant in AM 327 4to, AM 47 fol (c. 1300–1325), and AM 81a fol (c. 1450–1475), and is extended in Flateyjarbók (1387–1394). On the two versions of the prologue, see Sverrir Tómasson 1988, 388–394.

allz-*sonar* oc er þ*at* uphaf bocariNar er ritat er ept*ir* þ*ei*ri bok er fyrst ritaði Karl aboti Ionson. en yfir sat sialfr Sv*er*rir k*onung*r. oc reð fyr*ir* hvat rita skylldi er su fra-sogn eigi langt fr*a*m komin. Þar er sagt f*ra* nockor*um* h*an*s orrostum. Oc sua s*em* a liðr bokina vex h*an*s styrkr. oc seg*ir* sa hin*n* sami styrkr fyr*ir* hina meiri luti. kælloðu þ*ei*r þaN lut boc*ar* fyr*ir* þui Grylu hin*n* siðaRi lutr bocar er ritaðr eptir þ*ei*ra m*ann*a f*ra*-sogn er mi*n*ni hofðu til sva at þ*ei*r sialf*ir* hofðu set oc heyrt þessi tiðende oc þ*ei*r meN sum*ir* hofðu v*er*it í oRost*om* m*eð* S*verri* k*onung*i. Sum þessi tiðinde varo s*va* i minne fest at m*e*N ritaðo þeg*ar* ept*ir* er ny-orðin v*ar*o. oc hava þau ecki breyz siðan. (*Sverris saga*, 1981, Prologue, p. 1)

(Here we begin to speak of events which happened a while ago, within the memory of the men who related them for this book; to speak, that is, of King Sverrir, son of King Sigurðr Haraldsson. The beginning of the book is written according to the one that Abbot Karl Jónsson first wrote when King Sverrir himself sat over him and settled what he should write. The story has not come far [from its source]. It tells of certain of his battles, and as the book advances, his strength grows, foreshadowing the greater events. They therefore called his part of the book *Gryla*. The latter part of the book is written according to what is related by those who remembered what happened, having actually seen or heard it, and some of them had been with King Sverrir in battles. Some of these stories were fixed in memory, having been written down directly after the events occurred, and they have not been altered since.) (adapted from *Sverrissaga: The Saga of King Sverri of Norway*, 1899, Prologue, p. 1)

Unlike the texts of 589a–f and 586 – which take place long ago and far away – the events of *Sverris saga* happened within recent memory and thus derive their authority from eyewitnesses: King Sverrir himself and those who saw his deeds or heard of them soon after. Central to this truth-defence is the closeness between the written text and the eyewitnesses. It is these same caveats that are used in the mid-saga *apologia* of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* to explain possible errors: inaccuracies may have crept into the saga because the same closeness cannot apply to a text set in the distant past. Although seemingly undermining its own claim to truth, this explanation is accompanied by a (somewhat tongue-in-cheek) claim to the authority of written texts: the narrator accepts no responsibility for the contents of their sources, saying that "er þar ok uannt i mote at mæla, er hinir fyrri menn hafa samsett" (589f, 26^{v}, 30; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 25, p. 309) (it is difficult to speak against those things which have been set down by men of the past). The mid-saga interjection therefore both undermines the authority of the written text by emphasising its susceptibility to misinterpretation but nevertheless uses the high status afforded to it to divert criticisms of its own content. The result is a kind of comedic distancing of the written word, which is at once both a source of authority as well as one of potential inaccuracies.

The instability of the written record comes up again later in the saga following the death of Sturlaugr starfsami at the final battle in Garðaríki. As he dies, the narrator says:

> um þenna atburd a greinir miog bækr [at því] suo segir i sturlaugs saugu ok fleirum audrum bokum at hann hafi sottdaudr ordit heima i hringariki ok ueret þar heygdr, En her segir suo at eptir fall þordar kom grimr ægir [upp ór] iórduni at baki sturlaugi ok hio med mæki á hrygg honum suo at hann tæki i sundr i m[idju] uitum uer eigi huort sanara er (589f, fol. 31^{v}, ll. 2–6; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 31, p. 332).
>
> (About these events books disagree greatly, because it says in *Sturlaugs saga* and several other sagas, that he died of illness at home in Hringaríki and was buried in a mound there, but this saga says that after Þórðr fell, Grímr Ægir came up out of the ground behind Sturlaugr and struck his sword in his back so that he took [him] apart in the middle. We do not know which is truer.)

In this aside, the saga's written status is foregrounded and positioned as one among several *bækr* (books), which contain different versions of the hero's death. In the absence of first-hand accounts, and with these books as our only sources, it is impossible to know which is closer to what really happened – which one is *sannara* (truer). Interestingly, the alternate account alluded to here is not actually that which either we are familiar with or, it seems, that which the scribes of 589a–f and 586 were familiar with either. In the extant version of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, recorded in 589f, the eponymous hero dies in Sweden, not Hringaríki as takes place (we may assume) in the now-lost version of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* which is alluded to here. Across these two texts, this manuscript therefore refers to three distinct accounts of Sturlaugr's death: the one in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* (where he dies in Sweden), the one presumably in the now-lost saga which is alluded to here (where he dies in Hringaríki), and the one described in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* itself (where he dies in Garðaríki). The narrator acknowledges the alternate accounts, but, faced with such a variable record, they can provide no guarantee of truth.[187]

Something similar occurs in *Kirialax saga* when the eponymous hero visits Troy. As he gazes on the graves of Hektor and Akillas, the narrator notes that they are inscribed with the events of the great war in Latin letters: "hir huiler herra ektor hin hæste kappi allz heims hann sa ok lei[di] akillas hins fræga uar þar ok med þui likri mynd pentad allt med gu[lli] ok a grafit þat fræga verk er hann felldi ektorem" (589a, 7^{v}, 16–18; *Kirialax saga*, 1917, p. 26) (here rests Ektor, the bravest hero in all the world. He also saw the tombstone of Akillas the famous which was similarly decorated all with gold and it was engraved with the famous

187 There is a precedent for this in the prose narration of the Codex Regius following the death of Sigurðr where a number of alternative accounts are alluded to. Unlike in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, however, these accounts are ascribed to poems rather than books: *Edda*, 1983, p. 161.

deed that he had killed Ektor). Nevertheless, the narrator offers two different accounts of the heroes' final encounter:

> greinizt su saga miog med meisturunum med huerium hætti þat gerdizt sumir sanna at akillas hefdi heited a pallacem bardaga gydiuna ok ektore hafi hun birzt i þeira uidrskipti med miklu liose suo at hann matte uarla i gegn sia ok hafi tekit af ser hialmin hneigiandi i gegn med litilæte, En meistari dares segir at akillas beid þess at ektor uar nær sprungen af mædi ok hafi adr barezt vid sterkuztu kappa ok unnet þa ok hafi þa akillas komit i mot honum ok unnet hann suo (589a, fol. 7^{v}, ll. 18–25; *Kirialax saga*, 1917, pp. 26–27).
>
> (This saga diverges greatly among the masters regarding the manner in which it happened. Some assert that Akillas had called to Pallas, the goddess of war, and she had appeared to Ektor in their dealings with a light so great that he could hardly see and he had taken off his helmet, kneeling before her with humility. But master Dares says that Akillas waited until Ektor was nearly exhausted and had already fought against the strongest champions and defeated them, and then Akillas had come against him and defeated him in this way.)

Although the words on the gravestones record the events, the narrator reminds us that they only provide a selection of the information – the rest is up for debate. In both this saga and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, the written record is presented not as an infallible representation of past events and a stable storehouse for memories, but rather a resource to be used with caution, in which meanings are liable to flux, misinterpretation, and contradiction. With only written records available, it is impossible to really know what happened in the distant past.

The way these texts undermine the authority of the written word may have contributed to concerns that 589a–f's scribes had about their manuscript's reception and motivated their decision to add the *apologiæ* to *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*. Before addressing the saga's magical content, the narrator of the prologue discusses the subjectivity of eyewitnesses, presumably to explain why this account may differ from others. They say: "uerda menn iafnan misfrodir þui þat er optliga anars syn ok heyrd er anars er eigi þo þeir se uid atburd staddir" (589f, fol. 13^{r}, ll. 15–16; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 1, p. 237) (People are differently informed because often one sees or hears what another does not even though they may have been present at the same event). The first line of the epilogue, which was never finished, begins to address a similar problem:

> þo þessi saga þicki eigi samhlioda uerda audrum þeim er at ganga þessu male, um manna naufn edr adra atburdi, huat er huerr uann edr giordi med frægd edr uisku (589f, 36^{v}, ll. 11–13; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 38, p. 363)
>
> (Even if there are discrepancies between this story and others that deal with the same events, about people's names and other details, and what each person achieved or did with greatness or wisdom . . .)

As discussed above, the discrepancies between this story and others are, when it comes to Sturlaugr starfsami, quite significant, and they are even more so in this manuscript than *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s other extant witnesses. The addition of these *apologiæ* suggest that those discrepancies and, arguably, the compiler's insistence on drawing attention to them, concerned 589a–f's scribes. They suggest that, along with this saga's unusual handling of pre-Christian material, its lack of reliable sources and failure to provide a clear suggestion of what 'really' happened weakened its status as saga 'history'.

7.6 Conclusion

The various self-conscious references to writing, reading, and storytelling discussed here reveal the sagas to have a complex relation with both oral and written traditions. It seems that the scribes of these two manuscripts saw their sagas as occupying a middle ground between both.

On the one hand, literacy is given a high status in these texts: it is the domain of the elite with a monopoly on 'legitimate' accounts of the past, which (via intertextual references and the integration of book learning) these texts position themselves within. However, there are also several places where the high status of the written word, and the sphere associated with it, is subtly undermined, both as a practice and as a source of authority. In fact, a central tenet of these sagas' self-definition seems to be predicated on opposition to the sphere most associated with literacy. As the prologue to *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans* makes clear, these sagas are not boring stories about holy men, but rather entertaining tales of powerful kings famed for physical deeds that were so incredible weak monks may not believe them to even be possible. And while the sagas' written status and indebtedness to the Christian technology of writing means that they were confined to a particular narrative of history as well as theological orthodoxy, they nevertheless push those constraints to their limits and relish in making fun of the conservative standards to which they would be held. Such is most obviously the case in the depiction of Busla in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*.

Instead, as the scenes of saga-storytelling in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* and *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans* attest, despite their dependence on writing, these sagas were still seen to be fundamentally oral forms of entertainment. This may go some way towards explaining the great prominence of references to oral materials in these texts. Because although the ideal aristocratic courtly culture found across them reaches its apex in *Kirialax saga*, a text which contains little material from oral tradition and is exceedingly bookish, the other sagas indulge in precisely the material which is suggested to be that cul-

ture's antithesis: most of the heroes are ultimately reliant on the kinds of marginal figures and forces that had controversial status within Christian theology and were potentially at odds with the sagas' written medium. It seems likely, however, that these figures had popular appeal and helped to distinguish these texts from the less entertaining ones promoted by the church. The most extreme examples are *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* and *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* where the sagas' two potentially contradictory functions – as both oral entertainments and written histories – seem to come to a head. As a result, much like Oddr Snorrason and the compiler of the Codex Regius, the narrator must intervene to justify their choices. In doing so, they reveal the constraints of the saga as a medium. They reveal the extent to which 'pagan' or 'folkloric' content could be incorporated into a saga, and, in the case of Sturlaugr starfsami, they suggest that there was a limit to how far saga writers could question the authority of the written word before the integrity of the saga as a form would break.

In this way, these two manuscripts participate in both the clerical world of Christian book learning and oral traditions, with one foot in and one foot out of both. This is not just in the practical sense of being examples of 'vocalised' texts (i.e. written texts that were read out loud), but rather this duality seems to be at the core of their self-conceptualisation or 'medium theory': they were written texts with popular appeal that were distinct from both the narratives circulated by the church and those of the general population.

Returning to the questions posed of the sources at the beginning of this chapter – what are they mediating? For whom? And for what purposes? – it is possible, at this stage, to suggest a broad answer for the first two: these sagas act as meeting places for a variety of oral and written sources which aimed to reach and appeal to a broad cross-section of society, the extreme ends of which were the unlearned populace (who were to be entertained) and the clergy (whose standards were to be upheld).

8 The Manuscripts in Context

The final chapter moves focus onto the last question: for what purposes were these texts produced? My guiding questions in this chapter are: what were the patrons trying to 'do' by copying and disseminating these manuscripts? How were they trying to shape their politics, society and culture, along with its beliefs and values?

To answer these, I begin by outlining the late fifteenth-century historical context: drawing on the works of various historians, I discuss how Iceland's political circumstances were transformed following the collapse of the Commonwealth and how they developed over the following centuries. Some specific examples of important individuals, locations, and events are given that are relevant to the discussion that follows, in which I explore the manuscripts' pre-archive transmission histories. Building on this, I suggest (in very general terms) where and for whom the manuscripts may have been made and make some suggestions about how they were used. In the final section, I place these findings into dialogue with the manuscripts as texts and media, focussing first on their original fifteenth-century context before considering their later reception.

8.1 Fifteenth-Century Iceland

With the collapse of the Commonwealth in 1262–1264, Iceland's internal political structures and international relations were transformed.[188] Although many of the *goðar* (chieftains) of the Free State had already turned to King Hákon Hákonarson for support during the Civil Wars and had, in return, become his vassals, following the formal country-wide surrender of power, this relationship was codified in law. The position of *goði* was abolished and replaced with a variety of royal officers who received their titles directly from the king. The most prominent among them was the *hirðstjóri* (governor),[189] who was followed by the *sýslumenn* (sheriffs) who covered the twelve new *sýslur* (sheriff's districts).[190] The *alþingi*, which had been Iceland's legislative body, was transformed into a *lögþing* (law assem-

188 The following summary of Icelandic political and economic development is based on Björn Þorsteinsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1990; Björn Þorsteinsson and Sigurður Líndal 1978; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1995 and 2013; Sigríður Beck 2011; Sverrir Jakobsson 2013; Wærdahl 2011.

189 This title only emerges in the sources from 1320, although before that there were individuals who had comparable roles.

190 The exact number of *sýslumenn* could vary and there were at times more than one *hirðstjóri*.

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bly), which was presided over by two *lögmenn* and attended by the *sýslumenn* as well as eighty-four *nefndarmenn* (representatives) from across the districts (*Jónsbók*, 2010, ch. 1. 2, pp. 8–12). From these were selected thirty-six *lögréttumenn* (law-council men) who consented to new laws. Ultimate authority now lay with the Norwegian king who took over legislative responsibility and was entitled to make the final judgement at court (*Jónsbók*, 2010, ch. 1. 4, p. 14).[191] The new royally-affiliated titles gave members of the Icelandic elite entry into the king's retinue as either lords or retainers. According to Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (1995, 158), Icelanders seem to have made up five percent of the king's entourage in the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries.

With these political developments, the economic basis of the Icelandic elite also changed. One source of income for the king's new men were taxes: the royally-appointed *sýslumenn* were entitled to a portion of the tax paid by landholders to the king (*Jónsbók*, 2010, ch. 3. 1, p. 28). Their other principal source of income was the possession of land: they no longer needed to use their income to pay for gifts and feasts and could instead invest it in their own farms. Such is reflected in the post-Commonwealth laws where the term *höfuðból* (manor) gained a new prominence (*Jónsbók*, 2010, ch. 5. 7, pp. 96–98).[192] According to Magnús Már Lárusson (1971, 45), in the late Middle Ages there were thirty *höfuðból*, with the highest concentration in the Vestfirðir.

Over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the importance of land ownership only increased. After *c*. 1320, references to retainers stop appearing in the sources and it seems that service within the king's retinue ceased to be a productive means through which upper-class Icelanders could generate income. The plague (*Islandske annaler*, 1888, pp. 286–287) which devastated the population twice during the fifteenth century likely accelerated the process of accumulation, as it left large areas depopulated, and land was opened up for the taking by a small class of wealthy Icelanders.[193] It seems that there was a larger wealth disparity between the major landowners and the smaller householders during this period than during the thirteenth century, since the latter were no longer subsidised by a class of wealthy chieftains who were reliant on their support. Árni

191 However, Björn Þorsteinsson and Sigurður Líndal (1978, 66) and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (2013, 214–220) emphasise that law was not wholly imposed from above, and the local elite retained a large degree of influence in its formulation.

192 Manors do seem to have been a part of Iceland's political and economic landscape from much earlier, one example being Hofstaðir in northern Iceland, which was a centre of power in the ninth and tenth centuries: Árni Daníel Júlíusson 2010, 7.

193 Gunnar Karlsson (1996, 268–276) estimates that this wave of the plague had a sixty-percent mortality rate.

Daníel Júlíusson (2010, 16 and 22–25) argues from the inventory evidence that the disparity was also much greater during this period than in the centuries after. For example, the Vestfirðir *höfuðból* Saurbær á Rauðasandi had forty-five cows in 1446 but only nineteen in the early eighteenth century.[194]

This was, as Glauser (1983, 57) writes, "die Zeit der reichen Männer" (the time of the rich men), and several figures stand out who were given the cognomen *ríki* (rich) and who, following Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir (2010, 378), we might describe as Iceland's "quasi-kings". One example was *sýslumaður* Guðmundur ríki Arason (born *c*. 1395; *ÍÆ*, *II* 1949, 123–124), who owned several Vestfirðir *höfuðból* (among them Reykjahólar and Saurbær á Rauðasandi) (*DI*, *IV*, 1897, pp. 683–694; Magnús Már Lárusson 1971, 43). Another was *hirðstjóri* of the north and west Loftur ríki Guttormsson (d. 1432; *ÍÆ*, *III* 1950, 395–396) who owned numerous estates that added up, in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson's (1995, 164) calculation, to a total of 4300 hundreds – equivalent to about 215 average-sized farms and twice as much as the land owned by Snorri Sturluson in the thirteenth century (Magnús Már Lárusson 1971, 47).[195] Loftur was a member of the rich Skarðverjar family, who took their name from Skarð in Skarðströnd (Breiðafjörður) – one of Loftur's many holdings (Magnús Már Lárusson 1971, 43). Another notable member of this family was Björn ríki Þorleifsson (*c*. 1408–1467), a *hirðstjóri* who owned extensive lands in the Vestfirðir and inherited the manor of Skarð through his marriage to Loftur ríki's daughter Ólöf (*ÍÆ*, *I* 1948, 256; Björn Þorsteinsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, 1990, 106; Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, 2010, 327–328). In this economic context, marriage was an important tool for the elite to enhance their power and financial assets. Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir (2010, 299–376 and 432–435) has shown how marriage practices in this period aimed to ensure that family landholdings were not broken up (for example via dowries), and marriages were used to amass wealth instead. An example of this development is a prominent landowner in the north, the widow Margrét Vigfúsdóttir (1406–1486) – formerly the wife of Þorvarður (d. 1446), a son of Loftur ríki – who advantageously married her three daughters off in a *riddarasaga*-style triple wedding in 1465 to three *sýslumenn* (*DI*, *V*, 1899–1902, pp. 378–379; Orning 2017, 208).

In terms of international concerns, the elite's priorities did not remain stagnant as the post-Commonwealth period progressed. Most significant was the death of Olaf, the sixteen-year-old King of Norway and Denmark, in 1387. With no heir, Olaf was succeeded by his Danish mother Margrete (d. 1412), who united the

194 However, he also notes the opposite to be the case for the landholdings of the bishop's seat of Skálholt: Árni Daníel Júlíusson 2010, 16–17.

195 Jón Viðar bases this calculation on a document from 1430 where Loftur lists many of his landholdings: *DI*, *IV*, 1897, pp. 405–406.

Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish kingdoms under the Kalmar Union a decade later. This brought about an increased disconnect between the Icelandic elite and their monarchs; since Olaf was the last of the Norwegian kings descended from Haraldr hárfagri (to whom some prominent Icelanders traced their own ancestry), his death was, as Rowe (2005, 26) writes, "the last straw for the ideology of personal relationships that had long served as the mental framework within which Icelanders conceived their individual connections to the structures of power of their society". This became even more apparent in the following century. King Eric (Margrete's adopted son and heir) made Copenhagen his centre of power in 1417, and Helgi Þorláksson (2013, 279) has shown how from then on the Norwegian council became a new intermediary between the Icelanders and their kings, which was called on to not only "accept individual kings on behalf of the Icelanders but also to take care of Icelandic affairs". There seems to have been a sense of abandonment in Iceland: in a letter from the *alþingi* in 1419, leading Icelanders complained to King Eric that a commitment made as part of the *Gamli sáttmáli* (Old Covenant) that Iceland would receive six ships of provisions every year had not been kept for some time (*DI*, *IV*, 1897, pp. 268–69; Carus-Wilson 1993, 165).[196]

Nevertheless, the Kalmar kings maintained an interest in Icelandic affairs. This was because the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw a growth in international demand for Icelandic dried fish, known as *skreið*, which radically increased the presence of English and Hanseatic merchants in Icelandic waters.[197] English presence seems to have begun early in the fifteenth century and was a concern for the Danish crown because it caused a significant loss of tax revenue and threatened the lucrative monopoly of the Bergen merchants. Many attempts were made by the Kalmar kings to regulate English trade, but these proved largely futile, and it thrived for the first half of the century. Tensions came to a head in the 1460s: Christian I cancelled all English sailing privileges in 1466 after the English King Edward IV refused to ratify an article in a treaty concerning toll payments (*DI*, *XI*, 1915, pp. 20–21). A year later, the king's man Björn ríki Þorleifsson was killed by English merchants, and his son Þorleifur was taken captive, triggering a state of war between the English and Danish kings (*DI*, *V*, 1899–1902, pp. 497–503).

The Icelandic elite were not passive victims in these conflicts, rather they selectively collaborated with various international actors for their own political and economic gain. Many pursued a close relationship with the Kalmar kings,

196 *DI*, *IV*, pp. 268–69. On *Gamli sáttmáli* (possibly a fabrication of the fifteenth century), see Boulhosa 2005, 87–153.

197 The following summary of the late medieval Icelandic fish trade is based on Beck 2011; Björn Þorsteinsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1990; Carus-Wilson 1993; Gelsinger 1981; Seaver 1996.

while others allied themselves with the English who, Baldur Þórhallsson and Þorsteinn Kristinsson (2013, 117) argue, provided them with "important economic and societal shelter". A clause in the *Langaréttarbót* (Long Law Code Amendment) of 1450 points towards an anxiety present in Denmark about this collaboration: it forbids foreigners from taking young or old people from Iceland except to go to Norway or on pilgrimage and Icelandic parents from giving or selling their children to foreigners (*DI*, *V*, 1899–1902, pp. 62–69). Nevertheless, much trade happened under the radar. As Eleanor Mary Carus-Wilson (1993, 162–163) writes, "the arbitrary decrees of distant kings, whether in London or in Copenhagen, could not actually put a stop to a business which in Iceland was equally opportune to both parties". This conclusion is borne out by the concentration of wealth in the areas of Iceland frequented by the English; many of the major landowners already mentioned, such as Loftur ríki Guttormsson and Björn ríki Þorleifsson, had their power bases in the west of the country, precisely the region where most trade occurred (Beck 2011, 223–225; Glauser 1983, 55).

The post-Commonwealth period also saw an increased separation between the clergy and the secular elite. This begun with a late thirteenth-century conflict spearheaded by bishop of Skálholt Árni Þorláksson (under the instruction of archbishop of Niðarós), who wanted to secure the landholdings of the church and end Iceland's long-held tradition of lay church-ownership. The conflict was resolved by 1297: the bishops assumed authority of the *staðir* (institutions where they owned all the local land) whereas landholders retained their rights to the *bændakirkjur* (those which were on farmer-owned land).[198] Erika Sigurdson (2016, 96–118) has shown how this created the conditions for the development of a class of clerical elites as the church, much like the secular elite, gradually increased its landholdings. These clerics also seem to have developed a distinct sense of identity that differentiated them from the secular magnates. Central to this identity, Sigurdson (2016, 174) argues, was their connection to the archbishop of Niðarós and their participation in a clerical learned culture that valued "knowledge and use of canon law, liturgy, writing, composition and Latinity".

Correspondingly, the secular elite seem to have developed a strong sense of identity that distinguished them from both the clergy and the non-land-owning classes. They expressed this in signs such as dress, coats of arms, and, most critically, literary production (Björn Þorsteinsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1990, 74 and 106; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1995, 159). This was likely one of the reasons why control of churches was appealing: in addition to revenue, churches gave access to scribes who could contribute to "identitetsskapande verksamhet" (Beck

198 For an overview of the conflict, see Magnús Stefánsson 1978.

2011, 214) (identity-forming activities) like the production of genealogies and sagas. But lay literacy also appears to have been quite high in this period, and it seems that the secular aristocracy played a prominent role in manuscript production as both scribes and patrons, particularly in the fifteenth century (Stefán Karlsson 1999, 149–151; Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir 2018, 181–194). Several manuscripts have been associated with Möðruvellir fram during Margrét Vigfúsdóttir's time (Sanders 2000, 41–44; Stefán Karlsson 1999, 152–154). These are the saga manuscripts Holm perg 7 fol,[199] AM 81a fol (1450–1475),[200] AM 579 4to,[201] AM 445c II 4to (1440–1460),[202] AM 162a η fol (1459–1475),[203] and AM 343a 4to;[204] the legal collection AM 132 4to (1440–1460);[205] a copy of *Konungs skuggsjá* in AM 243a fol (1450–1475); and the model book AM 673a III 4to (Teiknibókin, 1450–1475). These manuscripts have been the subject of several studies by Orning, who has attempted to map out the mental universe of the Möðruvellir fram elites. He writes that "this milieu must be characterised as giving quite a secular impression" (Orning 2017, 312) due to the absence of clerical texts in their collection, while the presence of *Jónsbók*, *Konungs skuggsjá*, and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* suggest a particular interest in (and perhaps an affiliation with) the Norwegian crown (Orning 2017, 310–311). But this elite's literary production included clerical as well as secular material (Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir 2018, 188–191). For example, Bjarni Ívarsson, Margrét Vigfúsdóttir's nephew, is known to have been the commissioner and illuminator of the liturgical manuscript AM 80b 8vo (1473, fragment), which was gifted to the monastery at Munkaþverá in Eyjafjörður (Stefán Karlsson 1999, 141–142).

199 *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, *Elíss saga ok Rósamundu*, *Sigurðar saga turnara*, *Bevers saga*, *Konráðs saga keisarasonar*, *Ektors saga*, *Gibbons saga*, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, *Sigurðar saga fóts*, *Partalópa saga*, *Adonias saga*. This manuscript and what it can reveal about the context in which it was produced is studied in detail by Kjesrud 2010.

200 *Sverris saga*, *Böglunga sögur*, and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*.

201 *Elíss saga ok Rósamundu*, *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, *Adonias saga*, *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, and *Ektors saga*.

202 *Svarfdæla saga*.

203 *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*.

204 *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*, *Samsons saga fagra*, *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*, *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, *Yngvars saga víðförla*, *Ketils saga hængs*, *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, *Örvar-Odds saga*, *Áns saga bogsveigis*, *Sálus saga ok Nikanórs*, *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, and *Af meistara Perus*.

205 *Jónsbók*, *Kristinréttur Árna biskups* (Bishop Árni's Christian Law), *Kaflar úr kirkjulögum* (chapters from church law), *Lagaformálar* (legal prefaces), and *Réttarbætur* (amendments).

Many secular magnates from the west have also been connected to literary production: Ólafur Loftsson, son of Loftur ríki who was himself a poet (Jónas Kristjánsson 1990, 276–277), has been identified as the scribe of the saga manuscripts AM 557 4to (1420–1450)[206] and AM 162c fol (1420–1450).[207] His brother, *hirðstjóri* Ormur Loftsson, is credited with copying part of Holm perg fol 2 (1425–1445), a collection of saints' lives (Foote 1962, 11–12; Stefán Karlsson 1999, 141).[208] AM 152 fol contains a note claiming that one of its scribes was the brother of Björn Þorleifsson.[209] The Björn in question is likely the grandson of Björn ríki and the scribe his half-brother Þorsteinn Þorleifsson (Stefán Karlsson 1999, 142–143). The younger Björn is also believed to have been the writer of AM 667 V 4to (Reykjahólabók, 1525) and some fragments of other religious works (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2014, 91; Kalinke 1996; Stefán Karlsson 1999, 143). Their father, Þorleifur Björnsson (son of Björn ríki), has been associated with a miscellany known as Codex Lindesianus (ManchRyl Ice 1, *c*. 1473; MacDougall 1983, 191–219), the medical text RoyalIrAcad 23 D (1475–1500; Örn Bjarnason 2004, 335–336), and was likely the commissioner of some additional pages in Flateyjarbók (Rowe 2005, 13 and 405).

But it was not only these major power players who were literary patrons. AM 471 4to[210] has been connected to three brothers – Jón, Þórkel, and Örnólfr Einarssynir – living at Hvílft in the Vestfirðir (Jónas Kristjánsson 1964, xxxix–xlvi). They were successful farmers and Örnólfr was a *sýslumaður*, but they were nevertheless, in Orning's (2017, 231) words, "situated further down the social ladder than Margrét Vigfúsdóttir" and the other figures already discussed. Finally, there are some other manuscripts from the same period that Glauser (1983, 75) has associated with the west of Iceland but which lack known scribes or patrons. These are

206 *Valdimars saga*, *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*, *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, *Eiríks saga rauða*, *Rögnvalds þáttr ok Rauðs*, *Dámusta saga*, *Hróa þáttr heimska*, *Eiríks saga víðförla*, *Stúfs þáttr*, *Karls þáttr vesœla*, and *Sveinka þáttr Steinarssonar*.

207 *Ljótsvetninga saga*, *Vopnfirðinga saga*, *Finnboga saga ramma*, *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhöggs*, and *Sálus saga ok Nikanórs*.

208 His hand has also been identified in AM 238 fol VIII, another collection of saints' lives (Foote 1962, 17–18).

209 *Grettis saga*, *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, *Flóvents saga*, *Sigurðar saga þögla*, *Þórðar saga hreðu*, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, *Ektors saga*, *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, *Mágus saga jarls*, and *Gautreks saga*.

210 *Þórðar saga hreðu*, *Króka-Refs saga*, *Kjalnesinga saga*, *Ketils saga hængs*, *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, *Örvar-Odds saga*, and *Viktors saga ok Blávus*. This manuscript was originally joined with

AM 510 4to[211] and AM 593 a–b 4to (1450–1500),[212] in addition to 589a–f and 586, to which I shall turn now.

8.2 Localising the Manuscripts

To date, no details are known about the production of 589a–f and 586 such as who may have written them or for whom. The suggestion that they may have been made in the west of Iceland follows from Loth's observation of a unique detail in 586's *Þórðar saga hreðu* that places the title character's death in Hreðavatn in Borgarfjörður: when Þórðar dies, the text adds that "segia þat ok sumir menn at þordr hafi buit .á. hreduuatni i borgar firdi ok uard hann sott daudr" (586, fol. 30^{r}, ll. 47–48) (it is said by some men that Þórðar had lived at Hreðuvatn in Borgarfjörður and died of illness).[213] This provides "[s]light evidence that the original home of the two manuscripts was in western Iceland" (Loth 1977, 19).

There are, however, several other reasons to associate the manuscripts with this region. Firstly, several of their texts contain characters with affiliations to western Iceland. The title character of *Stúfs þáttr*, Stúfr Þórðarson, was the grandson of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir and her second husband Þórðr Ingunnarson of *Laxdæla saga*, which takes place across the Breiðafjörður region. *Króka-Refs saga* takes place in the same region, and the protagonist is said to be from Kvennabrekka in Dalasýsla. Refr was (supposedly) the nephew of Gestr Oddleifsson who had his farm at Barðaströnd, on the south coast of the Vestfirðir peninsula, and features in several *Íslendingasögur*. Finally, one of the supporting characters of *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar* is Oddr, father of Gull-Þórir of *Gull-Þóris saga*, and he is associated with Þorskafjörður.

Further evidence is provided by the manuscripts' transmission histories. Loth has identified a number of names in their margins from the mid-sixteenth to seventeenth centuries that can, tentatively, be associated with known individuals who are either recorded in the biographies compiled by Páll Eggert Ólason (1948–1976) and Einar Bjarnason (1952–1955) or mentioned in documents edited in *Diplomatarium Islandicum*. When these figures are mapped out geographically and

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that now labelled AM 489 I 4to, which contains *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Kirialax saga*: Jónas Kristjánsson 1964, xxxix–xl.

211 *Víglundar saga*, *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns*, *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*, *Jómsvíkinga saga*, *Finnboga saga ramma*, *Drauma-Jóns saga*, and *Friðþjófs saga*.

212 AM 593a 4to contains *Mírmanns saga* and *Adonias saga*; AM 593b 4to contains *Viktors saga ok Blávus* and *Sneglu-Halla þáttr*.

213 Transcribed with guidance of Loth 1977, 19.

genealogically and combined with what we know about who gave the manuscripts to Árni Magnússon, we can paint a rough picture of how the manuscripts travelled in the later part of their pre-archive lives and, accordingly, make some informed suggestions about who they were created for and why. Some simplified family trees are provided in Appendices 3–5 to help illustrate the connections between the individuals discussed below. A map is provided in Appendix 6 illustrating some of the significant locations.

8.2.1 AM 586 4to

Bjarni Bjarnason
Of the two manuscripts, there is comparably less data for 586. It was given to Árni Mágnusson by a wealthy farmer and lawyer named Bjarni Bjarnason (1639–1723, see Appendix 3). Bjarni had lived for a time at his father's residence at Hestur in Önundarfjörður (Vestfirðir) but spent much of his life at Arnarbæli in Fellsströnd (Breiðafjörður) (*ÍÆ, I* 1948, 158–159). For this reason Árni referred to 586 as Arnarbælisbók (Loth 1977, 23). Bjarni was the son of Bjarni Jónsson, the son of Jón yngri Magnússon, one of the many sons of the powerful *sýslumaður* Magnús prúði Jónsson (1525–1591) and his wife Ragnheiður Eggertsdóttir who lived at the *höfuðból* Saurbær á Rauðasandi on the southern shore of the Vestfirðir peninsula (*ÍÆ, III* 1950, 431).

Brynjólfur Jónsson
There is only one name in a marginal note of 586: on 25^{v} it is written (in Loth's transcription) "þetta hef eg skrifad / blindandi Briniolf*ur* Jonss*on*" (Loth 1977, 20) (I have written this while becoming blind Brynjólfur Jónsson). This is probably connected to another note on 26r, which reads "nu skal briniolf / lataz blinda" (Loth 1977, 20) (now shall Brynjólfur become blind). These notes are "rather crooked and wobbly" (Loth 1977, 20), making them impossible to date. Loth does not attempt to identify this individual, but there is record of a priest named Brynjólfur Jónsson who resided at Holt in Önundarfjörður and who probably died in 1578 (*ÍÆ, I* 1948, 278). He was the son of Jón Ólafsson (*ÍÆ, III* 1950, 233), a *sýslumaður* who lived nearby at Hjarðardal and acted as an *umboðsmaður* (agent) for his father (another *sýslumaður*) and the powerful *lögmaður* Eggert Hannesson (*c.* 1515–1583; *ÍÆ, I* 1948, 319–320), the father of Magnús prúði's wife Ragnheiður who lived at Saurbær á Rauðasandi before them, having bought it in 1544 (Kjartan Ólafsson 2019). Considering the regional and political connections between this Brynjólfur Jónsson and Bjarni Bjarnason, it seems likely that this individual was responsible for the marginal notes. However, it is not possible to associate any other people with 586, making the identification highly speculative.

8.2.2 AM 589a–f 4to

Björn Þorleifsson

Much more can be said about the readers of 589a–f, many of whom have genealogical connections to Bjarni Bjarnason but are localised further south. This manuscript was given to Árni Magnússon by Björn Þorleifsson (1663–1710, see Appendix 3), probably while Björn was visiting Copenhagen petitioning for the bishopric of Hólar, which he received in 1697 (Loth 1977, 23).[214] Björn was the son of Þorleifur Jónsson of Oddi and Sigríður Björnsdóttir. Sigríður was the daughter of Björn Magnússon (d. 1635), another of Magnús prúði's children (*ÍÆ*, *I* 1948, 235). Björn Þorleifsson grew up at his father's home of Oddi in Rangárvellir in the south of Iceland. He worked there as a priest before moving to Hólar where he remained until his death (*ÍÆ*, *I* 1948 258–259).

Hannes Ólafsson

589a–f contains several marginal notes with names that can help map out some of the manuscript's movements before it was acquired by Björn Þorleifsson. The seemingly oldest name is that of Hannes Ólafsson on 23^{r} of 589d. Loth (1977, 20) suggests this refers to the *lögréttumaður* of Kjalarnesþing who resided at Hvammur in Kjós (*LM*, *II* 1953, 236). His father was the *lögréttumaður* Ólafur Narfason (*c*. 1490–1554; *LM*, *IV* 1955, 421–442), the grandson of Bjarni Ívarsson, Margrét Vigfúsdóttir's nephew (see Appendix 4).[215] Hannes's mother was Sólveig Bjarnadóttir, the daughter of Guðrún Björnsdóttir and Bjarni Andrésson (the grandson of Guðmundur ríki) (see Appendix 3; *ÍÆ*, *I* 1948, 255–256). After Bjarni's death, Guðrún married *hirðstjóri* Hannes Eggertsson (*c*. 1485–1533) with whom she had many children, including the powerful Eggert Hannesson mentioned above. This made Guðrún's daughter Sólveig Eggert's half-sister, and Solveig's son Hannes Ólafsson his nephew. Hannes spent his youth with his uncle Eggert at Saurbær á Rauðasandi before taking over his father's estate further south in Kjós. Hannes could also trace his ancestry back to Margrét Vigfúsdóttir through his mother's line as well as his father's: Solveig's maternal great-grandmother was Ragnhildur Þorvarðsdóttir, one of Margrét's three daughters (see Appendix 4).

Helgi Vigfússon

The next oldest identifiable name is that of Helgi Vigfússon on 21^{r} of 589f, which is written in a hand probably from the beginning of the seventeenth century (Loth 1977, 20). Loth suggests this refers to the *lögréttumaður* from Hvítárvellir in

214 See also the slip at the front of 589a.

215 Bjarni Ívarsson is mentioned above as the illuminator of AM 80b 8vo.

Borgarfjörður, who was a great landowner (see Appendix 5; *ÍÆ*, *II* 1949, 346; *LM*, *II* 1953, 238–239).[216] Helgi was the son of Vigfús Jónsson, the illegitimate son of *lögréttumaður* Jón Grímsson and Kristín Vigfúsdóttir, Kristín being the great-granddaughter of Margrét Vigfúsdóttir via her daughter Guðríðr. As well as sharing some ancestors with Hannes Ólafsson, Helgi Vigfússon is connected to other names already discussed via his daughter Agatha who was married to Eyjólfur Ísleifsson, a grandchild of Magnús prúði via his daughter Sesselja and Ísleifur Eyjólfsson. Sesselja and Ísleifur lived at Ísleifur's residence of Saurbær in Kjalarnes, very near to where Hannes Ólafsson lived.

Guðrún Þórðardóttir and Henrik Þórðarson

The next two names can be discussed together. The names of Guðrún Þórðardóttir on 19^{v} of 589a and Henrik Þórðarson on 22^{v} of 589e were both written in hands from the seventeenth century (Loth 1977, 20). Loth suggests these are two children of the *sýslumaður* Þórður Henriksson (d. 1652; see Appendix 3) who was from Innrihólmur in Hvalfjörður (*ÍÆ*, *V* 1952, 100; *LM*, *IV* 1955, 539–540).[217] Þórður was the son of *sýslumaður* Henrik Gíslason (d. 1638) and his wife Guðrún Magnúsdóttir, yet another of Magnús prúði's children. Little is recorded about his son Henrik (in terms of family or location), but his daughter Guðrún married Jón eldri Ólafsson, the son of priest Ólafur Böðvarsson (d. 1650) of Saurbær in Hvalfjörður (*ÍÆ*, *IV* 1951, 34).

Brandur Jónsson and Sigríður Fúsadóttir

In addition to these individuals, there are several other names in 589a–f's margins that Loth has not associated with any known individuals but for some of whom candidates may be suggested. In the bottom margin of 2^{v} in 589b is written: "gud veri med branndi jonssyne og med sigridi fusa dottur og med ollvm dom (?) monnum" (God be with Brandur Jónsson and with Sigríður Fúsadóttir and with all (?) people). Loth (1977, 20) describes this note as being written in a "book-hand more or less of an age with the manuscripts themselves". There are two potential candidates for the identity of Brandur Jónsson. The first is a prominent figure contemporary to the manuscript: he died in 1494, was the *lögmaður* of the north and west from 1452–1478 and lived at Hofi in Höfðaströnd (northern Iceland) and then at Mýrar in Dýrafjörður (Vestfirðir) (*ÍÆ*, *I* 1948, 267). Slightly later, another Brandur Jónsson is named as a *lögréttumaður* (probably from Kjalarnesþing) who was present at a judgement in 1539 at Kópavogur concerning the *lögmaður* Erlendur

216 No birth or death dates are given for him, but his name is recorded in various documents from 1587 to 1634 making him somewhat younger than Hannes Ólafsson.

217 According to Páll Eggert Ólason, Þorður Henriksson was *sýslumaður* of Kjósarsýsla from 1636, while Einar Bjarnason states he was *sýslumaður* of Borgarfjarðarsýsla from the death of his father in 1638.

Þorvarðsson (d. 1576), another of Margrét Vigfúsdóttir's descendants (*ÍÆ*, *I* 1948, 447; *LM*, *II* 1953, 81). This Brandur Jónsson is perhaps a more likely candidate for the marginal note seeing as his regional and political affiliations are a closer match to those of the other individuals Loth has identified. Hannes Ólafsson, for example, was a *lögréttumaður* of Kjalarnesþing later in the sixteenth century. However, there does not seem to be a Sigríður Fúsadóttir, or indeed a Sigríður Vigfúsdóttir, associated with either Brandur Jónsson, making either identification far from conclusive.

Magnús Bjarnason

Next, on 18^{r} of 589f is the name Magnús Bjarnason written in an "unpractised hand probably from the beginning of the seventeenth century" (Loth 1977, 20). There was a *lögréttumaður* and *sýslumaður* by the name of Magnús Bjarnason who lived from *c*. 1600 to 1657 *(ÍÆ*, *III* 1950, 410; *LM*, *III* 1954, 360). He resided at Lærubakka á Landi and was *lögréttumaður* for Rangárþing and briefly *sýslumaður* of Vestmannaeyjasýsla. He does not seem to have any close connections to the individuals discussed so far and his regional ties are somewhat further afield. Rangárvallarsysla is, however, where the manuscript ended up later in the century (when it came into the hands of Björn Þorleifsson of Oddi) and the dates of this individual's life do match up with Loth's judgement concerning the age of the hand that wrote the name.

Jón Ívarsson

On 34^{r} of 589d is the name Jón Ívarsson in a "cursive hand probably from the last part of the seventeenth century" (Loth 1977, 20). There is no record of anyone by the name of Jón Ívarsson in the biographies of Páll Eggert Ólason or Einar Bjarnason, and the late dating places him outside the remit of the *Diplomatarium Islandicum*.

Jón Ketilsson and Teitur Pálsson

Finally, in the bottom margin of 28^{v} of 589f there is a longer piece of marginalia that Loth (1977, 20) determines to be near contemporary with the manuscript itself and which contains two personal names. It reads "þ*ei*m godu*m* m*onnum* se*m* þ*et*ta br*ef* sia ed*ur* hey*ra* sei*nder æg* jo*n* kettilss*on* yd*ur* teitt*ur* palss*yni* og þack*ar* æg þi*er* fyr*er* þav e*nv* godu knjfa kiorj*n*" ("to the good people who see or hear this letter, I, Jón Kettilsson, send to you, Teitur Pálsson, and I thank you for the very good knife") (Loth 1977, 20). Both Loth and Zitzelsberger have made suggestions about who these two individuals may be. The latter suggests that Jón Ketilsson may be the same person whose debts were listed around 1440 on 54^{v} of AM 232 fol and to whom a transfer of land is recorded in 1429 in a collection of letters belonging to the bishop Jón Vilhjálmsson (Craxton) (Zitzelsberger 1969, 308; *DI*, *IV*, 1897, pp. 618–619 and 393–394). Considering that the list of this individual's debts were recorded in 1440 when he died and the manuscript itself has been more

commonly dated to the second half of the century, it seems unlikely that the marginal note on 589f refers to the same individual. Zitzelsberger (1969, 305) also suggests that the Teitur Pálsson may have been the same person named in a marginal note on 21^{v} of AM 544 4to (Hauksbók). Again, this seems unlikely: as Jón Þórkelsson (1865, xi–xii) notes, this Teitur Pálsson travelled abroad in 1344 and attended the *alþingi* in 1375, a whole century earlier than 589a–f is believed to have been compiled.

Somewhat likelier candidates are suggested by Loth (1977, 20) who has found the two names in three fifteenth-century documents edited in the *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, although none of them feature both names together. The first that mentions a Jón Ketilsson was written at Hólar in 1481 and deals with the *Hvassafellsmál* case in which a farmer named Bjarni Ólason was accused of committing incest.[218] A Jón Ketilsson is listed among the supporters of the *lögmaður* Hrafn Brandsson, Bjarni Ólason's advocate (*DI*, *VI*, 1900–1904, pp. 379–381). The second document was written at Bjarnarhöfn in Helgafellssveit (Snæfellsnes) in 1485 and names Jón Ketilsson as a witness in a transfer of land (*DI*, *VI*, 1900–1904, p. 544). In addition to those that Loth identifies, there are some other occurrences of this name in other volumes of the *Diplomatarium Islandicum*. Perhaps the most interesting is one from 1521, which records an attack made by Ari Andrésson with a number of armed men on Núpur in Dyrafjörður, the home of Hannes Eggertsson (*DI*, *VIII*, 1906–1913, pp. 833–834). Ari was the grandson of Guðmundur ríki Arason and the brother of Bjarni Andrésson (Hannes Ólafsson's grandfather, see Appendix 3). Ari lived at Saurbær á Rauðasandi before Eggert Hannesson acquired it in 1554 (*ÍÆ*, *I* 1948, 12). The name Jón Ketilsson appears in the list of men who accompanied Ari on his attack on Núpur.[219] Other documents mention men by this name in the Laxárdalur region in 1492 (*DI*, *VII*, 1903–1907, pp. 108–109), at Hvanneyri in Borgarfjörður between 1510 and 1514 (*DI*, *VIII*, 1906–1913, pp. 331–332, 409–410, and 514–515), at Hvestuþing in 1533 (*DI*, *XI*, 1915, pp. 111–112), at Reynivellir in Kjós in 1549 (*DI*, *XI*, 1915, pp. 708–710), and in two 1552 account books – one of a Viðey priest named Jón Bárðarson and the other of Eggert Hannesson (*DI*, *XII*, 1923–1932, pp. 389 and 429). These documents were written some seventy years apart, but it is possible that some refer to the same individual; strikingly, they are concentrated in the west of Iceland and some are associated with names and places that have already cropped up. However, while they are certainly tantalising, there is no way of knowing which of these people, if any, was the individual named in the marginal note of 589f.

218 On this case, see Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir 2010, 211–212; Björn Þorsteinsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1990, 132–134; *ÍÆ*, *II* 1949, 371–372.

219 On this dispute, see Arnór Sigurjónsson 1975, 460–461.

There is only one occurrence of a Teitur Pálsson in these records, which is mentioned by Loth (1977, 20). This document was written at Hlíðarendi í Fljótshlíð (in Rangárvallasýsla) in 1481 and lists him as a *lögréttumaður* who was witness to Erlendur Erlendsson (presumably the *sýslumaður* married to Guðríðr Þorvarðsdóttir, daughter of Margrét Vigfúsdóttir) proving his ownership of his estate Lágafell í Eystrum Landeyjum (*DI*, *VI*, 1900–1903, pp. 413–414). Again, the lack of any other evidence means it is not possible to take this identification any further.

Jón Sigmundsson

Loth suggests an identification of one final figure from the manuscript's marginalia. That is the writer of several hymn verses that are copied onto various margins and which are all in the same seventeenth-century hand.[220] She identifies the writer "with some certitude" (Loth 1977, 21) as Jón Sigmundsson because he also wrote a letter to the bishop of Skálholt Gísli Oddsson around 1635 (*Alþingisbœkur Íslands, V*, 1930, pp. 390–391). Jón Sigmundsson was a parson in Kjalarnes from around 1620 but was deprived of the living in 1631 for marking somebody else's lamb (*ÍÆ*, *III* 1950, 256). He pleads with the bishop about this situation in his letter. He also had disagreements with *sýslumaður* Ormur Vigfússon of Eyjar (Kjós) and *umboðsmaður* Ísleifur Eyjólfsson, the latter being the husband of Agatha Helgadóttir, the daughter of Helgi Vigfússon discussed above (*ÍÆ*, *IV* 1951, 102).

Copies of 589a–f

Further individuals can be associated with 589a–f because of copies that were made before it came into the possession of Árni Magnússon. The first is Þorsteinn Björnsson (*c.* 1612–1675) who was parson at Útskálar in Reykjanes between 1638 and 1660 and who had many sagas copied around the year 1650, including several from 589a–f (Loth 1977, 14; *ÍÆ*, *V* 1952, 196–197). Árni Magnússon received these copies from a lawyer named Sigurður Björnsson (1643–1725) and divided the codex into several parts. The texts from 589a–f are *Samsons saga fagra* (AM 181b fol), *Ektors saga* (AM 181d fol), *Klári saga* (AM 181e fol), and *Ála flekks saga* (AM 181k fol). It seems that Þorsteinn also had a copy of *Kirialax saga* made, but this was removed by Árni Magnússon who gifted it to the bishop of Hólar in 1710, and it was never recovered (Kålund 1917, xv–xvi; Loth 1977, 15). Loth (1977, 15-16) notes that a copy of *Valdimars saga* was probably also included in Þorsteinn Björnsson's collection. This is suggested by AM 588q 4to (1690–1710), which contains a copy of *Valdimars saga* with a note saying that its exemplar had been in a book which Þorsteinn Björnsson and then Sigurður Björnsson had owned and which was in the hand of Magnús Þór-

220 For details on the hymns and their possible sources, see Loth 1977, 21–22.

ólfsson, who is known to have been employed by Þorsteinn (Werronen 2018b). We must assume that this refers to the same book.

589a–f's *Ektors saga* was also copied later in the seventeenth century by the scribe Jón Þórðarson into what is now AM 585a 4to (1675–1700) (Loth 1977, 16; Werronen 2018a). His exemplar may have been either 589a–f itself or Þorsteinn Björnsson's copy. Beeke Stegmann (2018, 170–171) has identified AM 585a 4to as part of what was formerly a larger codex that Jón compiled over the course of around ten years at the end of the seventeenth century, which was separated into at least twelve parts by Árni Magnússon at some point in the beginning of the eighteenth century.[221] This codex was given to Árni by the *sýslumaður* of Ísafjarðarsýsla Markús Bergsson. In Markús we find a potential connection between this copy and the other names discussed so far: he was closely associated with the family of the Vestfirðir magnate Magnús digri Jónsson of Vigur (1637–1702), another of Magnús prúði's great-grandchildren and a prolific manuscript patron (Stegmann 2018, 165; *ÍÆ*, *III* 1950, 433–434; Werronen 2018c).[222] Both Jón Þórðarson and Magnús Þórólfsson (who had previously copied 589c's *Valdimars saga* for Þorsteinn Björnsson) were, at various points, in the employ of Magnús digri. It is impossible to say precisely how 589a–f moved among these individuals (who received the manuscript from whom and when).[223] They do, nevertheless, seem to have been an offshoot of the same broad regional/familial network within which we know the manuscript was circulating.

8.2.3 Conclusions

As Loth (1977, 23) concludes, the various individuals associated with 589a–f's marginalia and copies clearly suggest that in the century and a half before it came into Árni Magnússon's possession it was in south-west Iceland: "Kjós, Hvalfjörður, Kjalarnes, Útskálar". No direct connections can be made between all these individuals making it impossible to map out the manuscript's precise transmission history. Having said that, if we assume that these identifications are largely accu-

221 For a full table of contents as well as the current shelfmarks of its constituent parts, see Stegmann 2018, 169.

222 However, it is worth noting that Jón Þórðarson's manuscript is not among those that are known to have been patronised by Magnús digri.

223 Loth (1977, 16) suggests that Magnús Þórólfsson may have passed it from Þorsteinn Björnsson to Jón Þórðarson when he left the employ of the former and entered that of Magnús digri. However, it is also possible that, considering his genealogical connections, Magnús digri was the link between this network of scribes and literary patrons and the familial one identified already.

rate, it is possible to draw some broad conclusions about how 589a–f was used in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which may shed some light on its original fifteenth-century context.

The individuals discussed here were not closely related but do seem to have been part of a wider elite familial network that shared prominent ancestors. Hannes Ólafsson and Helgi Vigfússon could both trace their ancestry to the daughters of Margrét Vigfúsdóttir and Þorvarður Loftsson (Ragnhildur and Guðríður respectively). Hannes was also connected, via his grandmother Guðrún Björnsdóttir's second marriage, to the powerful *hirðstjóri* and *lögmaður* Eggert Hannesson and thus moved in the orbit of the *höfuðból* Saurbær á Rauðasandi. This manor came to be the home of Eggert's daughter Ragnheiður and her husband, the *sýslumaður* Magnús prúði Jónsson, and from them are descended several of the manuscript's subsequent owners/readers who resided further south, namely the siblings Henrik Þórðarson and Guðrún Þórðardóttir, and then Björn Þorleifsson. The manuscript also seems to have been passed among scribes (Magnús Þórólfsson and Jón Þórðarson) who were both at various points in the employ of Magnús digri, another of Ragnheiður Eggertsdóttir and Magnús prúði Jónsson's descendants who may have been the missing link between this familial network and the manuscript's seventeenth-century copies. Other individuals connected to 589a–f have regional ties if not genealogical ones. Both Jón Sigmundsson and Brandur Jónsson had positions in Kjalarnes, very close to the residences of Hannes Ólafsson (Hvammur in Kjós) and Þórður Henriksson (Innrihólmur) and slightly south of Hvítárvellir where Helgi Vigfússon was based. Finally, Magnús Bjarnason lived at Lærubakka á Landi in Rangárvallarsýsla, very near to where Björn Þorleifsson grew up (Oddi).

It seems that 589a–f was passed around quite fluidly. It does not seem to have been handed down from one generation to the next or held in any individual's collection for a long time. Rather, it seems to have moved laterally across near-contemporary households with familial and/or regional ties.[224] Its transmission history lines up neatly with the eighteenth-century description of the *kvöldvaka*, which I quoted in Chapter 1.3.4. It is worth repeating this description in the current context: Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson wrote that, "hvis Huusbonden er en Elsker af Historier, laaner han hos Naboerne eller andre gode Venner, saa mange Sagar, som han kan være forsynet med for heele Vinteren; og herved bliver den Arbeidende munter og vaagen" (Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson, *Reise igiennem Island, I,* p. 47) ("if the head of the household is a devotee of sagas, he will borrow

224 Of course, it should be pointed out that marginal notes by members of different households may in some cases have resulted from the movement of the individuals concerned rather than movement of the manuscript itself.

from his neighbours or other good friends a sufficient number of sagas to last him the winter and in this way the workers are kept contented and wakeful") (Driscoll 1997, 40). This is perhaps what was happening in the case of 589a–f, which does seem to have been passed between "neighbours and other good friends" and which, considering its size, presumably contained a "sufficient number of sagas" to provide entertainment for a winter. It also lines up the 'medium theory' expressed by the texts themselves.

This conclusion is supported by the artefactual evidence. As discussed in Chapter 2, 589a–f was produced relatively frugally and contains only very sparing ornamentation. Although the production of any manuscript required a considerable investment of time and resources and would always have been a status symbol, this one is particularly unadorned when compared to others that are roughly contemporary and have similar contents – that is, mostly *fornaldarsögur*, *riddarasögur*, and some *Íslendingasögur*. AM 152 fol, for example, contains many of the same texts but is much larger and considerably more decorated, although, as Ármann Jakobsson (2012, 25) notes, it is more of an exception than the rule. Having said that, some less expensively produced codices are somewhat more ornamented than 589a–f: AM 571 4to (1500–1550) and AM 556a–b 4to (Eggertsbók, 1475–1499) both have coloured initials with larger and more ornamented ones sometimes marking the beginning of a new text. A few can also be found in AM 577 4to and AM 579 4to, and many elaborate (although not coloured) initials can be found in AM 510 4to. These manuscripts might be said to represent a middle ground between the magisterial AM 152 fol and the "workaday" (Loth 1977, 7) 589a–f and 586. The latter are joined in their lack of ornamentation by GKS 2845 4to, AM 343a 4to, AM 471 4to, and Holm perg 7 fol. We cannot draw firm conclusions from these observations, but as I suggested in Chapter 1.4, they may suggest that the texts contained within the manuscript were considered more important than the physical beauty of the book itself. The creation of 589a–f would have certainly been an expensive endeavour. However, the patron's priority seems to have been the manuscript's length, perhaps because it was for the kind of consumption later described by Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson.

Due to a lack of evidence, there is comparably less to say about the life of 586, which does not seem to have been passed around as many people. It seems likely (although it is unprovable) that the two manuscripts were made for the same patrons, since they were written by the same two scribes, look very similar, and it seems likely that one of the same exemplars was used for both. The two manuscripts' transmission histories provide further evidence for their production in similar contexts: by the end of the seventeenth century, 586 was owned by an individual (Bjarni Bjarnason) with relatively close familial ties to several of the

known readers of 589a–f, which might suggest both manuscripts were originally produced for and transferred among members of that same family.

The difference in the afterlives of the two manuscripts suggests that 589a–f was read by a wider audience than 586, although the substantial erasures in the latter do evidence that it was read by people other than those who wrote it. There seem two likely reasons for its lesser circulation.[225] The first in fact relates to those erasures: three in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, which correspond with where we would expect three extramarital sex scenes to be found, and the lewd closing lines of *Vilmundar saga viðutan*. The erasures provide further evidence of the potentially controversial nature of the former text and are indicative of the generally less aristocratic quality of 586 compared to 589a–f. The fact that *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (the *fornaldarsaga* most heavily-inflected by romance) was one of the most enduringly popular of the legendary sagas (O'Connor 2009, 375) suggests that the more aristocratic texts of 589a–f suited the tastes of later readers more than those in 586 did. The second reason is more practical and relates to 586's lacunæ: it has a total of twelve leaves missing, cutting off large portions of many of its texts. It is impossible to say when the missing folios were lost, but if it was at an early stage, the whole manuscript may have lost appeal to anyone other than later antiquarians. This may be why Bjarni Bjarnason had 586 in his possession. He was a learned man employed by Árni Magnússon's colleague Páll Vídalín and is named by Árni as a source for five other manuscripts: three law books,[226] a fifteenth-century fragment of *Ektors saga* (AM 567 XIII 4to), and one of the oldest manuscripts of *Breta sögur* and *Trójumanna saga* (AM 573 4to).[227] Bjarni was, moreover, not unfamiliar with controversy and seems to have harboured an interest in the occult: in his youth, he was expelled from school for writing *galdrastafir* (magical staves) (*ÍÆ, I* 1948, 158–159),[228] and there is an eighteenth-century folk story about the troubles he had with magic as an adult in the Vestfirðir (*Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri, I*, 1862, pp. 539–541). It may be that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, 586 lacked the communal appeal that 589a–f had and instead attracted the more niche interests of this small-scale collector.

225 While the limited marginalia comparable to that of 589a–f suggests that 586 was not passed around as frequently, it is certainly possible that the manuscript was enjoyed and cherished in private settings.

226 AM 135 4to (1340–1525), AM 160 4to (1540–1560), and Lbs 65 4to (1640–1655).

227 Bjarni Bjarnason has also been identified as a reader of AM 122b fol (1375–1399), which contains *Sturlunga saga*, *Árna saga biskups*, and *Guðmundar saga biskups* (Loth 1977, 23).

228 According to Páll Eggert Ólason this happened in 1651 whereas the folk story puts it in 1664 (*Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri, I*, 1862, p. 539)

To conclude, it seems likely that both manuscripts were produced in western Iceland for members of the secular elite, possibly with some connections to the family that would go on to acquire the *höfuðból* Saurbær á Rauðasandi. 589a–f seems to have been passed around several households across the west and then south of Iceland and, I would argue, was probably used in communal forms of entertainment. It is not possible at this stage to identify any particularly likely candidates for the manuscripts' late fifteenth-century patrons; neither tracing the ancestry of their later owners or the ownership of the manor associated with some of them seem to be particularly promising lines of enquiry. Although the late medieval Icelandic aristocracy were a relatively closed off group, the families within it were not distinct or fixed units, and the high degree of intermarriage that happened between them makes it possible to trace the ancestry of most members of the late medieval and early modern elites to one or more major power players of the fifteenth century – the kinds of people discussed in the first part of this chapter, such as Björn ríki Þorleifsson and his wife Ólöf ríka Loftsdóttir, or her brother Þorvarður Loftsson and his wife Margrét Vigfúsdóttir. Moreover, the manor, Saurbær á Rauðasandi, was caught up in a protracted inheritance dispute during the fifteenth century between different branches of this interconnected elite – Guðmundur ríki Arason and his descendants on the one hand and Björn ríki Þorleifsson and his descendants on the other.[229] The 1522 raid on Núpur by Ari Andrésson in which a Jón Ketilsson participated was just one moment of crisis in what had already been a decades-long quarrel. Thus, if we were to make a (very large) leap and assume that the manuscripts had some affiliation with Saurbær á Rauðasandi, it would be difficult to say much about who exactly may have initiated their production. With only a few pieces of evidence of what was probably a complex transmission process, the patrons of 589a–f and 586 must, for now, remain anonymous. The prominent fifteenth-century individuals named above may, however, be taken to represent the general milieu that they were from and representative of their general concerns.

8.3 Connecting Text, Book, and Context

In the final section of this chapter, I will connect those general concerns to the previous chapters' literary and media-focussed analyses of the manuscripts' texts. The focus will be on 589a–f, since it has been examined in considerably more depth and seems to have been more widely circulated, but mention will also be

229 A history of the manor is provided in Kjartan Ólafsson 2019. On the wider dispute, see Arnór Sigurjónsson 1975, 60–294, 349–350, 460–461; Orning 2013, 237–243; 2017, 321–329.

made of 586. I will begin with the international political context before moving on to discuss more local concerns – specifically these manuscripts' role in constructing class identities. However, since some work has already been done in this area, I will focus a larger part of the discussion on the political implications of these manuscripts' 'vocality' and explore their aural reception.

8.3.1 The International Situation

These manuscripts' patrons were clearly invested in the royal power structure of their time and seem to have identified strongly with their kings in Denmark. They likely saw themselves reflected in these sagas' royal protagonists since, on a local level, they functioned as 'quasi-kings' themselves. But since they also derived much of their status from their close relationship with their kings in Denmark, they probably also identified with those characters who elevate themselves through royal service (e.g. Bósi and Vilmundr). Moreover, both manuscripts feature flattering portrayals of the Danish royal house, although this is more the case in 589a–f than 586. As argued in Chapter 5.3, one of the overall effects of the former is to reimagine Europe's political and cultural geography to paint pre-Christian Denmark in a particularly favourable light.

The patrons' endorsement of Scandinavia's post-1397 political situation emerges most clearly in the intertextual dynamics of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*. As discussed in Chapter 4.2.1, the eponymous hero of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* takes a mocking stance on *Völsunga saga*. This has political implications since the Völsung legend served an ideological purpose. The only surviving manuscript of this saga, NKS 1845 4to, integrates the legend into that of Ragnarr loðbrók (via Sigurðr and Brynhildr's daughter Áslaug who goes on to marry Ragnarr) and thus into a genealogy that led all the way to the Norwegian King Haraldr hárfagri from whom the Norwegian kings (up until the death of Olaf) traced their ancestry. Many prominent Icelanders identified with this lineage: Haukur Erlendsson (d. 1334) traced his own descent back to Ragnarr and Áslaug and thus considered himself genealogically as well as politically connected to the Norwegian crown (*Hauksbók*, 1882–1896, pp. 68–69; Mitchell 1991, 124; Rowe 2012, 236–238). Thus, in mocking and displacing *Völsunga saga*, *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* undermines the ideological position that saga seems to have been employed to support – that is, political identification with the Norwegian monarchs. The movement of political allegiance south from Norway to Denmark is reflected in the father-son dynamic of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*'s pairing with *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*; read side-by-side, they construct a narrative of development in which the old interpretation of the past is put aside in the

former's Norway for the reconstruction of something new in the latter's Denmark – the centre of power for the Kalmar kings.

The same dynamic is present in the text which precedes this pair in 589a–f: *Hákonar þáttr Hárekssonar*. This tale tells of a Norwegian farmer who squanders his father's wealth and flees from Norway in embarrassment. He eventually returns to his position after befriending King Sveinn Úlfsson of Denmark who provides him with training in various crafts and sends him to England where his skills are so great he is accused of witchcraft. Much like Göngu-Hrólfr, Hákon advances himself not in his home country of Norway but at the Danish court, which is rich and technologically advanced. It is significant that the court in question is that of Sveinn Úlfsson (*c.* 1019–1076), the first monarch in the House of Estridsen, which would eventually produce the Kalmar Union. Sveinn is also positively depicted in 586's *Króka-Refs saga*: Refr has an antagonistic relationship with the Norwegian King Haraldr Sigurðsson but finds refuge in Denmark with Sveinn Úlfsson who recognises his worth, praises his actions, and rewards him with land.

As we might expect, these manuscripts' patrons seem to have had a correspondingly ambivalent view of the English. In *Hákonar þáttr Hárekssonar*, the English are wholly outshone by a Scandinavian craftsman. The same dynamic is also present within *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (as discussed in Chapter 5.3.2) and on a cross-textual level in the contrast between that saga's Denmark and the England of *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra* and *Ála flekks saga* (see Chapter 3.2.3 and Chapter 3.2.4). An interest in (and comparable attitude towards) England is also attested in 586 by the unflattering stories about the English King William II (*Af Vilhjálmi bastarði*) and his brother Robert (*Roðberts þáttr*). This can be understood against the backdrop of the *skreið* trade and the variable relationship that Icelanders had with the English. This trade context may also help explain the presence of some characters who have tense relations with kings: the freewheeling ethic of characters like Sturlaugr, Bósi, and Vilmundr may well have appealed to an elite who, although identifying with their king, still saw themselves as independent political actors.

The importance of overseas trade to these manuscripts' patrons is clear from the overall positive assessment of traders. The one moral line drawn by the otherwise callously violent Sturlaugr starfsami is that he does not kill merchants. Correspondingly, in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, killing merchants is the sign of one's evil character: the first antagonist encountered by Hrólfr is the Viking Jólgeirr who "for illa med [her]skap sinum rænti buþegna ok kaupmenn" (589f, fol. 17^{r}, ll. 21–22; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 6, p. 256) (plundered ruthlessly and robbed farmers and merchants). The transfer of goods is central to the relationship between Króka-Refr and King Sveinn, who tells Refr: "Nú af þ*ui* at þú hefer vorn fund sótt – hef*er* þú *og* þ*a*nn v*arnin*g flutt i l*a*nd vórt, s*em* oss er nu ecki v*m* hrid miög audf*ein*gur sak*er* vór[*r*]a fiand-m*anna*, s*em* e*r* suordr t*il* reida á skipu*m* vóru*m* – þá m*unu* ver v*id*

ydr taka" (*Króka-Refs saga*, p. 37) (Now because you have sought to meet with us and because you have brought these goods to our land which are not easily obtained because of our enemies, like walrus hide ropes for our ships, we will take you in).[230] For Refr, having access to valuable goods and the resources to transport them is a ticket to medieval high-society, a sentiment which likely reflected the views of prominent fifteenth-century Icelanders who were involved in the *skreið* trade.

This trade context is also surely reflected in the closing description of England in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, which provides an overview of England's main towns and exports. It has no known source but probably reflects, as Jacob Wittmer Hartmann (1912, 77) notes, the "common knowledge of the educated classes" during what is sometimes referred to as Iceland's 'English Age'.

> Eingland er kallad gagnaudigazt af uestr londum, þui þar er blasen allr malmr, ok þar fellr vin ok huette, ok allz kýns sædi ma þar hafa, er þar ok klæda gerd ok marghattadir uefir meir en i audrum staudum, lunduna borg er þar haufud stadr ok kruta borg þar er skanna borg ok hominga borg brandfurdu borg jork ok uincestr ok margir adrir stader ok borgir er her eru eigi nefndar (589f, fol. 36^{r}, ll. 7–11; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 37, p. 360)
>
> (England is called the most productive of the western lands, because all sorts of metals are worked there, and vines and wheat grow, and all kinds of cereals. There are more varieties of cloth and textiles woven here than in other places. London is the main town, and then Krutaborg. There is also Skannaborg, Homíngaborg, Brandfurðuborg, York, Winchester and many towns and cities which are not named here.)[231]

To conclude, the international perspective of these manuscripts' patrons is in keeping with the realities of Iceland's political situation in the fifteenth century. They reflect an elite who seem to have strongly identified with the Kalmar kings and wanted to distance themselves from the old elite who had looked to those of Norway. This elite seems to have seen themselves as both the loyal subordinates of the Danish kings and independent political actors (or 'quasi-kings') in their own right. Thus, complicating the generally positive presentation of kingship runs an uncourtly voice of dissent, which surely reflects the interests of an elite who, in defiance of their king, were in regular contact with the English.

230 This occurs during the seventh lacuna of 586 so I have quoted from Pálmi Pálsson's edition.
231 589f's version of the description features some rather strange renderings of English place names: Krutaborg, Skannaborg, and Homíngaborg, which are elsewhere Kantaraborg (Canterbury), Skarðaborg (Scarborough) and Helsingjaborg (Hastings).

8.3.2 The Domestic Situation

Next, we move to matters of more local concern, specifically how these manuscripts functioned to support the local political agendas of their patrons. Not only does the interest in legitimate power-acquisition function to endorse the royal status quo, but it likely also chimed with the domestic concerns of the manuscripts' patrons who were probably involved in (or at least proximate to) the dispute over the inheritance of Guðmundur ríki Arason, which included Saurbær á Rauðasandi. This struggle would have made them keenly interested in the question of how to legitimately acquire territory and meant they would have had something to gain from promoting narratives that celebrated the defeat of those who were perceived as having done so illegitimately. Individuals on both sides of the conflict likely saw themselves as the rightful owners of the contested lands in western Iceland and surely saw their attempts to either retain or recover them reflected in the sagas of 589a–f and 586.[232]

As well as tapping into these inter-elite politics, the sagas also would have helped maintain the high status of the elite by providing ideological support to the prevailing power structure. This aspect of these texts has been discussed by several scholars so will not be dwelled on for long here. Of particular relevance is the work of Jürg Glauser (1983, 229–233), Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2012, 242–244; 2013, 107– 124), and Henric Bagerius (2009, 91–199) among others, and the following paragraphs' summary is indebted at various points to their insights.[233]

589a–f and 586 construct an aristocratic culture which is characterised by particular looks, skills, and manners. Central to this culture is a preference for alliance over violence: power is acquired through coalition building (via marriage or sworn-brotherhood) with members of the same social class while violence is directed against either monstrous non-humans, demon-worshipping pagans, or figures who otherwise threaten the social order. This creates a powerful sense of 'us vs. them', which enhances and justifies the closed-off aristocratic community created by these various forms of alliance. As Barnes (2000, 277) writes of the 'indigenous' *riddarasögur*, but which also applies to the *fornaldarsögur* I have discussed, "[t]he ultimate aim [. . .] is the acquisition, extension, and legitimization of power" – specifically upper-class male power. In support of this aim, these texts construct a set of ideal gendered behaviour patterns: the preference for alliance among elite men is mirrored by a model of elite femininity that is characterised by

232 Orning (Orning 2013, 243–258) discusses how this feud is reflected in the texts associated with Möðruvellir fram during the time of Margret Vigfúsdóttir.

233 See also Bandlien 2005, pp. 280–293; Barnes 2000, 276–283; Roby 2020, 48–57.

chastity and passivity. The boundaries of this aristocratic class are drawn by the various depictions of those who fall outside it. The lower classes do not partake in the same culture as the elite, despite sometimes being close to it: their ugliness, vulgarity, and lack of learning contrasts the aristocracy's beauty, refinement, and intelligence. Any relationship that crosses these class lines (between a noble hero and a lower-class woman, or vice versa) generally provokes either punishment or ridicule. If the relationship is sexual, it is temporary and does not produce any legitimate heirs. By the end of all the sagas, elite men marry elite women, and the lower classes are divided into either their opponents, who are subject to violence, or their allies, who are rewarded with some upwards social movement, although not total integration into the elite itself.

These gendered class dynamics corresponded with the political situation of fifteenth-century Iceland. Much like the sagas' protagonists, members of the elite in this period distinguished themselves from the lower classes through outward signs, used marriage as a mechanism for amassing and consolidating power, and negotiated with powerful international actors. The copying and subsequent oral dissemination of these texts can therefore be seen to have two broad effects: firstly, they would have inculcated this sense of identity – along with its corresponding values and behaviours – among the elite themselves; and secondly, they would have functioned to endorse the status quo beyond that elite by showing how the stability of human society depends on the superior skill and worth of its most powerful members. And just as they lay out what elite behaviour should look like, they also demonstrate how the lower classes should support them and what the consequences might be if they do not. The enduring popularity of 589a–f (the more aristocratic of the two manuscripts) suggests that this vision of the past, along with its class and gender politics, also spoke to the elite of later centuries who continued to circulate, promote, and identify with it.

But what has been discussed less than the identity-forming function of these texts, is *how* they form identities or how they generate cultural memories. What makes them take hold in the minds of communities and individuals? What makes them effective shapers of politics, society, and culture? This is where further consideration of the medium may have a role. In the final part of this chapter I will, therefore, return to the previous chapter's media-focus and explore the political implications of these manuscripts' 'vocality' – their status as both 'written' and 'oral'. I will begin by briefly discussing the role of literacy before turning to the slightly more nebulous, but arguably more interesting, subject of orality.

The appeal of the written word is quite obvious. In medieval culture, literacy had high status: it was the preserve of learned men and imbued with the authority of the church. Much like historical writing today, which is "bounded by a set of limiting disciplinary rules" (Confino 2011, 43) these texts' written status and the con-

straints that status placed on them would have been (in part) what allowed them to make claims to historical truth. For learned members of the audience, this effect would have been enhanced by references to Latin learning and other historical works, which position the texts in these manuscripts as participants in the existing canon of Christian learning. For the rest of the audience, the materiality of the books and the stability of their texts (in comparison to oral ones) would have had a similar function. As DuBois (2014, 61) writes, "cross-cultural ethnographic examination of the uses of reading and writing in oral societies illustrates powerfully the tremendous importance written sources can have in the repertoires of even predominantly illiterate people, particularly in a culture in which reading and writing hold high prestige". Fifteenth-century Iceland would, of course, be one such culture.

What is less obvious in light of this elite ideology is these manuscripts' debt to material circulating in oral tradition. Some reasons for this were discussed in the previous chapter. A key component of its appeal would have been its entertainment value, with entertainment being one of the central tenets of these texts' 'medium theory', and, as Glauser (1983, 224) argues, high entertainment value surely enhanced their political efficacy. The 'oral materials' may also have appealed to the secular magnates because they did not always fit within clerical standards of acceptability: they may have helped the individuals that sponsored these manuscripts distinguish themselves and their literature from (what they perhaps perceived to be) the effeminate and boring class of clerics. But it is also worth thinking about the effect this material may have had on the non-elite population too, since they likely formed a large portion of these texts' audiences when they were read out loud. These would have been the same groups of people associated with the 'unlearned nonsense' that these texts define themselves in opposition to. Much like Vilmundr's mother, they would have circulated their own stories about *álfar* and *tröll* – the kinds of stories collected by later folklorists and which formed a part of many medieval Icelanders' worldviews. It is worth asking, beyond increasing their entertainment value, what impact might these sagas' 'orality' have had on them?

I would argue that, beyond increasing entertainment value, these texts' proximity to orality and their distancing of the written word also formed part of their memory-generating appeal; that while their 'literacy' gave them high status, their 'orality' gave them familiarity – or, as Erll puts it, "referentiality". She writes that in order for literary texts (i.e. modern works of fiction) to generate "mnemonic authenticity" and effectively shape cultural memory, they must "be able to resonate with a memory culture's horizons of meaning, its (narrative) schemata, and its existing images of the past" (Erll 2011, 165). This may be, in part, what these texts' references to oral traditions were doing; they were engaging with the general population's "horizons of meaning" and making the narratives feel authentic in a way that the texts' literary aspects could not. A story with familiar elements

may well have been, to the general populace, more authoritative or meaningful than one with purely unfamiliar written sources and references. Like the characters in these sagas, ordinary Icelanders lived in a world where, quoting Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (2003, 149) again, there were "supernatural beings in the woods, the mountains and the lakes". And to those people – being read to from a book that they themselves could not read – what might have distinguished these stories from the other stories that were read to them (also from books by educated men, i.e. clerics) was their entertainment value and proximity to stories circulating in the community anyway. It may be that through the manuscripts' participation in and 'performance' of oral traditions, its elite ideological viewpoints were impressed upon the wider populace as well as those among its upper echelons.

It is also worth dwelling on the fact that supernatural empowerment had long been used by the secular elite as a means of solidifying their claims to power. An obvious example is Snorri Sturluson's investment in the 'cultural capital' of pre-Christian mythology (specifically Óðinn), which formed a central part of his political identity (Wanner 2008; Viðar Pálsson 2008, 129–131). Another example is Óðinn's patronage of the Völsungs, the genealogical significance of which has already been discussed. It may be, therefore, that in these texts we find an attempt to create a network of otherworldly figures on whom the new aristocracy could base their power, which were not tied to either the old elite (who had looked to Óðinn) or the ideology and literature of the church. This seems to be most explicitly the case in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, but it extends to many of the other texts too where the heroes receive some kind of magical, often non-human, sponsorship.

Moreover, the capacity for genuine belief and the idea that these texts had "referentiality" should not be reserved for exclusively the non-elite: although at something of a remove, it seems likely that the upper classes also had an interest in the folk beliefs more commonly associated with the illiterate population, which they selectively interpreted in relation to their own more learned worldviews.[234] This seems to have been the case in later centuries at least: in the early modern period, many Icelandic scholars (including men of the church) debated the existence and nature of beings like the *álfar*, *tröll*, and giants. As Terry Gunnell (2018) demonstrates, there was not one agreed position on these matters, rather each scholar drew on the sources available to them – both oral and written – to try and make some sense of them on their own. One notable example is the scholar Þormóður

234 The importance of balancing studies of 'folk belief' with a consideration of 'folk disbelief' and 'educated belief' is highlighted by Roper 2018.

Torfason (d. 1719) who wrote, for instance, on the question of whether or not *álfar* could have children with humans as was commonly believed (Gunnell 2018, 205).[235]

This learned discourse did not just apply to Iceland's 'small gods' but also to the practice of magic. This was, in part, a product of intellectual currents emanating from the continent in the later medieval period, that saw the emergence of a learned discourse on 'natural magic', which sought to manipulate the occult virtues of nature to achieve various effects (Bartlett 2008, 20–23; Collins 2015, 335–337; Kieckhefer 1994, 818–819). This discourse was somewhat controversial, and some medieval scholars saw no difference between 'natural magic' and 'demonic magic' (Bailey 2015, 366–371; Kieckhefer 1994, 820). Little work has been done tracing this debate in Iceland, and, as Mitchell (2019, 138) observes, a clear-cut distinction between the two kinds of magic is not articulated explicitly in medieval Nordic sources more generally.[236] Nevertheless, an awareness of learned magic is very clearly articulated in the 'indigenous' *riddarasögur*, which feature a positively coded conceptualisation of magic which is distinctly learned and aristocratic (Matyushina 2006; Johanterwage 2006). Pérús, who appears in *Klári saga* and two short tales in 586, arguably represents a similar understanding of magic: his skills are learned, occult, and clearly class exclusive (Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson 2021, 174).

And while sources on late medieval learned magic may be lacking, the tenor of Iceland's early modern witch trials provide hints at the earlier situation. In Iceland, the figure of the 'witch' had a uniquely learned character: a large proportion of accused witches were men, many of whom were members of the elite, and they often enjoyed a high degree of popular support (Hastrup 1990a, 386, 398–399). The foundation of their learning was, however, traditional orally-transmitted knowledge: poetry, spells, runes, and *galdrastafir*. These were, in Kirsten Hastrup's (1990a, 390) words, "generally transmitted from one generation to the next without mediation", although they would occasionally enter the written record in *galdrabœkur* (magic books), written runes, or (arguably) texts like *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*. For early modern witch-hunters this learning was wholly demonic in character, but this seems to have been a minority position held more by particularly zealous figures of authority who had been educated abroad than the wider population, many members of the secular and clerical elites included (Hastrup 1990a, 392–397).

Interestingly, a heavy concentration of early modern witch trials occurred in the Vestfirðir and several people associated with magic in this period (on both

235 On debates about giants, see Kuusela 2021, 473–476.

236 He also comments that "far too little attention has been paid" to the concept of 'natural magic' in Scandinavia (Mitchell 2019, 144).

sides of the debate) were from the same circles as those among whom 589a–f and 586 were circulating. I have already discussed Bjarni Bjarnason, who was expelled from school for writing *galdrastafir*. Contemporary to Bjarni were individuals less inclined to magic. In particular, Páll Björnsson (1621–1706), another grandson of Magnús prúði and Ragnheiður, was a prominent witch-hunter and man of learning who had been educated in Copenhagen (*ÍÆ*, *IV* 1950, 111–112). He wrote a treatise called *Character Bestiæ* in which he made reference to Heinrich Kramer's *Malleus maleficarum* (a popular tract on demonology published in 1487) and described *galdr* as a branch of satanic learning (Hastrup 1990a, 394; Þorvaldur Thoroddsen 1898, 49–50). Páll was supported in his crusade by his half-brother Eggert Björnsson (1612–1681), a *sýslumaður* who inherited Saurbær á Rauðasandi (*ÍÆ*, *I* 1948, 314). Although neither Páll nor Eggert have been associated with 589a–f and 586, and likely would not have been very interested in them, they were part of the same familial network that is outlined above and closely related to individuals who we know owned the manuscripts: they were the first cousins once removed of Bjarni Bjarnason, the first cousins of Þórður Henriksson, and the maternal uncles of Björn Þorleifsson. They thus give some insight into the intellectual climate within which the manuscripts were circulating: it was one in which magic was very much alive and a hotly contested issue.

The post-Reformation evidence cannot, of course, be taken to wholly represent the intellectual conditions of the late fifteenth century when the manuscripts were produced. Indeed, Hastrup (1990a, 397–398) argues that the sharpening of moral standards that came with the Reformation was a necessary precondition for the witch trials to arise in the first place. However, the uniqueness of the Icelandic trials would suggest that before the seventeenth century, there was already an emerging tradition of learned magic that was in dialogue with folk belief, just one that did not yet arouse the suspicions of authorities (Hastrup 1990a, 385). There are clear resonances between the learned debates of the early modern period and the anxieties about the representation of magic which are expressed by the manuscripts' *apologiæ* and the introductions to Busla's curses. It is unlikely that the controversies of later centuries sprung out of thin air; their seeds must have been sown somewhere, and that process may be what we are witnessing in these texts.

In fact, more than just reflecting an early stage in these debates, these manuscripts may well have been one of many locations for their development. As Guðrún Nordal (2001) has argued, the twelfth-century manuscripts of *Snorra Edda*, which positioned orally transmitted knowledge about skaldic verse and its pagan imagery alongside the study of *grammatica*, functioned like modern textbooks in Iceland's early educational settings and paved the way for vernacular prose writing of later centuries. Although operating in a considerably less formal setting, the manuscripts under discussion here also warrant being understood as active texts (if not text-

books). The above attempt to localise them suggested that 589a–f at least was read and engaged with throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It therefore would have continued to be an active shaper of oral traditions and cultural memory beyond its original creation context (Glauser 1996). And indeed, in his discussion of early modern treatises on *álfar* and *tröll*, Gunnell (2018) argues that the surprisingly high degree of sympathy that many Icelandic intellectuals had for folk belief resulted from the country's unique farm-based social structure, in which different classes of society lived side by side and frequently came together for evening entertainment. He argues Þormóður Torfason's interest in these matters resulted from the fact that he grew up in "a world in which the church's academic vision of the unseen was in regular conflict with the rooted perceptions of popular culture, perceptions shaped by old beliefs and new experiences, reinforced by regular winter evening storytelling sessions in Icelandic farmhouses" (Gunnell 2018, 204).[237]

Judging by later observers, these sessions were lively affairs where people other than just the storyteller would speak. In the early nineteenth century, Ebenezer Henderson wrote that during evening readings,

> [t]he reader is frequently interrupted, either by the head, or by some of the more intelligent members of the family, who make remarks on various parts of the story, and propose questions, with a view to exercise the ingenuity of the children and servants. (Henderson, *Iceland, I*, 1818, ch. 9, p. 367)

Around the same time, Eiríkur Magnússon also noted that during readings, "[t]he handmaidens, as well as everybody else [. . .] make their laconic remarks as the story develops on the character of this or that hero, and on the tragic as well as the comic interest of the whole situation" (quoted in Driscoll 1997, 45). Although these observations relate to more modern practices, there is no reason to assume that audiences of the late medieval period were any less inclined to interrupt those who were reading to discuss the stories that they were being told. In fact, O'Connor (2005, 167) argues that this kind of participative storytelling context may have necessitated the writing of the *apologiæ* to begin with, which (in his words) were aimed at "silencing noisy sceptics". The content of the *apologiæ* suggest that such audience interventions would have extended beyond passing comments about the stories and their heroes to matters of some weight, such as their truth-value and relationship to church teachings.

That this evening entertainment may have had intellectual and/or religious ramifications is suggested by the concerns more conservatively minded clerics expressed about it. As Driscoll (1997, 14) points out, Reformation pioneer and Bishop

237 See also Hastrup 1990b, 191–192.

of Hólar Guðbrandur Þorláksson viewed it with suspicion. He took most issue with the recitation of poetry and songs but also described sagas and *ævintýr* as a kind of "Saurlifje med Ordunum" (Guðbrandur Þorláksson, *Sa store catechismus*, 1691, p. 155) ("fornication by word") (Driscoll 1997, 14). Interestingly, Guðbrandur was also proximate to the network within which we know 589a–f was circulating: his daughter Kristín was married to *sýslumaður* Ari Magnússon of Ögur, a son of Magnús prúði and the grandfather of Magnús digri (*ÍÆ*, *II* 1949, 114–115). It may be, therefore, that the sagas in 589a–f were precisely the kinds of texts that had aroused Guðbrandur's suspicions.

But despite the hostility of people like him, popular forms of oral and text-based entertainment endured for many centuries. This is presumably in large part because of the value they had for those among the secular elite who sponsored their production and facilitated their performance. With manuscripts such as 589a–f and 586, they could capitalise on the high status of the written word: they could appease the clerics and put forward an acceptable account of history. But by also incorporating into their texts material from oral traditions and then having them read out loud, they could also participate in the oral sphere. I would argue that this dual-mediality gave these texts broad appeal and helped them shape cultural memory across different parts of Icelandic society. As a result, it also created a space within which different kinds of knowledge could intermingle – in which oral traditions could be elevated to the sphere of literature/history and the secular elite could (on their own terms) share in the folk beliefs of the general population. Moreover, it seems likely that the performances prompted by the manuscripts in the decades and centuries that followed their creation facilitated further interaction between these two spheres and may have contributed to the learned discourses on folk belief and magic that arose in the written records of the early modern period.

8.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided some answers to the question of *why* 589a–f and 586 were produced, for which it was first necessary to identify who they were produced for. While it has not been possible to identify specific individuals, it seems likely that the manuscripts were created in the west of Iceland under the instigation of members of the late fifteenth-century secular elite – possibly some ancestors of the family that came to own the *höfuðból* Saurbær á Rauðasandi from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. The power of this elite was based on their ownership of property, which they would have amassed and maintained through strategic marriage alliances with other members of their class, and they would have

had a large number of people working on their estates upon whom their revenues relied. The most powerful among them may have been royal officers who derived additional income and prestige from their proximity to the kings in Denmark. They would have been aware of, and possibly involved in, the conflicts between the Danish crown and the English over access to Icelandic fish in addition to domestic conflicts over inheritance – specifically that associated with Guðmundur ríki Arason. Although high-ranking members of the church were drawn from the same economic class and the same families, the clerics had their own institutional identity and economic power base that separated them from the secular magnates who were likely responsible for the production of 589a–f and 586.

I have argued that a key stimulus for the production of 589a–f and 586 was the desire to uphold the prevailing power structure. Both manuscripts express a clear affiliation with the Danish crown and endorse the movement of power away from Norway to Denmark. The latter is given a new legendary past in which Icelanders (at least those of the upper classes) could share, culturally if not genealogically. This culture is characterised by specific ideals of male and female behaviour that seem to have been suited to preserve the power bases of the late-medieval elite. This culture would have helped that elite both distinguish themselves from the general population and to police behaviour among their own number.

Judging by the sagas' 'medium theory' and materiality, along with later descriptions of the *kvöldvaka*, it can be extrapolated that the manuscripts this elite produced were intended to form the basis of evening entertainments. This means they would have reached a large cross section of society. Beyond the immediate function of providing entertainment for both the sponsors and their dependents, these occasions would have provided an ideal setting for the secular elite to put forward their interpretations of the past and, in doing so, promote their own class and gender politics. The manuscripts' intended wide audiences may provide some explanation for the high number of references to oral materials in these texts. I have argued that these would have enhanced the texts' 'sticking power' by increasing their appeal and likelihood of being taken up and reintegrated into those same oral contexts. The 'small gods' may well have provided some kind of supernatural endorsement of these sagas' aristocratic vision of the past. But interest in this material was likely not restricted to the general, illiterate population. Evidence from later centuries suggests that learned members of the elite were themselves interested in, and variously sympathetic to, the orally-transmitted folk beliefs of the general population among whom they lived. It seems likely that the texts in these manuscripts acted as arenas in which those beliefs could be discussed and their relationships to church-teachings could be negotiated, both for the scribes/patrons when they were originally being written and when they were vocalised in performances from the late fifteenth century and beyond.

9 General Conclusion

My aim in this book was to read texts known in modern scholarship as the 'comic-adventurous' *fornaldarsögur* as mediums of cultural memory. My intention was to reinterpret their 'fictional' qualities as windows into the changing relationship between medieval Icelanders and their legendary histories. That is, I wanted to more closely study their 'derivative' use of other texts and 'fantastic lore', their proximity both to 'folklore' and romance, their self-conscious narration, and, perhaps most interestingly, their apparent implausibility.

To do so, I drew on various theoretical and methodological insights from the fields of cultural memory studies, media studies, and philology, in addition to those from scholars of Old Norse literary culture. While the principal question with which I began this book centred on the variability of the *fornaldarsögur*, this memory and media lens has, I would argue, enabled me to arrive at more meaningful conclusions about the status and function of the *fornaldarsögur* in late medieval Iceland. Using Lachmann's intertextual framework to study the 'memory of literature' helped illuminate how the manuscripts' creators were engaged in a dialogue about their culture's memory and drew attention to the multivocality of the texts they produced – how they drew others into them through reference and adaption, and how their various redactors and scribes added their own voices through rearrangement, alteration, and the addition of *apologiæ* and other metatextual comments. Studying the manuscripts as 'mediums of cultural memory' helped me to conceptualise the relationship between text and context with more nuance than viewing the former as a 'reflection' of the latter. Situating the manuscripts within their creation and reception contexts, has allowed me to suggest how they, as channels for a plurality of voices, responded to and bore upon matters of significant historical import, such as the Icelanders' relationships with the Kalmar monarchs, their local manorial and dynastic politics, and the moral worth and plausibility of 'pre-Christian' magic. By exploring both their intertextual and extratextual relations, I have tried to show how 589a–f and 586, were not just texts in contexts, but nexuses for those contexts.

It is worth returning now to the more specific research questions I posed in Chapter 1. Some of those questions related to the *fornaldarsögur*'s literary aspects and 'fictional' qualities: how did saga compilers respond to the versions of the legendary past they had inherited? Why did they reuse so many of the same motifs? And to what effects? What was so appealing about the translated *riddarasögur* that they chose to write legendary histories that looked so much like romances? How and why did they fit material that we would call 'fantastic' into those

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histories? And if they were so concerned that their sagas might be perceived as unbelievable, such that they would need an *apologia*, why write them down?

Over the course of this book, I have argued that these sagas' 'derivativeness' can be understood as a mechanism through which the later medieval elite could tap into culturally dominant representations of the past and decentre them. One key example of this process is their frequent reference to *Völsunga saga*, which is used across many of the sagas discussed here as a chronological anchor that lends, as Rowe (2013, 212–213) writes, "some credibility or legitimacy" but also functions as what Rigney (2008, 351) describes as a "literary monument" – a text that acts as "a benchmark for reflecting critically on dominant memorial practices". Since the *fornaldarsögur* of 589a–f and 586 construct pasts that are defined by their difference to *Völsunga saga*, by referencing it they also displace it; their borrowings from it are, from this perspective, evocative not of a degenerating literary tradition, but of a desire to critically reflect on and *change* its narrative of history.

When it comes to the hybridity of the *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*, I have shown how romantic lexis is used in the texts discussed here with intent and historical specificity. As Larrington (2012, 265) has argued in relation to *Völsunga saga* and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, genre is not politically neutral, and the translated *riddarasögur* were part of a political project in Norway when King Hákon Hákonarson initiated their translation in the thirteenth century (Bagge 2010, 170–174). Medieval Icelanders knew this: the king's centrality is made clear in several of the translations' opening and closing lines which name him as patron.[238] In Chapters 3–5, I demonstrated how material from those texts is deployed in the sagas of 589a–f in a way that responds to this inherently political nature: 589a–f reasserts the Europeanised kingly politics the translations promote but also re-contextualise those politics to create a legendary past that was relevant to an Icelandic elite who looked to the Kalmars in Denmark instead of Hákon's legacy in Norway. Rather than some kind of novel surface dressing, these texts borrow from the translated *riddarasögur* to construct a 'useful past'.

I have also argued that, far from evidence for fictionality, these sagas' use of 'fantastic lore' (or 'folklore') may well have enhanced their 'referentiality' and thus their popular appeal. The positive reception of this lore is evident if we turn to the poetry of later centuries. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir's (2018) survey shows that much of it memorialised the *fornaldarsögur*'s 'small gods' in addition to their human heroes. Verses were written about Arinnefja and Brana in the seventeenth

238 For example, see *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, 1999, p. 28; *Möttuls saga*, 1999, ch. 1, p. 6; *Ívens saga*, ch. 16, p. 98; *Strengleikar*, 1979, pp. 4–5.

century, one about Goðmundr of Glæsisvellir in the nineteenth century, and a set of *kappavísur* (hero's verses) by Bergsteinn blindi Þorvaldsson (1550–1635) mentions Hreggviðr and Möndull alongside Hrólfr and his antagonist Vilhjálmr. In a group of mock-heroic poems known as *ýkjukvæði* (exaggerated poems) which were recorded in the nineteenth century, mention is made of Arinnefja, Alba, and Hreggviðr (*Íslenzkar gátur*, *IV*, 1898, pp. 328 and 331); Busla is mentioned in another contemporaneously recorded poem called *Ellakvæði* along with Grímr Ægir (*Íslenzkar gátur*, *III*, 1894, p. 403); and a *lánglokur* (rigmarole) by Sigurður Ketilsson (1689–1730; *ÍÆ*, *IV*, 1951, 244) begins with the words "Víst var Brana væn, kæn" (*Íslenzkar gátur*, *IV*, 1898, p. 377) (Brana was surely kind and clever). In fact, in Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir's (2018, 48–49) calculation, the troll-woman Brana was more popular in later poetry than many of the *fornaldarsögur*'s actual heroes – Göngu-Hrólfr being a notable exception. These verses show that the *tröll*, giants, and members of the waking dead who populate 589a–f and 586's diverse cast of characters clearly lived on in the minds of their audiences and thus surely played a significant role in enhancing the ideological value of those manuscripts' sagas.

I have, moreover, put forward the case that these characters provide a crucial insight into the saga as a medium and help to understand the presence of the *apologiæ*. Here, it is worth returning to the other questions I posed in Chapter 1 about media: what kind of memory medium was the Icelandic saga, specifically the legendary saga? What were its boundaries as a (potentially) historical form of writing? What kind of relationship did it have with literate and oral cultures? And other written and spoken 'texts'? Why did this form appeal to literary patrons in this period? And what role did it play more broadly in late medieval Iceland?

I have contended that, in their mediation of oral traditions or 'vocality', these sagas were participants in oral culture: that they contributed to the transfer and development of knowledge that was, for the most part, transmitted by word of mouth. That is, knowledge of the 'unseen' – of *jötnar*, *tröll*, *dvergar*, *álfar*, and the living dead, and of the capabilities and ethics of magic spells and rituals that lay outside the bounds of usual church teachings. Within these sagas, knowledge that was, for some more zealous clerics, subject to "an endless effort at exorcism" is canonised and validated, while also being mocked and pushed back into "the pagan past, in the foolish minds of babbling 'old wives'" (Ostling 2018, 10). As a result, these manuscripts, became sites for the development of this knowledge as they were performed over the course of the late medieval and early modern periods.

By honing in on these texts' participation in those traditions, we can begin to see the boundaries of the form emerge. No eyebrows are raised when the woman-stealing *jötnar* are pushed to the fringes, to Jötunheimar or some other world, and are defeated by a noble hero. Even when those heroes depend on magically empowered marginal figures for their success there is no cause for concern. However,

when questionable forces make the kingdom of Denmark their arena of action, when a conventionally devilish figure (a grave-dwelling watchman) becomes the champion of good against evil, or when a witch utters suspicious, pagan spells to save a mistreated protagonist, we find ourselves on unstable ground. At these points, the narrators of our sagas produce defences: they acknowledge the controversy of their narratives but permit themselves to tell them anyway, alluding to and hopefully minimising the unflattering interpretations of their potential critics. In doing so, they reveal one of the constraints on the saga as a medium – that constraint being how 'pagan' or folk beliefs are represented. There are other constraints that are revealed by the *apologiæ*: the contradictory accounts of Sturlaugr starfsami's death are similarly treated with trepidation, as argued in Chapter 7.5.

At this stage it is worth asking whether or not it is possible (or worthwhile) to describe these sagas as a 'historical form of writing' at all. The answer depends, of course, on how we define the term 'history', and I am still inclined to take the view of O'Connor (2005; 2022) that these texts were (like other saga subgroups) written within a historical mode because of the concerns they display about plausibility, acceptability, and contradiction. Their function as entertainment does not, in my view, contradict this: entertainment and learning are not mutually exclusive categories and the intertextual connections these sagas have to other more conventionally historical texts brings them into a dialogue about the past. Undoubtedly, they shaped how many (if not all) of their audiences thought about it.

But nevertheless, these manuscripts' 'rhetoric of historicity' is, undeniably, incredibly slippery, and, as the discussion in Chapter 7.5 highlighted, the compilers seemed to have lacked confidence in the written word's ability to convey historical truths about the distant past at all. Their sagas are (supposedly) based on old stories and books written by learned men, but they also say that books can be contradictory and subject to misinterpretation, while eyewitnesses (usually the gold standard of authentication) are themselves fallible and subjective. Our compilers provide contradictory accounts of Sturlaugr starfsami's death but cannot say which one is 'truer' let alone correct. Through their truth defences and gaps in knowledge, the legendary past they depict becomes murkier; it is filled with an ever-growing cast of characters and adventures, but at the same time it is fundamentally unknowable.

Therefore, I think it would be fair to argue with O'Connor (2005, 168) and Mundal (2012, 185–186) that, while evidencing adherence to the traditional historical mode, the *apologiæ* were also symptomatic of a desire to move away from it – or, at least, 'history' as it was defined by the powers that be in the fifteenth century. Although the compilers of these texts position their sagas as works of history, they were clearly interested in exploring subjects that occupied a contentious position in relation to the interpretation of history mandated by the church (or at least some members of it). These sagas' 'medium theory' also revealed an

ambivalence towards both the written word and the clerical sphere associated with it. As Iceland's secular elite attempted to carve out a space for themselves in the turbulent political climate of the fifteenth century, sagas were one of their most important tools. The self-conscious narrators they introduced into those sagas – which poked fun at clerical standards of acceptability and made light of the practice of writing – may well have provided a means through which that elite could distance themselves from the clerics whose technology they shared. The flexibility that those narrators created within the form – by pushing the boundaries of 'history' – also meant that they could explore more fundamental, and clearly controversial, questions about the mysteries of the world in which they lived.

How the historical and moral value of these experimental texts was assessed over time we cannot say for now. What Bjarni Bjarnason and Björn Þorleifsson thought in the seventeenth century was surely different to what 589a–f and 586's compilers did two centuries earlier. In the interim, these manuscripts likely provoked much debate and discussion as they were read, copied, and (occasionally) erased. But, as Rigney (2008, 346) writes again, "'memory sites,'[. . .] only stay alive as long as people consider it worthwhile to argue about their meaning", and the discussions that likely took place during the evening storytelling sessions where these sagas were told surely helped them 'stick' in the minds of their audiences. Such is suggested by the enduring popularity of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, which, in addition to being one of the most 'chivalric' of the *fornaldarsögur*, also seems to have been one of the most controversial; far from putting audiences off, this likely only enhanced its appeal and efficacy as a shaper of cultural memory.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Lacunæ in AM 589a–f 4to

Lacuna 1: 589a, beginning of the manuscript

One or more leaves. The first lines of *Kirialax saga* are missing, which were probably written at the bottom of the verso page of a missing leaf. The fact that only a very short portion is absent from the preserved text suggests that there may have been something else written on the rest of that missing page and its corresponding recto side – what that may have been is impossible to say. The missing first lines of *Kirialax saga* were added to the lower margin of 589a, 1^{r} by Árni Magnússon (Loth 1977, 12). This lacuna corresponds with p. 1, ll. 1–3 of Kålund's edition. I have not needed to quote from this lacuna.

Lacuna 2: 589a, between fols 6 and 7

One leaf is missing that was previously joint with the lost leaf at the beginning of the first gathering (Lacuna 1). This lacuna corresponds with p. 19, l. 31 to p. 22, l. 7 of Kålund's edition. Where I have quoted from this lacuna, I have used AM 532 4to (1690–1710), a copy of a now-lost copy of the saga in 589a that was made before this leaf was lost (Loth 1977, 15).

Lacuna 3: 589a, end of the manuscript; 589b, beginning of the manuscript

Loth suggests this was made up of "one or more gatherings, approximately the first four leaves of which must have been taken up by the last part of *Kirialax saga*" (Loth 1977, 12). This lacuna begins at p. 79, l. 28 of Kålund's edition and runs to the end of the saga. Where I have quoted from this section of *Kirialax saga,* I have again used AM 532 4to.[239] This lacuna also covers the beginning of *Samsons saga fagra*, up to p. 7, l. 1 of Samuel Wilson's edition. Where I have quoted this section of the text, I have used AM 181b fol (1638–1652), a copy of 589b's version of the saga that was made before these pages were lost (Loth 1977, 15).

239 The very end of the saga is also missing in AM 532 4to, but has not been preserved anywhere else (*Kirialax saga*, 1917, p. 101).

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111338651-010

Lacuna 4: 589b, between fols 2 and 3

Probably two leaves missing in *Samsons saga fagra*. This lacuna corresponds with p. 18, l. 7 to p. 29, l. 17 of Wilson's edition. Where I have quoted this section of the text, I have again used AM 181b fol.

Lacuna 5: 589b, end of the manuscript

The end of *Samsons saga fagra*, probably three leaves – the first being joined with the lost leaf at the beginning of the saga and the second two beginning a new gathering (Loth 1977, 12). It is not known what was in the rest of this gathering. This lacuna begins at p. 40, l. 5 of Wilson's edition and runs to the end of the text. Where I have quoted this section of the text, I have used AM 343a 4to (1450–1475), an independent witness to *Samsons saga fagra*, because these leaves were already absent when the copy in AM 181b fol was made (Loth 1977, 15).[240]

Lacuna 6: 589d, end of the manuscript

The end of *Stúfs þáttr*. This lacuna begins at p. 6, l. 21 of Björn Magnússon Ólsen's edition. I have not needed to quote from this lacuna.

Lacuna 7: 589e, between fols 19 and 20

Two leaves missing cutting off the very end of *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, beginning at p. 591, l. 4 of Carl Christian Rafn's edition, and the beginning of *Ála flekks saga*, corresponding with p. 84, l. 1 to p. 98, l. 16 of Åke Lagerholm's edition. I have not needed to quote from this small section of *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, but for *Ála flekks saga*, I have used AM 181k fol (1640–1660), a copy of 589e's version of the saga that was made before these leaves were lost (Loth 1977, 15).

240 The end of *Samsons saga fagra* was added to AM 181b fol's witness at a later date using another source.

Lacuna 8: 589e, end of the manuscript

The end (and majority) of *Hákonar þáttr Hárekssonar*. This covers pp. 8–35 of Mariane Overgaard and Mirjam Lanjala's edition. I have not needed to quote from this lacuna.

Lacuna 9: 589f, beginning of the manuscript

The beginning of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* up to p. 9, l. 29 of Zitzelsberger's edition. Where I have quoted from this lacuna, I have used AM 335 4to (Zitzelsberger's base text), the probable exemplar for this saga in 589f.

Lacuna 10: 589f, between fols 17 and 18

One leaf in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, which covers p. 259, l. 21 to p. 264, l. 29 of Rafn's edition. I have not needed to quote from this lacuna.

Lacuna 11: 589f, between fols 22 and 23

One leaf in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, which covers p. 286, l. 25 to p. 290, l. 28 of Rafn's edition. I have not needed to quote from this lacuna.

Lacuna 12: 589f, between fols 31 and 32

One leaf in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, which covers p. 335, l. 2 to p. 340, l. 9 of Rafn's edition. I have not needed to quote from this lacuna.

Appendix 2. Lacunæ in AM 586 4to

Lacuna 1: between fols 6 and 7

Two leaves missing, cutting off the end of *Af Vilhjálmi bastarði ok sonum hans* and the beginning of *Roðberts þáttr*, corresponding to p. 56, l. 140 to p. 66, l. 197 of Gering's edition.

Lacuna 2: between fols 9 and 10

One bifolio missing, cutting off a portion in the middle of *Flores saga konungs* corresponding with p. 142, l. 7 to p. 156, l. 11 of Lagerholm's edition.

Lacuna 3: between fols 20 and 21

One leaf missing, cutting off a portion in the middle of *Vilmundar saga viðutan* corresponding with p. 154, l. 8 to p. 163, l. 14 in Loth's edition.

Lacuna 4: between fols 26 and 25

One leaf missing and then another whole quire of around 7 leaves missing after that. This cuts off a large portion (including the end) of *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, beginning at p. 102, l. 16 of Schröder's edition, as well as most of *Hrings saga ok Tryggva* other than its very end.

Lacuna 5: between fols 29 and 30

One bifolio missing, cutting off a portion in the middle of *Þórðar saga hreðu* corresponding with p. 187, l. 26 to p. 222, l. 1 of Jóhannes Halldórsson's edition.

Lacuna 6: between fols 30 and 31

Two leaves missing, cutting off a portion in the middle of *Króka-Refs saga* equivalent to p. 12, l. 16 to p. 27, l. 13 of Pálmi Pálsson's edition.

Lacuna 7: between fols 32 and 33

Two leaves missing, cutting off the end of *Króka-Refs saga* beginning at p. 25, l. 4 of Pálmi Pálsson's edition, and the beginning of *Ásmundar saga kappabana*, up to p. 85, l. 32 of Ferdinand Detter's edition.

Lacuna 8: after fol. 33

Two leaves missing, cutting off the end of *Ásmundar saga kappabana* beginning at p. 95 of Detter's edition.

Appendix 3

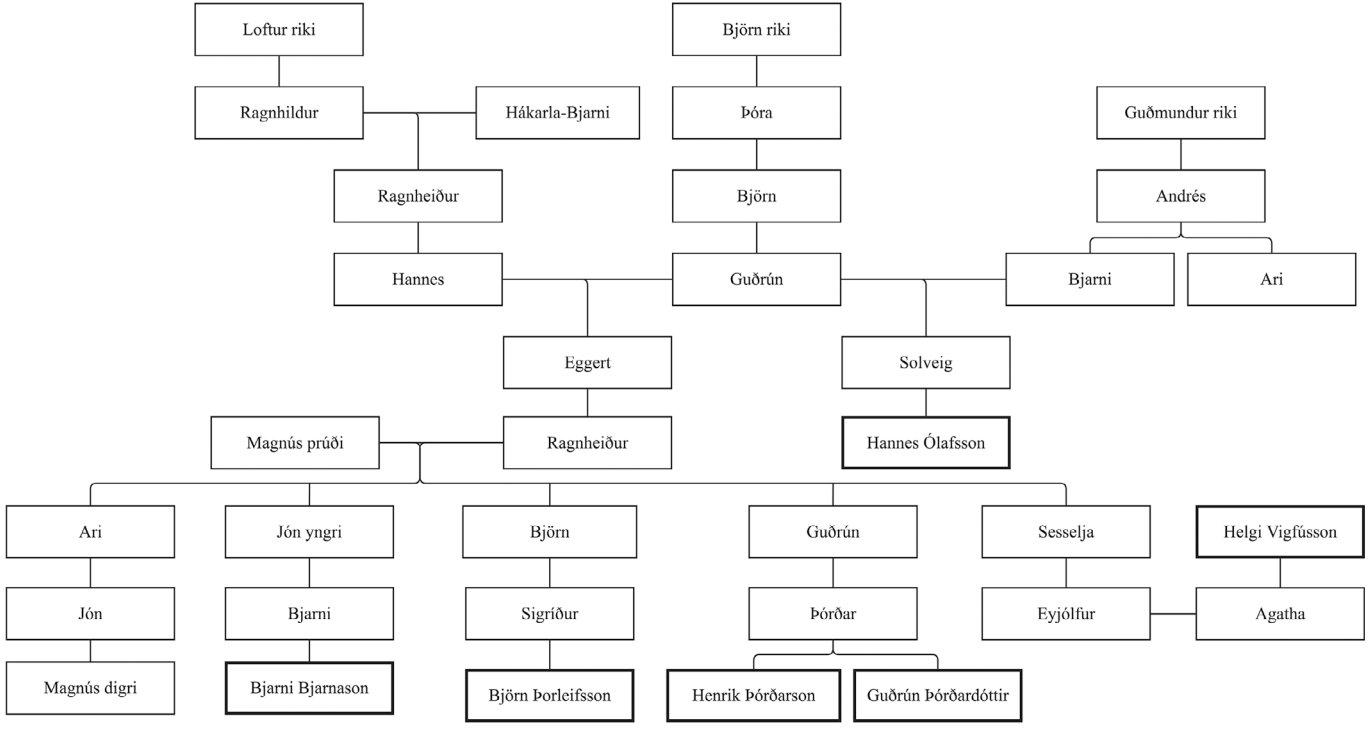

Fig. 6: Family tree illustrating some of Magnús prúði Jónsson and Ragnheiður Eggertsdóttir's significant ancestors and descendants.

Appendix 4

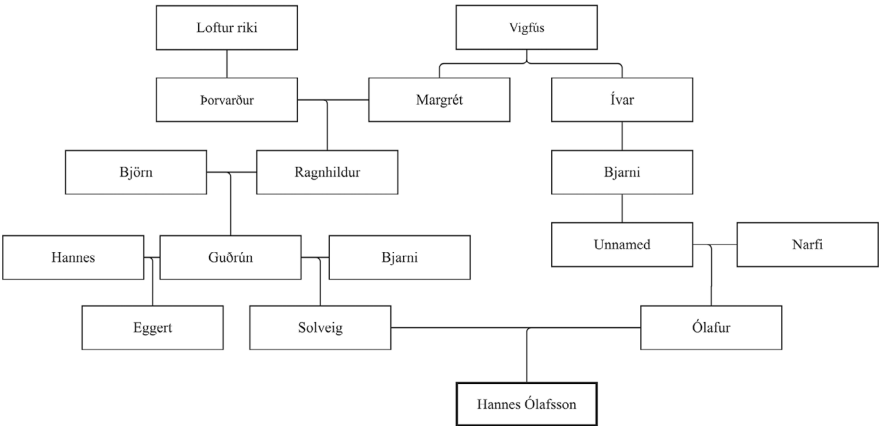

Fig. 7: Family tree illustrating some of Hannes Ólafsson's significant ancestors.

Appendix 5

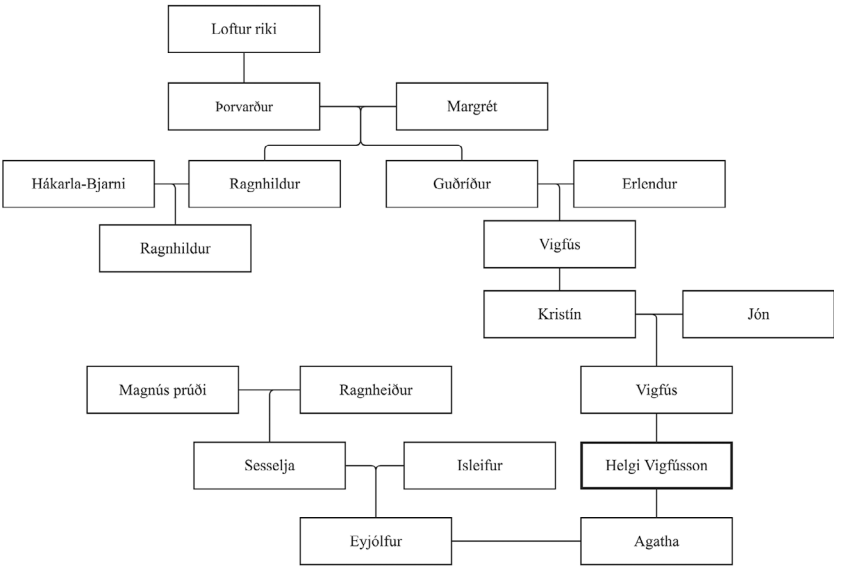

Fig. 8: Family tree illustrating some of Helgi Vigfússon's significant ancestors and descendants.

Appendix 6

Fig. 9: Map illustrating locations of individuals associated with AM 589a–f 4to and AM 586 4to.[241]

241 I have identified locations using the place-name database provided by Landmælingar Íslands.

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