MONASH University

There and back again: the significance of far-travel and far-travellers in the Icelandic sagas

by

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Abstract

The Icelandic sagas describe men and women from the North travelling throughout the medieval world, journeying to foreign, even marginal lands, fighting in foreign wars, serving at, or visiting foreign courts. These saga far-travellers were uniquely Icelandic cultural creations; their stories were a form of epic literature. The sagas were also written during a time of unrest and uncertainty; a time when Icelandic society was under great pressure from Norwegian political influence that was bringing great change to the community. This thesis argues that the saga authors used images of far-travelling warriors and explorers to create and foster a sense of Icelandic independence, and their imagery was a deliberate construct that served to subtly advance the reputation of Iceland and Icelanders on the world stage. The crafting of these images also reveals aspects of author intent and values, and how far-travel and journeys have been used to promote personal agendas, be it religious evangelism, to legitimise land-holdings, or for political purposes. They articulated a literary response to a sense of an emerging Icelandic identity; the images served to shape, and were in turn shaped by attitudes towards far-travellers. Far-travellers were now to be seen as cultural heroes.

Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Kerry Kirwan
15 November 2020

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The Journey Begins

In western lands beneath the Sun
The flowers may rise in Spring,
The trees may bud, the waters run,
The merry finches sing.
Or there maybe 'tis cloudless night,
And swaying branches bear
The Elven-stars as jewels white
Amid their branching hair.

***Journey's End* – J.R.R. Tolkien**[1]

My own far-travel journey started in 2007 when I visited Iceland as an undergraduate student. As a visiting scholar from the other side of the world, I was fortunate to be able to stay at Snorrastofa,[2] a research centre, museum and historical site in Reykholt. It was also the home of poet, historian and twelfth/thirteenth-century statesman – Snorri Sturluson. Living where Snorri lived was a fascinating experience, and gave me some insight into the character and motivation of one of the great saga authors, but it wasn't my main reason for travelling to Iceland. I was interested in far-travel and journeys and I wanted to walk in the footsteps of eleventh-century mercenary warrior and far-traveller Halldór Snorrason.[3] And I did. I travelled around Breiðafjörður in the west of Iceland, visiting farms mentioned in the Icelandic sagas where Halldór and his family lived at various times in his life. I sailed the waters of the North Atlantic, the same seas Halldór and the other far-travellers would have sailed upon. I craved to know more about Halldór and those other Icelandic warriors who travelled east to exotic places, as well as those brave men and women who travelled the dangerous seas to the west of Iceland, sailing into the unknown to colonise Greenland and Vínland. And I wanted to understand the value of their journeys to later generations of Icelanders.

[1] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, Book Six, Chapter I: "The Tower of Cirith Ungol", Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1994, p. 888.
[2] https://snorrastofa.is/en/ Accessed 10 October 2020.
[3] This thesis in the main uses Icelandic/Old Norse spellings. The exception is where names are anglicised in quotes or publication titles.

As a New Zealander visiting Iceland, the sense of place was enticingly familiar; the rivers and waterfalls, black sand beaches, the geothermal landscape of geysers and volcanoes, the remains of old lava flows from past seismic activity, all being common features of both countries. Even the unpaved roads, sporadic settlements and the sheep dotting the deforested hillsides were familiar.[4] Iceland and New Zealand are island countries at the ends of the earth and I felt a similar sense of alterity. At a cultural level too, Iceland has much in common with New Zealand's own indigenous past, and I felt that I understood the Icelanders' pride in their past achievements, the importance they placed on their heritage, and the central role given to their *whakapapa* (genealogy).[5]

The foundation history of both countries is embedded in a strong oral tradition and involves far-travel and far-travellers. New Zealand's earliest colonisers were Māori men and women of legend, who navigated great *wakas* or canoes across vast expanses of the Pacific Ocean, rather than the clinker-hulled longships sailing the stormy waters of the North Atlantic. But both journeys were long, difficult and dangerous. Both brought the far-travellers to small islands at the ends of the world.[6] The stories of both country's landnám (land-take or grab), share similarities. Just as the first arrivals did in Iceland and Greenland, the early Māori far-travellers came to claim land and settle, and similarly, their stories, their genealogy and their land rights were all captured in oral tradition and passed down through the generations. Mirroring what occurred in Iceland, New Zealand's first wave of European arrivals also came

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[4] This is particularly true of an area located near the central of New Zealand's South Island known as Mackenzie Country, an intermontane basin where the original vegetation cover prior to human settlement has been completely transformed, initially due to fires lit by Maori and European settlers, and in more recent times by farming activity and by pests. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mackenzie_Basin Accessed 10 October 2020.
[5] Reciting *whakapapa* genealogy, genealogical tables, lineage and descent, was, and is, an important skill and reflected the importance of genealogies in Māori society in terms of leadership, land and fishing rights, kinship and status. https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?&keywords=whakapapa (ref. 4), Accessed 10 October 2020.
[6] Iceland was the penultimate major land mass to be colonised, the last was New Zealand. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Settlement_of_Iceland Accessed 10 October 2020.

to exploit the country's natural resources. Instead of Norway, they sailed from bases in Australia; and they came for seals and whales, not walrus. The sealers and whalers were soon followed by those seeking timber and flax; and just as happened in Iceland and similarly in Greenland a millennium earlier, very soon after, the missionaries arrived. There are undoubtedly many unique similarities between both developing societies caused by similar geology and geographical remoteness, and their uniquely late colonisation, but I will leave these for others to explore. The focus of this study is on travel, in particular the representation of far-travel and of those early Icelanders who undertook long and dangerous journeys.

And travel they did. The Icelandic sagas describe men and women from the North travelling throughout the medieval world, as raiders, traders, explorers, colonisers, scholars and poets. One of the techniques the saga authors used to distinguish some of these travellers was to give them the honorific *víðförla,* meaning 'widely travelled' or 'far-travelling'. Icelanders are described journeying to foreign, even marginal lands, fighting in foreign wars, and serving at, or visiting foreign courts. International land and sea trading routes witnessed the movement of warriors, poets, goods, slaves, missionaries and scholars. After the introduction of Christianity in 1000CE, Icelandic pilgrims are described travelling to holy sites to worship. Many of the stories of these journeys include geographic and navigational details,[7] descriptions of distant lands and interactions with far-away peoples. These tales can also reveal aspects of the authors' intent, including their interest in local and international affairs and politics,[8] even their moral outlook.

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[7] Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, "Ships, Navigation and Routes in the Reports of Ohthere and Wulfstan", in P. H. Sawyer (trans.), *Two Voyagers at the Court of King Alfred*, Niels Lund (ed.), Christine E. Fell (trans.), York: William Sessions, 1984, pp. 30-42.

[8] Jesch, discusses this in more detail, see Judith Jesch, "Geography and Travel", in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture,* Rory McTurk, (ed.), Oxford, Blackwell, 2005, pp. 119-135, particularly pp. 119 and 129.

The Icelandic saga authors and patrons who converted the oral stories of these far-travelling Icelanders to vellum, were producing manuscripts during what were very turbulent times. The effect of the looming over-lordship of Norway and the contentious local political environment, played a pivotal role in influencing and advancing the use of independence themes. This can be seen in the trope of the heroic far-traveller. As I will argue, the saga authors used images of tenth and eleventh century far-travelling warriors and explorers to create and foster a sense of Icelandic independence. I propose that this imagery was a deliberate construct that subtly advanced the reputation of Iceland and Icelanders on the world stage, and also served to promote or advance an author's own personal agenda, be it religious evangelism or political advancement.

In order to understand what was behind the crafting of these stories and what might have motivated those who wrote them down or sponsored their recreation centuries later, we must first examine what we know about the sagas, their origins, their authorship, and the political climate existing in the North Atlantic at the time they were written down. Using the saga stories about far-travel and the characterisation of far-travellers, I will argue that there is a link between Iceland's loss of independence to Norway in the thirteenth-century, these heroic characters from earlier times, and a communal need to remember the past.

To support this argument, I have examined a selection of sagas that describe eastward and westward travel and far-travellers. While the sagas can be studied from a literary and philological perspective, this is not my approach. Instead, I examine the representation of journeys and travellers against the political and social context of the time they were written down, and through the lens of cultural history. As either literary or historical sources, the Icelandic sagas are also cultural artefacts of the society that produced them. Stories of

travellers and journeys, like much saga literature, are created, and were read as being history, and they had a meaning in history.

In the chapters that follow I discuss how the selected sagas value far-travel to the west and to the east. I identify motifs and characterisations in these works that have been used by the saga author for their own purposes, and present hypothesis as to their likely motivation for presenting specific far-travellers the way they have. I argue that, while they may have drawn on traditional materials, the sagas as they survive are literary creations that reflect the priorities and assumptions of the time of writing.

Chapter One

Sources and Historiography

And although we do not know how true they are,
we know of cases where learned men of old
have taken such things to be true.

***Heimskringla* - Snorri Sturluson.**[1]

The Icelandic saga authors used a variety of common literary motifs interwoven with contrasting common independence tropes to advance the image of Iceland locally, and potentially on the world stage. And they did this through the characterisation of two specific types of Icelandic far-travellers – Icelandic mercenary warriors whose journeys are recounted in a variety of saga genres, including for the purposes of this study, the *Konungasögur* (kings' sagas) and the *Íslendingasögur* (family sagas) – and the Icelandic explorers and settlers whose travels are detailed in the sagas collectively known as The Vínland Sagas.[2] Previous historical studies of either group have been focused on the role of the traveller as either a 'warrior' attached to a foreign court, or on the unreliability of the Vínland sagas as a historical source.[3]

Saga stories tend to reflect the interests or beliefs of the patron or sponsor.[4] Although studies have looked at saga author or patron motivation, they have not considered the potential of

[1] "Prologue", *Heimskringla*, vol. 1, Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes, (trans.), London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College, 2011, p. 3.
[2] The Vínland sagas are two separate works, first written down independently in Iceland in the early thirteenth century, see "The Vínland Sagas, Keneva Kunz, (trans.), *The Saga of Icelanders,* Örnólfur Thorsson (ed), New York: Penguin Books, 2001, pp. 626-674.
[3] Barnes reviews some of the Vínland literary historiography related to "nostalgia for an idyllic land", in Geraldine Barnes, "Nostalgia, Medievalism and the Vínland Voyages", *Postmedieval*, vol. 2:2, (Summer 2011), pp. 141-154.
[4] Keneva Kunz, "Introduction", *The Vínland Sagas,* Keneva Kunz (trans.), London: Penguin, 2008, p. xi.

these heroic characters being used to advance independence themes, or how they might have helped to enhance the reputation of Iceland and the Icelander abroad.[5]

The richness of the Icelandic saga tradition has stimulated a wide range of historiographical lines of enquiry and many of these converge relevant to this study. This includes differing views about sagas and Icelandic national identity,[6] and the role played by cultural icon, politician, poet, and known saga author Snorri Sturluson (*c.*1179-1241), in advancing Icelandic independence themes and cultural capital.[7] My research explores the proposition that some sagas had a historical or political function, and seeks to identify the possible motivating factors that prompted some saga authors to portray journeys and travellers the way they have done. I also note the very use of the word "author" in relation to the sagas, continues to be debated.[8] But the question of how and why some sagas portrayed journeys and travellers in certain ways, cannot be fully answered without taking account the authorship, and dating of these sagas. This research has however been considered within the context in which these sagas were written down, as well as the changing ways in which sagas are generally understood as being historical evidence.

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[5] "Icelander abroad" has become a literary expression used by some academics to describe Icelanders who travel off-shore, for example see Anthony J. Gilbert, "The Icelander Abroad: Social and National Identity in some Icelandic þættir", *Neophilologus* 75 (1991), pp. 408-424; Kári Gíslason, "The Icelander abroad: Hjalti Skeggjason's Swedish mission", in G. Barnes and G. Singleton, (eds.), *Travel and Travellers from Bede to Dampier*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2005, pp. 67-77.

[6] For example: Simon Halink, "The Icelandic Mythscape: Sagas, Landscapes and National Identity", *National Identities*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2014, pp. 209-223.

[7] For this thesis, I have in the main, concentrated on research dated from 1993 onwards, except in the case of some still relevant earlier studies. There is a tremendous amount of past research published both about the Icelandic sagas and the Icelandic Commonwealth, see Gunnar Karlsson, "A Century of Research on Early Icelandic Society", in *Viking Revaluations,* Viking Society Centenary Symposium, 14-15 May 1992, in Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins, (eds.), London: University College, Viking Society for Northern Research, 1993, pp. 15-25.

[8] As Shafer writes: "By deliberate choice I do not refer to the "author" of a saga, even when the name of the writer of a particular saga is known or well-attested." Instead, Shafer repeatedly uses the words "saga-writer"; I argue it's semantics, see John D. Shafer, *Saga Accounts of Norse Far-Travellers*, PhD Dissertation, Durham University, 2010. p. 29. See also Carol Clover and John Lindow, (eds.), *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, (1985) 2005, pp. 13-15 and 239-241.

The Value of the Sagas as 'History'

Saga and author provenance have been a cornerstone of saga studies for scholars from a variety of disciplines. Scholarly opinion has vacillated on the value of the sagas as historical documents, from a position in the early twentieth century where they were seen as faithful records of historical events, to a view offered by Sigurður Nordal (1886-1974) and the 'Icelandic School' or Íslenski skolinn, which regarded this trust as misplaced. They put forward a new hypothosis that held the sagas should be regarded as works of historical fiction and representative of the view and sensibilities current in the age of saga-writing, viewing extant sagas as "shadowy reflections of far superior original narratives".[9]

The debate was characterised by the polarised positions of what would become known as bookprose and freeprose.[10] Freeprose supported the sagas' oral origins and held an empiricist view of the truthfulness of the sagas in reporting Icelandic ninth- to eleventh-century history. In response, bookprose (as supported by the Icelandic School) proposed that the sagas were created by later male authors, who used their own imaginations and existing texts, and (if at all) oral traditions.[11] Only during the mid-twentieth century did academics – Nordal again, was an influential figure – increasingly start to focus on the preserved sagas rather than the supposed lost original texts. Yet there was still an overwhelming emphasis on

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[9] This can be seen in the prologues to the influential *Íslenzk fornrit* editions that were first published in 1933. With 28 volumes published, 14 with sagas of Icelanders, three with bishops' sagas and eleven kings' saga volumes, although a marked shift in scholarly interests can be seen in later volumes, in Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (eds.), "Introduction", *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas,* Abingdon: Routledge, 2017, pp. 1-3.

[10] These positions are noted by Carol J. Clover, "Icelandic Family Sagas", in Clover and Lindow, (eds.), 2005, pp. 239-315, at pp. 139-40.

[11] See Konrad Maurer, "Ueber die Hæsa-Þóris saga", *Abhandlungen der philosophisch-philolologischen Klasse der königlichen bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 12, vol. 2 (1871), pp. 157-216; and Bogi Th. Melsteð, *Íslendinga saga,* vol. 2, Copenhagen: Hið íslenzka bókmentfélag, 1910.

identifying possible saga authors, rather than on the texts in their own right, or their usefulness as historical or political signposts.[12]

Norwegian historian Sverre Bagge agrees the sagas have value both as historical sources and also as history writing, describing them as "early examples of the emergence of a vernacular historiography", comparable with contemporary Italian and French works, but with a "more vivid narrative as well as more coherent story-telling and clearer political analysis". [13]

History writing was held in high regard in Iceland and both the sagas themselves and their contemporary observers, regarded and discussed them as historiographical works. Known Icelandic saga authors Ari Þorgilsson (*c.*1067/8-1148), and Sæmundur Sigfússon (1056-1133), who were writing as contemporaries, were acknowledged as capturing what was understood to their current, and to later audiences, as being 'history'. Magnusson and Palson support the validity of Ari as being "a meticulous and scrupulous historian".[14]

Danish historian and cleric Saxo Grammatius (*c.*1160 – *c.*1220), identifies history telling for Icelanders as a matter of displaying glory and crafting a story worthy of remembrance.

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[12] See Sigurður Nordal, *Hrafnkatla*, Studia Islandica, 7, Reykjavik: Isafoldarprentsmijða, 1940; and also Sigurður Nordal, *Hrafnkels saga freysgoða: A Study*, R. George Thomas, (trans.), Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1958, in Theodore M. Andersson, "The Long Prose Form in Medieval Iceland", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 101, no. 3 (Jul. 2002), pp. 380-411, p. 385, fn 17. For a summary of the view of Nordal and the Icelandic school see T. M. Andersson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins*, Yale: Germanic Studies, 1, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964, pp. 82-119; see also Carol J. Clover, 1985, pp. 241-245; and Leifnd Ólason Vésteinn, "Jorvik Revisited – with Egil Skalla-Grimsson", *Northern Studies*, 27, (1993), pp. 64-75, in Matthew Townend, *Language and History in Viking Age England: Linguistic Relations Between Speakers of Old Norse and Old English,* Turnhout: Brepols, 2002, p. 145.

[13] Sverre Bagge, "Icelandic Uniqueness or a Common European Culture? The Case of the Kings' Sagas", *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 69, no. 4 (Fall 1997), pp. 418-442, at p. 434.

[14] Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Palsson, (trans.), "Introduction", *King Harald's Saga,* New York: Dorset Press, 1966, p. 21.

> Indeed, they account it a delight to learn and to consign to remembrance the history of all nations, deeming it as great a glory to set forth the excellences of others as to display their own.[15]

Jesse Byock describes the Icelandic sagas as capturing "social memory", which he defines as the process by which a society uses its past to give its present form and meaning.[16] This sense of a shared social memory would have functioned as a bond of shared understanding and perspective, and this likely helped to give credibility to the saga stories and helped to unite the saga teller-author with the audience.

There are issues though that make their historical verification difficult. The Scandinavian records are sadly incomplete,[17] with a vast number of Icelandic manuscripts since lost having been taken to Denmark to facilitate their publication; at the time Iceland was a Danish colony.[18] Writing about kings was a popular saga endeavour but many such account may have just disappeared. This includes manuscripts that generations of Icelandic bishops had previously sent to the Kings of Denmark, including those acquired by Icelandic scholar Arni Magnusson.[19] The disappearance of all these manuscripts has led generations of scholars to

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[15] Saxo Grammatius, *The Danish History*, Books I-IX, Douglas B. Killings and David Widger (prods), The Project Gutenberg: EBook #1150, Release Date: 11 February 2006, Last Updated: 6 February 2013. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1150/1150-h/1150-h.htm Accessed 8 November 2020.

[16] Jesse Byock, "Social Memory and the Sagas: The Case of Egils saga", *Scandinavian Studies*", vol. 76, no. 3 (2004), pp. 299-316, at p. 299.

[17] Greenfield estimates that over about a 50-year period, around 3,000 manuscripts were removed from Iceland, (where the majority of medieval Scandinavian writing had been produced) and from about 1650 onwards, expeditions were sent out from Sweden and Denmark to revival manuscripts due to an antiquarianism revival amongst Scandinavian scholars, in Jeanette Greenfield, *The Return of Cultural Treasures,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 2 and 13.

[18] Denmark/Iceland Relations: Between 1397-1523 all of the Nordic states were united in one alliance, known as the Kalmar Union. When this Union dissolved, Iceland came under Danish rule which lasted until they were granted independence in 1944, see Thomas Kingston Derry, *History of Scandinavia: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, pp. 69-85.

[19] Arni spent 10 years travelling around Iceland carrying out a land census. In 1702 he brought back fifty-five cases of vellum manuscripts to the University of Copenhagen library. The library was destroyed by the great fire of 1728 and even though Arni was able to save a third of his books, many other works were lost. It is estimated over 35,000 texts, many unique, were burnt, see Greenfield, 2007, pp. 3, 13 and 39.

speculate about what has been lost. This is still an important consideration in saga scholarship as it impacts on what we know about dating and authorship, and how much a surviving version may have been adapted from earlier sources.

One feature of the sagas as a form of historiography is their use of skaldic poetry to retell events. Some sagas, especially the *Konungasögur*, contain elements of verse composed by skalds (Icelandic bards or poets) who were associated with foreign monarchs, or who served them as court poets. Skalds did not necessarily owe any personal allegiance to the kings they praised, although some did become inseparably attached to their kings. Poole,[20] Foote,[21] Guðrún Nordal,[22] and Stafford,[23] have analysed skaldic poems for their complex relationship to actual events, and although the incorporation of skaldic poetry into sagas poses certain challenges for modern readers, recent scholarship suggests that for contemporary audiences it was a feature that promoted the authority and reliability of the text.[24] Whether they used skaldic verse to support their stories, or whether they were translating what were common oral history stories into a written format, it would seem that saga writers had limited scope to be able to alter what were likely to be familiar story outcomes involving famous people from earlier times. However, rather than historical accuracy, this study is more concerned with

[20] Poole has shown that stanzas were inserted or omitted by saga authors when incorporated into prose narrative, but he also gives examples where the Icelandic poems agree with other contemporary sources, for example in England, in the first decades of the eleventh century. While the broader historical picture, such as the outcome or magnitude of battles, need not necessarily be reliable, the Icelandic poems generally agree with the overall context provided by independent contemporary sources, and can in some cases provide extra details, which could be regarded as trustworthy, in Russell Poole, "Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History: Some Aspects of the Period 1009-1016", *Speculum,* vol. 62, no. 2 (Apr., 1987), pp. 265-298.
[21] Foote supports the veracity of skaldic stanzas particularly those found in the *Konungasögur,* where there are named poets, most of whom can be dated, and many of these shown as participating in, or associated with the events they describe, see Peter Foote, "Wrecks and Rhymes", *Aurvandilstd: Norse Studies*, Odense: Odense University Press, 1984, pp. 223-224, in Poole, 1987, p. 266.
[22] Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries,* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001.
[23] "In the eleventh century those who were to be convinced were usually in a position to know or check", in Pauline Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries,* London: Edward Arnold, 1989, p. 86.
[24] Ghosh points to the complexity of skaldic poetry, which is "notoriously complicated in its language, style and metre", and how this complexity may have ensured the content of the verse remained stable over the centuries, in Shami Ghosh, *Kings' Sagas and Norwegian History: Problems and Perspectives*, Leiden: Brill, 2011, p. 18.

how skalds and the sagas into which they are incorporated expressed events, and how this was intended to influence opinion, including the saga authors' manipulation of the characterisation of key saga figures using literary themes and tropes.

Sagas as Cultural History

The Icelandic sagas have been studied from many angles, not just literary scholarship,[25] and textual criticism. Academic interest includes historical analysis, oral history,[26] and folklore studies,[27] medieval memory,[28] as well as cultural and social anthropology scholarship.[29] The sagas have also been used by archaeologists to identify historic sites and sociologists looking at Icelandic family relationships and societal structures. Theme and genre within individual sagas have also been examined by academics over a number of years, but almost always from a literary dissection and comparison perspective,[30] or with an anthropological lens where historians have examined "social processes, cultures and mentalities".[31] In considering the many threads of research, including multi-disciplinary publications focused on cultural and

[25] Examples: Torfi Tulinius, *The Matter of the North. The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-Century Iceland,* Odense: Odense University Press, 2002; Carol J. Clover, "The Long Prose Form", *Arkiv fór nordisk filogi* 101 (1986), pp. 10-39; and Clover, 2005, p. 34.

[26] Example: Gisli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition. A Discourse on Method*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004; and S. Ranković, "Emergent Realism and its Distributed Author, or When Orality Met Literacy in the Sagas of Icelanders", paper presented at *Cultures in Contact: Northern Europe 700-1200 AD*, Tartu, August 16-26, 2004, pp. 1-10.

[27] Example: Oren Falk, "Fragments of Fourteenth-Century Icelandic Folklore", *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature; Sagas and the British Isles*, 2 vols., preprint papers of the 13th International Saga Conference, John McKinnell, David Ashurst and Donata Kick (eds.), Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, pp. 231-40.

[28] Example: Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, "Cultural Memory and Gender in Iceland from Medieval to Early Modern Times", *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 85, no. 3 (Fall 2013), pp. 378-399; Pernille Hermann, "Saga Literature, Cultural Memory, and Storage", *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 85, no. 3 (Fall 2013), pp. 332-354, and Byock, 2004, pp. 299-316.

[29] An early example is V.W. Turner, *An Anthropological Approach to the Icelandic Saga – The Translation of Culture: Essays to E. E. Evans-Pritchard*, T. O. Beildelman (ed.), London: Tavistock, 1971, pp. 349-374

[30] As an example see Joseph Harris, "Theme and Genre in some Íslendinga Þættir", *Scandinavian Studies,* vol. 48, no.1 (Winter, 1976), pp. 1-28.

[31] Jakobsson and Jakobsson, 2017, p. 2

social themes, my approach is similar to that taken by Byock,[32] and Ólason[33] albeit including travel.[34] Key debates informing current saga scholarship include how much oral information do certain sagas preserve, do certain sagas combine learned material from medieval Europe with local Norse traditions and opinions, and how much influence from the time of writing is reflected in various saga depictions of the past.[35] This is a key element of this study.

Long agrees that saga patrons or compilers reworked "existing stories, traditions, and possibly earlier lost texts, for their own contemporary purposes".[36] Byock writes that saga authors were "free to decide what details and known events to include and what new actions to introduce". He suggests that the very nature of oral tradition allowed authors to "incorporate new elements such as Christian themes and changing ethical judgements".[37] Although Byock is referring to the representation of feuds in the Icelandic sagas, it could equally be applied to stories of far-travelling warriors. Looking to the west, Barnes' study of Viking America interprets the "Vínland Sagas and their post-medieval reception as social history."[38]

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[32] Byock has published widely on the society, archaeology, literature, and history of medieval Scandinavia. See http://www.viking.ucla.edu/publications/index.html Accessed 8 November 2020.

[33] Ólason also suggests reasons for the behaviours of certain saga characters and the motivation behind saga authorship, in Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age: Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders,* Andrew Wawn, (trans.), Reykjavík: Heimskringla, Mál og Menning Academic Division, 1998.

[34] For a comprehensive review of current saga travel scholarship see Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough, "Travel", in Jakobsson and Jakobsson, 2017, pp. 210-217.

[35] See Barraclough, 2017, pp. 210-217; Judith Jesch, "Namings and Narratives: Exploration and Imagination in the Norse Voyages Westward", *The World of Travellers: Exploration and Imagination*, Kees Dekker, Karin E. Olsen, and Tette Hofstra (eds.), Leuven: Peeters, 2009, pp. 61-79; John Shafer, "Saga Accounts of Violence-motivated Far-travel", *Áustrvega: Saga and East Scandinavia*, 2 vols., preprint papers of the 14th International Saga Conference, Agneta Ney, Henrik Williams and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist (eds.), Gävle: Gävle University Publishing, 2009, pp. 867-74; Michael Barnes, "Language", in McTurk , 2005, pp. 173-189, and Judith Jesch, "Geography and Travel", in McTurk, 2005, p. 129.

[36] Ann-Marie Long, *Iceland's Relationship with Norway c.870-1100: Memory, History and Identity*, Leiden: Brill, 2017, p. 256.

[37] Jesse Byock, *Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas, and Power,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, p. 37.

[38] Barnes argues that the *Vínland Sagas* have been shaped by a variety of vested interests from "dynastic pride to national identity", in Geraldine Barnes, *Viking America: The First Millennium,* Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001, p. xix.

Kathleen Self's objective, outlined in her PhD thesis where she has critically analysed saga accounts of the conversion of Iceland to Christianity in 1000 by researching conversion discourse and reviewing the scholarly discourse attendant on them, has some similarity with my research objectives. Self's aim was to "show that the [conversion] narratives were written by the Icelanders to tell themselves and others the story of a unique and admirable people, thereby contributing to a nationalist discourse".[39] Although her analysis centred on conflict, authority, nationalism and religious conversion, whereas my focus is on travel, far-travellers and independence themes; nevertheless, we are both interested in the motivation behind the narratives, and as to how they might be presenting Icelanders as holding a unique place on the world stage.

Interdisciplinary scholarship has enabled techniques of literary criticism and historicism to be brought to bear on both the sagas themselves, and on saga scholarship. This is not without controversy, with Self and also Byock critiquing some recent scholarship. In her 2005 study, Self argues that Iceland's Christianity conversion narrative is modern-era construct with the event providing "the material they need to construct this image and locate that image in the medieval past", and she criticises indigenous Icelandic scholarship, for wishing "to replace the romantic image of Iceland as a wilderness with that of Iceland as a mature nation populated by rational, peaceful men and women." [40] Byock points to recent scholarship that has constructed an image of Iceland as 'equal or better', that can be understood as 'nationalist'.[41] These are both interesting critiques that seek to understand how the saga

[39] Kathleen M. Self, *Telling the Story: National Myth, Scholarship and the Conversion of Iceland,* Chicago: PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2005, p. 9.
[40] Self, pp. 201-206.
[41] Byock calls for the development of "a nationalist discourse that argues for a development from limited literacy and expression of culture to the full blossoming of literature, culture and civilization that is equal to or better than other nations", in Jesse Byock, "Modern Nationalism and the Medieval Sagas", *Northern Antiquity:*

images were produced in the original texts, how they might have been manipulated, and for what purpose.

Medieval Travel

Just as saga studies generally have shifted from understanding them as evidence for the events of the early Icelandic past, to evidence for the formation of social memory and opinions in the time of their commitment to writing, the study of travel within the sagas has also begun to encompass a socio-cultural element. The mobility of various groups in medieval society has been studied by historians for many years,[42] yet northern travellers rarely feature.[43] It also highlights a larger observation that other studies have tended to examine *either* westward or eastward travel, without considering how saga representations of each were related.

The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga, Andrew Wawn (ed.). Middlesex: Hisarlik Press, 1994, pp. 63-187, at p. 69-70.

[42] Margaret Wade Labarge, *Medieval Travellers,* New York: Norton, 1983. This work focuses on the wealthy and elite medieval traveller; Paul Newman, *Travel and Trade in the Middle Ages,* Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2011, which is a general overview of every aspect of European travel and trade; and Norbert Ohler, *The Medieval Traveller,* Caroline Hillier (trans.), Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989, p. 167. Minimally referenced, Ohler presents Iceland in the form of a medieval travelogue, although he does mention a saga account of an Icelander travelling to Byzantine to join the Varangian Guards in order to avoid a blood-feud. There are various studies associated with the perceptions of travel found in Latin and Germanic literature of the early Medieval period, including articles by Judith Jesch and Lars van Wezel dealing with aspects of travel in saga-literature, see *The World of Travellers: Exploration and Imagination*, Kees Dekker, Hofstra Tette and Karin Olsen, (eds.), Germania Latina VII, Leuven: Peeters, 2009.

[43] Recently published multidisciplinary studies continue to somewhat neglect Icelandic travellers and their journeys, and their stories continue to be on the periphery of what is considered to be of value about a medieval travel story, see *Travels and Mobilities in the Middle Ages,* Marianne O'Doherty and Felicitas Schmieder (eds.), Turnhout: Brepols, 2015, which has one reference to Iceland in relation to a papal delegation; and *Journeying Along Medieval Routes in the Europe and the Middle East,* Alison L. Gascoigne, Leonie V. Hicks and Marianne O'Doherty (eds.), Turnhout: Brepols, 2016, contains no references to northern travellers.

Historical analysis of Icelandic travellers has traditionally looked at the motivations for travel, either taking a global approach like Classen, who has analysed the different incentives for travelling west, east, south, etc., such as raiding or exploration and settlement, or for travelling to a specific destination to study or to trade.[44] Travelling on pilgrimage, which is prevalent in the kings' sagas, particularly those related to royal pilgrims, is a popular topic and has been the subject of a number of studies.[45] One scholar who has looked specifically at Norse travel is Kristel Zilmer. She has published a number of works on the role of travel in sagas including her 2010 philology doctoral dissertation on Viking Age Baltic traffic, and its representation in early Nordic sources (including runes).[46] Her studies include the value of both travel and heroic motifs to saga-literature, including an observation how a saga-hero's career advancement is determined by "memorable deeds", and that the hero is "the bearer of social problems and conflicts".[47] My research extends some of her ideas about the characterisation of heroes, albeit in a different travel context.

[44] *East Meets West in the Middle Ages,* Albrecht Classen (ed.), Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013 is a good example.
[45] Joyce Hill, "Pilgrimage and Prestige in the Icelandic Sagas", *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 23, 1993, pp. 433-533; Christian Krötzl, "Pilger, Mirakel und Alltag: Formen des Verhaltens im skandinavischem Mittelalter", (12-15 Jahrhundert), *Studia Historica* 46, Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1994, which discusses the many Scandinavian pilgrims of the Middle Ages. The earliest account of Scandinavian pilgrimage to Rome and Jerusalem, the 12th-century travel itinerary of an Icelandic abbot named Nikulás (now usually identified as Nikulás Bergsson of Munkaþverá), has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention. Translations of Nikulás's description of Jerusalem and the anonymous description of Jerusalem appended to it in AM 194 8vo, are included in *Jerusalem Pilgrimage, 1099-1185,* Issue 2/167, John Wilkinson, Joyce Hill, and William Francis Ryan, (eds.), London: Hakluyt Society, 1988. See also Benjamin Z. Kedar and Chr. Westergård, "Icelanders in the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem", *Mediaeval Scandinavia,* XI, (1978-1979), pp. 193-211; and Tommaso Marani, "The Roman Itinerary of Nikulás of Munkathverá: Between Reality and Imagination", in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature; Sagas and the British Isles*, 2 vols., preprint papers of the 13th International Saga Conference, John McKinnell, David Ashurst and Donata Kick (eds.), Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, pp. 638-48.
[46] Kristel Zilmer, " 'He Drowned in Holmr's Sea – His Cargo-ship Drifted to the Sea-bottom, only three came out alive.' Records and Representations of Baltic Traffic in the Viking Age and the Early Middle Ages in Early Nordic Sources", *Nordistica Tartuensia* 12, Tartu: University of Tartu, 2005; also see Kristel Zilmer, "Learning about Places and People: Representation of travelling connections and communication situation in the Sagas of Icelanders", *Sagas & Societies: International Conference at Borgarnes, Iceland*, September 5-9, 2002; also Kristel Zilmer, "The Motive of Travelling in Saga Narrative", in *Dialogues with Tradition: Studying the Nordic Saga Heritage*, Kristel Zilmer (ed.), Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2005, pp. 64-92; and Kristel Zilmer, "Icelandic Sagas and the Narrative Tradition of Travelogue", in McKinnell, Ashurst and Kick, 2006, pp. 1105-1113.
[47] Zilmer, 2005, p. 34 and p. 272.

The last thirty plus years have seen a significant growth in academic interest in the interrelated fields of travel and exploration. Although travel and sagas have been linked from at least the 1980s,[48] more recently scholars have looked at the importance of travel and journeys as described in the sources,[49] rather than the specifics and logistics of the journey itself, such as found in Zilmer's dissertation.[50] Ármann Jakobsson's 2013 article about the representation in *Morkinskinna*, of King Sigurðr of Norway's journey to the Holy Land, is an example of research into the imagery presented by saga descriptions of travel and travellers, and is more in line with my study. Ármann Jakobsson has looked at the image of Sigurðr and his journey, describing the account as a social drama where the King and his entourage's deliberate behaviour is used to manipulate both how Sigurðr, and Norway, are perceived by an audience of the King's own choosing.[51] Eastward journeys like Sigurðr's have been substantially studied, often with a focus on the Icelandic or Scandinavian presence in Byzantium. Here we can see the development of similar academic pathways from earlier break-through Varangian publishings by Sigfús Blöndal,[52] and Hilda Ellis Davidson,[53] focused on the historiography of identifying Varangians in a number of primary sources, and with the logistics of the journey; to current studies by Sverrir Jakobsson. His relevant studies include a number of works that analyse the Varangian experience, with his latest research due for publishing in October 2020.[54] Sverrir Jakobsson's studies on the Varangians, as well as

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[48] Rosemary Power, "Journeys to the North in the Icelandic *Fornaldarsögur*.", *Arv: Scandinavian Yearbook of Folklore*, 40 (1984), pp. 7-25.
[49] Barraclough, 2017, p. 210; Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough, "Sailing the Saga Seas: Narrative, Cultural, and Geographical Perspectives in the North Atlantic Voyages of the *Íslendingasögur*", *Journal of the North Atlantic*, vol. 7 (2012), pp. 1-12; and Shafer, 2010.
[50] Zilmer, 2005.
[51] Ármann Jakobsson, "Image is Everything: The Morkinskinna Account of King Sigurðr's Journey to the Holy Land", *Parergon*, vol., 30, no. 1 (2013), pp. 121-40.
[52] Sigfús Blöndal, *The Varangians of Byzantium*, Benedikt S. Benedikz, (trans/reviser), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, and Sigfús, Blöndal, *Væringjasaga*, Reykjavik: Ísafoldarprentsmiðja, 1954.
[53] H.R. Ellis Davidson, *The Viking Road to Byzantium,* London: Allen & Unwin, 1976.
[54] Sverrir Jakobsson, *The Varangians: In God's Holy Fire*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave, 2020; and Sverrir Jakobsson, "The Varangian Legend: Testimony from the Old Norse Sources", *Byzantium and the Viking World,* (Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia 16), Fedir Androsjtsjuk, Jonathan Shepard and Monica White, (eds.), Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2016.

on the imagery and representation of journeys to Vínland,[55] his thoughts about the medieval Icelandic and Norwegian world views,[56] and Iceland's pathway to state formation,[57] have been useful adjuncts to my own research, and his body of work has contributed towards the development of many of the propositions presented here.

Between the 1960s and early 1990s, developments in philosophy influenced historical and cultural approaches seeking to integrate investigations of the spatial more fully into the study of history, society, culture and literature.[58] For example, Michel de Certeau, who distinguished between 'space', being an area of movement, and 'place' understood as a fixed locale, has influenced a number of scholars to consider the patterns of movement within and between places.[59] Of relevance to far-travel is the concept of "place", a development of the 'spatial turn', an intellectual movement that has looked at the relationships of societies and cultures with their local environments – both natural and constructed – and the wider world. Nora has sought to locate the "memory places" of French national identity, as it has been constructed since the Middle Ages. Kritzman sums up the importance of this contribution, thus: "By reinterpreting the real territory of shared experience, representations of imaginary places persuaded strangers of their belonging in a common realm of experience."[60]

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[55] Sverrir Jakobsson, "Vínland and Wishful Things: Medieval and Modern Fantasies", *Canadian Journal of History,* vol. 47, no. 3 (2012), pp. 493-514.
[56] Sverrir Jakobsson, "Iceland, Norway and the World: Ari Þorgilsson as a Narrator of Barbarian History", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 132 (2017), pp. 75-99; and Sverrir Jakobsson, "Hauksbók and the Construction of an Icelandic World View", in *Saga Book XXXI*, London: University College, Viking Society for Northern Research, 2007, pp. 22-38.
[57] Sverrir Jakobsson, "The Process of State-Formation in Medieval Iceland", *Viator*, 40, no. 2 (2009), pp. 151-170.
[58] See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* Donald Nicholson-Smith (trans.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1991; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* Steven Randall (trans.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984; Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977,* Colin Gordon (ed. and trans.), Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980, especially "Questions on Geography, pp. 63-77, referenced in Gascoigne, Hicks and O'Doherty, 2016, pp. 3-4.
[59] See Leonie V. Hicks, "Coming and Going: The Use of Outdoor Space in Norman and Anglo-Norman Chronicles", *Anglo Norman Studies, 32* (2009, 2010), pp. 40-56, at p. 41, who also cites de Certeau, p. 117; and the essay collection of Barbara Hanawalt and Michal Kobialka, "Medieval Practices of Space", *Medieval Cultures* 23, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
[60] Lawrence Kritzman, "Foreword", in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past,* vol. 1, Lawrence Kritzman, (ed.), New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, p. ix.

Saga audiences living on a remote island in the North Atlantic in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were being exposed to tales of far-away and exotic places they likely could have barely imagined without the saga stories. One of the arguments explored here is about community pride and engagement with the representation of far-travel and far-travellers. This is supported by Kritzman's reference to "imagined [but real] places". Just as Nora and Kritzman suggests a relationship between communities, their local environments, and their response to hard-to-imagine places, for Icelanders this theory applies equally to the wild and resource-rich, but unknown Vínland, as it does to glittering and sophisticated Constantinople. I extend this supposition by proposing that by sharing the experiences of far-travel and the image of the larger-than-life far-traveller as presented in the Icelandic sagas, the saga authors were contributing towards creating a sense of national collectiveness or belonging. Depending on the context, this served to collapse, or maintain, the conceptual distance between Iceland and the rest of Scandinavian, indeed the rest of Europe.

More recently, Shafer has somewhat extended this concept of 'place' and 'space', when he attempts to define saga references to far-travel and distance in relation to imaged borders:

> Distant lands in different directions, naturally, correspond to different literary purposes and themes. The key factor in all directions is the idea of an imaginary border being crossed in the saga-writers' mental, imagined map of the world, from "inside" [an area of Norse familiarity – northern or Scandinavian Europe] to "outside".[61]

[61] Shafer, 2010, p. 7.

These concepts are also relevant in defining what was understood as being far-travel, how far away is ‘far’, and as to what it might take to be categorised as *víðförull* meaning ‘widely travelled’ or ‘far-travelling’. They also contribute towards giving definition to the idea of ‘place’, in terms of Iceland’s place in a wider system of geographical and human meaning, including being at the centre and on the periphery.

This connection between literature and sense of place has been explored by Grove, who points to the impact of the tension between centres and peripheries, on the sense of identity experienced and expressed in medieval North Atlantic cultures. With reference to Greenland, he describes a “preoccupation with its own perceived place at the heart of the medieval North Atlantic world”.[62] This can be equally applied to the representation of travel in the Icelandic sagas and Icelandic identity, and Grove’s argument supports my own ideas around the use of far-travel and far-travellers to advance the position of Iceland and Greenland on the world stage, or at least in the “North Atlantic world”.

Sagas about Far-travel and Far-travellers

The stories of Icelandic far-travellers appear in a wide number of saga genres including those found in the *Íslendingasögur*, and those that are found in the *Konungasögur* where they are associated with foreign kings and elite men. There are also stories of travel in the *Samtíðarsögur* (contemporary) genre. Sagas in this genre recount events that took place at the time the sagas were being written down. Named the Sturlungaöld or the Sturlung Age

[62] Jonathan Grove, “The Place of Greenland in the Medieval Icelandic Saga Narrative”, *Journal of the North Atlantic,* no. 2 (2009), pp. 30-51, at p. 30.

(1180-1264), it was the time of Snorri Sturluson, and of great turbulence for Iceland that eventuated in civil war (1235-1264).

Warriors journeying over three continents, even the difficulties of communicating with foreign races and peoples are described in the *Riddarasögur* (chivalric sagas),[63] and in the *Fornaldarsögur* (heroic sagas).[64] Both of these genres feature heroic figures, and they are usually categorised as being works of fantasy. They are still useful from a travelogue perspective - for example Kalinke points to the practicalities that are covered in the depiction of foreign languages and language learning.[65] *Riddarasögur* are not indigenous Icelandic creations either, they were inspired by translated continental chivalric romances which had first come to Iceland via Norway.[66] Tulinius dates this as occurring in the third decade of the thirteenth century "at the latest", prompted by the 1226 translation of *Tristrams saga.*[67] Whereas sagas in the heroic genre are chronologically set in the time before Haraldr hárfagri (Haraldr Finehair) founded Norway (i.e. before the Icelandic landnám or land-take/settlement

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[63] The *Riddarasögur* are essentially prose translations or adaptations of chivalric texts originally written in foreign languages, in the majority of cases Old French and Anglo-Norman, and in a few cases Latin and Low German, and translated into Old Norwegian, and Old and Middle Icelandic. They can also be said to include the Old Swedish and Middle Danish *Eufemiavisor*, a number of Norwegian, Faeroese, Icelandic, Swedish and Danish medieval ballads, see Jürg Glauser, "Romance (Translated *Riddarasögu*r)", in McTurk, 2005, pp. 372-387. Barnes also points to characterisation and narrative connections with classic Greek stories and heroes in *Riddarasögur,* see Geraldine Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur: Writing Romance in Late Mediaeval Iceland*, The Viking Collection 21, Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2014, Chapter 3.

[64] Tulinius, 2002, pp. 17-19.

[65] Kalinke concludes that even if the saga heroes' apparent proficiency in foreign languages is not a feature of the original continental romances, and their Old Norse translations, from which the original *Riddarasögur* are ultimately derived, the practicalities of travelling in foreign lands is not necessarily neglected, in Marianne E. Kalinke, "The Foreign Language Requirement in Medieval Icelandic Romance", *The Modern Language Review,* 78 (1983), pp. 850-61, at p. 853.

[66] According to Margaret Clunies Ross, "the Old Norse term riddarasaga ... covers what were a number of genres in Latin, French and Anglo-Norman, but common to all of them are their courtly setting, their interest in kingship, and their concerns with the ethics of chivalry and courtly love", in Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 81.

[67] Torfi H. Tulinius, "Saga as a Myth: The family sagas and social reality in 13th-century Iceland", in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society. Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference 2-7 July 2000, University of Sydney*, Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies-Ross (eds.), Sydney: Centre for Medieval Studies, 2000, pp. 526-539, at p. 528.

c.870),[68] and they are geographically set primarily in mainland Scandinavia, or elsewhere in the Germanic world – so were not Icelandic centred. Chapter Three discusses how the heroic saga images of far-travelling Icelandic warriors, who were real Icelanders and their stories known through oral tradition, [69] are a contrasting characterisation to those fantasy heroes found in the French and English chivalric tales.

The Icelandic sagas have been preserved in a great variety of manuscripts over a long period of time and they have typically undergone a variety of changes and redactions. We do know that the earliest continuous narrative history of Iceland is the *First Grammatical Treatise*, (likely written *c.*1122–32), which is also the earliest extant example of narrative prose in any Scandinavian language.[70] This work is a compilation manuscript, and it includes a description of other works written in Icelandic, which at the time it was compiled, had only recently been established as a Latin alphabet-based literary language. One work found in the *First Grammatical Treatise* is by Ari Þorgilsson,[71] known as inn fróði (or 'the wise'). Ari is more widely known as the author of *Íslendingabók* (The Book of the Icelanders). An influential figure, Ari Þorgilsson was both a cleric and a chieftain. His role as a saga author, his background and potential influencers are further discussed in Chapter Four, particularly in

[68] Very little is known about Harald. According to Ari the Wise, writing in the first half of the twelfth century, Haraldr ruled from 870 until 931/32, in Sverre Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom: State Formation in Norway c.900-1350,* Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2010, p. 25.

[69] Unlike its neighbours, Iceland was, up until around the twelfth century, essentially an oral society, although Tulinius does caution against making "too sharp a distinction between oral and written literature at this time", in Torfi H. Tulinius, "The Social Conditions for Literary Practice in Snorri's Lifetime", in *Snorri Sturluson and Reykholt: The Author and Magnate, his life, works and environment at Reykholt in Iceland*, Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir and Helgi Þorláksson (eds.), Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2018, pp. 389-405, at p. 389.

[70] As Jakobsson notes, *Íslendingabók* is generally (and incorrectly), the only work attributed to Ari Þorgilsson, in Sverrir Jakobsson, 2017, pp. 75-99, at p. 75.

[71] *First Grammatical Treatise* records the works listed: "*bæði l0g ok áttvísi eða þýðingar helgar, eða svá þau in spakligu frœði, er Ari Þórgilsson hefir á bækr sett af skynsamligu viti*", ("both laws and genealogies, or religious interpretations as well as the wise lore which Ari Þorgilsson has composed with a reasoned conception", in *The First Grammatical Treatise*, Hreinn Benediktsson, (ed.), Reykjavik: Institute of Nordic Linguistics, 1972, p. 208, in Sverrir Jakobsson, 2017, p. 75.

relation to landnám and geneology. Ari was also admired as a historian. Another named author is Sæmundur Sigfússon, also called inn fróði. An Icelandic priest and scholar, he was educated in France, and he wrote a now lost history of the kings of Norway in Latin.[72] But very few saga authors are named. Writing a century or so later, known saga author Snorri Sturluson, cites Ari Þorgilsson as one of his sources:

> He [Ari] was very wise, and so old that he was born in the year after the death of King Haraldr Sigurðarson.[73]

Snorri is best known as the author of *Heimskringla,* or The Orb of the World (*c.*1230),[74] his great royal biographical compilation work, and the most well-known of the *Konungasögur*.[75] Written as a series of saga-histories, with each individual king's tale a self-contained story, Snorri's work illustrates the individual personalities, motivations, aspirations and short-comings of the various Norwegian rulers, with their stories sometimes overlapping and sometimes contradictory.

Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar is one of the sagas included in *Heimskringla* and it tells the story of King Haraldr Sigurðarson of Norway, including his service in the Varangian guard. It is one of the sagas referenced here and forms an important part of my argument about Snorri and the influences on his writing (said to be *c.*1220-1241).[76] Chapter Two discusses the political environment in Iceland, and the effect it may have had on Snorri's political

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[72] Magnusson and Palsson, 1966, p. 16.

[73] Finlay and Faulkes surmise that Ari's *ættatala ok konungaævi* ('genealogy and lives of kings') omitted from the surviving version is presumably about the 'lives of kings in Norway and Denmark', but it is not known whether these were extended narratives or merely recorded the years of the kings' reigns, in Finlay and Faulkes, 2011, Chapter 3, pp. 304, and fn.1.

[74] The date of *c.*1230 has been proposed by Driscoll, 1995, p. xii.

[75] Massimiliano Bampi, "Genre", in Jakobsson and Jakobsson, 2017, p. 4.

[76] This thesis uses the 1966 translation of *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* by Magnusson and Palsson, which is titled King Harald's Saga.

career. Chapter Three discusses the themes and motifs evident in Snorri's characterisation in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*, of Icelandic mercenaries Halldór Snorrason and Úlfr Óspaksson, both of whom served with King Haraldr in the east. The characterisation of a third Icelandic warrior who fought on foreign soil, in a second work attributed to Snorri Sturluson – *Egils saga* – Snorri's tale about tenth-century warrior/poet Egil Skallagrímsson who fought as a mercenary in England, is also reviewed.

Iceland's literate elite used their influence over the sagas and saga writing, to give a sense of regional identity to the specific politics often associated with the Sturlungar family, the patriarch of which was Sturla Þórðarson (the elder), father of Snorri Sturluson. The Sturlungar family's story and those of other contemporary elite families appear in *Sturlunga* – a series of sagas, the longest of which is *Íslendinga saga*.[77] This particular work is attributed to Snorri Sturluson's nephew Sturla Þórðarson and is considered part of the *Samtíðarsögur* genre. *Sturlunga* are set in what has become known as Sturlungaöld of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This was a time of turbulence, which would eventually lead to a civil war.[78] Even during these troubled times, any argument about personal interests influencing saga writing may not be universally applied to all saga authors or patrons. Callow has examined the relationship between the *Íslendingasögur*, including *Laxdœla saga*, which is one of the texts discussed in Chapter 3. The family sagas are concerned with tenth and eleventh-century events, whereas the *Samtíðarsögur* recall events of troubled times of the mid-thirteenth century. Callow concludes: "It appears that there is relatively little in common between the political situations depicted in *Laxdœla* and any situation portrayed in contemporary sagas".[79] However, it appears that there is a link between powerful, personal

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[77] Bragason gives a comprehensive history of *Sturlunga* studies in Úlfar Bragason, "Sagas of Contemporary History (*Sturlunga saga)*: Texts and Research", in McTurk, (ed.), 2005, pp. 427-446.
[78] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2009, pp. 151-170.
[79] Chris Callow, "Reconstructing the Past in Medieval Iceland", *Early Medieval Europe*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2006), pp. 297-324, at p. 322.

self-interest and saga writing as evidenced by *Egils saga*. Here Snorri Sturluson seems to have tried to establish a connection, in the minds of his audience at least, between his own principality and lands, and those of his ancestor Skalla-Grímr, (or "bald Grim") who was Egil's father. As one of the original settlers of Iceland (*c*.870-930), *Landnámabók*, (Book of Settlements), details Skalla-Grímr's landnám, but in *Egils saga* this has been considerably enlarged.[80]

Snorri was first identified as the author of *Egils saga* in 1818, by N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872) in the introduction to his translation of *Heimskrinkgla.*[81] Nordal, as editor of the 1933 edition of *Íslenzk fornit*, supported this provenance based on similarities in style, vocabulary and theme, when compared with the two works generally accepted as being authored by Snorri Sturluson – *Snorra Edda* and *Heimskringla*.[82] More recent studies looking at the textual relationship between the two works, and by default the question of authorship, have come from Jónas Kristjánsson[83] and Melissa Berman.[84] Both Berman and Kristjánsson conclude that it is impossible to derive either *Egils saga* or *Heimskringla* from the other; and that both depended on a common source, which was also used in *Hálfdanar þáttr svarta* in *Flateyjarbók*.[85] Where Berman and Kristjánsson differ from previous scholarship, is in their view of the relative chronology of *Egils saga* and *Heimskringla* and their dates of

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[80] Axel Kristinsson, "Sagas and Politics in 13th-Century Borgarfjörður", *Sagas and Society – Conference at Borganes, Iceland, 2002*, Stefanie Wúrth; Tönno, Jonuks, and Axel Kristinsson, (eds.), Tübingen: Skandinavistik, Universität Tübingen, 2002, p. 5.

[81] *Heimskringla,* N.F.S. Grundtvig (trans.), København: Trykt i det Schultziske officin, 1818-1822. p. xxix. The idea was kept alive by Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1827-1889) and received its first scholarly treatment at the hands of Björn Magnússon Ólsen, "Landnáma og Egils saga", *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie,* 1904.

[82] For the early history of scholarship on the subject, see Vésteinn Ólason, "Er Snorri höfundur Egils sögu?", *Skírnir,* 142, (1968), pp. 48-67. Finlay discusses Ólason in Finlay, 2015, p. 128, fn 9.

[83] Jónas Kristjánsson, "Egils saga og konungasögur", in *Sjötíu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20. júli 1977,* Einar G. Péursson and Jónas Kristjánsson, (eds.), vol. 2, Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977, pp. 449-72.

[84] Melissa Berman, "Egils saga and Heimskringla", *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 54 (1982), pp. 21-50.

[85] *Flateyjarbók*, Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Carl Rikard Unger (trans.), Christiania: P.T. Malling, 1860-68, Book 1, pp. 561-576.

composition. The general consensus however, has been that *Egils saga* was the earlier work, whereas Kristjánsson, and tentatively Berman too,[86] suggest that *Egils saga* was composed after Heimskringla, when a disillusioned Snorri returned from Norway to Iceland in 1239, after being forced to leave in 1237 due to family conflict. Kristjánsson bases his hypothesis on the premise that *Egils saga* clearly makes use of a work such as *Heimskringla*, whilst *Heimskringla* contains no references to Egil's family. His supposition loses impetus as Kristjánsson has also suggested that *Egils saga* made use of a common source, and the difference between *Egils saga* and *Heimskringla*, as well as their differing attitudes towards the kings of Norway, can be explained by the aims and interests of the different author(s). Berman describes *Egils saga* as a "political saga" with an "un-Norwegian attitude".[87] Kristjánsson suggests that *Heimskringla* was composed with a Norwegian audience in mind, whereas *Egils saga* was composed for an Icelandic audience.[88]

In response, Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir comments that any reliable conclusion about the relationship and dating of these two texts must be based on careful textual comparisons. She has reviewed the evidence for a common source and supports the traditional chronology for the three works attributed to Snorri Sturluson – being *Egils saga*, the separate saga of St. Óláfr, and *Heimskringla.* Additional evidence that *Egils saga* and *St. Óláfr's saga* predate *Heimskringla* is based around their accounts of the final years of Eiríkr blóðøx (blood-axe) and of the marriage of his daughter Ragnhildr; the separate saga about St. Óláfr is generally agreed to have been composed before the main body of *Heimskringla*.[89]

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[86] Berman, 1982, pp. 21-50.
[87] Melissa A. Berman, "The Political Sagas", *Scandinavian Studies* 57, no. 2 (1985), pp. 113-129, at p. 125.
[88] Kristjánsson, 1977, pp. 470-742.
[89] Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir, "Hvenær var Egils saga rituð?", in *Yfir Íslandsála. Afmælisrit til heiðurs Magnúsi Stefánssyni,* Reykjavík: Sögufræðslusjóður, 1991, pp. 131-145.

There is a close connection between saga authors, their works, and the history and position of their families in Icelandic society. A named author makes the contemporary relevance and importance of the historical narrative of the saga clearer, and adds weight to any discussion about author motivation, as one of the typical motivators of the saga authors to present characters the way they have, was to recognise and reinforce kinship ties. The importance of kinship and genealogy is evident throughout the sagas and early Icelandic historical works. Sverrir Jakobsson suggests one of Ari Þorgilsson's motivations in his historical writings "must have surely been to affirm the importance of his kinsmen and friends as important actors on various stages, both the regional setting of Breiðafjörðr (in western Iceland) and the national one of the parliament."[90]

Taking Sverrir Jakobsson's theory that Ari's literary motivation included the pull of kin and kinsmen, several generations further on, Snorri Sturluson too, had a strong family and generational interest in the events he recorded. Just as he has done with Skalla-Grímr in *Egils saga,* in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* Snorri points to his own genealogical connection with far-travelling warrior Halldór Snorrason,[91] whose stories about his adventures travelling east with Haraldr Sigurðarson and their interactions, were passed down through the generations. In a similar fashion to historian Ari Þorgilsson who a century or so earlier constructed his own genealogical connection to the first settlers of Iceland,[92] Snorri Sturluson has also ensured that the images of his kinsmen are seen as being important historical characters. As we shall see, by using the motif of a heroic far-travelling mercenary warrior, Snorri was able to place his ancestor on a world stage, making important inferences, both about his own importance and that of other Icelanders of his present.

[90] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2017, p. 94.
[91] *King Harald's Saga*, Chapter 3, Magnusson and Palsson, 1966, p. 55.
[92] See Chapter Four.

The saga authors drew on a wide range of written sources, as well as putative oral tradition. Ari Þorgilsson wrote in the prologue to *Íslendingabók* that there was an earlier version containing áttartala (genealogy), and konungaævi (kings' lives).[93] Sverrir Jakobsson dates Ari's lost work as written between 1122 and 1133/34,[94] and Ghosh suggests Ari's lost kings's lives were still available in some form at least until the thirteenth century.[95] To compile *Heimskringla,* Snorri Sturluson is known to have used at least three extant written sources including *Ágrip,*[96] *Morkinskinna,*[97] and *Fagrskinna.*[98] Snorri also accessed the vast amount of skaldic poetry composed by those Icelanders who since the tenth century had dominated the posts of Court Poets particularly in Scandinavia,[99] including in his work, at least ninety-one stanzas culled from the work of twelve skalds.[100] He refers to the poets who were his sources for historical events, and has interspersed skaldic poetry through much of his work. Two skalds of relevance to this study, are Haraldr Sigurðarson himself, and far-travelling

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[93] Matthew J. Driscoll, *Agrip af noregskonungasogum,* London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1995, pp. xv-xvi.
[94] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2017, p. 77.
[95] Ghosh, 2011, pp. 2 and 5.
[96] *Ágrip af noregskonungasogum* is a brief history of Norway's kings from the ninth century to the twelfth century, probably written before the end of the twelfth century by an Icelander living in Norway, in Magnusson and Palsson, 1966, p. 24.
[97] *Morkinskinna* is the earliest collection of *Konungasögur* covering the period 1030-1157, see Theodore M. Andersson, and Kari Ellen Gade, (trans.), *Morkinskinna*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2000, p. 1. Composed between 1217 and 1222, the extant *Morkinskinna* text diverges considerably from the original version as a result of substantial redactorial changes and intercalations, see Jonna Louis-Jensen, "Kongesagastudier, Kompilationen Hulda-Hrokkinskinna"*, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana*, 32, Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1977, p. 67, in Marianne E. Kalinke, "Sigurdar saga Jorsalafara: The Fictionalization of Fact in Morkinskinna", *Scandinavian Studies,* vol. 56, no. 2, (Spring 1984), pp. 152-167 at p.152.
[98] *Fagrskinna* is a work similar to *Ágrip* compiled a few years after, by an Icelander living in Norway, in Magnusson and Palsson, 1966, p. 24.
[99] Kari Ellen Gade, "The Dating and Attributions of Verses in the Skald Sagas", *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*, Russell Poole, (ed.), Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001, pp. 50-74.
[100] Snorri details facts about King Haraldr Sigurðarson and mentions his sources. The skalds quoted are: Thiodolf, Bolverk, Illuge Bryndalaskald, Stuf the skald, Thorarin Skeggjason, Valgard o' Val, Od Kikinaskald, Grane Skald, Thorleik the Fair, Stein Herdison, Úlfr the Marshal (Úlfr Oskapsson), Arnor the Earls' skald, Thorkel Skallason, and King Haraldr Hardrade himself", in Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla,* Douglas B. Killings and David Widger, (prod), The Project Gutenberg, ebook, 2009. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/598/598-h/598-h.htm Accessed 8 November 2020.
See also, See also G. Turville-Petre, *Haraldr the Hard-Ruler and his Poets*, Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies, London: Lewis & Co., 1966, p. 6; and Magnusson and Palsson, 1966, pp. 24-26.

Icelandic mercenary warrior Úlfr Óspaksson. Their poetry has been incorporated into the narrative of *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar,* in which Úlfr and his fellow mercenary warrior Halldór appear. As a skald himself, Snorri favoured this form of complex, but soon to be considered archaic poetry. Snorri's passion for skaldic verse and how it may have resulted in his work being viewed as being grounded in past authorities, and could have helped to eventually alienate him from the Norwegian court, is discussed in Chapter Two. Like Ari Þorgilsson, Snorri considered himself to be a historian, but despite his assurances about the veracity of his sources, scholarly opinions are mixed about his abilities and impartiality. Jones points to historical inaccuracies in Snorri's saga about King Haraldr.[101] Barlow is also less than complimentary about Snorri's abilities as a historian.[102] However, for this study, the question of how faithfully Snorri retold the events of the past is not as important as how and why he crafted them for his contemporary audience.

Given the connection between saga characterisation, authorship and Icelandic politics and foreign relations in the context of tension between the Iceland and Norway, it is important to identify which sagas present an Icelandic perspective. There has been much past scholarship concerned with authorship. At least three of earliest of the surveys of kings, were produced in Norway, and probably by Norwegians. These include the vernacular *Ágrip*[103] (even

[101] Jones describes *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* as "a highly coloured and far from acceptable account of Harald's exploits", in Gwyn Jones, *A History of the Vikings,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, second ed. 1984, p. 405, fn 1

[102] Referring to these translations – Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla,* Samuel Lang (ed.), London, 1880, and *King Harald's Saga,* Magnusson and Palsson, 1966, Barlow writes that Snorri only provides, "a little, sometimes untrustworthy, detail", in Frank Barlow, *The Godwins,* Harlow: Longman, 2002, p. 7, and fn 9, p. 12.

[103] The *Ágrip* manuscript was in Iceland in the sixteenth century, but the preparation of the vellum looks Norwegian, see Thorkil Damsgaard Olsen, "Kongekrøniker og kongesagaer", in *Norrøn Fortællekunst*: *Kapitler af den norsk-islandske middelalderlitteraturs histori*e, Hans Bekker-Nielsen and Ole Widding, (eds.), Copenhagen, 1965, p. 69, who lists other manuscripts of *Konungasögur* with Norwegian connections; and Bjarni Einarsson who considers it most likely that the manuscript was copied in Iceland from a Norwegian exemplar, in *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasogum*: *Fagrskinna – Nóregs konungatal*, Bjarni Einarsson, (ed.), *Íslenzk fornrit 29,* 1984, pp. cxxvii-cxxxi, and Alfred Jakobsen, "Om Fagrskinna – forfatteren", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi,* vol., 85 (1970), pp. 88-124 at p. 123, in Diana Whaley "The Kings' Sagas", in *Viking Revaluations,*

though it is one of Snorri Sturluson's sources),[104] and two Latin works, Theodoricus's *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium* and the *Historia Norwegiæ*; Theodoricus also mentions a now lost, but probably Norwegian, *Catalogus Regum Norwagiensium*. Whaley points to "substantial Norwegian involvement by authors, scribes and patrons in the development of the *Konungasögur*, sufficient perhaps to invite the question whether sagas have to be Icelandic".[105] The Icelandic authors themselves spent time in Norway and elsewhere and their perspectives may also be coloured by these experiences.

The authorship debate also extends to Snorri Sturluson. Snorri is mentioned in two sagas written by his nephew Sturla Þórðarson (1214-1284), who was also a politician and the author of *Íslendinga saga*. This saga forms part of the compilation work *Sturlunga saga,* and it is in here Sturla records that Snorri wrote sagas.[106] The attribution of authorship has been supported by many scholars on the grounds of similarity in style, vocabulary and theme between *Heimskringla, Snorra Edda* and *Egils saga* – all works attributed to Snorri.[107] But there has also been long-standing academic discussion and a lack of universal agreement about his authorship of *Heimskringla*.[108] However, given Snorri's kinship with Icelandic traveller Halldór Snorrason, and the generally accepted view that he was the author of

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Viking Society Centenary Symposium, 14-15 May 1992, Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins, (eds.), London: University College, Viking Society for Northern Research, 1993, pp. 48-49, fns. 7-9.

[104] *Agrip af noregskonungasogum* is a brief history of Norway's kings from the ninth century to the twelfth century, probably written before the end of the twelfth century by an Icelander living in Norway, in Magnusson and Palsson, 1966, p. 24.

[105] Whaley, 1993, pp. 48-49.

[106] Sturla Þórðarson *Sturlunga Saga,* vol. 1, Gudbrand Vigfusson (ed.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1878, p. 299.

[107] Finlay, 2015, p. 119.

[108] See Alan J. Berger, "Heimskringla and the Compilations", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi,* 114 (1999), pp. 5-15; Patricia Pires Boulhosa, *Icelanders and the Kings of Norway: Mediaeval Sagas and Legal Texts,* Leiden: Brill, 2005, pp. 6-21; Margaret Cormick, "Egils saga, Heimskringla, and the Daughter of Eiríkr blóðøx", in *Alvissmál,* no. 10 (2001), pp. 61-68; Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, "Snorre Sturlusøn's Fortale paa sin Chrønicke: Om kildene til opplysningen om Heimskringla forfatter", *Gripla*, 9 (1995), pp. 45-62; and Jonna Louis-Jensen, "Heimskringla – Et værk af Snorri Sturluson?", *Nordica Bergensia*, 14 (1997), pp. 230-245, in Ghosh, 2011, p. 16, fn 56. Also Rafnsson argues that Snorri is not the author of the saga of King Óláfr found in Heimskringla, (he qualified 'author' as being the person who composes a unique new work), see Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar Um gerðir þeirra, heimildir og höfunda*, Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2005, p. 286, in *Saga Book* vol. XXX1, London: University College, Viking Society for Northern Research, 2007, p. 116.

compilation work *Heimskringla*, this study supports the view of Snorri Sturluson as being at least the author of *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*.

The influence of Norman sources on the Icelandic sagas and Snorri's writing, particularly William of Jumièges (*c.*1000-1070) and William of Malmesbury (*c.*1095-*c.*1143), is well documented too. White supports the view the *Konungasögur* were influenced by the Norman works.[109] Ghosh questions *Heimskringla's* origins, suggesting it follows William of Malmesbury in some areas, for example the prelude to the Battle of Hastings (14 October 1066), which appears in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*.[110] I have found no direct Norman links with *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*, [111] but it is possible some of the early Icelandic sagas referencing various European royal figures, could have been influenced by Norman sources, particularly William of Jumièges' work *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*.[112] William of Jumièges was a Benedictine monk whose work was copied and disseminated around the Benedictine religious houses across Europe,[113] including probably Iceland.[114] It is known that there were a number of Benedictine monasteries and abbeys in Iceland at that time, such

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[109] "*Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla* supply ample indications of continued contact between Normandy and Scandinavia in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In no less than three places in *Heimskringla,* Snorri provides a genealogy of the Dukes of Normandy …", in Paul White, 'The Latin Men: The Norman Sources of the Scandinavian Kings' Sagas', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 98, no. 2 (April 1999), pp. 157-169, at p.163.

[110] Ghosh, 2011, p. 120.

[111] I have reviewed Matthew Paris, William of Malmesbury, and William of Jumieges, looking to identify Norman influences in the characterisation of the Icelandic warrior, Úlfr Ospaksson. Úlfr stayed on to serve King Haraldr and was given the title of 'stallare' (or Marshall). Although Haraldr himself is documented in both the Icelandic and English sources as having been killed on the battlefield by Harold Godwinson's forces at the Battle of Stamford Bridge, there is no mention of Úlfr in the Norman sources. See: William of Jumieges. "Gesta Normannorum Ducum", in Elisabeth M.C. van Houts, (ed.), *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William Jumieges, Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni,* London: Oxford University Press, vol. II 1995. William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England. From the earliest period to the reign of Stephen,* Giles, J.A. (ed.), London: Bohn, 1847; Matthew Paris, *Life of St Edward the Confessor,* MS Ee.3.59, Cambridge: University of Cambridge Digital Library, http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-EE-00003-00059/70 Public Domain. Accessed 13 September 2020.

[112] See Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c.550 to 1307*, London: Routledge, 1974, p. 96.

[113] Gransden, 1974, p. 96.

[114] Paul Herrmann, *Island in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, vol II, Leipzig, 1907, p. 91, cited by Pius Wittmann, and Arthur F.J. Remy, "Iceland", *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*. vol. 7, New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910. *New Advent Catholic Encyclopaedia*. http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07615b.htm Accessed 13 September 2020.

as those at Þingeyrar (founded in 1133), Munkaþverá (founded 1155) and Kirkjubæjar (founded 1186) which had been established in Iceland after Christianity was adopted *c.*1000.[115]

Faulkes disagrees that Snorri Sturluson was influenced by Norman works, concluding that even if Snorri appears to have had some familiarity with Latin writings, he shows no clear sign of having read them. Faulkes points out that Snorri avoids the overall structure of the literary works commonly found amongst the twelfth-century Latin critics, and that he is the only medieval historian never to make any definite reference to Latin sources. In Faulkes's opinion, Snorri would have been unable to write as well as he did, if he had known Latin.[116]

It is possible Snorri Sturluson did refer to some of the early Norman sources amongst other works when compiling parts of *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*; and he may have had access to the Greek sources. For our understanding of those Scandinavians who travelled east to serve as the mercenaries known as Varangians, as Sverrir Jakobsson notes: "Almost all of our reliable knowledge about the Varangians stems from the Greek sources. There is a distinct lack of Latin or Old Norse sources with the same validity."[117] It is unlikely Snorri was overly influenced by Norman or Greek sources when characterising and writing about the Icelandic mercenaries who travelled to Russia and Constantinople, and I take the view that Snorri's work and the characters he describes, are mainly shaped and driven by Icelandic and Norwegian contexts and concerns.

[115] Cloister cartularies mention large libraries in some instances, and when it came to literary production and the rewriting of the saga literature, the Thingeyrar monastery seems to have been the most important one in Iceland with stories of kings and bishops written there before and after the turn of the 12th century, see Anthony Faulkes, *The Sources of Skáldskaparmál: Snorri's intellectual background*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham,1993, pp. 7-8.
[116] Faulkes, 1993, pp. 7-8.
[117] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2016, pp. 345-362, at p. 346.

In contrast to the sagas by known authors, Icelandic far-travelling mercenaries Halldór and Úlfr are both mentioned in two anonymous *þættir* (or short tales), and in *Magnúss saga góða ok Haralds harðráði* which is part of a *Konungasögur* saga known as *Morkinskinna* (meaning rotten parchment). Written by an anonymous author, over 60% of *Morkinskinna* is devoted to the lives of King Magnús Óláfsson (Magnús the Good) and his uncle King Haraldr Sigurðarson.[118] *Morkinskinna* was probably written earlier than another compilation work in the kings' saga genre, *Fagrskinna,* (meaning fine parchment), the surviving text of which is dated to *c.*1275, however this text's relationship with the original version, along with its authorship, has been the subject of scholarly debate.[119] There are chapters in *Fagrskinna* recalling Haraldr Sigurðarson's Varangian adventures, but the general orientation of *Fagrskinna* suggests a Norwegian origin.

There is a deficit of surviving Scandinavian texts, whether by named authors or anonymously written, and all we know is that there were older manuscripts, now lost. There is only a fragment remaining of the oldest extant *Morkinskinna* manuscript (*c.*1275), and it has been suggested that most of *Morkinskinna* is based on a lost series of royal biographies.[120] The extant fragment is a copy of an earlier version and is in very bad condition. It was found in the Royal Library in Stockholm where it had been sent to authenticate the original manuscript, which was burnt in the great fire of Copenhagen in 1728.[121] Composed between 1217 and 1222, the surviving *Morkinskinna* text diverges considerably from the original

[118] I have used the English translation by Andersson and Gade, 2000.
[119] Based on palaeographical evidence, it is thought the only surviving medieval manuscript fragment of the earlier of the two versions of *Fagrskinna* was written in or near Trondheim. It has also been suggested the author was an Icelander working in Norway, see Alison Finlay, "Introduction", *Fagrskinna, a catalogue of the Kings of Norway: A Translation with Introduction and Notes*, Leiden: Brill, 2003, p. 36.
[120] Johs. Brøndum-Nielsen, et al., (eds.), *Festskrift til Finnur Jonsson 29 Maj 1928*, Copenhagen: Verlag Levin and Munksgaard, 1928, p. xxxviii, in Andersson, and Gade, 2000, p. 57.
[121] Greenfield, 2007, pp. 3, 13 and 39.

version as a result of substantial later edits and intercalations.[122] Andersson and Gade write how *Morkinskinna* has "suffered surprising neglect over more than a century of intense research in the field of Icelandic literature generally, and the *Konungasögur* in particular".[123] Their translation of *Morkinskinna,* which dates from 2000, is the first published in any language other than Icelandic; prior to this, *Morkinskinna* was only available to those historians who could study it in the vernacular. In this study, *Morkinskinna,* provides a valuable comparison for the characterisation of the same far-travelling warriors described by Snorri Sturluson in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar.*

In addition to the sagas discussed above dealing with eastward travel, this study also considers the representation of far-travelling Icelandic explorers and settlers who travelled to Greenland and North America. The best-known Icelandic texts referring to Greenland in the greatest detail are known collectively as the Vínland sagas.[124] Comprising *Eiríks saga rauða* (Saga of Eiríkr the Red) and *Grænlendinga saga* (Saga of the Greenlanders), the Vínland sagas were written by unknown authors between 1220-1280, and depict events occurring between 970-1030. *Eiríks saga* is preserved in two manuscripts: *Hauksbók*,[125] from the first half of the fourteenth century, and *Skálholtsbók*,[126] from the first half of the fifteenth century, both based on a version set down after 1263.[127] Although scholars usually claim that both sagas originated in the thirteenth century,[128] the evidence for this is not conclusive.[129] A

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[122] Louis-Jensen, 1977, p. 67, in Kalinke, 1984, p. 152.
[123] Andersson, and Gade, 2000, pp. ix.
[124] See Keneva Kunz, 2001, p. 637.
[125] *Hauksbók, Íslenzk fornrit 4,* pp. 193-237.
[126] *Skálholtsbók Íslenzk fornrit 4*, pp. 401-434.
[127] For a translation of the *Skálholtsbók* version, see Hreinsson, 1997, vol. 1, pp. 1-18. Significant variants from the *Hauksbók* version are found in Gwyn Jones, *The Norse Atlantic Saga. Being the Norse Voyages of Discovery and Settlement to Iceland, Greenland, and North America*, London: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 207-332. For translations of the *Grænlendinga saga*, see E.Ó. Sveinsson and M. Þórðarson (eds.), *Íslenzk fornrit 4,* Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1935, pp. 239-269, at p. 439; Hreinsson, 1997, vol. 1, pp. 19-32, and it is preserved in the version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* in *Flateyjarbók.*
[128] See Ó. Halldórsson, *Grænland í miðaldaritum*. Reykjavík: Sögufélag 1978, pp. 398-400, and Ó. Halldórsson, 2001, pp. 39-51.
[129] See H. Þorláksson, *The Vínland sagas in a Contemporary Light*, in Wawn and Sigurðardóttir, 2001, pp. 238.

detailed analysis of saga provenance, authorship and author motivation, along with the Vínland sagas' inclusion in later produced compilation manuscripts, is discussed in Chapter Four, and detailed in Chart 5.

There are other *Islendingasögur* and related *þættir* also containing stories and episodes set in Greenland. These tales incorporate a range of "observations and truisms regarding life in Norse Greenland", including references to the special environmental and economic circumstances of the colony, the nature of the settlements and central sites, the importance of foreign trade and connections with Norway.[130] There are references to exotic goods from Greenland in the *Konungasögur,* and the settlement is mentioned in *Landnámabók.*[131] Ari Þorgilsson's text *Íslendingabók* is also an early source for the settlement of Greenland and the discovery of Vínland.[132]

There are additional Greenlandic passages to be found in the *Samtíðarsögur*. This genre of sagas recalls events of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and includes the well-known compilation work *Sturlunga saga*, as well as the various bishops' sagas (*Biskupasǫgur*). The circumstances leading to the establishment of the bishopric of Garðar in 1123–6, and a violent altercation over salvage rights between Greenlanders and a party of Norwegian merchants in 1135–6 are described in *Grœnlendinga þáttr*, also known as *Einars þáttr*

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[130] Grove, 2009, pp. 30-51 at p. 30.

[131] The first version of *Landnámabok*, since lost, was compiled in the early decades of the twelfth century. The major extant versions date from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. Written as a record of the settlement and as a genealogy, *Landnámabok* records in detail the land-grab or *landnám* of Iceland, and the names of the first (approximately) 400 *landnámsmenn*. It continues through the ninth and tenth centuries to the twelfth century. Comprising five parts with over 100 chapters, it gives details and a brief genealogy of over 3,500 people and names 1,500 places and settlements, in Byock, 1988, p. 17.

[132] *Íslendingabók* details Icelandic history between 870 and 1120 and was likely written between 1122 and 1132. There were two versions circulating in medieval times but only one has survived, in two seventeenth-century copies. *Íslendingabók* covers a wide range of subjects including ninth-and tenth-century events, such as the naming of Greenland and the timing of the establishment of the settlement, however almost "three-fourths of *Íslendingabók* is devoted to selected events occurring between 996 and 1120", in Byock, 1988, p. 15-16.

Sokkasonar. Like *Grœnlendinga saga*, this *þáttr* (sl.) survives only in the late fourteenth-century saga compendium *Flateyjarbók*.[133] As these stories are not focused on far-travel, they are not included here, but they do give us another indication there were economic confrontations and competition for resources between the communities in the North Atlantic.

Sagas, Travel and Independence Themes

In her 2005 study Rowe looked at the motivations for authors writing about travel. Examining a late fourteenth-century context, she suggests motivation of authors was multi-layered, drawing influence from vernacular and Latin sources, oral and literary traditions.[134] Despite aspects of Rowe's conclusions having been questioned,[135] her idea about multiple layers of interpretation being present in travel writing is not without merit. I have applied her ideas to an earlier period in Icelandic political history, from the lifespan of saga author/ historian/skald/politician/and Icelandic icon Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241) and to the last days of the Icelandic Commonwealth (1262-1264). Chapter Two extends the academic debate about whether or not Snorri supported the Norwegian monarchy, by proposing that he promoted Icelandic independent motifs and themes of resistance against the monarchy in the sagas, through the character of far-travelling warrior Halldór Snorrason. Through his representation of this far-travelling warrior, Snorri Sturluson may have been publicly trying to counter some of the criticism levied on him, after his time in Norway, that he was anti-

[133] *Íslenzk fornrit 4,* Sveinsson and Þórðarson, 1935, pp. 271-292, at p. 439; and Hreinsson, vol. 3, 1997, pp. 372-382; also see Grove, 2009, pp. 30-51, at p. 33.
[134] Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, "The Development of Flateyjarbók: Iceland and the Norwegian Dynastic Crisis of 1389", *The Viking Collection 15*, Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2005.
[135] Tómasson questions Rowe's full understanding of "the political intrigues in Iceland during the fourteenth century and how independent the Icelandic government was in its relations with the Norwegian kingdom", in Sverrir Tómasson, "Reviewed Work: The Development of Flateyjarbók: Iceland and the Norwegian Dynastic Crisis of 1389 by Elizabeth Ashman Rowe", *Speculum,* vol. 82, no. 4 (Oct. 2007), pp. 1033-1034.

independence. I am not aware of any other research, certainly not in English, that makes this connection with heroic literary motifs, nor is there any trace of this argument having been referenced by others.

A major focus of traditional Icelandic historical scholarship has been on Iceland's lost independence, with the introduction of foreign dominance and Norwegian sovereignty. Yet, the 'theme' of Icelandic independence, including the relationship with Norway during the period of the Icelandic Commonwealth (930-1264), and particularly during the time Snorri Sturluson is likely to have been writing, has only been the subject of limited previous academic focus; certainly in English. Nor has Iceland figured prominently in the debate on state formation in medieval Europe, despite its unique political system and the availability of source material. In fact Sverrir Jakobsson has gone as far as to contend that the period of Norwegian dominance is "of limited use for the analysis of state formation, a process already under way before the introduction of Norwegian rule in Iceland".[136] Tulinius disagrees that the idea of 'nation', much less that of national independence, existed in the minds of thirteenth-century authors and readers of the sagas.[137] Whilst I support Tulinius's comment that Iceland was attempting to "forge its own identity", I do not agree it was only supported by an "independent aristocracy", or "ruling class", as he suggests.[138] We know Iceland had a strong oral tradition,[139] and the practice of public readings was already well established in Iceland by the time Snorri Sturluson was writing.[140] And who doesn't love a local hero. The

[136] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2009, pp. 151-170.
[137] Torfi H. Tulinius, "Political Exegesis or Personal Expression? The Problem of Egils saga" in *Neue Ansätze in der Mittelalterphilologie – Nye veier i middelalderfilologien: Akten der skandinavistischen Arbeitstagung in Münster vom 24. bis 26. Oktober 2002*, Susanne Kramarz-Bein, (ed.), Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2005, pp. 131-140.
[138] Tulinius, 2000, pp. 526-539, at p. 537.
[139] See G. Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition. A Discourse on Method*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004, and S. Ranković, *Emergent Realism and its Distributed Author, or When Orality Met Literacy in the Sagas of Icelanders*, paper presented at the international course "Cultures in Contact: Northern Europe 700-1200 AD", Tartu, August 16-26, 2004, pp. 1-10.
[140] Tulinius, 2018, pp. 389-405, at p. 389.

imagery and stories of far-travelling heroic figures was embraced by the Icelandic community who could take pride in the exploits and independence of their own on the world stage. The adventures and successes of these larger-than-life characters, were already well-known in Iceland, particularly amongst connected family groups (who may, or may not be considered "ruling class"), and the reinvigoration of their stories, served to reinforce a collective bonhomie, leading to the start of a collective identity.

The theory of nationhood has been the subject of specific studies since the 1980s and has prompted much academic discourse with various scholarly movements debating what constitutes nationalism and nationhood.[141] Essentialists define nationhood as a "natural division of peoples"; Constructivists link the rise of nations to "the human mind and discursive practices", including those based on race and ethnic purity principles. Similarly, Ethno-symbolists link nationhood to ethnic ties, sentiments and traditions, but conclude the development of nations is an evolving process. As Davies explains, "A nation becomes a nation when it believes itself to be such."[142] Primordialists or perennialists believe nations have existed since Antiquity or (at least) the Middle Ages, and are the "fruit of a shared history", whereas Modernists view nations as recent phenomena developing with the rise of the bourgeoisie, proletarian and Marxist movements.[143] Two examples in what was a long

[141] Colette Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology: Myths and Symbols of Nation in Late-Medieval France*, Susan Ross Huston (trans.), Fredric L. Cheyette, (ed.), Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991, p. 1.
[142] Rees Davies, "Nations and National Identities in the Medieval World: An Apologia", in *National Identities and National Movements in European History,* Belgisch Tijdschrift Voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis: Revue Belge d' Histoire Contemporaine, xxxiv (2004), pp. 567-579. p. 568; for a similar viewpoint see also V.H. Galbraith, "Nationality and Language in Medieval England", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, vol. xxiii (1941), pp. 113-128, at pp. 113-114; and Michael Jones, *The Creation of Brittany*, London: Hambledon Press, 1988, p. 286.
[143] Maarten van Ginderachter, "Some Conceptual Remarks Concerning Nations and Nationalism", in *National Identities and National Movements in European History*, Belgisch Tijdschrift Voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis: Revue Belge d'Histoire Contemporaine, xxxiv, (2004), p. 563.

tradition, were defined by Cicero in 51BC,[144] and again by Isidore of Seville (*d.*636).[145] One medieval concept of nationhood was based around a group of men of common origin, bound together by ties of blood, language, law, and ultimately, a common language. Medieval sources use the word *natio* to refer to many different groups,[146] only sometimes meaning 'nation' in a modern sense. I agree with Tulinius that the idea of 'nationhood' in terms of the modern construct, had not yet developed in minds of thirteenth century Icelanders. As they had no king or single ruler throughout the lifespan of the Commonwealth, it can be argued Icelanders already had a degree of assumed independence. This notion or awareness there was a collective Icelandic community identity, regardless of the internal disputes between families, was understood and as such actively promoted by the saga authors in their stories, through the use of independence motifs, and in the characterisation of heroic and successful far-travellers and their journeys.

Applying this concept of nation and its construction to the sagas, I will be building on the research of Kristinsson who puts forward the hypothesis that the roots of saga-writing are connected to the political situation of the Icelandic Commonwealth, and saga writing served a variety of specific purposes for Iceland's secular aristocracy.[147] I am also extending the research of Tulinius, who links Icelandic independence with political instability in Norway during most of the twelfth century, and who suggests that this was a catalyst towards

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[144] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Re Publica*, J. E. G. Zetzel (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

[145] Isidore of Seville's reflections on the divisions of peoples and languages in book 9 of *Etymologies* has served as a reference point for modern discussions on ethnicity and the ideological construction of nationhood (ethnogenesis) in early Medieval Europe, in Mark Vessey, Sharon B. Betcher, Robert A. Daum and Harry O. Maier, *The Calling of the Nations: Exegesis, Ethnography and Empire in a Biblical-Historic Present,* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011, p. 234.

[146] These included ethnic (for example Bretons), academic (four nations of the University of Paris), mercantile (nation of London), and ecclesiastical (nations of the College of Cardinals and four nations of the Church councils: France, Germany, Aragon and England), in Colette Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology: Myths and Symbols of Nation in Late-Medieval France*, Susan Ross Huston, (trans.), Fredric L. Cheyette (ed.), Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991, p. 5.

[147] Axel Kristinsson, "Lords and Literature: The Icelandic Sagas as Political and Social Instruments", *Scandinavian Journal of History*, vol. 28 (2003), no. 1, pp. 1-17.

allowing “the ruling class of Iceland to use medieval humanism to forge its own identity as an independent aristocracy through the constitution of genealogies and historiography.”[148] My research also supports the supposition there was a close connection between imagery in the sagas, politics and genealogy, in the construction of an image of what it meant to be an Icelander.

Sagas and Cultural and Political Capital

A small, remote island population created literary works that far exceeded anything being produced by their continental contemporaries, both in scope and in volume. So why, then, were the sagas written in Iceland, and not say Sweden, which after all shared most of the cultural characteristics of Iceland, including the impact of Christian learning and literacy? This debate about “why this occurred at the time it did” has mostly been the province of literary scholars, rather than historians.

Callow’s 2006 study has linked saga descriptions of farm geography and ownership with local politics. Using modelling from anthropology and examples of local political relationships in West Iceland – which is where all my far-travellers called home and from where they started their journeys, and near where Snorri Sturluson held sway – Callow concluded that the descriptions do not entirely reflect the socio-political circumstances extant in thirteenth-century Iceland. Instead, he suggests they may reflect elements of earlier, unrecorded power relations.[149] The theory that the sagas might be politically and socially

[148] Tulinius, 2000, pp. 526-539, at p. 537.
[149] Callow, 2006, pp. 297-324.

motivated was presented by Kristinsson at a conference in 2002.[150] Kristinsson's research, based on a survey of the regional production of *Íslendingasögur* showed they completely bypassed the four oldest Icelandic regional principalities (goðorð), but were produced in abundance in almost every other location. Linking the sagas with politics or at least political motivation, Kristinsson has put forward a theory explaining the proliferation of family sagas produced in these locations, by the need for new principalities, (including that of Snorri Sturluson who created a new principality in Borgarfjörður around 1200),[151] and the "old feeble" chieftaincies" to embrace solidarity, and to create a sense of common identity by emphasising common history and legends. Kristinsson associates this need for solidarity with the crisis of civil war in thirteenth century Iceland, where it was potentially crucial to the survival of a chieftaincy or principality. This was due to the four original principalities being each ruled by a höfðingi (or prince), who wielded much stronger authority than had earlier goðar (or chieftains).[152]

The need for an Icelandic identity may have been felt earlier than the civil war era (1235-1264), a time put forward by Tulinius, who links the rise of fiction in early thirteenth-century Iceland, "to a crisis of the identity which had been established by the historiographers of the preceding century", and points to a "number of social factors in medieval Iceland which could question the identity of the families in power in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries".[153] If an earlier dating is correct, I propose there was every motivation for a politician and saga authors like Snorri Sturluson and the powerful men who were the patrons

[150] Kristiansson, 2002, pp. 1-14; and Kristinsson, 2003, pp. 1-17.
[151] The main primary source for Icelandic history covering this period is *Sturlunga saga*. The relevant passages for the building of a principality in Borgarfjörður are also to be found in *Sturlunga saga*, Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason, and Kristján Eldjárn. (eds.) Reykjavík: Sturlunguútgáfan, 1946, vol. 1, pp. 240-242. See also Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Frá goðorðum til ríkja: þróun goðavalds á 12. og 13. öld,* Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóðs 1989, pp. 63-64.
[152] Kristiansson, 2002, pp. 1-14; Kristinsson, 2003, pp. 1-17.
[153] Tulinius, 2000, pp. 526-539, at p. 536.

of compilation works like *Fagrskinna* to manipulate the characterisation of far-travellers and the representations of travel success, for their own purposes.

As Kristinsson notes, Snorri Sturluson's political ideas are not known for certain, "He [Snorri] certainly had a wider political horizon than most contemporary Icelandic lords and was perhaps the first to realize that Iceland's future lay in a union with Norway". I disagree. Through his use of heroic motifs and independence themes associated with far-travellers, Snorri was potentially a supporter of Icelandic independence. My research does expand on some of Kristinsson's ideas with respect to the representation of far-travellers being used by the saga authors as a potent literary motif that encouraged their twelfth and thirteenth century local audiences to take pride in the achievements of their own on the world stage. But as the reach of the sagas extended beyond Iceland into Norway and further afield, it is possible that the independent and heroic image presented by Icelandic far-travellers did serve to increase the worth of Iceland in the eyes of a wider overseas medieval contemporary audience.

The need to be noticed has also been a theme in scholarly debates about Icelandic historiography. According to Byock, a desire to put Iceland on the world stage, at least in respect to the sagas, has been an entrenched position that has been supported by the Icelandic School from about 1950 onwards. Commenting on their motivation, Byock notes, if the sagas "could be shown to be products of 'one of the most powerful literary movements in recorded history' … then Icelandic culture would be comparable to other European cultures and even have reached a state of cultural sophistication", before it actually did.[154] I propose it was the medieval saga authors who had first attempted to do this.

[154] Byock, 1994, pp. 63-187, at p. 69-70.

Chapter Two

Politics and Foreign Relations

> Just about that time King Haraldr Fine-Hair
> was forcing his way to power in Norway.
> During the campaign many men of high standing
> abandoned their estates in Norway…
>
> ***Eyrbyggja Saga*** [1]

During the Age of Settlement and throughout the lifespan of the Icelandic Commonwealth, Norway and Iceland were inextricably connected. This connection is reflected in the historical accounts of Icelandic origins offered by the saga themselves. According to the sagas, the first wave of landnámsmen (land takers or settlers) to reach Iceland were fleeing Norway and the tyranny of King Haraldr Finehair (or hárfagri[2]). The sagas also either credit Haraldr Finehair with founding Norway or imply he conquered various smaller principalities until he had achieved Norwegian overlordship. Given the familial and economic ties between Norway and Iceland from the very earliest days of the relocation of people to Iceland, the early settlers would have had a special, if not vested interest, in what was occurring with their closest neighbour.

In examining the representation of some of the warriors and explorers engaged in far-travel, I propose that ongoing Norwegian hegemony was one of the main motivators for the presence of the independent Icelander far-traveller tropes evident in the sagas. The use of these characterisations to promote independence themes was in response to the political and

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[1] *Eyrbyggja Saga,* Chapter 1, Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (trans.), London: Penguin, 1989, p. 25.

[2] The origin of his name is explained in the *Konungasögur,* "as a young man, Haraldr had sworn never to cut or comb his hair until he had conquered all Norway, and when he eventually achieved his aim and was freed of his pledge, everyone realized for the first time what a fine head of hair he had", in *Laxdæla saga,* Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson (trans.), London: Penguin, 1969, p. 48, fn 1.

economic influence, even control, of the Norwegian ruling elites on Iceland and Icelanders, (and by default Greenland); perhaps even directly on individual saga authors.

The Icelandic Settlement Myth in Context

The power of Norway and the identity of Icelanders are closely linked in the sagas. In *Laxdæla,* for example, the original Icelanders are presented as persecuted opponents of the Norwegian King:

> I have reliable reports of King Haraldr's hostility towards us, and I am sure that there are only two courses open to us: either to flee the country, or else be killed off each in his own place … And so it was settled that they should leave the country …[3]

We do not know if these early Icelanders were really fleeing a tyrant, as very little is known about Haraldr Finehair, if indeed he even existed. According to Ari Þorgilsson, writing in the first half of the twelfth century, Haraldr Finehair ruled from 870 until 931/32, but as Sverre Bagge points out, most of the detail about Haraldr's reign found in the later sagas is scant, unreliable and often contradictory; and there is no extant evidence that independently confirms the accuracy of these dates.[4] Byock writing about social history as a narrative tool, writes that Harald's tyranny provided the Icelanders with an honourable explanation for the migration.[5]

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[3] *Laxdæla saga,* Chapter 2, Magnusson and Pálsson, 1969, pp. 48-49.
[4] Sverre Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom: State Formation in Norway c. 900-1350,* Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2010, p. 25.
[5] Jesse Byock, "Social Memory and the Sagas: The Case of Egils saga", *Scandinavian Studies*", vol. 76, no. 3 (2004), pp. 299-316, at p. 299.

Haraldr's 'unification' of Norway may have been a reaction against an earlier period of Danish dominance. Although not much is known about Danish power particularly in Norway at this time, it would seem that Haraldr's power base was restricted to Western Norway. Most of the reliable evidence places him there, in a region from which many of those who first settled Iceland originated, according to the sagas. In contrast, other parts of Norway, such as the south-eastern regions, were possibly under Danish control or suzerainty; or were independent areas ruled by local magnates.[6] If this is an accurate assessment, it would follow that anyone looking to control the whole of Norway at that time, such as Haraldr Finehair, had to have either Danish support, or much wealth and military experience (perhaps gained from Viking expeditions or overseas mercenary service), or both.[7] But we do not know, as nothing much is known about Danish power or involvement in Norwegian unification affairs at the end of the ninth century.[8]

Whether they were fleeing Haraldr Finehair or the Danes, political upheaval and a lack of available farming land in Norway are still the common explanatory models for the settlement of Iceland. In addition to the attractive, and honourable concept of political independence, the pragmatic, economic pressures towards settlement and colonisation were also available as potential explanatory frameworks for saga authors. This proposition is explored further in Chapter Four about westward travel, where I discuss how settlement and economic benefit formed part of a narrative of independence and status-building.

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[6] Klaus von See, "Studien zum Haraldskvæði", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi,* vol. 76, 1961, pp. 96-111. Reprinted in Klaus von See, *Edda, Saga, Skaldendichtung. Aufsátze zur skandinavischen Literatur des Mittelalters,* Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1981, pp. 295-301; and Claus Krag, "The Early Unification of Norway", in Knut Helle (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia 1, Prehistory to 1520,* Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2003, p. 187. Also see Bagge, 2010, p. 25.
[7] Bagge, 2010, p. 33.
[8] Bagge, 2010, p. 25.

Recently archaeologists have proposed a new settlement narrative involving cash-crop hunting, which was organised and directed by societal elites.[9] The rationale for this landnám catalyst proposition is the hunt for walrus products.[10] This has led some scholars to suggest that the landnám in both Iceland and Greenland[11] were preceded by an initial phase of exploration for resources.[12] Although not as romantic or heroic as fleeing a tyrant, it does better explain the landnám in distant and less hospitable Greenland, as the sagas record that

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[9] Christian Madsen, *Pastoral Settlement. Farming and Hierarchy in Norse Vatnahverfi, South Greenland*, PhD Dissertion, (preprint version), Denmark: University of Copenhagen, 2014, pp. 13 and 25.

[10] Walrus ivory was the "white gold", and walrus skin, was used to make ropes for ships' riggings. Both were low-bulk, high-price commodities, that were increasingly demanded by European markets. See Else Roesdahl, *Hvalrostand, elfenben og nordboerne i Grønland*, Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1995, p. 10; Else Roesdahl, "Walrus Ivory – demand, supply, workshops, and Greenland. Viking and Norse in the North Atlantic", *Select Papers from the Proceedings of the Fourteenth Viking Congress*, Tórshavn, 19-30 July 2001, in Andras Mortensen and Símun V. Arge (eds.), *Annales Societatis scientiarum Færoensis, Supplementum*, 44, Faroe Islands, Tórshavn: Føroya Fróðskaparfelag, 2005, pp. 182-207, at p. 185; Andrew J. Dugmore, Christian Keller, Thomas H. McGovern, Andy Casely and Konrad Śmiarowski, "Norse Greenland settlement and limits to adaptation", in N. Adger, I. Lorenzoni and K. O'Brien (eds.), *Adapting to Climate Change: Thresholds, Values, Governance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 105; Elizabeth Pierce, "Walrus Hunting and the Ivory Trade in Early Iceland", *Archaeologia Islandica* 7 (2009), pp. 55-63, at p. 58; and Christian Keller, "Furs, Fish, and Ivory: Medieval Norsemen at the Arctic Fringe", *Journal of the North Atlantic* 3 (2010), pp. 1-23, at p. 3.

[11] Greenland would offer more viable walrus populations, as the numbers in Iceland were quickly depleted, in L. Witting and E. W. Born, "An assessment of Greenland walrus populations", *ICES Journal of Marine Science 62* (2005), pp. 266-284, at p. 282. Also see: Andrew J. Dugmore, Christian Keller and Thomas H. McGovern, "Norse Greenland Settlement: Reflections on Climate Change, Trade, and the Contrasting Fates of Human Settlements in the North Atlantic Islands", *Arctic Anthropology* 44:1 (2007), pp. 12-36; Sophia Perdikaris and Thomas H. McGovern, "Codfish and Kings, Seals and Subsistence", in Jon Erlandson and Torben Rick (eds.), *Impacts on Marine Environments,* California: University of California Press, 2008, pp. 187-214, at p. 192.

[12] Evidence of the exploitation of walrus tusk from the onset, to end of settlement in Greenland, including signs of early expert tusk extraction techniques, can be found in zooarchaeological evidence, see Thomas H. McGovern, "Contributions to the Paleoeconomy of Norse Greenland", *Acta Archaeologica* 54, (1985) pp. 73-122, at p. 89; Sophia Perdikaris and Thomas McGovern, "Codfish, Walrus and Chieftains: Economic intensification in the Norse North Atlantic", in T. L. Thurston and C. Fisher (eds.), *Seeking a Richer Harvest – The Archaeology of Subsistence Intensification, Innovation, and Change*, New York: Springer, 2007, pp. 193-216, at p. 210; Andrew J. Dugmore, Christian Keller, Thomas H. McGovern, Andy Casely and Konrad Śmiarowski, "Norse Greenland settlement and limits to adaptation", in N. Adger, I. Lorenzoni and K. O'Brien (eds.), *Adapting to Climate Change: Thresholds, Values, Governance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 99; Andrew J. Dugmore, Christian Keller and Thomas H. McGovern, "Norse Greenland Settlement: Reflections on Climate Change, Trade, and the Contrasting Fates of Human Settlements in the North Atlantic Islands", *Arctic Anthropology* 44:1 (2007), pp. 12-36, at p. 16; Sophia Perdikaris and Thomas H. McGovern, "Codfish and Kings, Seals and Subsistence", in Jon Erlandson and Torben Rick (eds.), *Impacts on Marine Environments,* California: University of California Press, 2008, pp. 187-214, at p. 192; and Christian Keller, "Furs, Fish, and Ivory: Medieval Norsemen at the Arctic Fringe", *Journal of the North Atlantic* 3 (2010), pp. 1-23, at p. 3.

Greenland had wildlife in plentiful numbers, many of which were in high demand by European markets.[13]

To support this exploitation theory, Vésteinsson has analysed signs of wealth and nobility in Iceland compared to Scandinavia. He concludes Icelandic wealth appears to be very modest until at least the mid-thirteenth century, suggesting that the initial profits of landnám were at first not exploited locally, but were instead returned to investors in Scandinavia.[14] Also, based on relatively new archaeological settlement evidence and a high-resolution tephrachronology from Mývatnssveit in northern Iceland, it has been projected that a minimum population of 24,000 people had to be relocated from Norway (or elsewhere) to Iceland over a timespan of just twenty years, to "fill out" the settlement landscape as described by the sagas and *Landnámbok*.[15] When considered in tandem, this new evidence suggests that the landnám was driven, or at least spearheaded, by a systematic exploitation of resources, followed by rapid relocation of a large number of people who likely still answered to manorial centres in Scandinavia.[16] If this is the case, the influence of Norway on Iceland and Icelanders, would have been significant and ongoing from the very earliest days. Arguably Norwegian political and economic influence and control extended right the way through to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries – the time the saga authors were writing – and it was even more significant than is currently acknowledged.

[13] Greenland's natural resources included furs and skins (fox, hare, seal, caribou, as well as polar bear – the "soft gold"), and the tooth of narwhal, in Else Roesdahl, *Hvalrostand, elfenben og nordboerne i Grønland*, Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1995, p. 7; J. Arneborg, "Norse Greenland: Reflections on Settlement and Depopulation", in J. H. Barrett (ed.), *Contact, Continuity, and Collapse. The Norse Colonization of the North Atlantic*, Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003, pp. 163-181, at p. 170; and Andrew J. Dugmore, Christian Keller and Thomas H. McGovern, "Norse Greenland Settlement, Trade, and the Contrasting Fates of Human Settlements in the North Atlantic Islands", *Arctic Anthropology* 44:1 (2007), pp. 12-36, at p. 16.
[14] Orri Vésteinsson, "Archaeology of Economy and Society", in Rory McTurk, (ed.), *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 7-26.
[15] Orri Vésteinsson and Thomas H. McGovern, "The Peopling of Iceland", *Norwegian Archaeological Review,* 45:2 (2012), pp. 206-218. *Landnámbok* (Book of Settlements) is an enumeration, or a list, of the first alleged settlers of Iceland (the so-called *landnámsmenn*), and a record their lands or settlements (landnám).
[16] Madsen, 2014, p. 15.

This influence and control over such a long period of time may have sparked the independence and self-promotion themes evident in the sagas reviewed in this study, and influenced the saga authors to represent far-travellers and journeys the way they have done. Although development theory as an anthropological or sociological construct is outside of the parameters of this thesis, it does support some of the propositions put forward.[17] Particularly, as it can be argued that Iceland's desire to be viewed as a political and economic entity in its own right in the North Atlantic Region, supported the development of the independent themes reviewed in this study.[18]

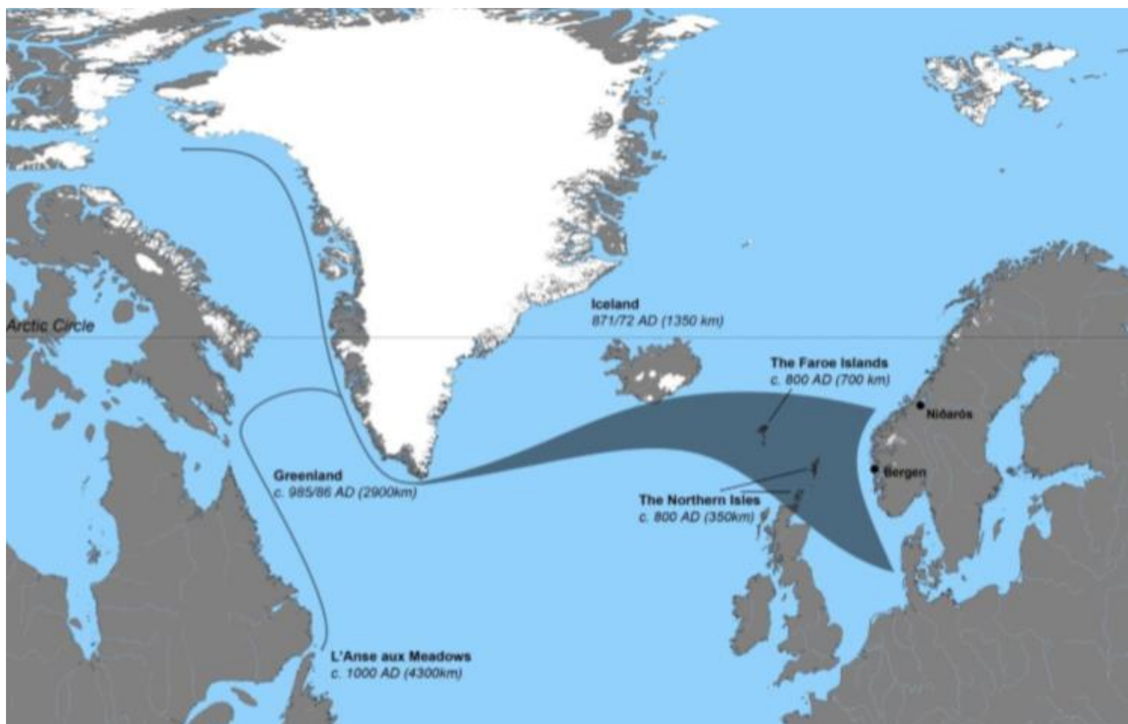

Figure 2: North Atlantic Migrations in the Late Viking Age.[19]

[17] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2016, pp. 345-362 at p. 358.

[18] Part of development theory, studies about peripheries and centres have been key scholarship areas over the past few decades. The focus of these studies has centred on the economic relations between areas. This includes the seminal study on world-systems by Immanuel Wallerstein, who defines a world-system as "an economic but not a political entity", in contrast to a political empire [such as the Byzantine Empire], which he regards as a "primitive means of economic domination", in Sverrir Jakobsson, 2016, p. 358.

[19] This overview map shows the general routes and timing of the late Viking Age migrations across the North Atlantic. The thickness of the 'arrow' indicates relative population numbers involved. Kilometres set in parenthesis gives the accumulated distance from the Norwegian trade capital of Bergen, in Madsen, 2014, p. 13.

Community Connectivity

The influence of and connection with family and kin, was fundamental to Icelandic social and political relationships from the time of the first colonists. Whatever motives had brought settlers to the island, the structure of the Icelandic Commonwealth created a unique opportunity for the dissemination of information and stories relevant to the construction of their identity and history. This would have happened during regular organised local assemblies held throughout the year, and at the major annual national assembly or Alþingi. Byock describes the Icelandic assemblies as “skapthing”, meaning they were governed by established procedures as outlined in the law code *Grágás*.[20] The assemblies were held at legally designated intervals throughout the year and at pre-determined meeting places across the country, with the most important local assembly held for around a week each year in May. All Þingmenn were required to attend these local assemblies. The major national gathering was the summer Alþingi, which was the annual meeting of all goðar, each of whom would be accompanied by some of his Þingmenn. This assembly lasted for two weeks each June and people from all over Iceland would attend, as they also did for the local assemblies. It was a major event and the sagas mention peddlers, traders, brewers of ale, tradesmen, performers and poets, and young people looking for spouses. No doubt from time-to-time there would have been visitors from outside of Iceland; possibly even Greek clerics.[21] News of foreign happenings or stories of past events would have been exchanged, or passed on, during these national and local assemblies.

[20] The name *Grágás*, first appears in an inventory taken in 1548 at the bishop’s seat at Skálholt, but the origins of the name are unknown. Byock references various translations including an English translation of sections 1-117 of vol. 1, see *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, Vol 1a, Chapter 82 and Chapter 245, in Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote and Richard Perkins (trans.), Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980, p. 140 and, p. 277, in Jesse Byock, *Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas, and Power,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, p. 20 and fn 10 and p. 61.

[21] Byock, 1988, pp. 20 and 61.

There were also local sources with potential independent access to information about Anglo-Saxon events, particularly those involving famous men like King Æthelstan. According to *Landnámabók,* many of those who settled in the Breiðafjörður region of Western Iceland originally came from the British Isles and Ireland.[22] The flow of people and ships around the North Atlantic was frequent during the sailing season and sagas record regular journeys to the North Atlantic Islands and beyond; for example, sailing from the Faroes to Breiðafjörður takes around four to five days. The sagas also make regular mention of the comings and goings of overseas secular and religious visitors. Those that travelled would have brought back political and family news, stories and possibly books. The Breiðafjörður region is about two to three days walk from Reykholt where saga author Snorri Sturulson lived in his later years, and Breiðafjörður is also where far-travelling warriors Halldór Snorrason and Úlfr Óspaksson likely departed for Norway on the first leg of their journey east. Fellow far-travelling mercenary Bolli Bollason too, came from this region, as originally did Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir, who travelled to Greenland and North America and who appears in the Vínland sagas. It is probable most, if not all of the residents of this area would have been interconnected in one way or another, from the earliest days of the Icelandic settlement, through marriage, family relationships, economic and community ties and allegiances, including the decedents of those original English, Irish and Scots settlers. It was a rich pool from which to draw stories and information.

The pressure of working with known tales and known characters would have placed some contextual pressure on the saga authors, at the time the sagas were written down. In terms of creating a history for Iceland, the option to include information gleaned from a broad range of sources, seems to have been largely rejected by saga authors in favour of one in which

[22] Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition,* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 260-261.

emphasised Scandinavian links. This may suggest a complex relationship in which Icelanders both craved connection to, yet sought to distinguish themselves from, societies of the Scandinavian mainland.

North Atlantic Hegemony

Although many of the sagas show awareness of Norwegian politics and happenings, there is arguably an inherent tension evidence in any assumption that this was the only political relationship that existed in Iceland throughout the Icelandic Commonwealth period. Iceland was part of a greater North Atlantic trade and political network, albeit located on the periphery and from the earliest days of the colonisation of Iceland (870 onward) to the end of the Iceland Commonwealth (1262/64), the politics of the whole North Atlantic region remained very fluid. Iceland maintained strong links to Norway, but Norwegian internal and external relations were often fractious and divided. If there were ruling elites who sponsored the resource-gathering ventures in Iceland and Greenland, whether they were based in Norway or Denmark, is not known.

Denmark was clearly the great Scandinavian power throughout this period, and potentially more or less completely controlled Norway during most of the unification period,[23] with the sagas exaggerating the importance of the internal Norwegian struggles, and minimising the importance of Danish intervention.[24] Despite the lack of saga verification, it could be that the

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[23] Krag, 2003, pp. 187 and 466-68. Also see Bagge, 2010, p. 33, fn 26; Dagfinn Skre, "Towns and Markets, Kings and Central Places in South-Western Scandinavia *c.*AD 800-950", in Dagfinn Skre, *Kaupangin Skiringssal. Kaupang Excavation Project. Publication Series* 1, Aarhus, 2007, pp. 445-69, in Bagge, 2010, p. 33.

[24] Bagge, 2010, p. 33.

reported alliance between Haraldr Fairhair and King Æthelstan (who was King of the Anglo-Saxons from 924-927, and King of England from 927- 939) was directed against Denmark. After all, other sources record that Æthelstan was fostering Haraldr's son, Hákon, the younger brother of Haraldr Finehair's oldest son and successor Eiríkr blóðøx. Eiríkr would eventually be ousted from the Norwegian throne by Hákon after just a five-year reign.[25] Haraldr could have been motivated to make this alliance in order to check Danish expansion, particularly if the Danish king still had a foothold in south-eastern Norway or had designs on the whole country. According to Bagge, these agreements were likely designed to counter Danish interests in England.[26] All this would have been commonly known in Iceland, as it was one of several fluid and complex Norwegian/English alliances.[27] But as argued in this study, any politicising evident in the sagas (even the lack thereof) is potentially part of a constructed narrative on the part of the saga author.

Icelandic internal and external politics during the time of Icelandic Commonwealth has been a key focus of my research, but I have also looked for political narrative within the sagas, including the context to which the sagas are responding, and within which they are being written. For example, Haraldr Sigurðarson is an important figure in Icelandic history. Later when he ruled as King of Norway (*r.*1046-1066), he was also called Haraldr harðráði, which has been variously translated as severe counsellor, hard-ruler, even the tyrant. Writing nearly

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[25] Thomas Kingston Derry, History of Scandinavia: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, pp. 30-31.

[26] There was a connection between King Æthelred II of England (*r.*978-1013 and 1014-1016) and King Óláfr Tryggvason (*r.*995-1000), who is credited with bringing Christianity to Norway. Óláfr was confirmed as Christian in a ceremony at Andover in 994, where Æthelred stood as his sponsor. There was also a later alliance (or at least understanding) between Æthelred and King Óláfr II Haraldsson, (later known as St. Óláfr, who was King of Norway from 1015 to 1028), see Bagge, 2010, p. 28-30.

[27] For example, Óláfr Tryggvason had probably initially been an ally of Danish King Cnut who ruled England (*r.*1016-35), Denmark (where he was known as Canute II, (*r.*1019-35), and Norway (*r.*1028-35), but Óláfr deserted his former ally to support King Æthelred. Óláfr was eventually driven into exile by discontented Norwegian nobles, and the crown reverted to Cnut, see Bagge, 2010, p. 28-30.

two hundred years later, saga author Snorri Sturluson wrote that the Icelanders never applied this epithet to Haraldr.

> He was also, indeed, a great friend to all the Icelanders … Such are the memories of King Haraldr that people in this country still cherish …[28]

Haraldr may have been a friend to all Icelanders in the eleventh century, and likely was still a significant and remembered figure in Iceland at the time the sagas were written down. He may have even been thought of as a kind and cherished king. Snorri certainly wanted it known that he was, pointing out it was the Norwegians who gave Haraldr the name harðráði.[29] But there were potentially other influences at play in Snorri's remembrance of Iceland's friendly, but now bygone relationship with the Norwegian crown.

Just as there was in Iceland (1220-1264), there was a long period of civil war in Norway between 1130 and 1240, as various parties fought for the right of succession.[30] Given the economic and familial ties between Iceland and Norway, it was inevitable that Icelanders would be involved. The conflict started with the death of King Sigurd I in 1130 and ended with the death of Jarl Skúli Bárðarson in 1240. The contrast between the prolonged period of conflict and the peaceful periods before and after, has resulted in many scholars regarding the

[28] "Once when there was a severe famine in Iceland, King Haraldr permitted four ships to sail to Iceland with flour, and he decreed that the price should not exceed a hundred lengths of homespun for three hundredweights. He also allowed all the poor who could get themselves a passage from Iceland, to come to Norway". See Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla,* Douglas B. Killings and David Widger, (prod), The Project Gutenberg, ebook, 2009, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/598/598-h/598-h.htm Accessed 12 November 2020. See also Snorri Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, Chapter 36, Magnus Magnusson and Herman Pálsson, (trans.), New York: Dorset Press, 1966, pp. 86-87.
[29] Likely this was to contrast Haraldr with his more refined and more popular nephew Magnús Óláfsson. The son of Haraldr's half-brother Óláf II Haraldson. Magnús became known as Magnús the Good and was crowned joint king of Norway, alongside Haraldr in 1045. Haraldr became sole king from 1047 after Magnús's death.
[30] Sverrir Jakobsson, "The Process of State-Formation in Medieval Iceland", *Viator* 40, no. 2, (2009), pp. 151-170 at p. 40.

problem of succession as a symptom, rather than a cause of the conflicts.[31] Holmsen interprets the conflict as being competition between the pretenders who formed the "sparks" which set fire to the material for conflict that had built up during the preceding period.[32]

The Norwegian civil wars have also been explained by long-term divisions between family clans going back to the struggles in the tenth and eleventh centuries,[33] and by ideological divisions, notably those between the clergy fighting for *libertas ecclesiae* (freedom of the church) and the adherents of the traditional ideal of a church dominated by the king and laity. Other scholars distinguish between deeper changes leading to prolonged conflicts, and the divisions between the factions, seeing these simply as conflicts between groups of magnates who were linked together with personal ties, but without any significant social, geographic or ideological difference between them.[34] Instead these ties were based on personal loyalty including friendship, kinship and marriage, or other links based on the exchange of women. Just as they had done in earlier times, Norse kings gave daughters and other female relatives in marriage to their most trusted adherents. The kings themselves normally married foreign princesses, if they married at all, and they had mistresses who came from prominent Norwegian families. This also served to create alliances.[35] However, as the kings' personal links also reached outside Norway, this poses a question about the extent of outside

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[31] All Norwegian male descendants of a kings, at least the agnatic descendants, whether they were born in wedlock or not, had an equal right to claim the throne and could in principle be recognised by any local assembly. If two or more kings were recognised at the same time, they had to make an arrangement between them or fight over the throne, in Bagge, 2010, p. 40.
[32] Andreas Holmsen, *Norges historie. Fra de eldste tider til 1660,* 4th ed., Oslo, 1977, originally published in 1939, pp. 225-27, in Bagge, 2010, p. 41.
[33] Halvdan Koht, *Innbogg og utsyn,* Kristiania, 1921, pp. 111-123, *and* "Norsk historie I lys frå ættehistoria", *Norsk slektshistorisk tidsskrift* 5, 1936, pp. 89-104, in Bagge, 2010, p. 41.
[34] Kåre Lunden, "Norge under Sverreættens kongedømme"*,* Knut Mykland, (ed.), *Norges historie,* vol. 3, Oslo: Cappelen, 1976, pp. 39-56; Sverre Bagge, "Borderkrig og statsutvikling i Norge i middelalderen", *Historisk tidsskrift 65* (1986), pp. 145-197, at pp. 151-56; and Sverre Bagge, "The Structure of Political Factions in the Internal Struggles of the Scandinavian Countries during the High Middle Ages", *Scandinavian Journal of Medieval History* 22 (1996), pp. 345-77 at pp. 302-17.
[35] Sverre Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, pp. 117-21; and Bagge, 2010, p. 48.

influences on aspects of the Norwegian civil wars.[36] To some extent, the factional divisions in the 1130s corresponded to similar ones in Denmark,[37] and then later on in Iceland. The relationships across various borders were important during the civils wars and according to Bagge, may even have been more important than the sagas indicate because of their tendency to focus on internal politics. For example, *Sverris saga,*[38] the story of Sverrir Sigurðarson (later King of Norway *r.*1177–1202), repeatedly states King Magnús V Erlingsson (*r.*1161-1184) received considerable aid in the form of ships and men from Denmark – as did the various pretenders claiming to be his descendants – but without giving any information as to how it happened or the motivation of the Danish kings to provide this support to the Norwegians.[39] Those pretenders with strong ties to another country, such as Sverre Sigurdsson, had difficulty being accepted in Norway as a viable option for kingship, nor was he supported by the Church who favoured Magnús's claim over his. Ultimately the Danish invasions of Norway during the twelfth and thirteen centuries were mostly unsuccessful, but Denmark remained an ever-present avaricious neighbour.[40]

Politics and Sagas

In 1262, Icelandic saga author and goði (or chieftain), Sturla Þórðarson (1214-1284), would make an early pledge of fealty to King Hákon IV Hákonarson of Norway (1204-1263). Other goðar would hold out until 1264. Having said that, we do not know what affect the

[36] Birgit Sawyer, "The Civil Wars Revisited", *Historisk tidsskrift* 82 (2003), pp. 43-73 at pp. 44-53 and 63-69.
[37] Bagge, 2010, pp. 48-50.
[38] *Sverris saga* was written about 1170 by Icelander Eiríkr Oddsson. The stories deal with several twelfth century kings of Norway, including the titular King Sverre Sigurdsson.
[39] Bagge, 2010, pp. 49-50.
[40] Bagge, 2010, pp. 50, 174-77 and 389-390.

assassination of his famous uncle, saga author Snorri Sturluson, (*c.*1179-1241), twenty-one years earlier, and likely ordered by King Hákon, had on Sturla's later outlook and perspective. And even if he was in favour with, and did support the King, just one year later in 1262, Sturla would be found guilty of acts of treason against Hákon.[41]

Given the familial and economic ties between Norway and Iceland, it was perhaps inevitable that Iceland's elite, like Snorri and Sturla, had become entwined with Norwegian political events, and as the sagas reveal, families and politics were inexorably tangled. Family groupings were traditionally an important concept in Norse society.[42] This is clearly indicated in *Grágás*, which is a collection of Icelandic laws from the Commonwealth period, where kinship is reckoned out to the fifth degree, or fourth cousin.[43] Referencing *Íslendinga saga*,[44] considered a contemporary saga and written by Sturla Þórðarson, Clunies Ross notes that the conception of history as being family generated and family linked, is fundamental to the medieval literary and historiographical tradition of which *Íslendinga saga* is part.[45] Gíslason agrees: "Both the family and contemporary sagas appear to integrate family matters

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[41]Magnús Stefánsson, "Drottinsvik Sturlu Þórðarsonar", in *Sturlustefna: Ráðstefna á sjö alda ártíð Sturlu Þórðarsonar sagnaritara 1984*, Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir and Jónas Kristjánsson, (eds.), Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1988, pp. 147-183, in Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson, 2017, p. 5, fn 15.

[42] In this context, the word "Norse" is used to describe all those of Norwegian descent, no matter where the family had ended up by the late twelfth/early thirteenth century – the time the sagas authors were converting the sagas to vellum. This includes Norse populations in Iceland, Greenland and some of the North Atlantic isles.

[43] Byock points to multiple references of these extended family networks, covering all 3 volumes of *Grágás* in Byock, 1988, p. 57, fn 7.

[44] The saga is preserved in two parchment manuscripts dating from the latter half of the fourteenth century, *Króksfjarðarbók* and *Reykjarfjarðarbók*, neither of which survives complete. There are also about 40 copies on paper from later periods. Scholars believe that the compilation was originally made around 1300, see Úlfar Bragason, "Reykholt Revisited", Anna H. Yates (trans.), in Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson, 2017, pp. 168-169.

[45] Margaret Clunies Ross, "Myth and Society in Íslendinga saga", in *Samtíðarsögur: Proceedings of the Ninth International Saga Conference, Akureyri, 1994*, pp. 674-88, p. 676, see also Clunies Ross, "The Development of Old Norse Textual Worlds: Genealogical Structure as a Principle of Literary Organization in Early Iceland", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 42 (1993), pp. 372-85; and Clunies Ross, "*Íslendinga saga* as Family History", *Frá Suðlægri Strönd*, 3 (1987), pp. 73-83.

in all aspects of the stories they tell; family is the central and unifying cultural concern of saga authors and their contemporaries".[46]

Family and clan conflicts would drive Icelandic politics in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. But the Iceland of Snorri Sturluson's time was very different to the Iceland depicted in the saga stories, as by then Iceland had fallen under the control of a few powerful and warring families, Snorri's family included amongst them. Both Sturla Þórðarson and his uncle Snorri Sturluson were part of the Sturlungar dynasty, an elite and powerful clan that gave rise to what has become known as the Sturlung Age.[47] We know something about Icelandic and Norwegians interactions involving Sturla and Snorri, through Sturla's works *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*,[48] and *Íslendinga saga*. Both sagas relate how Iceland became part of the Norwegian kingdom in a process lasting some fifty years; but they come at it from very different, even contradictory perspectives. *Íslendinga saga* covers the period 1183-1262. Sturla has used the timeframe from just after the birth of his uncle Snorri in 1179, ending the saga with Iceland's subjugation to Norway in 1262/64. It is believed Sturla Þórðarson wrote *Íslendinga saga* towards the end of his life. He may not have even have completed it before his death in Iceland in 1284.[49] The volatility of family and wider clan relationships was one of the features of the *Íslendinga saga*, which is essentially about the civil war period, and it can be argued that Sturla's accounts of his uncle Snorri may be coloured accordingly.

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[46] Kári Gíslason, "Within and Without Family in the Icelandic Sagas", *Parergon,* 26, vol.1 (2009), pp. 13-33, p. 14.

[47] Two family-based power blocks dominated the political scene in Iceland in the thirteenth century, the Sturlungar (the family of Snorri and his nephew Sturla) and the Haukdælir, who included several bishops and King Hákon's political favourite, Earl Gizurr Þorvaldsson. See Gísli Sigurðsson, "'I'm on an island': The Concept of Outlawry and Sturla's Book of Settlements", in *Sturla Þórðarson Skald, Chieftain and Lawman*, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (eds.), Leiden: Brill, 2017, p. 89.

[48] To be referenced going forward, as *Hákonar saga*.

[49] Jakob Benediktsson, "Sturlunga saga", *KLNM* 17, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1972, p. 357, in Grímsdóttir, 2017, p. 14.

Hákonar saga was written by Sturla *c.*1264/65,[50] around twenty years earlier than *Íslendinga saga,* and he was commissioned to compose it at the explicit bidding of King Hákon's son Magnús, and Magnús's advisers.[51] It was written just after Hákon's death (1263), and was aimed at a Norwegian audience.[52] Brink suggests it was potentially written as work of propaganda, as it gives a detailed account of the succession to the throne in 1217-23 to prove the claim of King Hákon. To add gravitas, the saga quotes various lawspeakers (*lagmenn*[53]) all of whom conclude that King Hákon IV (*r.*1217-1263) is the only legal heir to the throne.[54] Hákon is also presented very positively. Ólafía Einarsdóttir has argued that it was the Norwegian court, King Magnús and his advisers, not Sturla, who decided to portray King Hákon as being a friend to Iceland and Icelanders.[55] Luckily Sturla appears to have maintained favourable relations with Hákon's son Magnús, even if he did not with King Hákon. Sturla was in Norway at the time of Hákon's death answering to treason charges for unlawful killings. Magnús would commission Sturla to write the dead king's saga and granted him access to the royal archives.[56]

Sturla wrote that his uncle Snorri Sturluson made two trips to Norway; both are recorded in *Hákonar saga*. The first visit was 1218-1220 and Sturla reports that Snorri is tasked by King Hákon to bring Iceland under Norwegian sovereignty, possibly even to help avert an invasion

[50] Grímsdóttir, 2017, pp. 8-19, at p. 8.
[51] Theodore Andersson, "Sturla Þórðarson's Narrative Personalities", in Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson, 2017, p. 156.
[52] Grímsdóttir, 2017, p. 8.
[53] In Norway, a *lögmaður* or law-speaker was, from the late twelfth century onwards, a royal official responsible for interpreting the law. Earlier sources occasionally refer to *lögmenn* as being respected members of the local community who were supposed to know the laws and offer legal opinions, in Bagge, 2010, p. 185, fn 22.
[54] Stefan Brink, "Verba volant, scripta manent? Aspects of Early Scandinavian Oral Society", in Pernille Hermann (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval and Early Modern Scandinavian Culture,* Odense: University of South Denmark, 2005, pp. 77-135.
[55] Ólafía Einarsdóttir, "Om samtidssagaens kildeværdi belyst ved Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar", *alvíssmál* 5 (1995), pp. 29-80, at pp. 61-62.
[56] *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, contains quotations from or references to ninety-nine letters; thirty to the king, forty-one from the king, and twenty-eight between other persons in the saga, Narve Bjørgo, "Om skriftlegekjelder for Hákonar saga", *Historisk tidsskrift* 46 (1967), pp. 185-229.

of Iceland.[57] Snorri's second trip to Norway around 1237-1239 was as a result of falling out between Snorri and another of his nephews. They had clashed over the control of landholdings, resulting in Snorri and his son Órækja being forced to leave Iceland for Norway.[58]

The *Hákonar saga* account of Snorri agreeing to the young King's demands seems hardly credible. Firstly, if the dates are correct, King Hákon IV (*r.*1217-1263) was young and very new to kingship, having only come to the throne the year before in June 1217, aged 13 years.[59] At that time Snorri would have been around 38 or 39 years of age; a mature man, a politician and chieftain in his own right. Perhaps Sturla simply had no choice but to obey King Hákon's heir's instructions to present Snorri the way he has. Maybe Sturla had other reasons. Regardless of whether Snorri received instructions from Hákon about Icelandic independence, it seems that he did not act upon them. According to Sturla, Snorri would run into trouble, partly because "he made no progress among his countrymen", and partly because "he did not promote [the king's case] very much".[60]

If Snorri was indeed opposed to Norwegian rule as early as 1218, then he was not alone. That there were Icelanders resistant to the rule of a Norwegian king in the thirteenth century is confirmed by a passage in the extant fragment of Sturla's *Hákonar saga*. It recalls the moment at which Hallvarðr gullskór brings news of Iceland's submission;

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[57] "Snorri skyldi koma landinu undir konung" [Snorri should bring the country under the king], in *Hákonar saga*, I, pp. 229-231.
[58] Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson, 2017, p. 1-7.
[59] Hákon was born in March/April of 1204 and died in December 1263, in Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson, 2017, p. 1-2.
[60] "engu kom Snorri áleiðis við landsmen; flutti hann [kongssaka] ok litt", in *Hákonar saga*, I, p. 231, see Hans Jacob Orning, "Sturla Þórðarson's Two Perspectives on Thirteenth-Century History: Royal Chronicler vs. Icelandic Chieftain", in Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson, 2017, pp. 151.

> He [Hallvarðr gullskór] was accompanied by Þorvarðr Þórarinsson, who submitted to King Magnús and handed over all his authority for the wrongs he had committed against royal rule in the killing of Þorgils skarði and Bergr, the retainers of King Hákon.[61] Since then the Icelanders have never opposed the commands and interdictions of King Magnús. They also submitted to him with greater accommodation than they did to his father King Hákon.[62]

Sturla Þórðarson's other work that might give us an insight into Norwegian politics is *Íslendinga saga.* Written for what was likely an Icelandic audience, Sturla gives us different perspective on Snorri Sturluson, who by the time of writing had been dead for over two decades. Snorri's role in averting the invasion of Iceland is lessened, and although he is presented as advising the king, he only offers to arbitrate a feud between some Icelandic farmers and a party of Norwegian traders. That this situation needed mediation, also reveals that was a level of economic tension between the Iceland and Norway, again perhaps reinforcing the imagery of an independent Iceland, wanting to go its own way.

Whether Snorri as the diplomat is a more accurate scenario or not, Sturla's role in contemporary political and military events, as well as his position as an Icelandic saga author, chieftain and as a Norwegian courtier, remains paradoxical. On the one hand, Sturla appears to be a neutral observer, on the other, he is an active participant in events with interests of his own to protect, and his works are shaped by his views and attitudes as a Sturlungar chieftain.[63] Then there is the passage of time to consider. As Jakobsson proffers: "The Sturla

[61] King Hákon had become ill and died the year before in Orkney during the campaign against the Scots.
[62] Håkon Håkonssons saga, II, Finn Hødnebø and Hallvard Magerøy, (eds.), *Norges kongesagaer* 4, Oslo: Gyldendal, 1979, p. 273, in Andersson, 2017, p. 164.
[63] Gunnar Harðarson, "Postscript: The Subjectivity of Sturla Þórðarson", in Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson, 2017, p. 246.

Þórðarson described as taking part in the events of *Íslendinga saga* in the 1240s and 1250s does not necessarily have to feel the same way about everything as the Sturla Þórðarson who wrote *Hákonar saga* in 1264".[64]

The Rise and Fall of Snorri Sturluson

Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar, Snorri Sturluson's tale featuring two far-travelling Icelandic warriors – Halldór Snorrason and Úlfr Óspaksson – is one of the sagas featured in Chapter Three. In order to try to understand why Snorri Sturluson might have characterised far-travel and far-travellers the way he has, I have looked to place him in the political and social landscape of the time he was writing. Sagas are narrative works that reflect the views and attitudes of those who wrote or compiled them, but assessing what may have been Snorri's motivators presented a unique challenge. A wealthy landowner, influential politician, a chieftain, and a poet, Snorri Sturluson was a powerful figure in medieval Iceland. He is also a national icon, and there is a great deal of cultural sensitivity around Snorri, his writing, and his politics. An enigmatic, even anomalous figure, Snorri never wrote about himself, we have no extant letters, only his sagas and poetry. We only know he wrote sagas, as his nephew Sturla Þórðarson recorded Snorri was a saga author.[65] Snorri is twice called inn fróði, an honorific for someone deemed 'wise', and Vigfusson records inn fróði as being an historians' epithet used in a genealogy. In Snorri's case, it might then also be an acknowledgement of Snorri's skills as a writer of history.[66] Bagge, referencing Snorri's

[64] Ármann Jakobsson, "A Personal Account: The Official and the Individual in Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar", in Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson, 2017, p. 194.
[65] Sturla Þórðarson *Sturlunga Saga,* vol. 1, Gudbrand Vigfusson (ed.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1878, p. 299.
[66] Gudbrand Vigfusson, "Prolegomena", in Sturla Þórðarson *Sturlunga Saga,* vol. 1, Gudbrand Vigfusson (ed.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1878, p. lxxv.

integrated account of *Óláfr's saga* in *Heimskringla,* concludes that Snorri's understanding of the political mechanisms and main stages in the political "plot" around King Óláfr's rise to power in Norway was "explicit".[67]

Just how much actual influence Snorri, or any other individual Icelander, had outside of Icelander at that time is difficult to assess. Wanner writes that although Iceland's elite were "politically, economically and socially dominant" at home, "within the larger Scandinavian context" they "were dominated in all these areas of power and distinction."[68] It is usually assumed that Snorri's first visit to Norway provided the stimulus for him to begin work on his seminal work *Heimskringla* (The Orb of the World), of which *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* forms part, and its composition is dated to the years 1220–30.[69] On his second visit to Norway, in 1237, in flight from the escalating political tensions, including from within his own family, Snorri cast his lot with Jarl Skúli Bárðarson (*c.*1189–1240). The sagas report Snorri had been well received by Jarl Skúli who was King Hákon's regent, and whose daughter Margrét (1208–1270) had married Hákon in 1225. Jarl Skúli was at that time however, at the point of rebellion against the Norwegian throne. Later in 1239, his supporters would even crown him king. Unfortunately for Snorri's political future, Skúli was defeated

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[67] Sverre Bagge, 'Icelandic Uniqueness or a Common European Culture? The Case of the Kings' Sagas" *Scandinavian Studies,* vol. 69, no. 4 (Fall 1997), pp. 418-442, at p. 426.
[68] Kevin J. Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda: The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval Scandinavia,* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008, p. 57.
[69] Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla,* vol. 1, Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (trans.), London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College, 2011, p. ix. The date of *c.*1230 has been proposed by Driscoll in the introduction to his translation of another of the *Konungasögur – Agrip;* see *Agrip af noregskonungasogum.* Matthew J. Driscoll, (trans.), London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1995, p. xii. However, the authorship of Heimskringla has been much debated, see Alan J. Berger, "*Heimskringla* and the Compilations", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 114 (1999), pp. 5-15; Patricia Pires Boulhosa, *Icelanders and the Kings of Norway: Mediaeval Sagas and Legal Texts,* Leiden: Brill, 2005, pp. 6-21; Margaret Cormick, "Egils saga, Heimskringla, and the Daughter of Eiríkr blóðøx", in *alvissmál,* (2001), no. 10, pp. 61-68; Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, "Snorre Sturlusøn's Fortale paa sin Chrønicke: Om kildene til opplysningen om Heimskringlas forfatter", *Gripla*, (1995), no. 9, pp. 45-62; and Jonna Louis-Jensen, "Heimskringla – Et værk af Snorri Sturluson?", *Nordica Bergensia*, (1997) no. 14, pp. 230-245; in Shami Ghosh, *Kings' Sagas and Norwegian History: Problems and Perspectives*, Leiden: Brill, 2011, p. 16, fn 56.

and killed in 1240. Snorri's own star would also fall and he would himself be murdered, likely on order of the king, in 1241. This great rivalry between Skúli and Hákon for the Norwegian crown would mark the last phase of the Norwegian civil war. Whether Snorri's motivation to involve himself with Norwegian politics and Jarl Skúli was anti-sovereignty, pro-independence, or self-interest, is unknown. Brown suggests the latter.[70]

But there are doubts as to whether Snorri was ever an advisor to King Hákon, no matter what was written about him in *Íslendinga saga*,[71] and it is possible that Snorri and the King did not relate to each other from their earliest encounters. Snorri possessed a substantial amount of expertise in skaldic poetry, which, at the time he had acquired it, was the sort of cultural and social capital that could potentially be very useful in the Icelandic and, more importantly, Norwegian political fields. Sturla Þórðarson wrote in *Íslendinga saga* how Snorri had been unusually honoured by being made a lendr maðr, one of the king's companions and highest attainable ranks in the hirð, standing beneath only jarls and other kings. Whether true or not, by the early 1220s, Snorri faced a number of negative events including the death of some of those most likely to reward his verse, and instead of being praised, his poetry was mocked. Royal patronage was unlikely too, Hákon IV unlike his predecessors, was indifferent to skaldic verse. Instead he favoured the chivalric tales and had a series of French romances translated for him, the first of which was *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* in 1226.[72] Snorri's skaldic value to the Norwegian court had fallen away. Wanner attributes skaldic verse's fall

[70] "Snorri's greed and ambition cost Iceland its independence – no matter what, exactly, he promised the boy-king of Norway on the quay at Bergen in 1220", in Nancy Marie Brown, *Song of the Vikings: Snorri and the Making of Norse Myths,* New York: Palgrave, 2012, p. 5.
[71] Wærdahl says he was not, see Randi Bjørshol Wærdahl, "Gautr Jónsson of Mel: Craftsman of Battle and Chief Oral Source of Hákonar saga", in Sigurdsson and Sverrir Jakobsson, 2017, p. 111, fn 20.
[72] *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, Peter Jorgensen, (ed. and trans.), in *Norse Romance Volume I: The Tristan Legend*, Marianne E. Kalinke, (ed.), Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999, pp. 23-226. See also Marianne E. Kalinke, (ed.), *The Arthur of the North: The Arthurian Legend the Norse and Rus' Realms,* Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011, pp. 2 and 5.

in popularity to "the ascendancy of ecclesiastical modes of legitimation, the growing popularity of sagas and ballad meters, the imminent flood of Anglo-Norman romance and its associated chivalric ethos, all of which were causes or symptoms of the fading convertibility and market value of his [Snorri's] poetic capital within domestic and foreign contexts".[73]

We don't know why Snorri eventually broke ranks and joined Jarl Skúli. Maybe it was his increasing disenfranchisement from the Norwegian crown; and *Heimskringla* has been extensively examined to determine Snorri's attitude toward Norwegian kings. As Fjalldal points out however, "in a historical work as long and convoluted as *Heimskringla*, it is no surprise that different answers have been suggested." What we do know is that when Snorri began writing *Heimskringla* around 1220, there was tension between Iceland and Norway over trade due to various Icelandic chieftains insisting on regulating the prices of Norwegian goods in their regions, putting them at odds with Norwegian merchants. The trade dispute escalated into armed conflict with deaths on both sides. This in turn led in 1219 to a Norwegian trade embargo, and in 1220 to preparation for a military expedition against Iceland.[74] Fjalldal is of the opinion that in Iceland, these events were seen as signs of the aggressiveness and expansionist tendencies of the Norwegian crown.[75] Snorri was at the Norwegian court at this time, although there is doubt about Snorri's exact role in what occurred, and whether he did indeed take on the role of mediator and ensured the continuation of trade between the two countries.[76] Or it could have just been Sturla Þórðarson's version of events.

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[73] Wanner, 2003, p. 230.
[74] According to *Hakonar saga* this plan was mainly Skúli Bárðarson's, in Sturla Þórðarson, *Hakonar saga Hakonarsonar and a Fragment of Magnus Saga*, Vigfusson Gudbrandur (ed.), Rerum Britannicarum Medii Ævi Scriptores, 88, Icelandic Sagas 2, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1887, see ch. 59, pp. 51-52.
[75] Magnús Fjalldal, "Beware of Norwegian Kings: Heimskringla as Propaganda", *Scandinavian Studies,* vol. 85, no. 4 (Winter 2013), pp. 455-468, at p. 456.
[76] See Sturla Þórðarson, *Islendinga saga*, in *Sturlunga saga*, Chapter 38, vol. 1, Jon Johannesson, Magnus Finnbogason, and Kristjan Eldjam, (eds.), 2 Vols, Reykjavik: Sturlunguutgafan, 1946, pp. 277-78; and Vigfusson, 1887, Chapter 59, pp. 51-52. For an in-depth review and critique see Wanner, 2003, pp. 174-176.

Subjugation

Instead of invading Iceland, Hákon IV spent many years trying to convert various Icelandic chieftains to his cause with promises of privileges and power, and from 1237 onwards, Hákon worked with the church to impose Norwegian bishops on the Icelandic sees.[77] After the death of Jarl Skúli Bárðarson in 1240 and Snorri Sturluson in 1241, Hákon, who had always attempted to play the various conflicting Icelandic chieftains off against each other, was more successful in controlling Icelandic politics. By the 1250s he controlled most of the Icelandic chieftaincies, which were given to his favourites. Even though the submission in 1262-64 was inevitable, the Icelanders did not surrender unconditionally.[78]

After his second visit to Norway in 1237, Snorri returned to Iceland a shadow of the powerful figure of his younger years, I think it unlikely that Snorri would have held much sway politically at that time, even if he were to attempt to persuade anyone else of influence. The breakdown of Snorri's relationship with King Hákon IV was likely well known in Iceland; Wærdahl writes that "knowledge of the king, his aspirations and actions was widespread in the political elite of Iceland in the 1240s and 1250s".[79] Sigurðsson and Jacobsson date the King's ambitions to gain control over Iceland to be as early as 1220;[80] referring to Snorri's first visit to Norway and supposed promise to the King. Snorri was not the only chieftain

[77] Bagge, 2010, p. 88.
[78] The agreement between Norway and Iceland was, according to Icelandic historians, set in two treaties from 1262-64 and 1302. These are preserved in manuscripts from the sixteenth century. However, the legitimacy of these documents has been questioned with Boulhosa maintaining the treaties are forgeries from the early fifteenth century, in Boulhosa, 2005. See also Helgi Þorláksson who defends the traditional point of view, in Helgi Þorláksson, "Review of Patricia Bulhosa, Icelanders and the Kings of Norway*", Historisk tidsskrift* 86 (2007), pp. 142-47.
[79] Randi Bjørshol Wærdahl, "Gautr Jónsson of Mel: Craftsman of Battle and Chief Oral Source of Hákonar saga", in Sigurdsson and Sverrir Jakobsson, 2017, p. 110.
[80] Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson, 2017, p. 5.

negotiating with King Hákon and Andersson agrees that the "annexation of Iceland was a steady focus of Norwegian policy in the thirteenth-century".[81]

Snorri departed Norway in 1239 without obtaining the king's leave, and a lendr maðr who departs the country without royal permission, is a traitor. King Hákon IV would order Snorri's death in 1241. He was killed in a cellar at his home at Reykjaholt the same year, by a band of men led by his own son-in-law, Gizurr Þorvaldsson, who had become Hákon's agent.[82] Eventually, in the late 1240s, Hákon would claim his right to Snorri's property and chieftaincy, in accordance with the law of the hirð.[83]

Having ended Skúli's rebellion, Hákon IV spent the last twenty-three years of his reign focused on foreign affairs. He turned his attention westward and to strengthening his control over the western islands, with partial success. Greenland submitted to the Norwegian crown in 1261 and the Icelandic parliament agreed to Norwegian overlordship in 1262/64. Hákon also sent a fleet to Scotland in 1263 in a show of strength over control of the Hebrides and the Isle of Man, however the Norwegians were prevented from landing and many of Hákon's *leiðangr* deserted.[84] Hákon IV would withdraw to the Orkneys where he died. King Henry III of England (*r.*1216-1272) who was a long-term friend of King Hákon, had attempted to mediate in 1262, but had his own challenges with England's Second Baron's War (1258-1265) – a rebellion led by Simon de Montfort. As Henry depended on Scottish support with

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[81] He points to the references about King Hákon's dissatisfaction with the performance of the chieftains in doing what they promised, as found in *Hákonar saga* II, pp. 153, 161-62, 170, 207 and 210, in Andersson, 2017, p. 164, fn 33.

[82] Phillip Pulsiano, Kirsten Wolf (eds.), *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, New York: Garland, 1993, p. 259.

[83] A hirðman was similar to a housecarl, but by the reign of Håkon IV (1204-1263) the Norwegian hirð was no longer exclusively focused on the military function, and had acquired several subdivisions on continental patterns.

[84] The peasants' levy or *leiðangr* could also be used for land warfare, but sea warfare was more favoured and important in Norway until at least the thirteenth century. However, a fleet needed a large number of men to manoeuvre the ships, and these were drawn from the general population, in Bagge, 2010, pp. 70-77.

his own struggles, he favoured the Scottish cause in the later negotiations with Hákon's successor King Magnús VI (1238-1280). Magnús would cede the Hebrides and Isle of Man to the Scots, in return for an annual sum and a guarantee of Norwegian possession of the Orkneys and Shetland. This was agreed in the Peace of Perth on 2 July 1266.[85] These events affecting North Atlantic relations are recorded in the sagas, and even where some earlier history is misremembered, they are written in light of a pattern of thirteenth-century alliances.

Acquiring Iceland may have been some compensation for Hákon's loss of the Hebrides and Isle of Man; Greenland perhaps less so. Far away and dependent on exports, Greenland had been an outlying Norse settlement since around the year 1000; the smaller settlement/s in Vínland were even more remote.[86] With two major Greenland sites – the larger Eastern Settlement in South Greenland, and the Western Settlement located about 500 km to the north, in the inner parts of the Nuuk fjord region – the Greenland landnám operated a two-tier economy, combining pastoral livestock farming of cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, and horses, with extensive hunting. It is the latter that provided lucrative trade options in wildlife luxury exports to other parts of Europe.[87] Although not rich in resources, Iceland too possessed some valuable commodities, the most important of which was woollen cloth; Icelandic falcons too, were sought after, and from the twelfth century onwards Iceland exported fish. However, it is likely that King Hákon IV had no interest in invading either Iceland or Greenland, as both were too far away, and too under-resourced to feed an army for any sustained campaign.

[85] Bagge, 2010, p. 87
[86] Vínland is now considered to be in North America, after Helge Ingstad's discovery of a Norse settlement site at L'Anse-aux Meadows on the northern tip of Newfoundland in 1960, see Helge Ingstad, and Anne Stine Ingstad, *The Viking Discovery of America: The Excavation of a Norse Settlement in L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland*, Newfoundland: Breakwater Books, 2000.
[87] The Greenland Norse settlement lasted for around 450 years, with the Western Settlement being abandoned in the mid to late fourteenth century and the Eastern Settlement a century later. See Madsen, 2014, pp. 12 and 25.

So why would Snorri Sturluson who was at least three days of optimal sailing time away in Iceland, involve himself with Jarl Skúli, and the mire that was Norwegian politics and succession, when many historians view Skúli's rebellion as "doomed at the outset"?[88] Perhaps, as Norwegian historian Sverre Bagge suggests, this preordination of failure is "probably not correct". Bagge points to Arstad's arguments in favour of Skúli's strategy and reliance on his elite forces. Arstad suggests Skúli's tactics may well have been based on the past successes of other leaders against whom Skúli had actually fought. The importance of having numerical superiority might have seemed less obvious to him than it is to modern historians.[89] Snorri, who had studied the lives of kings, would likely have known about these successes, although, as Bagge points out, Arstad's examples show the ability of elite forces to win battles, but not to win the war.[90] Perhaps Snorri simply considered Skúli represented a better option; at least he was not the king. Saga authors like Snorri, who experienced shifting involvement in the Icelandic-Norwegian political scene, could well have felt disillusioned and disengaged from the Norwegian crown. The impact of these experiences on themes of independence that emerge in their writing deserves further study.

There is evidence of Norwegian kingship and Norwegian political events that did impact on Iceland and became important aspects of saga construction. This can be seen in illustrations in manuscripts, like this representation of Hákon IV and Jarl Skúli from *Flateyjarbók*,[91]

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[88] Holmsen, 1977, pp. 252-55*;* Lunden, 1976, pp. 203-8; Knut Helle, *Under kirke og kongemakt, Aschehougs Norgeshistorie* III, Oslo: Aschehoug & Co., 1995*,* p. 77, in Bagge, 2010, p. 83, fn 52.

[89] Arstad refers to great successes where elite forces defeated superior forces in Sverre's early years, and for the Croziers under Erling Stonewall (1204-07) and the Ribbungs under Sigurd (1218-26), in Knut Arstad, "Strategi og feltherregenskaperi Norge I første halvdel av 1200-tallet", in Knut Arstad (ed.), *Krigføring I middelalderen. Strategi ideologi og organisasjon c.1100-1400, Rapport fra Clio og Mars-seminaret på Forsvarsmuseet 6-7 nov. 2002,* Oslo: Forsvarsmuseet, 2003, pp. 27-61, at pp. 51-54, in Bagge, 2010, p. 83.

[90] Bagge, 2010, p. 83.

[91] *Flateyjarbók* is a compilation work and one of the (*Konungasögur*, and also the largest of the medieval Icelandic manuscripts. Comprising 225 written and illustrated vellum leaves, only a few fragments of the saga survive that can be dated earlier than the fourteenth century. It also contains *Grœnlendinga saga* (Saga of the

Figure 3: King Hákon IV and Skúli Bárðarson from *Flateyjarbók*.[92]

The Challenges with Historiographical Debates

Norway's relationship with Iceland is a question of concern to scholars, with debate about how much, and in what ways it may have influenced saga construction. From a political-historical analysis perspective, a major theme of this Chapter has been a review of Norwegian historical events that might have impacted on Iceland, or were likely to have been of significant interest to those Icelanders who commissioned, wrote, or otherwise engaged with sagas. But there are challenges when interpreting the meaningfulness of any studies on the political history of either Iceland or Norway, especially when viewed through the lens of indigenous historians.

Greenlanders), the story of the Vínland colony with some differences from the account contained in *Eiríks saga rauða* (Saga of Eiríkr the Red). Also known as GkS 1005 fol., it was written around 1387-1394, with further material inserted at the end of the fifteenth century, see Costel Coroban, *Ideology and Power in Norway and Iceland 1150-1250,* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018*,* p. 85.

[92] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Skule_B%C3%A5rdsson#/media/File:HakonTheOldAndSkule-Flateyjarbok.jpg Accessed 12 November 2020.

Norwegian historiography has had a strong tradition of seeing secular aristocracy as a class or an estate, and the struggle between the monarchy and the aristocracy has been a central theme of scholarship, particularly in the nineteenth century.[93] This focus was diluted from the early twentieth century onwards by the international development of the Marxist historical school with ideas about economics and societal division.[94] Their reinterpretation of historiography was modified again by the empiricist traditions of the post-war period. The influence of the Annales School on Norwegian medieval history came quite late, and prior to the 1980s was mainly restricted to the field of pre-modern history; and to the studies by Holmsen.[95] Running in tandem with social history throughout this time was a strong line of traditional political historiography,[96] including the idea that a relatively well-defined aristocracy played an important political role in medieval Norway.[97] This study is in some ways a response to this debate.

By taking a fresh and a non-partisan lens to Icelandic and Norwegian political studies, considered in a historical and cultural context, my proposition about Snorri's Sturluson's use of motifs and imagery to promote Icelandic independence themes is based on Snorri's role in

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[93] Ottar Dahl, *Norsk historieforskning i 19. og 20. århundre,* Oslo, 1959, pp. 60-64 and 165-78; Sverre Bagge, "The Middle Ages", in William Hubbard, Jan Eivind Myhre, Trond Nordby and Sølvi Sogne (eds.), *Making a Historical Culture. Historiography in Norway,* Oslo: Aschehoug, 1995, pp. 111-31, at pp. 112-16. An exception is Ebbe Hertzberg, *En fremstilling af det norske aristokratis historie indtil kong Sverres tid,* Christiania: J. Dahl, 1869, pp. 106-10, fns. 119 and 124, who points out that the aristocracy did not form a coherent class or estate with common interests.

[94] For example, see Edvard Bull's (1881-1932) various studies of economic structure in Medieval Norway; Halvdan Koht (1873-1965) whose focus was on social-historical interpretations from the post-modern period onwards; and Johan Ernst Sars (1835-1917) who wrote about peasants as bearers of national identity from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, in Jan Eivind Myhre, "From the History of Society to Social History? The Development of Social History in Norway", *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte,* 1996/1, p. 262.

[95] Holmsen was criticised for "playing down the role of politics in his textbook on Norwegian history before 1660", in Myhre, 1996/1, p. 264.

[96] For example, Jens Arup Seip (1905-1992) and some of his students, see J.A. Seip, "Problemer og metode i norsk middelalderforskning", in *Historisk tidsskrift*, 1940, in Myhre, 1996/1, p. 267.

[97] Holmsen, 1977, pp. 251-78; Ole Jørgen Benedictow, "Norge", *En nordiske adel I senmiddelalderen. Struktur, funktioner og internordiske relationer, Det nordiske historikermøde i* Copenhagen: Rapporter, 1971, pp. 9-44, at pp. 9-29; Knut Helle, *Norge blir en stat, 1130-1319. Handbok i Norges historie* III, Bergen: Universitetsforlaget 1972, pp. 30-32.

Norwegian politics being more likely that of self-interested diplomat, than a collaborator. But there were potentially other factors influencing Snorri's writing. In his 2017 study examining Ari inn fróði Þorgilsson as a narrator of barbarian history, Sverrir Jakobsson proposes one of the influences on Ari's historical writings, "must have surely been to affirm the importance of his kinsmen and friends as important actors on various stages". [98] Genealogies are an integral part of saga narrative and Jakobsson's supposition supports my own argument with respect to Snorri Sturluson, that at the time he wrote his sagas, Snorri would have been influenced by his community and familial connections, including those stretching back in time to his ancestors in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

We can see this kinship attachment in another work attributed to his authorship – *Egils saga.*[99] Snorri was himself a descendant of Icelandic warrior-poet Egil Skallagrimmson (*c.*904–*c.*995). Egil, who is the focus of a major part of the saga, has been the subject of much academic scrutiny and review.[100] This includes whether or not Snorri Sturluson was indeed the author of *Egils saga,* (considered the oldest of the extant *Íslendingasögur*).[101] *Egils saga* records how Egil fought with King Æthelstan against the Scots and their allies. Tulinius comments on the saga author's knowledge of English history, and points to a common theme of resistance against the monarchy being prevalent in both *Egils saga,* and in

[98] Sverrir Jakobsson, "The Varangian Legend: Testimony from the Old Norse Sources", *Byzantium and the Viking World*, (Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia, 16), Fedir Androsjtsjuk, Jonathan Shepard and Monica White (eds.), Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2016, pp. 345-362, at p. 356.

[99] I have omitted the possessive apostrophe in the saga name *Egils saga,* as this is the common title in Old Norse. I have however kept the apostrophe, where the saga is part of the title of a secondary source.

[100] For a comprehensive review of, and commentary about the historiography of research about Snorri Sturluson and a biography of Snorri's life, see Wanner, 2003, pp. 1-10 and Chapter 3.

[101] *Egils saga* is preserved in three main versions (earliest version dated to *c.*1320-50) and many fragments (dated from the mid-thirteenth century onwards). Nordal outlines the historiography and how the earliest fragment of the saga, known as *theta* shows that not only has the text been thoroughly revised, abridged, and polished, but also that the three verses that appear in *theta* are better preserved than in the *Egils saga* text found in *Möðruvallabók,* which is the earliest of the three main versions, in Guðrún Nordal, "*Ars metrica* and the Composition of *Egil's Saga*", in *Egil the Viking Poet: New Approaches to Egil's Saga,* Laurence de Looze, Jón Karl Helgason, Russell Poole and Torfi H. Tulinius (eds.), Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015, p. 41.

Snorri's saga about King Óláfr II Haraldsson, which forms part of *Heimskringla.* There is uncertainty around some of the events described in *Egils saga* – such as whether Egil's brother Þórólfr died during a battle in England at Vinheiði,[102] or as is recorded in one version of *Landnámabók* that he died during a battle near the River Vína in Garðariki, on the eastern Baltic. Nevertheless, Tulinius suggests that having Þórólfr die in England during the battle of Vinheiði, was a useful reminder of the resistance theme.[103] Tulinius also proposes the author may have even purposefully located Þórólfr's death in England.

> Could he [Snorri Sturluson] have wanted to make Egil and Þórólfr participate in this battle because of the thematic links between this incident in English history and the image of Norwegian history presented in this saga? These links are clearly evident, for Óláfr leads an army of nobles in revolt against the grandson of a king who had deprived them of some of their honours and power by establishing one-man rule over the whole country.[104]

Óskarsdóttir also supports the idea of a resistance motif, describing *Egils saga's* overarching theme as "the struggle of independent farmers against overbearing kings." She offers a motivator for the author's focus on this particular theme:

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[102] *Egils saga* records the event as the battle of Vínheiði (Vin-heath) by Vínuskóga (Vin-wood), but it is generally thought Þórólfr was killed during what became known as the battle of Brunanburh, an engagement which is mentioned or alluded to in over forty Anglo-Saxon, Irish, Welsh, Scottish, Norman and Norse medieval texts, see Sarah Foot, *Æthelstan. The First King of England*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011, pp. 179-80.

[103] Tulinius also extends Hollander's earlier research on the resemblances between the description of the battle at Vinheiði in *Egils saga* and the battle of Dunheiði in *Hervarar saga,* by identifying borrowed motifs and episodic structures which he surmises alert the reader of the similarities between the sagas. See Lee M. Hollander, "The Battle on the Vin-Health and the Battle of the Huns", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* vol. 32 (1933), p. 33-43, in Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North. The rise of literary fiction in thirteenth century Iceland,* Randi C. Eldevik, (trans.), Odense: Odense University Press, 2002, pp. 251-252, and fn 122.

[104] Tulinius does acknowledge the possibility of other rationale to explain the anomaly around where Þórólfr died, such as a scribal error, or two different oral traditions. See Tulinius, 2002, p. 252.

> This picture of the proud chieftain may be all the more clearly presented because the author and his contemporaries were aware that such individuals were now becoming figures of the past. There was no room for them in the changing economic and political milieu of thirteenth-century Iceland – no room, that is, except in stories. We can detect in Egil's Saga a certain nostalgia for the time when an Icelandic farmer was able to hold his own against powerful rulers of other countries.[105]

Clearly the most influential kings having sway over Iceland were in Norway. Snorri's attitude towards Norwegian kings was not consistent over the course of his life. Cormack who has looked at similarities of theme in *Heimskringla* and *Egils saga* points out that "the two works evince opposite attitudes toward the kings of Norway who are the heroes in *Heimskringla* and the villains in *Egils saga*."[106] Whereas, Tulinius would seem to disagree about this interpretation: "*Egils saga* is not anti-monarchical, since it repeatedly portrays its main character, Egill, as seeking to be in the service of kings."[107] As early as 1873, Gustav Gjessing proposed an alternative option to the origins of *Egils saga* and Snorri's authorship – Gjessing suggested Icelander Ari Þorgilsson inn fróði. was the initiator of a lost text that was used by the author(s) of *Egils saga*, [108] *Heimskringla* and *Flateyjarbók.* Whereas Cormack does not support the argument that Ari could have been the author of *Heimskringla* in its

[105] Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, "Introduction and Notes", *Egil's Saga,* Bernard Scudder (trans.), London: Penguin Books, 2002, p. ix.

[106] Margaret Cormack, Egils saga, Heimskringla, and the Daughter of Eiríkr blóðøx, *Alvíssmál* 10 (2001), pp. 61-68 at pp. 61-62. Versions of this paper were also presented at a meeting of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study in Amherst, Massachusetts in 1991, and at the Tenth International Saga Conference in Trondheim, Norway, in 1997.

[107] Torfi H. Tulinius, "Political Exegesis or Personal Expression? The Problem of Egils saga", in *Neue Ansätze in der Mittelalterphilologie / Nye veier i middelalderfilologien: Akten der skandinavistischen Arbeitstagung in Münster*, vom 24, bis 26. oktober 2002, Susanne Kramarz-Bein (ed.), Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2005, pp. 1-10.

[108] Gustav A. Gjessing, *Undersøgelse af Kongesagaens fremvæxt*, vol. 1, Oslo: A. W. Brøgger, 1885, in "Egils-saga's forhold til Kongesagaen", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, vol. 2 (1885), pp. 289-318.

entirety.[109] Nevertheless, the attribution of Snorri as the author of *Egils* saga, which is the position taken by this study, has mostly been accepted by scholars with little further scrutiny, and the debate has moved on to the question of the relative chronologies of *Heimskringla* and *Egils saga,* and as to which work was written first.[110] Heroic themes and travel images evident in *Egils saga* are discussed further in Chapter Three.

Icelandic historiography of relevance to this study, is divided about the relationship between medieval Icelanders (such as Snorri Sturluson) and Norway, and their loss of independence. When it comes to Snorri, there is academic division. Icelander and Medieval Literature scholar Ármann Jakobsson,[111] American historian Theodore Andersson,[112] and Norwegian historian Sverre Bagge,[113] all maintain that Snorri Sturluson harboured no animosity toward the Norwegian royal family. Ármann Jakobsson takes it a step further and proposes that the Icelanders had entirely positive associations with the institution of kingship.[114] In a later article, Andersson is more subdued, and suggests "the Icelanders had kingship very much on their minds, but it is possible to argue that to be preoccupied with kingship is not necessarily to be receptive to it."[115] He proposes that "the politicized version of events as depicted in *Morkinskinna*,[116] were inspired by an Icelandic distrust of Norwegian foreign policy",

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[109] Cormack, 2001, pp. 61-68, at p. 67.
[110] Kristjánsson is one who has argued that *Heimskringla* predates *Egils saga,* see Jónas Kristjánsson, "Egils saga og konungasögur", in *Sjötíu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20. júli 1977,* Einar G. Péursson and Jónas Kristjánsson, (eds.), vol. 2, pp. 449-72, Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, in Alison Finlay, "Elegy and Old Age in *Egil's Saga*", *Egil the Viking Poet: New Approaches to Egil's Saga,* Laurence de Looze, Jón Karl Helgason, Russell Poole and Torfi H. Tulinius (eds.), Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015, p. 119. Also see Melissa Berman, "Egils saga and Heimskringla", *Scandinavian Studies,* vol. 54, 1982, pp. 21-50.
[111] Ármann Jakobsson*, Í leit að konungi—konungsmynd íslenskra konungasagna*. Reykjavík, Iceland: Háskólaútgáfan, 1997, p. 283.
[112] Theodore M. Andersson, "The Politics of Snorri Sturluson", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 93, no. 1 (Jan., 1994), pp. 55-78, at pp. 71 and 77.
[113] Bagge, 1991, pp. 130-1.
[114] Ármann Jakobsson, "Nokkur orð um hugmyndir Íslendinga um konungsvald fyrir 1262", in *Samtiðarsögur (The Contemporary Sagas),* Níunda alþjóðlega fornsagnaþingið (The Ninth International Saga Conference), Akureyri, 1994, vol. 1, pp. 31-42.
[115] Theodore Andersson, "The King of Iceland", *Speculum,* vol. 74, no. 4 (Oct., 1999), pp. 923-934, at p. 924.
[116] *Morkinskinna* (meaning rotten parchment or vellum) is the earliest collection of *Konungasögur* covering the period 1030-1157.

whereas Snorri's work *Heimskringla*[117] was as much aimed at a Norwegian audience as an Icelandic one. Andersson suggests Snorri Sturluson deliberately toned down the critical accounts such as those found in the earlier anonymous *Morkinskinna,* "to remove the signs of Icelandic distrust in order to promote better relations with the mother country".[118]

On the other side of the academic divide, Marlene Ciklamini,[119] Björn Þorsteinsson,[120] and Magnús Fjalldal disagree about Snorri's targeted audience.[121] Whaley proffers that Snorri presented an Icelandic view of Norwegian history in *Heimskrinkgla* and suggests that he was writing "primarily for an Icelandic audience".[122] Long agrees these works were not just "culturally meaningful, but that they were also politically significant tools". She places them within the context of a broader dialogue that took place between Iceland and Norway, and suggests that they were to be read as responses to the interaction that took place between Iceland and Norway.[123] Fjalldal contends that "Snorri's method of warning his readers against the Norwegian royal dynasty – if that is indeed what he was doing – is not by moralizing or preaching to them, but simply by selecting the kind of information that he chooses to present".[124] Fjalldal also proposes that Snorri wrote *Heimskringla* as a work of

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[117] *Heimskringla* is another compilation work in the *Konungasögur* genre.

[118] Theodore M. Andersson, and Kari Ellen Gade, (trans.), *Morkinskinna*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2000, p. 1. Composed between 1217 and 1222, the extant *Morkinskinna* text diverges considerably from the original version as a result of substantial redactorial changes and intercalations, see Jonna Louis-Jensen, "Kongesagastudier, Kompilationen Hulda-Hrokkinskinna", *Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana* 32, Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1977, p. 67, in Marianne E. Kalinke, "Sigurdar saga Jorsalafara: The Fictionalization of Fact in Morkinskinna", *Scandinavian Studies,* vol. 56, no. 2 (Spring 1984), p. 152, and Andersson, 1994, pp. 55-78, at p. 71.

[119] Marlene Ciklamini, *Snorri Sturluson*, Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1978, p. 65.

[120] Björn Þorsteinsson*, Íslenzka þjóðveldið*. Reykjavík, Iceland: Heimskringla, 1953, p. 291.

[121] Magnús Fjalldal, "Beware of Norwegian Kings: Heimskringla as Propaganda", *Scandinavian Studies,* vol. 85, no. 4 (Winter 2013), pp. 455-468. p. 456

[122] Diana Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction*, London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1991, pp. 114-115 and 123.

[123] Ann-Marie Long, *Iceland's Relationship with Norway c.870-c.1100: Memory History and Identity,* Leiden: Brill, 2017, p. 39.

[124] Fjalldal, 2013, p. 457.

propaganda; “a warning to Snorri’s Icelandic audience to stay clear of the Norwegian royal house”.[125]

Snorri saw himself as a writer of history, and he wrote how he excluded or proclaimed anything he did not believe to be credible, from what he considered to be reliable oral historiographical and political sources.

> …we rest the foundations of our story principally upon the songs
> which were sung in the presence of the chiefs themselves
> or of their sons, and take all to be true
> that is found in such poems about their feats and battles,
> for although it be the fashion with skalds
> to praise most those in whose presence they are standing,
> yet no one would dare to relate to a chief what he,
> and all those who heard it,
> knew to be a false and imaginary,
> not a true account of his deeds;
> because that would be mockery, not praise.[126]

Saga author Snorri Sturluson was not the typical manuscript-producing cleric inking vellum in a European monastery, he was a chieftain and politician. Whatever his motivation for creating them, he may well have been crafting his independence motifs using the images of

[125] Fjalldal, 2013, pp. 455-456, and fn 1.
[126] Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, Killings and Widger, Preface. Although Gade does suggest that the part of this narrative about flattery and mockery is derived from Morkinskinna, in Kari Ellen Gade, “Morkinskinna’s Gifffarðsþáttr’: Literary Fiction or Historical Fact?”, in *Gripla,* 11 (2000), pp. 181-98, at pp. 183-184.

far-travelling warriors from the past, with some awareness there was potentially an overseas audience for his work about Norwegian kings. It is also likely *Heimskringla* potentially travelled further afield than just Norway, as there is some evidence that Icelanders exported stories and poetry.[127] Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus was familiar with works from Iceland. He wrote in the Preface to his work *Gesta Danorum* (*c.*1210) about the men of Thule (Iceland):

> For though they lack all that can foster luxury (so naturally barren is their soil), yet they make up for their neediness by their wit … devoting every instant of their lives to perfecting of knowledge of the deeds of foreigners.[128]

Sturlunga saga records Snorri was rewarded for writing a poem for Norwegian jarl Hákon galinn (1170-1214),[129] and his reward of a sword, shield and chain mail indicates the level of value placed on Icelandic poetry.[130] Perhaps in the early days, Snorri did want to ingratiate himself with powerful Norwegians, and as Tulinius suggests, composing a kings' saga was a way for an Icelandic aristocrat to ingratiate himself with Norwegian or Danish rulers by writing their history. Nevertheless, I argue that Snorri Sturluson also had reason not to be pro-Norway, particularly towards the latter part of his life and the reign of King Hákon IV (*r.*1217-1263). And he had every reason to use the images inspired by far-travel and heroic far-travellers for his own purposes.

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[127] Tulinius points to *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, Chapter 3, which references a poet who was compensated for his poetry from abroad, in Torfi H. Tulinius, "The Social Conditions for Literary Practice in Snorri's Lifetime", in *Snorri Sturluson and Reykholt: The Author and Magnate, his Life, Works and Environment at Reykholt in Iceland*, Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir and Helgi Þorláksson (eds.), Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2018, pp. 389-405, at p. 395.

[128] Saxo Grammatius, *The Danish History*, Books I-IX, Douglas B. Killings and David Widger (prods), The Project Gutenberg: EBook #1150, Release Date: 11 February 2006, Last Updated: 6 February 2013. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1150/1150-h/1150-h.htm#link2H_PREF Accessed 12 November 2020.

[129] Tulinius, 2018, pp. 389-405, at p. 389.

[130] *Sturlunga saga*, Chapter 1.

Chapter Conclusion

Saga authors and Icelanders generally were not unaware of political happenings occurring in England, or Norway, or Denmark, or in Constantinople; and indeed, of past and current political events occurring throughout the North Atlantic region as well as elsewhere in Europe. And may be it was the uncertainty of Iceland's political and economic relationship with Norway, combined with knowledge and experience of the Norwegian crown's vacillating approach to foreign relations,[131] that provided the motivation and impetus for some saga authors, such as Snorri Sturluson, to depict Iceland and Icelanders using independence themes. They certainly had nothing to lose. After all, Snorri and the other saga authors were writing during a time of violence and political turmoil.

From 930 and the establishment of the Alþingi (National Assembly) where goðar met annually to make laws and dispense justice, Iceland had recognised no king. Icelanders were freemen, tied to no monarch, free to travel to, and serve in other lands. But perhaps tired of their own civil war (1220-1264), or in their own self-interest, between 1262 and 1264, Iceland's goðar would forego their independence and would swear fealty to the Norwegian king.

These troubled political circumstances and the relationship of Iceland to its larger neighbour were a catalyst for enormous creativity. The Icelandic saga authors used this opportunity to discuss and shape the contemporary relationship of two lands and two peoples. As we will see, they did this by creating literature depicting a uniquely Icelandic image, in relationship to

[131] By foreign relations, I mean the diplomatic and self-serving approaches of whatever Norwegian regime holding majority rule, exercised towards other foreign regimes.

a Norwegian other, using the imageries of independent and heroic far-travellers from days gone by, who saw Iceland as their true home.

Chapter Three

Far-travelling Warriors
– those who went east

They journeyed boldly;
Went far for gold,
Fed the eagle
Out in the east,
And died in the south
In Saracenland.

Gripsholm Runestone .[1]

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, up until the end of the Icelandic Commonwealth in 1262/64, European politics were highly volatile with conflicts both close to Iceland and far away. Having no king to fight for of their own, Icelandic warriors were free to travel overseas where they were paid to fight and to serve in foreign lands. They were almost spoilt for choice due to the number of foreign conflicts, as well as various ongoing and violent disputes over trade, and attempts to control the eastern trading routes. For those warriors so motivated by holy war, there were crusades, including the Northern Crusade and those in the Holy Land.[2] This chapter focuses on the representation of three far-travelling Icelandic warriors, all of whom travelled the trade route to Constantinople. Appearing as characters in four *þættir* (short tales), and in several *Konungasögur* and *Islendingasögur* – the mercenary warriors discussed in this chapter are fighting men of a type not found elsewhere. Iceland

[1] Gripsholm Runestone, Mariefred, Sweden, (*c*.1050).
[2] Sweden was involved in a series of conflicts with Republic of Novgorod throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries over control of the Gulf of Finland. This area constituted a link in the Varangian-Byzantine trade route, and was also vital economically to the Hanseatic League who were a commercial and defensive confederation of German guilds and market towns. Byzantine conflicts included defeating Venice in 1172, fighting the Bulgarians between 1184 and 1204 and participation in the second crusade from 1145 to 1149. There were various local crusades taking place during this time including Northern Crusades from 1147 to 1242, and between 1198 to 1290 Denmark and Sweden were involved in the Livonian Crusade targeted pagans in Livonia, Estonia and the Baltic. See Thomas Kingston Derry, *History of Scandinavia: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

was a Commonwealth there was no king to fight for, and these men were free to travel. Loyal and committed, they stand above their peers and are depicted as being valued (even if sometimes begrudgingly) by the sophisticated courts and powerful men of medieval Europe. Using these heroic figures from Iceland's communal past, the saga authors[3] show their contemporary audiences how internationally important people respected and recognised far-travelling Icelandic warriors as being worldly, capable and desirable travellers.[4]

By presenting these heroic figures the way they have, the saga authors and their stories have contributed to and enhanced the construct of Icelandic self-identity – of an independent Icelandic community. Even if it was only an "imagined community", it existed in a cultural and communal sense.[5]

Saga stories about Warriors

Tales about the far-travelling Icelandic warriors referred to in this chapter are found in *Laxdœla,* and in the kings' sagas *Heimskringla* and *Morkinskinna,* as well two later compilation manuscripts *Fagrskinna* and *Flateyjarbók. Heimskringla*, attributed to chieftain, politician, historian and poet Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241), is the best known of the

[3] Author is used throughout this thesis to describe the person, or patron, who had the major influence on the translation of the saga into a written format. It is acknowledged in some instances the saga themes could be the scribe's own interpretation, particularly if the narrator or patron was illiterate, and some works have been redacted from earlier works. It is also possible the narrator may not have been the work's patron, which could also influence the depiction of characters and themes. I also think it less likely any of the works were collaborative.
[4] Barnes uses *Nitida saga* (one of the *Riddarasögur* or chivalric tales) to illustrate how the author presents the North as being intellectually and morally superior to the east and south, see Barnes, 2014, Chapter 1.
[5] "Imagined communities" is a description used by Benedict Anderson in his study about the origins of nationalism, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* 2nd ed., London: Verso, 2006, p. 6.

Konungasögur.[6] *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar,* which forms part of *Heimskringla*, is one of the sagas referenced in this study. As a source, *Heimskringla* is similar to *Morkinskinna* and *Flateyjarbók*, as they are all essentially compilations of tales connected with the Norwegian kings. But *Morkinskinna* and *Flateyjarbók* are different from other *Konungasögur*, as they also contain a series of *þættir*, or short stories, alongside longer sagas. Some of these *þættir* recall kingly encounters, particularly with Haraldr Sigurðarson (1015-1066), who is the focus of *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*.

My analysis of these sagas concerns the use of imagery and characterisation in the depictions of the same three far-travelling Icelandic warriors – Halldór Snorrason, Úlfr Óspaksson and Bolli Bollason – all from Western Iceland, and all of whom travelled to Constantinople where they served the Byzantine Empire. These warriors are presented in such a way they are potentially used to advance the image of Iceland and value of Icelanders, including reinforcing the motif that Icelanders were considered independent people.

Andersson and Gade, who translated *Morkinskinna* into English*,* discussed nearly twenty years ago how "fidelity and contentiousness", are important features of the *Morkinskinna* author's system of values. The author is anonymous,[7] but Andersson and Gade make the case he is "explicitly" an Icelander. They suggest the series of *þættir* (sl. *þáttr*) forming part of the work, function as a form of "opposition literature", and are a contrast to the idealisations of loyal service found in other stories that form part of both *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringkla.* They propose the *Morkinskinna* author is "animated by conflicting ideals of

[6] Massimiliano Bampi, "Genre", *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas,* Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (eds.), Abingdon: Routledge, 2017, p. 4.
[7] In this context author refers to the person, or patron, who had the major influence on the translation of the saga into a written format including from a historiographical perspective and in a literary and thematic sense.

service and national and personal autonomy."[8] They point to a *þáttr* about Halldór Snorrason where he "so aggressively argues Icelandic equality" with Haraldr Sigurðarson, slurring the king's status and genealogy.

> It may be, sire, … that you can get me to drink, but I can tell you that Sigurð sýr [Haraldr's father] could not have forced Snorri goði [Halldór's father].[9]

In another *þáttr* also featuring King Haraldr, the *Morkinskinna* author is concerned with how the "people" relate to the Norwegian crown. The word used for people is þegnar (or freeman) which appears four times in the opening chapters, and again in Chapter 19.[10] As the latter reference relates to King Haraldr's claim to the Norwegian throne, Andersson and Gade suggest although this word usage applies "overtly to internal Norwegian affairs … they may also reverberate with a special Icelandic consciousness". When the author recorded Icelanders speaking about the relationship between the king and his þegnar "they may very well have reflected on their own status as well as that of the Norwegians".[11]

Similar ideals motivated the representations of all the far-travelling warriors examined here, and the idea of opposition literature and conflicting ideals is not limited to the *Morkinskinna þáttr* about Halldór Snorrason. The use of these themes were deliberate constructs, with similar characterisations of Halldór and other warriors, appearing in a number of sagas and

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[8] Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade, (trans.), "*Morkinskinna:* The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030-1157)", *Islandica* 51, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000, pp. 79-80. Ármann Jakobsson offers a different perspective viewing *þáttr* as a modern construct with the word use occurring from the 1970s onwards. He writes that the tales themselves only started to be separated more clearly from the larger body of the saga, by fifteenth century scribes, and "þættir were reinvented as independent narratives in the twentieth century", in Ármann Jakobsson, "The Life and Death of the Medieval Short Story", *Journal of English and German Philology,* vol. 113, no. 3 (July 2013), pp. 257-291, at pp. 259, 288-289.
[9] *Morkinskinna,* Chapter 30, Andersson and Gade, 2000, p. 190.
[10] Andersson and Gade propose in this context, the word *þegnar* suggested a legal or contractual bond between the king as lord and his sworn adherents, in Andersson and Gade, 2000, p. 78-79.
[11] Andersson and Gade, 2000. p. 79.

þættir, written or compiled by different authors. These far-travelling and heroic warriors travelled as independent Icelanders, and were recognised as being such. Underpinning their characterisation are the same themes of conflict around the ideals of service versus personal autonomy.

These warriors are portrayed taking part in supposed events that occurred at least two hundred years before their stories were written down in the sagas. There are supporting extant contemporary accounts recalling some of the same eleventh-century events, and these present us with a non-Icelandic context. It is possible the saga authors' representations of far-travelling warriors were coloured, even catalysed, by some of these earlier negative portrayals, particularly those found in the Greek sources. Byzantine attitudes towards anyone considered to be a barbarian would have been common knowledge within the Icelandic community. This would have been driven by the returning eleventh-century Icelandic warriors themselves. They would have known how they were perceived, through the Byzantine attitudes they encountered during their overseas service. Given early medieval Iceland's strong oral tradition, between the events of the saga story age (870-*c.*1066) and when the tales were eventually committed to vellum (from the late twelfth century onwards), recollections about the warriors' Byzantine experiences could well have been passed down through their families, and likewise across the generations.[12]

[12] See also Barnes, 2014, pp. 158-159.

Icelandic Identity

The presentation of these warriors as held in high esteem in foreign lands serves to reinforce an already emerging sense of Icelandic shared cultural identity within local Icelandic audiences. Danish anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup argues this shift would have occurred shortly after the laws were written down in 1117-1118, with the appearance of two major vernacular works of twelfth-century Icelandic scholarship.[13] Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók*, the earliest extant example of narrative prose in a Scandinavian language,[14] gave Icelanders a separate history.[15] Slightly later, in the middle of the twelfth century, the *First Grammatical Treatise* was published.[16] Here the idea of 'Icelanders' was, possibly for the first time, used as a means of a conscious self-identification of the people of Iceland as distinct from other peoples.[17] This author not only refers to "us, the Icelanders," he also more generally speaks of different peoples (þioõir) speaking different languages.[18] Rather than promoting nationalism, which Hastrup argues did not exist at that time,[19] the saga authors used the images and characterisation of far-travelling warriors to create a sense of communal unity

[13] Kirsten Hastrup, "Defining a Society: The Icelandic Free State Between Two Worlds," *Scandinavian Studies,* 56 (1984), pp. 235-55, at p. 239.
[14] Matthew J. Driscoll, *Ágrip af noregskonungasogum,* London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1995, pp. xv-xvi and 6.
[15] Hastrup write: "Although linking Iceland to Norway in several ways, Ari established a distinct history of the people of Iceland, to whom the name of 'Icelanders' was given with retrospective application as from the beginning of social life in Iceland", in Hastrup, 1984, p. 239.
[16] *The First Grammatical Treatise*, Hreinn Benediktsson, (ed.) Reykjavik: Institute of Nordic Linguistics, 1972. Composed by an unknown scholar, the so-called First Grammarian, *The First Grammatical Treatise* survives in a mid-fourteenth-century manuscript where no title has been preserved, in Hastrup, 1984, p. 239.
[17] About the same time, the "Icelanders" had also appeared in external sources as a people of distinct language. Among the first outside observers to use this notion was Ælnod in his biography of Canute the Saint, written *c.*1120, see Hans Olrik, Danske Helgeners Levned, I-II, Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1968, p. 30, in Hastrup, 1984, p. 240, fn 23.
[18] Hastrup, 1984, p. 240.
[19] Hastrup argues: "the original society was emphasized as Iceland proper, and a chronologically displaced notion of cultural autonomy, marking a primeval freedom, was a conceptual counter move against the inevitable political submission … In the nineteenth-century nationalistic movement, this thirteenth century optical illusion was expanded and frozen in an image of national unity ever since", in Hastrup, 1984, p. 251.

and pride in the achievements of one of their own; an Icelander. This in itself sends a subtle independence message.

We can see the emphasis on Icelandic identity in the characterisation of eleventh-century far-travelling warrior Halldór Snorrason. Like other Icelanders abroad Halldór is described explicitly as being an Icelander. For example, in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* Snorri specified:

> There were two Icelanders in Haraldr's company; one of them was Halldór Snorrason … and the other was Úlfr Óspaksson.[20]

The anonymous author of Halldór's first *þáttr* also names Halldór's place of origin. "Halldór was the son of the chieftain Snorri from Iceland."[21]

All the stories mentioning Halldór Snorrason in any detail refer to his difficult relationship with Haraldr Sigurðarson, later King Haraldr III of Norway (*r.*1046-1066). Snorri Sturluson uses this characterisation of Halldór to promote the classic motif of the brave, but intractable warrior, who 'speaks the truth to power':

> Haraldr then said to Halldór Snorrason, "Halldór, you carry the standard."
> Halldór picked up the standard and said rather stupidly:

[20] *King Harald's Saga,* Chapter 9, (to be referenced going forward as *KHS*), Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson (trans.), 1966, New York: Dorset Press, p. 55.
[21] See "The Tale of Halldór Snorrason, 1", in *Hrafnkel's Saga and Other Stories,* Hermann Pálsson (trans.), Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971; "The Tale of Halldór Snorrason, II", Terry Gunnell (trans.), in *The Saga of Icelanders,* Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), New York: Penguin Books, 2001, p. 685; "The First Story of Halldór Snorrason", and "The Second Story of Halldór Snorrason", in *Forty Old Icelandic Tales,* Bryant W. Bachman, (trans.), Maryland: University Press of America, 1992, pp. 187-192 and 193-200.

> "Who would want to carry the banner before you, if you follow it as timidly as you have done today?"[22]

The *Morkinskinna* author offers a more forceful version:

> Norðbrikt [Haraldr] said that Halldórr should carry the standard into the town ahead of him. Halldórr answered instantly:
>
> "May the devil carry the standard ahead of you, coward!"
>
> "That is a mouthful, Halldórr", said Nordbrikt, "but you are valiant all the same".[23]

Both saga authors maintain this tension between Halldór providing loyal service whilst maintaining an independence of thought. He is clearly 'his own man'. However, in Halldór we also see a contrast of themes. He can be independent but he can also be the 'faithful retainer', albeit reluctant, whose worth is recognised, even rewarded by great men.

> He [Halldór] had received much honour and respect from King Haraldr.[24]

This bestowing of honour upon Icelanders by foreign rulers is used by the saga authors to advance the Icelandic character and to show the worth of Icelanders. Snorri writes in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* how Halldór was "very dear to Harald's heart".[25] Halldór is

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[22] *KHS,* Chapter 9, Magnusson and Pálsson, 1966, p. 56.
[23] *Morkinskinna,* Chapter 12, Andersson and Gade, 2000, p. 142.
[24] This quote is from Halldór's second *þáttr* which appears in *Morkinskinna,* see "The Tale of Halldór Snorrason II", Gunnell (trans.), in Thorsson, 2001. p. 685
[25] *KHS*, Chapter 9, Magnusson and Pálsson, 1966, p. 55.

similarly described in the first of the two *þættir* named after him: “He was always well-honoured by Harald”.[26]

My evaluation of the saga authors’ representation of Halldór differs from that of Shafer, who concludes Halldór’s role in the sagas and *þættir* in which his far-travel is narrated, is that of “retainer” to Haraldr Sigurðarson, and Halldór’s mercenary service in Byzantium is not an “independent action of his own, but service to his lord”.[27] Instead, I argue that the saga authors portray Halldór as having quite a different view of what it is to be a vassal. We can see this in several incidents involving Halldór after his return to Iceland, found in his eponymous *þættir*.[28]

The author of Halldór’s second *þættir* describes how Halldór does not accept an invitation to join Haraldr in Norway:

> “I shan’t be visiting King Haraldr again, so let each of us just hold what he has. I know his temper well enough to realise that he’ll keep his promise and not put anyone above me if I go to see him, for he’d put me on the highest gallows if he could have it his way”.[29]

The author of the first Halldór *þættir* presents him as not a subservient vassal, but as beholden to no man:

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[26] “The First Story of Halldór Snorrason”, in Bachman, (trans.), 1992, p. 187.
[27] John Douglas Shafer, *Saga Accounts of Norse Far-Travellers*, PhD Dissertation, University of Durham: Department of English Studies, 2009, p. 89.
[28] See “The Tale of Halldór Snorrason, 1”, Pálsson (trans.), 1971; “The Tale of Halldór Snorrason, II”, Gunnell (trans.), in Thorsson, 2001, p. 685; “The First Story of Halldór Snorrason”, and “The Second Story of Halldór Snorrason”, Bachman, (trans.), 1992, pp. 187-192, and pp. 193-200.
[29] “The Tale of Halldór Snorrason, 1”, Pálsson (trans.), 1971, p. 120.

> King Haraldr has said of him that of all men he was least troubled by the unforeseen, whether dire or welcome news. He took it all in stride. He would neither eat nor drink nor sleep any more than usual no matter what was happening. He was a man of few words, but too frank and hasty of sharp words, and too eager to win in everything, no matter who he was dealing with.[30]

Here the saga authors are highlighting Halldór's independent spirit using the trope 'speaking truth to power'.[31] He is not a *chanson de geste* knight concerned with courtly love and the ethics of chivalry. The seemingly intractable nature of his responses to the king is also not at variance with his 'local hero' image as a successful mercenary warrior, who is valued by foreign courts.

With the depiction of the character of Bolli Bollason, the anonymous *Laxdæla* author also uses this device to portray a sense of the independent Icelander. Visiting King Ólafr in Norway, Bolli shows he is not beholden, or tied to the king, who asks him to stay longer:

> You must decide for yourself where you want to go, Bolli, said the king.
> "For you Icelanders are self-willed in most matters".[32]

Despite being rebuffed, King Ólafr lavishes praise on the extraordinary Icelander:

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[30] "The Second Story of Halldór Snorrason", in Bachman, (trans.), 1992, p. 200.

[31] See "The Tale of Halldór Snorrason, 1", in *Hrafnkel's Saga and Other Stories,* Hermann Pálsson (trans.), Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971; "The Tale of Halldór Snorrason, II", Gunnell (trans.), in Thorsson, 2001, p. 685; "The First Story of Halldór Snorrason", and "The Second Story of Halldór Snorrason", in Bachman, (trans.), 1992, pp.187-192, and pp. 193-200.

[32] *Laxdæla,* Chapter 73, Magnusson and Pálsson, 1969, p. 227.

"But as my last word to you, I want to say that I think you Bolli, are the most remarkable man to have come from Iceland during my reign."[33]

Norway was seen by Icelanders as an emblematic place to earn an international reputation. The *Laxdœla* author tells us Bolli Bollason was "held in high esteem in Norway."[34]

By serving a foreign king, Icelanders could expect recognition and reward, and far-travelling warriors would return to Iceland with enhanced reputations and bearing items of value. Powerful men were also expected to recognise the deserved worth of Icelandic warrior heroes, even where they may have fallen on hard times.

> The King [Haraldr Sigurðarson] said …
>
> > "How are you spending your money?"
>
> He [Halldór] answered,
>
> > "I'm spending it quickly, because I have nothing but the clothes I am wearing."
> >
> > "A long service and many perils have received little reward then. I will give you a ship and crew. Your father will be able to see that you haven't served me for nothing."
>
> Halldór thanked the king for the gift.[35]

In contrast to Halldór, with his flashy gold embroidery and his self-pride, Bolli Bollason is one returning Varangian far-traveller who has also been singled out by the saga author as

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[33] *Laxdœla,* Chapter 73, Magnusson and Pálsson, 1969, p. 227.
[34] *Laxdœla,* Chapter 73, Magnusson and Pálsson, 1969, p. 226.
[35] "The Tale of Halldór Snorrason II, *The Sagas of Icelanders,* Gunnell (trans.), in Thorsson, 2001. Chapter 1, p. 685

being someone apart, but for different reasons to Halldór Snorrason. Bolli is not just a sharp dresser, he is very aspiring and competitive, although these qualities do not appear to necessarily be negative values. "It soon became evident that Bolli was very ambitious and wanted to outdo everyone else."[36]

And it seems he succeeded, as he is presented as being held in high regard by powerful people. On his homeward journey he visits Norway where his success is acknowledged.

> He [Bolli Bollason] is certainly an outstanding man, said the king.[37]
> Bolli had brought with him a great deal of wealth from abroad and many treasures given him by princes.

Despite his outward trappings, Bolli also supports the theme of Icelanders taking pride in the exploits of a brave and heroic far-travelling warrior, who was one of their own. "Bolli became renowned for this journey abroad."[38]

> He [Bolli] spent many years in Constantinople, where he was regarded as the most valiant of fighters in any perilous situation, where he was among the foremost of them. The Varangians thought highly of Bolli during his stay in Constantinople.[39]

According to Old Norse texts, Constantinople was perceived as not only a city of incredible wealth, it was one of the holiest cities in the world and the residence of one of the greatest

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[36] *Laxdæla,* Chapter 73, Magnusson and Pálsson, p. 226.
[37] With reference to Bolli Bollason, in *Laxdæla,* Chapter 73, Magnusson and Pálsson, 1969 p. 226.
[38] "The Saga of the People of Laxardal", Chapter 77, Keneva Kunz, (trans.), in *The Sagas of Icelanders*, Thorsson, Örnólfur, (ed.), New York: Penguin Books, 2001, p. 419.
[39] "The Saga of the People of Laxardal", Chapter 73, Kunz, (trans.), 2001, p. 412; and also see *Laxdæla,* Chapter 73, Magnusson and Pálsson, (trans.), 1969, pp. 227-228.

monarchs.[40] Despite the great distance between them, there was a long-running and strong connection between Iceland and the Byzantine Empire. This connection is amplified in the sagas and it remained intact through most of the Icelandic Commonwealth Period.[41] Politically, the Byzantine Empire was a volatile place, and the saga authors placing far-travelling Icelandic warriors at the centre of international political events, were using the power and allure of the east. Icelanders were aware of the Byzantine Empire and viewed it in a positive way; some even had personal or familial experience of service to the Empire. The saga authors knew this. By depicting the successful outcomes of journeys to Constantinople through the vehicle of Icelandic mercenary warriors, and characterising them as being central to Byzantium political events, they were acknowledging this long-standing link. Through the use of heroic tropes and independence imagery, they told their audience that these warriors brought glory to all Icelanders, and that Icelanders were valued by high status and powerful individuals in foreign lands.

Tales about Heroes

The far-travelling Icelandic mercenaries depicted in the sagas referenced in this chapter, present a significant and compelling contrast to the knightly or chivalric qualities exhibited by the followers of Arthur or Charlemagne found in the competing contemporary *chanson de geste* tales. We know chivalric romances and knightly tales likely first came to Iceland via Norway, having been translated into Norse during the reign of King Hákon IV (*r.*1217-

[40] Sverrir Jakobsson, *The Varangians: In God's Holy Fire,* Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave, 2020, p. 137.
[41] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2020, and Sverrir Jakobsson, "The Varangian Legend: Testimony from the Old Norse Sources", *Byzantium and the Viking World*, (Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia, 16), Fedir Androsjtsjuk, Jonathan Shepard and Monica White (eds.), Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2016, pp. 345-362.

1263).[42] Icelandic saga audiences were also probably familiar with the heroic tales of English and French knights, just as they were with the fantastical sagas' of knights (*Riddarasögur*) some of which were indigenous to Iceland. This exposure would have given them some understanding of the concept of chivalry.

The term chivalry has been in common use from the eleventh and early twelfth centuries onwards. Although it is not commonly or concisely defined in the extant sources by those who promoted or practiced chivalry, scholars agree that the concept of chivalry had a definitive indicative core cluster of common values and meanings, with significant continuity across time and place.[43] Richard Kaeuper, who has analysed the many traits and attributes that make up the concept of chivalry, nominates the prowess exercised in the pursuit and defence of honour as being "the most potent bond at the heart of chivalry".[44] This is very much in contrast to the Icelandic mercenary warriors examined here, who demonstrate quite different attributes to the stereotypical chivalrous knight with his focus on honour. Instead, they are presented as being unique, even incongruent ideals of champions. They are home-grown rather than exotic heroes, and for some Icelanders, they are their own forebears and kin. They are to be admired, but they are also often flawed.

By managing the contrast of giving loyalty, whilst maintaining independence of thoughts and action, the saga authors of the works selected for this chapter, created a very different type of

[42] King Hákon IV had a series of French romances translated, the first of which was *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* in 1226. See "Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar", Peter Jorgensen, (ed. and trans.), in *Norse Romance Volume I: The Tristan Legend*, Marianne E. Kalinke, (ed.), Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999, pp. 23-226, at p. 34.
[43] Scholars have long recognised three clusters of medieval meaning in the surviving sources associated with the term chivalry. These are deeds of great valour (historical or imagined) performed by arms bearers; or a collective body of knights present for any action might themselves be termed as chivalry; and thirdly, it is used in conjunction with a lord who asks how much chivalry his enemies possessed. The latter being usually associated with the number of armoured and mounted warriors the lord might be facing, in Richard W. Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 8-10.
[44] Kaeuper, 2016, p. 33.

warrior hero. Through the use of literary tropes and motifs to promote these independent and larger-than-life figures, the saga authors[45] presented their twelfth and thirteenth century Icelandic audiences with a persuasive but different image about what it means to be a hero. Their heroes are Icelanders, not the knights of chivalric literature where these ideals are explicitly adopted for various purposes.[46] They too were larger-than-life heroes, but they were also independent free-agents, able to serve wherever, and whoever they chose to serve. For local audiences sharing in the stories of these real life heroes from earlier times, they could take familial even communal pride in the achievements of their own. This in turn would help to foster a sense of the worth of Icelanders on a world stage, even if just in an imagined sense.

The Varangians

The three Icelandic far-travelling mercenaries discussed in this chapter are described by the sagas as being part of a warrior brotherhood comprised mainly of Scandinavians, known as the Varangians. The name is likely derived from the Old Norse word *vár* meaning pledge. In Norse mythology *Vár* was the goddess associated with oaths and agreements.

[45] Author is used throughout as a broad term to describe the person, or patron, who had the major influence on the translation of the saga into a written format including from a historiographical perspective and in a literary and thematic sense. It is acknowledged in some instances the saga themes could be the scribe's own interpretation, particularly if the narrator or patron was illiterate, and some works have been redacted from earlier works. It is also possible the narrator may not have been the work's patron, which could also influence the depiction of characters and themes. I also think it less likely any of the works were collaborative.

[46] Ármann Jakobsson, "Le Roi Chevalier: The Royal Ideology and Genre of *Hrólfi Saga Kraka*", *Scandinavian Studies* 71, no. 2 (1999), pp. 139-66; Carolyne Larrington, "A Viking in Shining Armour? Vikings and Chivalry in the Fornaldarsögur", *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia,* 4 (2008), pp. 269-88, and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, "Historical Writing and the Political Situation in Iceland 1100-1400", *Negotiating Pasts in the Nordic Countries, Interdisciplinary Studies in History and Memory*, Anne Eriksen and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, (eds.), Lund, 2009, pp. 59-78.

> The ninth [goddess] is Vár [beloved]. She listens to the oaths and private agreements that are made between men and women. For this reason, such agreements are called *várar*. She takes vengeance on those who break trust.[47]

Varangian was a general term used to describe Scandinavian mercenaries serving powerful lords and kings across eastern Europe. To be a Varangian meant being bound into a military company, swearing to observe certain obligations, including to support one another loyally, and to share profits.[48] There are references in a number of sagas of Icelanders travelling to Mikligarðr (Constantinople) to become members of what became known as the Varangian Guard.[49] This is the specific name given to a regiment composed of warriors who were in the main from Scandinavia, who served the Emperor, and were part of the great army of the Byzantine empire.[50]

There have been two detailed early studies of Scandinavians who served as mercenary warriors in the east. The earliest and seminal work is *Væringjasaga,*[51] by Sigfús Blöndal (1874-1950).[52] Blöndal's unique mix of language skills in Old Norse, Latin, Greek, and English, coupled with his library position, gave him access to a range of extant documents

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[47] Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda,* Jesse L. Byock (trans.), London: Penguin, 2005, p. 43.
[48] Sigfús Blöndal, *Væringjasaga*, Reykjavik: Ísafoldarprentsmiðja, 1954, p. 10 ff, in H.R. Ellis Davidson, *The Viking Road to Byzantium*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1976, p. 62 and fn 1.
[49] For example, in *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, a text from the last quarter of the thirteenth century, two secondary characters are returned Varangians. For a comprehensive review of individual Norse and English Varangians and travellers to Byzantium, see Sigfús Blöndal, *The Varangians of Byzantium,* Benedikt S. Benedikz (trans/reviser), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, Chapter 9, pp. 193-222.
[50] See Cécile Morrison, "Le role des Varanges dans la transmission de la monnaie byzantine en Scandinave", in *Les Pays du Nord et Byzance (Scandinavie et Byzance),* Uppsala: Actes du colloque nordique, et internationale de byzantinologie, 1981, pp. 131-140, at pp. 131-134; M. Bibikov, "Byzantinoscandica", in *Byzantium. Identity, Image, Influence,* Fledelius Karsten, (ed.), XIX International Congress of Byzantine Studies, 18-24 August 1996, Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, pp. 201-211, at p. 203; and Ellis Davidson, 1976, p. 180.
[51] Sigfús Blöndal, *Væringjasaga,* Reykjavik: Ísafoldarprentsmiðja, 1954.
[52] An Icelandic born librarian and scholar, Blöndal's proficiency in Old Norse, Latin, Greek, and English, gave him unique access to a range of extant documents and records, particularly those relevant to Varangians in Eastern Europe, including Russian, Arabic and Armenian sources, as well as archaeological evidences from Venice, Byzantium and Sweden. See Blöndal, Benedikz (trans/reviser), 1978, p. 193.

and records, particularly those relevant to the Eastern Roman Empire.[53] Although now somewhat dated, his research about the heroic status of the Varangians supports my proposition that the far-travelling warriors discussed here were indeed well known on a greater stage than just in Iceland, and that they would have been viewed by sagas audiences as being larger-than-life heroes. The other early Varangian study is *The Viking Road to Byzantium* by prolific scholar[54] and archaeologist Hilda Ellis Davidson (1914-2006). Written partly as a Varangian travelogue, Davidson discusses travel routes and trading, and how grave goods including weaponry can trace the contact between the Byzantium Empire and Scandinavia. More recently, Sverrir Jakobsson's 2016 broad paper on the Varangians as they appear in the Old Norse narratives, examines periodisation, medieval ideas of sovereignty, the relationship between the Byzantine Empire and the Norse communities covering two time periods, and explores the relationship between the periphery and the centre.[55] This is a similar approach to the one taken in this study.[56]

[53] Blöndal spent the last twenty-five years of his life scouring primary sources gathering up "such evidences from non-Byzantine sources as can be found about Varangians, and which are not of a clearly fictitious nature". Blöndal, Benedikz (trans/reviser), 1978, p. 193. Blöndal's other major contribution to Scandinavian studies was to put together a small team of scholars who over a twenty-year period would compile the Icelandic-Danish Dictionary. Completed in 1924, it was "hailed by philologists as the greatest advance so far made in Icelandic lexicography", in Benedikt S. Benedik, 'Preface', Blöndal, Benedikz (trans/reviser), 1978, pp. ix-xi.
[54] There are 58 publications cited on Hilda Ellis-Davidson Wikipedia profile. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hilda_Ellis_Davidson Accessed 21 July 2019.
[55] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2016, pp. 346 and 360.
[56] His publication of *The Varangians: In God's Holy Fire*, in October 2020 was not available at the time this thesis was presented for examination, see Sverrir Jakobsson, *The Varangians: In God's Holy Fire,* Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave, 2020.

Figure 4: Eastern Trade Routes – eighth to tenth century.[57]

The first arrival of the Varangians is recorded in the *Annales Bertiniani* against the year 852, but there is evidence a group of Swedes found a way down the Dnieper to Constantinople as early as 838 or 839.[58] There are references to Varangians in the contemporary Russian sources,[59] but almost all our reliable knowledge comes from the contemporary Greek sources. Although much of the later Greek historiography of the Scandinavian warriors who travelled to the East is only concerned with their attacks on the Byzantine capital of Constantinople,

[57] A. Frolov, in Tatjana N. Jackson, *Eastern Europe in Icelandic Sagas,* Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2019, Fig. 1, p. 44.

[58] *Annales Bertiniani*, Georg Waitz and G. Pertz, (eds.), Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in Usum Scholarum, Separatim Editi (SS rer. Germ), vol. 5, Hannover: Hahn, 1883, in Ellis Davidson, 1976, pp. 26 and 57.

[59] Russian sources for Varangians are *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, (eds. and trans.), Cambridge, Mass: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953; *The Chronicle of Novgorod 1016-1471*, Robert Mitchell and Nevill Forbes (trans.), Camden Third Series, vol. XXV, London: Offices of the Society, 1914; and *The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, David A. Warner (trans.), Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001. Slavic records are problematic as Slavonic was a kind of *lingua franca* as indicated by the Jewish traveller Ibn Yaqub in about 965, where he numbers the Rus' among the peoples who had learnt Slavonic through mingling with the Slavs, see A. V. Soloviev, “L'Organisation de l'etat russe au X siècle”, in *L'Europe au IX-XI siècles*, Warsaw, 1968, p. 261; cf., J. B. Bury, “The treatise De administrando imperio” (Byzantinische Zeitschrift, XV, Munich, 1906, p. 542.

none of the other sources, including those in Latin and Old Norse, have the same degree of legitimacy.[60] The chronicle *Synopsis historiarum*, written by Greek historian John Skylitzes (1040-1101), who wrote his chronicle several decades after events, contains one of the earliest references to the term 'Varangian'.[61] Skylitzes recorded for the years 1034-1035 that Byzantine fleets manned by Scandinavians under the command of Norwegian Haraldr Sigurðarson, raided along the North African coast and defeated Muslim fleets along the Anatolian coast.[62] He also references the intriguing happenings of the year 1034 when Byzantine Emperor Romanus III (*r.*1028-1034) was likely murdered by his successor known as Michael IV, the Paphlagonian (*r.*1034-1041). The day after his death, Michael IV would marry Romanus's widow Empress Zoe (*r.*1028-1050), and attempt to take command of the Empire by using Scandinavian mercenaries and a civilian bureaucracy controlled by his brothers.[63]

Both Snorri Sturluson in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar,* and the Morkinskinna author have Haraldr Sigurðarson and the Varangian Guard under his command (including two Icelandic warriors), at the epicentre of the political coup d'état of 1042, where Emperor Michael V Kalaphates (who was emperor for four months in 1041-1042) and his uncle fled the palace. They were eventually captured and blinded. According to contemporary medieval Icelandic poet Þjóðólfr, Haraldr Sigurðarson caused both eyes of the King to be taken out, and another skald, Þórarinn Skeggjason, wrote the prince [Haraldr] obtained gold, and "the enthroned King of the Greeks became stone-blind with horrible hurt".[64] This involvement of

[60] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2016, pp. 345-362. p. 346.
[61] John Skylitzes, *Synopsis historiarum*, Ioanns Thurn (ed.), Berlin & New York: De Gruyter, 1973, pp. 394-95.
[62] John Skylitzes, *Synopsis historiarum*, Thurn, 1973, pp. 394-95.
[63] John Skylitzes, *Synopsis historiarum*, Thurn, 1973, pp. 394-95.
[64] The poetry of skalds Þjóðólfr and Þórarinn Skeggjason, appears in a compilation work of the entire corpus of skaldic poetry: *Der norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning,* B1, F. Jonsson, (ed.), Copenhagen, 1913-15, pp. 340 and 368. https://archive.org/details/dennorskislandsk02finn/page/n6 Accessed 13 November 2020. Also see Ellis Davidson, 1976, p. 225; *KHS*, Chapter 14, Magnusson and Pálsson, 1966, p. 61, and also fn.2.

Scandinavians in events affecting the Byzantine Empire places them politically and militarily central to important happenings.

We do not know how many men travelled east to serve as mercenaries, but it seems there were many who did. Regardless of the veracity of the numbers,[65] it is likely Scandinavians formed the bulk of the Varangian Guard, up until the time Anglo-Saxons and Anglo-Scandinavians began to join in large numbers in response to the Norman invasion of England in 1066.[66] However, the tradition for Icelandic warriors to far-travel to give service in the Varangian Guard may have continued right up to 1204, and the breakup of the Byzantine Empire, although the last Greek reference to any identifiable Icelandic Varangian is a mention of three Varangian messengers being dispatched to Norway by Alexius II in 1195.[67] There are occasional mentions of Varangians up until 1405.[68]

The image of the Varangian Guard as being loyal is supported by Anna Comnena (1083-*c.*1153), who writes in *The Alexiad*:

> Varangians from Thule {Scandinavia} (by these I mean the axe-bearing barbarians) … regarded their loyalty to the Emperors and their protection of the imperial persons as a pledge and ancestral tradition …[69]

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[65] For example, 6,000 Varangians are reported as helping St Vladimir to gain his throne in 980. For a detailed review of the numerous sources referring to this event, see *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, (trans. and eds), 1953, pp. 245-246, fn 93; and Blöndal, 1978, p. 43, fn 2.
[66] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2016, pp. 345-362, at p. 345.
[67] This is supported by a reference in *Sverris saga* describing a man of the Vík named Hreiðarr, who had been long out of the country and who had travelled far, coming to Norway with letters from Emperor Kirjalax [Alexius] to King Sverre. See *Sverris saga,* Gustav Indrebø, (ed.), Kristiania [Oslo]: J. Dybwad, 1920, p. 133, in Blöndal, 1978, pp. 218-219.
[68] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2020, p. 160.
[69] Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad,* Elizabeth A.S. Dawes (trans.), Cambridge Ontario: In Parentheses Publications, 2000, p. 46 http://www.yorku.ca/inpar//alexiad_dawes.pdf Accessed 13 November 2020.

Although Anna praises their loyalty and steadfastness, she describes the Varangians as "axe-bearing barbarians". Byzantine sources refer to a number of non-Greek peoples as barbarians (βάρβαροι). It seems it was a term used to describe anyone who lived outside of the Empire including those from the Germanic tribes, Slavs, Huns, Goths, Visigoths, Avars and the Rus; all of whom attacked the Byzantine Empire at various times. Even though eventually some were allowed to settle in Byzantine territory, only the Persians escaped the 'barbarian' label in being considered, unlike the Varangians, as civilised and equals. [70] From the Byzantine perspective, the Varangians were considered barbarians, and of inferior status. It would appear that the common theme of all uses of the word barbarian was the implication of inferiority.[71]

[70] John H. Rosser, *Historical Dictionary of Byzantium,* 2nd edition, Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2012, pp. 15 and 73.
[71] Pagden who has traced the history of the word 'barbarian' from Aristotle and its Greek antiquity origins, describes the prime function of the word as distinguishing between those who were members of the observer's own culture and those who were not, in Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian,* London: Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 15-26.

Figure 5: Varangian Guards carrying axes in an illumination from *Synopsis historiarum*, the eleventh-century chronicle written by John Skylitzes.[72]

The Varangians are generally described as using axes, reflecting archaeological evidence. Unlike the swords of chivalry, as a weapon the Varangian or Viking axe does certainly lend itself to powerful and barbaric imagery.

Figure 6: The Langeid broadaxe, *c.*10-11th century.[73]

[72] Colour facsimile edition of the twelfth-century "Madrid Skylitzis" held at the Biblioteca Nacional de España in Madrid. Depicts the body of Leo V being dragged to the Hippodrome through the Skyla Gate, in John Skylitzes, *Synopsis historiarum*, Agamemnōn Tselikas and Luis Alberto de Cuenca, (eds.), kōdikas Vitr. 26-2 tēs Ethnikēs Vivliothēkēs tēs Madritēs, Athens: Militos, 2000. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Skylitzes#The_Madrid_Skylitzes Accessed 13 November 2020.

[73] The descriptions and illustrations of the barbarian axes is supported by archaeological evidence. The Langeid Broadaxe was found in the same grave as the Langeid sword. They were both discovered in a pre-Christian grave at Langeid in Southern Norway in 2011. The grave can be dated to early eleventh century. Location: University of Oslo, Museum of Cultural History. https://www.khm.uio.no/english/research/collections/objects/the-langeid-broadaxe.html Accessed 10 October 2020.

The Icelandic saga authors constructed their own heroic images to counter the negative earlier descriptions of northern warriors found in Greek texts, and in some Norwegian sources, which were also likely present in Iceland during this time. This negative imagery is clearly evident in the representations of those men who served as mercenaries in Byzantium, where their depiction in the sagas is very different to the images presented by the Greek sources. Greek monk and politician Michael Psellus (*c.*1017-*c.*1078) was critical of the Varangian lack of civilisation. He writes in *Chronographia*, about the founding of the Varangian Guard, which he records as taking place during the reign of Basil II (976-1025), although Psellus calls these soldiers "Tauroscythians" rather than Varangians.[74] Psellus also claims to have witnessed the last recorded Rus raid on Constantinople, which according to the *Primary Chronicle* occurred in 1043. He writes that the barbarian nation of the Rus have always hated the Empire and used any pretext for attack.[75] Although perhaps a reasonable claim from the Greek perspective in view of the series of earlier Rus attacks around the Black Sea, Psellus again emphasises the 'barbarian' and war-like nature of these men.

Conversely, in Iceland, their connection with Byzantium was looked at favourably. For example, Ari Þorgilsson traces his ancestry back to emigrants from Asia Minor,[76] and in *Hauksbók*,[77] the settlement of Scandinavia and Iceland is used to established connections with Asia, rather than other parts of Europe.[78] This relationship may well have been

[74] Michael Psellus, *Chronographia*, Book 3, Chapter 24-26, E.R.A. Sewter (trans.), New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953.
[75] Michael Psellus, *Chronographia*, Book 6, Chapter 99, Sewter (trans.), 1976.
[76] *Íslendingabók* : *Landnamábók,* Jakob Benediktsson, (ed.), *Íslenzk fornrit 1,* (to be referenced going forward as *ÍF*); Reykjavík, 1968, p. 27, in Sverrir Jakobsson, "Hauksbók and the Construction of an Icelandic World View", in Saga Book XXXI, London: University College, Viking Society for Northern Research, 2007, pp. 22-38, at p. 30.
[77] *Hauksbók*, written between 1302 and 1310, is a compilation work that includes Icelandic sagas and a redaction of *Landnámabók*, which describes the settlement of Iceland by the Norse in the eighth and ninth centuries.
[78] Sverrir Jakobsson, "Iceland, Norway and the World: Ari Þorgilsson as a Narrator of Barbarian History", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 132 (2017), pp. 75-99, at p. 95.

cemented in the eleventh century as *Strategikon* of *Kekaumenos* tells us Haraldr Sigurðarson kept on friendly terms with Byzantium after he became King of Norway in 1046. As a result, Greek priests were sent from Constantinople into Norway.[79] They may have reached Iceland, as the tradition of what could be Byzantine priests has been preserved in Icelandic sources, where bishops from abroad are said to have arrived in Iceland offering more lenient doctrines than those in the Icelandic Church.[80] Icelanders were forbidden from receiving service from them, which may have been less about doctrine and more about Church hierarchy.[81]

Setting out on the Varangian journey was a high-risk, high-reward venture. That Icelandic warriors were willing to undertake the long excursion to Russia and on to Constantinople, navigating the dangerous rapids of the Russian rivers, the arduous task of moving longboats over land to avoid the impassable cataracts or to connect with the next river, along with surviving the constant threat of enemy attack, is a testament to the glittering allure of the Varangian experience. It was a compelling reason to far-travel and on the memorial runestones of Norway, Sweden and Gotland, the name 'Greece' [Grikkland] and the Greeks appear more often than those of any other land or people.[82]

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[79] Kekaumenos, *Strategicon et incerti scriptoris de officiis regiis libellous,* 266, Charlotte Roueché (trans.), p. 209, in Ellis Davidson, 1976, p. 228.
[80] Roueché, p. 209, in Ellis Davidson, 1976, p. 228.
[81] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2020, p. 148.
[82] Jonathan Shepard, "Yngvarr's Expedition to the East and a Russian-Inscribed Stone Cross", *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 21 (1984-1985), pp. 222-292, at p. 230, and S.B.F. Jansson, *Runinskrifter i Sverige*, Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell Förlag AB, 1984, pp. 45-51, in Sverrir Jakobsson, 2016, p. 347. Also see the quote at the start of this chapter and footnote 1.

Haraldr Sigurðarson

Bleak showers lashed dark prows
Hard along the coast-line
Iron-shielded vessels
Flaunted colourful rigging.
The great prince saw ahead
The copper roofs of Byzantium;
His swan-breasted ships swept
Towards the tall-towered city. [83]

Haraldr Sigurðarson, later King Haraldr III of Norway (*r.*1046-1066) is probably the most famous of all the Varangians. He was also referred to as Haraldr harðráði.[84] Although he is not an Icelander, Haraldr is important to this chapter as two of the Icelandic far-travelling warriors who are the subjects of this study (and likely the third one too) are recorded in the sagas as serving in the Varangian Guard in Byzantium under the Haraldr's command. They may have been with Haraldr prior to his journey to Constantinople, as *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*, all record that Haraldr served Jaroslav (Jarizleifr), Grand Prince of the Rus, who controlled Hólmgarðr (Kiev) and Novgorod.[85] According to the Icelandic sources, Haraldr would later marry Jaroslav's daughter Elisaveta (1025-*c.*1067); or Elisiv as she was called in Old Norse.

Haraldr Sigurðarson was a significant political figure, even as a young man. There are reports of his Varangian Guard tenure and exploits in Norwegian, Danish and English

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[83] Attributed to the poet Bolverk Arnorsson, one of King Haraldr's court poets, in *KHS,* Magnusson and Pálsson, 1966, pp. 47-48.
[84] Variously translated as 'hard-ruler', 'hard counsel', or 'the ruthless', Haraldr Harðráði may have also been ruler of Denmark for a while, in Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings,* Susan M. Margeson and Kirsten Williams (trans.), London: Penguin Books, 1998, p. 74. Also see Gwyn Jones, *A History of the Vikings,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 466.
[85] Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla,* vol. 3, Chapter 70, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, (ed.), *ÍF 28*, 1951, and Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla,* vol. 3, *Magnús Óláfsson to Magnús Erlingsson*, Chapter 42, Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (trans.), London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2015. See also *Fagrskinna – Nóregs konunga tal.* Bjarni Einarsson (ed.), *ÍF 29,* 1985, p. 227; *Fagrskinna.* Finlay, (trans.), 2004, p. 182; *Morkinskinna,* Andersson and Gade, (trans.), 2000, p. 131; and *Morkinskinna*. 2 vols. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson (eds.), *ÍF 23-24*, 2011, Chapter 1, p. 85.

contemporary, or near-contemporary sources by twelfth-century Norwegian monk Theodoric, Dane Saxo Grammaticus (1160-1220) and Anglo-Norman chronicler William of Malmesbury (*c.*1090-1143).[86] The anonymous *Strategikon of Kekaumenos* (*c.*1078) refers to an Araltes, which was Haraldr Sigurðarson's name in the Greek sources.[87] Also known as *Advice to an Emperor,*[88] it is interested in Haraldr's Byzantine military service with the author claiming to have served with Haraldr in the Bulgarian campaign.[89] Ellis-Davidson judges this likely to be an accurate claim, as *Strategikon* shows a considerable knowledge of Haraldr's history.[90] Acknowledging Haraldr's "valiant" men, *Strategikon* supports the validity of the Icelandic 'larger than life' heroic motif. *Strategikon* also stresses the subservient nature of Haraldr's relationship with the Emperor, but the telling factor here too, is how he also acknowledges Haraldr and his men "chose to go" to Constantinople:

> Araltes [Haraldr] was the son of an emperor of Varangia [basileōs men Varangias ēn uios] … Even though he was young, Araltes chose to go and do obeisance to the Emperor, Lord Michael the Paphlagonian, of most blessed memory, and to come and see the Roman establishment. He brought with him troops as well, five hundred valiant men …[91]

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[86] Theodoric the Monk, describes Haraldr as strong and intelligent, but also as "sui tenax, alieni cupidus" (holding on to his own, desiring what belongs to others), in Theodoric the Monk, "Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium" in *Monumenta Historica Norvegice*, Gustav Storm (ed.), Kristiania: A.W. Brogger, 1880, pp. 51-53. Saxo refers to Haraldr's 'homicidi crimine damnatus', a comment that might be connected with some act of violence during a tax-gathering expedition, in Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum,* vol. 1, in J. Olrik, H. Raeder and F. Blatt (eds.), Copenhagen, 1931, p. 305. William of Malmesbury writes 'pro stupro illustris feminae', linking Haraldr to a woman, in *De Gestis Regum Anglorum,* 11, p. 318, in Blöndal, 1978, p. 87, fn 1.

[87] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2016, p. 346.

[88] Translated and published in the late nineteenth-century alongside *Cecaumeni Strategicon*, it was composed between 1075 and 1078 by a Byzantine general of partly Armenian descent. It offered advice on warfare and the handling of public and domestic affairs.

[89] Jones, p. 9.

[90] Ellis Davidson, 1976, pp. 208-209.

[91] Kekaumenos, *Strategicon et incerti scriptoris De officiis regiis libellous,* 266, Charlotte Roueché (trans.), p. 97, in Ellis Davidson, 1976, p. 208, fn 4.

In the *Konungasögur* known as *Fagrskinna* (*c.*1230), the author describes Haraldr's military status in relation to a powerful man, but again the mercenary status of his men is also acknowledged.

> King Jarizleifr [Jaroslav] [92] appointed Haraldr as second in command over his army and paid a wage to all his men.[93]

Here the Icelandic sources are representing men that can be both loyal and honourable, and in paid service – and that this is different to the ideals of chivalric heroism and fealty to kings seen in other contemporary literature.

The Greek sources give us an insight into the achievements of the Varangian Guard under Haraldr, including how he won a commendation from the Emperor for the part he had played in quashing the Bulgarian uprising (1040). They tell us that on his return to Constantinople, Haraldr became part of the Palace Guard, taking a number of his followers with him, and he received the rank of Spatharicandidatus; he is also recorded as already holding the rank of Manglabites.[94] Both were ranks of high order, and a man holding the office of Manglabites was entitled to wear a sword with a gold hilt.[95]

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[92] Jaroslav I, Grand Prince of the Rus', also known as Jaroslav the Wise. Sources for Haraldr and Jaroslav's relationship include: Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla,* vol. 3, Chapter 70, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, (ed.), *ÍF 28*, 1951, and Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla,* vol. 3, *Magnús Óláfsson to Magnús Erlingsson*, Chapter 42, Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (trans.), London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2015. See also *Fagrskinna – Nóregs konunga tal,* Bjarni Einarsson (ed.), *ÍF 29,* 1985, p. 227; *Fagrskinna,* Finlay (trans.), 2003, p. 182; *Morkinskinna,* Andersson and Gade (trans.), 2000, p. 131; and *Morkinskinna,* Chapter 1, *ÍF 23-24*, Jakobsson and Guðjónsson, 2011, p. 85.

[93] *Fagrskinna,* Chapter 51, Finlay, 2003, p. 182.

[94] Michael Psellus, *Chronographia*, Book 5, Chapters 26 and 30.

[95] The duty of a Manglabites was originally to walk before the Emperor in procession, carrying a jewelled whip on a belt, used to restrain the crowd. The rank of Spatharocandidatus has been compared with that of a colonel, although it was not necessarily a military rank, in Ellis Davidson, 1976, pp. 183, 209, 220-221.

All of the extant Greek sources confirm Haraldr Sigurðarson and his warriors were mercenaries who were paid to fight by powerful men. They emphasize the barbarian status of the Varangians, but they also describe their successes and praise their valour and loyalty. By association, this includes far-travelling mercenaries from Iceland Halldór Snorrason and Úlfr Óspaksson who are documented fighting alongside Haraldr, and possibly another fellow Icelandic mercenary warrior Bolli Bollason, who was likely also serving with Halldór and Úlfr. King Haraldr Sigurðarson was a significant political figure for many years, and any local Icelandic heroes associated with him would have been viewed as larger-than-life (worldly, knowledgeable, experienced, battle-scarred) figures too, if only by association. The story of their travels and successes, would have lived on, becoming legends within families and local communities.

Icelanders on the World Stage

The saga tales of three eleventh-century Icelandic far-travelling warriors from the western region of Iceland – Halldór Snorrason (born *c.*1010), Úlfr Óspaksson (born *c.*1000) [96], and Bolli Bollason (born *c.*1007) appear in a number of different sagas (see Chart 3). Written in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries these sagas describe Halldór and Úlfr travelling to Constantinople, likely via Norway, Hólmgarðr (Kiev) and Novgorod, where they fight and serve alongside Haraldr Sigurðarson. Bolli Bollason "spent one winter in Denmark", after which time, "he continued his travels to other lands, and did not break his journey until he

[96] Úlfr is the son of Ospak, the son of Osvif the Wise. He was a nephew of Gudrun Osvif's daughter, the heroine of *Laxdœla Saga.* His great-grandson, Archbishop Eystein Erlendsson (archbishop from 1161 to 1188) was one of the most influential men in twelfth-century Norway, see *KHS,* Magnusson and Pálsson, 1966, p. 55.

reached Constantinople …"[97] Halldór and his fellow traveller from Breiðafjörður Úlfr, travelled together. They are first mentioned in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*, where they feature as part of Haraldr Sigurðarson's forces besieging the "largest and strongest", and "wealthiest and most populous" town in Sicily.[98] They would have either journeyed with Haraldr from Sweden or Kiev, or they were already in Constantinople prior to Haraldr's arrival. Of course, they could have also left Norway with Haraldr in 1030 after his brother's defeat. Halldór came from a prestigious family. His father, Snorri Þorgrímsson (*d.*1031), also known as Snorri goði or Snorri the Priest, was one of the leading goðar in Iceland in the late Settlement Period (late tenth to early eleventh century). Twelfth- and thirteenth-century audiences would have recognised this well-known historical figure who features in many of the Iceland sagas including *Njals saga, Laxdæla saga, Eyrbyggja saga*[99] and *Grettirs saga.*[100] Eleventh of Snorri's nineteen children, Halldór is described as "the greatest [noblest[101]] of all Snorri's [ten] sons",[102] (albeit one born posthumously), and the only one of Snorri children who is described as travelling off-shore.

In the saga descriptions of Halldór, his Icelandic identity is linked with his impressive physicality. He is a heroic stereotype – as larger than life as any knight of chivalry:

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[97]The *Laxdæla saga* author also dates Bolli's travels to Constantinople about ten years earlier than Halldór and Úlfr's journey, see *Laxdæla saga,* Chapters 70, 73 and 77, in Magnusson and Pálsson, (trans.), 1969, pp. 220-221; 225-227 and 236.

[98] The "great prince" is Haraldr Sigurðarson, see *KHS*, Magnusson and Pálsson, 1966, p. 55.

[99] Chapter 24 mentions a negotiation between Eiríkr rauða (Eiríkr the Red) who features in the Vínland sagas, with Snorri the Priest, see *Eyrbyggja saga,* Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (trans), London: Penguin, 1989, pp. 67-68.

[100] I refer to two of these sagas. *Laxdæla saga:* I have referenced three translations of this saga from different periods, out of the possible six translations published in English; and *Eyrbyggja Saga:* I have referenced two translations from different periods. *Story of the Ere Dwellers,* William Morris and Eirikr Magnusson (trans.), Saga Library, vol. 11, London: Bernard Quaritch, 1892, reprinted by Kessinger Publishing, and *Eyrbyggja Saga,* Pálsson and Edwards (trans.), London: Penguin Books, 1972, 1989.

[101] *Story of the Ere Dwellers,* Chapter 65, William Morris and Eirikr Magnusson (trans.), Saga Library, vol. 11, London: Bernard Quaritch, 1892, reprinted by Kessinger Publishing, p. 166.

[102] "and from him the Sturlungs and the Vatnsfjord people are descended", in *Eyrbyggja Saga,* Chapter 65, Pálsson and Edwards, 1972, 1989, pp. 164-165.

> Halldór was a huge, exceptionally powerful man, and very handsome.[103]

Chapter 78 of *Laxdæla* gives us Snorri the Priest's death-bed words. Here the saga author links the Halldór's presence overseas, with the pre-eminence of his far-travelling warrior son, in his father's eyes:

> … and my son Halldór, the one who I think will be the foremost of all my sons, is not here in this country now.[104]

Although these words have been subject to varying translations from Old Icelandic into English, it is clear Halldór is being nominated as his father's heir and those gathered around the death-bed must wait for his return. Despite being absent overseas, Halldór is the chosen one. Halldór's appearance in *Laxdæla saga* gives a sense of his status. But it is the characterisation of Halldór Snorrason in the other sagas and *þættir*, that gives us a sense of his strangeness or alterity. Although he is handsome and powerful, he is presented by all the saga and *þættir* authors as being very 'difficult', 'larger than life' and a 'man apart'. Here is Snorri Sturluson's description:

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[103] *KHS,* Chapter 36, Magnusson and Pálsson, 1966, p. 87.
[104] *Laxdæla saga,* Chapter 78, Magnusson and Pálsson, p. 237. Kunz's 2001 translation is very similar, but gives the saga author's words more prescient, "The son of mine whom I expect to be foremost among them, Halldór is not in the country now", see "The Saga of the People of Laxardal", Chapter 78, in Kunz, 2001, p. 420. Perhaps a little more flowery is the 1880 translation by Muriel Press, where she chooses the 'greatest' instead of 'foremost': "*nor is there within this land now the one of my sons who I think will be the greatest man among them* Halldór to wit" in *Laxdæla Saga*, Chpater 78, in Muriel A.C. Press (trans.) and Peter Foote, (ed.), London: Dent, 1964, p. 269.

> Halldór was a man of few words; he was blunt and outspoken, sullen and obstinate. The king [King Haraldr III] found these traits disagreeable, as he had plenty of other men around him who were both well-born and eager to serve him.[105]

Halldór is also equally presented in *Morkinskinna* as being valued by the king.

> He enjoyed great honor and recognition from Haraldr at that time, and he stayed with the king during the winter when he resided in Kaupangr [Trondheim].[106]

No chivalrous knight, Halldór is far from being a heroic stereotype.

> The king said: "Don't you think it is presumptuous to ask that Halldórr be paid differently from the sons of our magnates – considering his disgraceful treatment of our payment last time?"
>
> Bárðr said: "What must be considered, sire, is that his valour is worth much more, as well as your long-standing friendship, and not least of all your own generosity. You know Halldórr's disposition and his stubbornness, and it is honourable for you to honor him".[107]

This is in contrast to the simplicity of his Icelandic Varangian comrade Úlfr Óspaksson's relationship with Haraldr. Snorri Sturluson writes how after they all return to Norway in 1045, Halldór returns to Iceland, whereas Úlfr remains in service to Haraldr, who is crowned

[105] *KHS,* Chapter 36, Magnusson and Pálsson, 1966, p. 87
[106] "Halldór's pattr Snorrasonar", in *Morkinskinna*, Chapter 30, Andersson and Gade, (trans.), 2000, p. 188.
[107] "Halldór's pattr Snorrasonar", in *Morkinskinna*, Chapter 30, Andersson and Gade, (trans.), 2000, p. 187.

as Norwegian co-ruler in 1046. Úlfr is rewarded for his loyalty and appointed to the rank of stallari (Marshall),[108] the highest officer of the hirð and he is recorded fighting alongside the king at the Battle of Nissa (1062). Ever the loyal retainer, Úlfr is said to have promised to raise his sword and help Haraldr to invade England, but died in the spring of 1066 before the fleet set sail.[109]

Fagrskinna gives us a different image of Úlfr, and a different perspective of heroic loyalty to that found in the indigenous Icelandic sagas. Likely written in Trondheim, Norway, *Fagrskinna* is thought to be Norwegian in origin.[110] It was written during a time of turbulence in Iceland, when the reigning Norwegian king would no doubt have surely have wished for loyal and trusted Icelanders. *Fagrskinna* presents Úlfr as a foil to Halldór Snorrason. Just as Oliver is to Roland in *The Song of Roland*, with the character of Úlfr we see the literary trope of the loyal and trusted retainer, even to death.[111]

> And that summer Úlfr stallari died, and when the king turned away from his burial he spoke words that were a fine memorial to Úlfr:
>
> > "Here lies the man who was most noble-minded and loyal to his lord."[112]

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[108] A stallari was one of the most prominent retainers of the Norwegian king whose duty it was to communicate the king's decisions to the populace. Haraldr harðráði had two marshals, Úlfr and Styrkárr, in Kari Ellen Gade 2009, "Introduction to Úlfr stallari Óspaksson, *Lausavísa*", in Kari Ellen Gade (ed.), "Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 2: From *c.*1035 to *c.*1300", in *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 2*, Brepols: Turnhout, 2009, pp. 348-9.
[109] *KHS,* Chapters 61 and 79, Magnusson and Pálsson, 1966, pp. 111-112 and 138.
[110] Finlay describes the *Fagrskinna* author as a "conservative compiler of earlier written sources", in Finlay, 2003, pp. 2, 3 and 8.
[111] "Count Roland, when he sees all his peers dead, and Oliver too, whom he loved so much, was overcome with tenderness and he began to weep", in *The Song of Roland,* Jessie Crosland (trans.), Ontario: In parentheses Publications, 1999, Chapter 164, p. 45. http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/roland_crosland.pdf Accessed 13 November 2020.
[112] *Fagrskinna,* Chapter 60, Finlay, 2003, p. 220.

Unlike the flawed Halldór, Úlfr had stayed on in the king's favour, enjoying rank and status. He even marries Haraldr's wife's sister; a major social advancement, particularly for an Icelander. In *Heimskringla*, Snorri Sturluson gives us another view of Úlfr's status in relation to King Haraldr. He stresses Úlfr's personal attributes including being extremely astute and well-spoken. In Snorri's opinion these attributes made Úlfr the perfect and compliant, long-term retainer; unlike the argumentative Halldór who chose to return to claim his place in Icelandic society. It could be that Snorri is using this contrast between the two characters' connection with King Haraldr to highlight that a successful relationship between Icelanders and the Norwegian crown was dependent on loyalty and compliance.

> Úlfr Óspaksson stayed on with King Haraldr in great favour and affection. He was extremely shrewd and well-spoken, very capable, loyal, and honest. King Haraldr made Úlfr his Marshall [stallari], and gave to him in marriage his own sister-in-law Jorunn.[113]

Jorunn was a member of the powerful Giske family who played a key role in Norwegian politics, and whether given as a reward, or for some other reason, the opportunity to make such a prestigious marriage would have been a tremendous boost to Úlfr's status in Norway and Iceland, even though he too came from a powerful Icelandic lineage. Such marriages of men and women from great families were carefully negotiated and contracted alliances, linking dynasties, territories and political interests, with oaths often accompanying matrimonial agreements. Duby describes how European medieval marriages were bound in a rigid framework of rituals and prohibitions, and strictly controlled by both law and

[113] *KHS,* Chapter 38, Magnusson and Pálsson, 1966, p. 88.

ceremony.[114] He has found cunning and subterfuge being used in the bargaining process, with care being taken to obtain guarantees to protect the interests and concerns of both parties.[115] By writing about this significant marriage alliance, on a superficial level Snorri could have been pointing to the historic ties between Iceland and Norway. Beyond this, his contemporary audience would have likely perceived that the prestige and importance of such a marriage also served to potentially advance the status, certainly of Úlfr's twelfth and thirteenth century descendants, but possibly of all Icelanders who could take pride in the advancement of one of their own, even if one to two centuries later. By contrast, in Snorri's characterisation of Halldór, we are clearly presented with a different heroic trope, one that includes independence of spirit and actions. Both of these characterisations are deliberate and reflective, as Snorri himself had a difficult relationship with the Norwegian Court, falling out of favour with King Hákon IV, who eventually ordered his murder.[116]

The benefits and rewards to be gained as a mercenary warrior in far-off lands feature in a number of sagas.[117] The sources record Haraldr Sigurðarson became very wealthy.[118] There are accounts in the sagas of the Icelanders under his command also benefitting from their mercenary experience, including returning warriors displaying both wealth and status items. Blöndal confirms the Varangian Guard were well-paid as mercenary soldiers. In comparison

[114] Georges Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages,* Jane Dunnett, (trans.), Chicago: Polity Press, 1994, pp. 3-4.
[115] Duby, 1966, p. 8.
[116] As detailed and discussed in Chapter Two.
[117] The most comprehensive survey of the history of Scandinavian mercenaries is Sigfús Blöndal's *Væringjasaga*, later translated from Icelandic into English, updated and re-written by Benedikt Benedikz and published as *The Varangians of Byzantium*, Benedikt S. Benedikz, (trans/reviser), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, pp. 193-222, which gives details about individual Varangians and travellers and the sagas in which they feature. See also Sverrir Jakobsson, 2016, pp. 354-357.
[118] *KHS* reports King Haraldr said to his nephew King Magnus: "I have spent much time in foreign lands and had to undergo not a few hazards in order to amass this gold you now see before you. Now I want to share this wealth with you … then scales and weights were produced, and the whole treasure was divided into two equal parts. All those present were astonished that such immense wealth in gold should have been assembled in Scandinavia in one place, see *KHS,* Chapter 24, Magnusson and Pálsson, 1966, p. 72.

to the basic rate of pay for men in the Byzantine Imperial forces which was from twelve to eighteen nomismata monthly, Blöndal has calculated the pay achieved by the Varangian Guard once they had become a separate military unit, was that of the Grand Hetairia[119] – around forty numismata per month. In addition to this pay, soldiers received a portion of the booty. One sixth of all plundered wealth went to the Emperor and the rest was split into two parts; one for the commanders, the other for the soldiers.[120]

The benefits and rewards to be gained in the east are illustrated in the characterisation of Bolli Bollason, the third Varangian far-traveller who is part of this study. We can see the trope of conspicuous consumption in *Laxdæla* with the success of Bolli's journey and his Varangian Guard service. We also learn, "he was held in high esteem in Norway."[121] This would indicate Norway too, was seen as an emblematic place to earn an international representation.

> Bolli brought with him a great deal of money and many treasures that princes and men of rank had given him.[122]

Gift exchange was an important political and economic factor in the Viking age and beyond, and both royal generosity and the valuable objects that were gifted, are celebrated in skaldic poetry.[123] The addition of the phrase 'men of rank' may indicate Bolli achieved more

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[119] Some divisions of the Byzantine Emperor's mercenary force were kept in the capital, and formed a part of the life-guard force stationed there. The overall name for these troops was the *Hetairia.* The Grand Hetairia was one of three *Hetairia* (Grand, Mid and Third) and according to Blöndal it contained a majority of foreign mercenaries, in Blöndal, 1978, pp. 20-21.
[120] Blöndal, 1978, pp. 25-28.
[121] *Laxdæla,* Chapter 73, in Magnusson and Pálsson, (trans.), 1969, p. 226.
[122] *Laxdæla saga,* Chapter 77, in Magnusson and Pálsson, (trans.), 1969, p. 236.
[123] Bjarne Fidjestøl, "Have you heard a Poem worth more? Economic Aspects of Skaldic Poetry", in *Selected Papers,* Odense, 1997, pp. 117-132.

widespread acclaim than just coming to the notice of princes. The only extant source describing Bolli's Varangian experience is *Laxdæla*.[124] One of its striking themes, however, is the use of fine clothing and named weaponry as motifs to signal the prestigious outcome and economic success of Bolli's Varangian Guard experience. These motifs are presented using a lot more specific detail than that found in other sagas describing returning far-travellers.

These motifs can also be found in other contemporary works, such as the chivalric knights in *The Song of Roland* of which there was a Norse version.[125] Saxo Grammaticus' (1186-1218) *Gesta Danorum* reveals the contemporary cultural anxiety about the conflict between the ancient warrior ideals and the new influx of continental courtliness. The *Gesta's* protagonist is tom between the new courtly ideals and values including diplomacy, romance and attention to clothing, and the traditional heroic ideals.[126] Icelandic far-travelling warriors were also depicted as dressing well and looking good, particularly when returning home. Saga authors frequently comment on the colour of clothing, bright colours being synonymous across medieval Europe with wealth and power due to the cost of dying the fabric. The addition of gold thread or gold decorations would have made Bolli Bollason a splendid sight.

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[124] Bolli Bollason does also feature in *Bolla þáttr Bollasonar* (Bolli Bollason's Tale), is a feud-based short story set in Iceland after Bolli's return from his travels.

[125] The Old Norse version of the *Chanson de Roland,* formed part of a compilation in prose of the history of Charlemagne, titled *Karlamagnús saga*. The text is preserved in four Icelandic manuscripts, none of which are complete, and in fragments are five more. It is likely a major part of the compilation was translated during the reign of King Hákon (1217-1263). This is consistent with the Norse translation of the story of *Tristram and Iseult*, which was likely commissioned by King Hákon around 1226, see E.F. Halvorsen, "The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland", *Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana* 19, Copenhagen, Ejnar Munksgaard, 1959, p. 32-37, and fn 3; also see Sif Rikhardsdottir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse: The Movement of Texts in England, France and Scandinavia,* Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012, pp. 28 and 57.

[126] See Stephen C. Jaeger, The Origins of Courtliness, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, pp. 176-189.

> He had become such a fine dresser by the time he returned from his journey abroad that he wore only clothes of scarlet or silk brocade and all his weapons were decorated with gold. He became known as Bolli the Elegant … He wore a suit of silk brocade given to him by the emperor of Byzantium, with a cloak of red scarlet outermost.[127]

Far-travel success as a mercenary warrior was measured by recognition, and the external signs and symbols of reward. The symbolism of a weapon as outward expressions of success is further enhanced in *Laxdæla*, where Bolli's famous sword Leg-biter is described as having had a 'make-over'.[128]

> He was girt with the sword 'Leg-Biter', its pommel now gold-embossed and the hilt bound with gold.[129]

Returning warriors as fabulously attired as Bolli and his entourage, were not an everyday sight in Iceland.

> …and whenever they took quarters the women paid heed to nothing but gazing at Bolli and his grandeur, and that of his followers.[130]

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[127] "The Saga of the People of Laxardal", Chapter 77, in Kunz, (trans.), 2001, p. 419. According to the Magnusson and Pálsson translation, "He was called Bolli the Proud", and in the Press translation, he is called "Bolli the Grand". The variances in translating just one Old Icelandic adjective into English, highlights the perennial debate surrounding the sagas – the challenge of interpreting a word or phrase in the context of its environment, see "The Saga of the People of Laxardal", Chapter 77, in Kunz, (trans.), 2001, p. 419; *Laxdæla saga,* Chapter 77, in Magnusson and Pálsson, (trans.), 1969, p. 236; and *The Laxdale Saga,* Chapter LXXVII, in Press, (trans.), 1964, pp. 267-268.

[128] According to *Laxdæla saga,* 'Leg-biter' was gifted to Bolli by his cousin Þuríðr who had stolen it off her husband Geirmundr. Geirmundr subsequently cursed the sword and then later drowned in Norway, see *Laxdæla saga,* Chapter 30, in Magnusson and Pálsson, (trans.), 1969, p. 115.

[129] *Laxdæla,* Chapter 77, Magnusson and Pálsson, (trans.), p. 236.

[130] *The Laxdale Saga,* Chapter LXXVII, Press, (trans.), 1964, pp. 267-268.

Bolli was every bit the rival of a knightly Sir Gawain or Roland. We can also see the accuracy of the *Laxdæla saga* description of Leg-biter, when compared with this sword dated to a similar period, which was found in Norway.

Figure 7: Langeid sword, *c.*10-11th century.[131]

Bolli Bollason is also acclaimed as being the very first northerner to serve the Byzantine Emperor. Although the *Laxdæla* author is incorrect,[132] such an assertion does serve to advance Iceland's position on the world stage, even if only to a local audience.

> After a year in Denmark, Bolli began his journey through foreign countries, not stopping until he reached Constantinople. After a short time there he entered the

[131] The Langeid sword is considered an ornate and prestigious sword. The hilt is overlaid with mystical Christian signs, complex Latin lettering, possibly even Greek lettering, and inlaid with threads of gold, silver and copper. It was discovered in a pre-Christian grave at Langeid in Southern Norway in 2011. The grave can be dated to early eleventh century. Location: University of Oslo, Museum of Cultural History. https://www.khm.uio.no/english/research/collections/objects/the-ornate-sword-from-langeid.html Accessed 10 October 2020.

[132] "The Icelandic sagas mention several others who were earlier, including Kolskegg Hamundarson, the brother of Gunnar of Hlidarend, who was considered exceptionally valiant in every hazard, and was always in the forefront", in *Laxdæla,* Magnus Magnusson and Herman Pálsson, (trans.), London: Penguin, 1969, Chapter 73, pp. 227-228, fn 1. For a full bibliography of the Icelandic Varangians see Blöndal, 1978, pp. 208-209.

> company of the Varangian guard, and we know no reports of northerners having entered the service of the Byzantine emperor before Bolli Bollason. He spent many years in Constantinople …[133]

These far-travelling warriors were all local heroes who achieved significant success. Their stories are relatable. They demonstrate an independence of spirit, which is not tied to unquestioning loyalty to a king or emperor. They return to Iceland. Even where they stay and serve a foreign king, like Úlfr Óspaksson did, they maintain their independence because they have the right to choose. By depicting these characters the way they have, the saga authors have reflected the idealised independence of Icelandic society during the saga age, and as this study advances, this likely contributed towards the development of a communal Icelandic identity, where local audiences could take pride in the achievements of one of their own.

Coming Home

The theme of 'return journeys' is a common one in the sagas, and for some far-travelling warriors, a return to Iceland can be depicted as desirable, if not aspirational. Halldór Snorrason is characterised as being one such traveller, and the anonymous author of *Halldórs þáttr Snorrasonar* reveals a Halldór who is longing to return home. Again we see that the inference an Icelandic mercenary warrior returning home is expected to look 'successful'; sartorial splendour was a customary or expected trope at the time the sagas were written

[133] "The Saga of the People of Laxardal", Kunz, (trans.), 2001, pp. 276-421.

down. The anonymous author of Halldór's first *þættir* names Iceland as being Halldór's home, therefore differentiating himself[134] from Halldór (and Iceland), indicating he was likely to be Norwegian.[135] In the second *þættir – Halldórs páttr Snorrasonar* – the author has focused on Halldór's loyalty to his Icelandic home.

> But as spring wore on, King Haraldr noticed that Halldórr Snorrason became very dejected. One day the king asked him what was on his mind. Halldórr replied,
>
> "I am eager to go to Iceland, lord".
>
> "Many others must have been more homesick than you", said the king. "But what is the state of your cargo, and how is your money invested?"
>
> "The investment is easy," he answered, "because I have nothing but the clothes on my back."[136]

We have no surviving account of Halldór's actual arrival or reception back in Iceland, but we know he returned to live there. "When Halldór reached Iceland, he set up a farm at Hjardarholt".[137]

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[134] Male gender is assumed here as there is no evidence of women writing or sponsoring sagas apart from some speculation about the possibility the author of *Laxdæla* being a woman, or that it was written for a predominantly female audience, due to the large number of female characters – more than any other saga, in Judith Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age,* Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991, p. 193. Also see Guðrún Nordal, "Text in Time: The Making of Laxdœla", Paper delivered at the 15th International Saga Conference, Aarhus University, August 5-11, 2012; and Helga Kress, " 'Mjok mun þér samstaft þykkja', Um sagnahefð og kvenlega reynslu í Laxdæla sögu", in *Konur skrifa til heiðurs Ön nu Sigurðardóttur*, Valborg Bentsdóttir et al., (eds.), Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 1980, pp. 97-109.

[135] "Halldor was the son of the chieftain Snorri from Iceland", in "The First Story of Halldór Snorrason", in Bachman, (trans.), 1992, pp. 187-192, at p. 187.

[136] "Halldórs páttr Snorrasonar", in *Morkinskinna,* Chapter 30, Andersson and Gade, 2000, Chapter 30, pp. 187-194, at p. 188.

[137] "The Tale of Halldór Snorrason II", Gunnell (trans.), in Thorsson, 2001, p. 693; also "After Halldór came to Iceland he became a farmer at Hjardarholt ...", in "Halldór Snorrason", *Hrafnkel's Saga and Other Stories,* Hermann Pálsson (trans.), London: Penguin Books, 1971, p. 120.

Although not described as specifically longing to return home to Iceland as was Halldór Snorrason, Bolli Bollason is still portrayed as being happy to be home, with his reunion with his wife Thordis described as being "a joyous one."[138]

In contrast, despite all his successes and military position, the representation of Úlfr in the sagas is obviously much more muted than that of Bolli Bollason. It is also more subdued than that of his travelling companion Halldór Snorrason in *Heimskringla* and *Morkinskinna.* Both of these works were compiled in Iceland. Úlfr could have been the subject of one or more lost saga or *þættir*. However, I have found no traces that such works existed. Character representations also depend on the outlook of the saga author and perhaps where the work was written. This applies to Úlfr. Out of the three Icelandic Varangians who are the focus of this study, only Úlfr appears in *Fagrskinna*; and always in connection to King Haraldr. This is understandable if, as has been argued, *Fagrskinna* is of Norwegian origin and written in Norway (possibly by an Icelander).[139]

Here we see Úlfr not only being acknowledged as valued by King Haraldr, but he is positioned alongside the king:

> Then Úlfr stallari called to his men, 'Place our ship forward next to the king's ship,' as the poet Steinn says:
>
> > Úlfr called on all of us—
> >
> > out there long spears quivered—

[138] "The Saga of the People of Laxardal", Kunz, (trans.), 2001, Chapter 77, p. 419. See also Magnusson and Pálsson who translate: "a very happy reunion, in *Laxdœla,* Chapter 77, Magnusson and Pálsson, 1969, p. 236.
[139] Based on palaeographical evidence, it is thought the only surviving medieval manuscript fragment of the earlier of the two versions of Fagrskinna was written in or near Trondheim. It has also been suggested the author was an Icelander working in Norway, see Finlay, "Introduction", *Fagrskinna,* Finlay (trans.), 2003, p. 36.

when sculling was speeded at sea—

the king's marshal; the courageous conqueror's

keen friend ordered men

well forward to lay his longship

alongside the king; men agreed.[140]

But it does beg the question, why weren't the Icelandic authors similarly descriptive with Úlfr's characterisation? One major difference in the Varangian experience of Úlfr Óspaksson compared with his fellow traveller Halldór Snorrason, and his cousin Bolli Bollason, is that Úlfr is the only one of the three who does not return to live in Iceland. His connection to Iceland seemingly ends, with the rest of his life being characterised by life-long service to a king (and well as marrying well and founding a famous dynasty).

The Icelandic saga authors were more focused on those far-travelling warriors who actually returned to Iceland to share their stories with family and friends. For men like Bolli and Halldór, the act of returning home signified and legitimised their ongoing Icelandic identity, and their independence from foreign overlordship. It certainly allowed their stories to circulate across time. Whereas saga descriptions of the later exploits of Úlfr Óspaksson, who chose Norway over Iceland and to stay and serve a king, are limited to events associated with King Haraldr, recalled by royal skalds such as Steinn Herdisarson.[141] Any stories featuring Úlfr coming out of Iceland were likely to be at least second-hand, or otherwise written by Norwegian authors, or produced under strong Norwegian influences, such with *Fagrskinna*. These accounts were potentially written for a Norwegian audience, unlike the first-person

[140] *Fagrskinna,* Chapter 57, Finlay, 2003, p. 211.

[141] According to Snorri Sturluson, Steinn was on board Úlfr's ship during the Battle of Nissa, see *KHS*, Chapter 61, Magnusson and Pálsson, 1966, p. 112.

accounts told by those returning warriors such as Halldór and Bolli. Perhaps the Icelandic authors did consider those who returned to be truer Icelanders, but what is clear in the writing of the Icelandic saga authors under review, is that returning home was just as important as successful far-travelling.

Warrior Far-travellers in a Thirteenth Century Context

The adventures of the far-travelling warriors examined here relate to far-travel in the eleventh century, but their stories were not committed to vellum until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. For their contemporary Icelandic audiences, these tales of long-dead heroes presented them with heroic imagery that emphasised independence of thought, even of actions. Most of the sagas were written at a time of upheaval and ongoing civil war in Iceland. There were secular conflicts between powerful families, as well as violent clashes between the episcopacy and the ruling elites, as the power of the church was at once aggressive and uncertain. Overlying all of the chaos and ultimately proving the most powerful influence of all was Norway's active involvement in Icelandic politics.[142]

We can see these influences in the writing of Snorri Sturluson. Even as his grip on power in Iceland and his influence in Norway were diminishing, Snorri continued to promote Iceland and Icelanders through the characterisation of far travelling warriors like Halldór Snorrason and Úlfr Óspaksson. In the characterisation of Úlfr, Snorri describes his rise to become a stallari in the service of King Haraldr Harðráði. Snorri writes how Úlfr was such a trusted

[142] Iceland's relationship with Norway is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

advisor he is credibly able to comment on the strength and quality of Harold Godwinson's English army.[143] As to the catalyst driving these themes, as Wanner points out, although Iceland's elite were "politically, economically and socially dominant" at home, within the larger Scandinavian context, the Icelandic elite "were dominated in all these areas of power and distinction".[144] Snorri certainly became alienated from King Hákon IV of Norway when he favoured Hákon's rival Jarl Skúli Bárðarson who had earlier served as Hákon's regent. Snorri likely did this as Hákon had favoured other Icelandic chieftains, and being a skald under Hákon's reign did not offer Snorri any literary or cultural advantages. Although Hákon was a patron of the arts, including introducing *chanson de geste* to Norway, unlike earlier Norwegian rulers, he was uninterested in Icelandic skaldic verse, which was one of Snorri's passions. Whilst the popularity and prestige of skaldic poetry remained strong in Iceland, Snorri's loss of favour and the fall-off in popularity of traditional skaldic verse in Norway,[145] would give him every reason to want to promote Iceland's own past and larger-than-life, independent heroes. With perhaps a subtle nod to King Hákon's lack of interest in skaldic poetry, Snorri praises its value as a form of knowledge about past kings:

> A great deal of information about King Haraldr is contained in the poems which Icelandic poets presented to him and his sons; and because of this interest in poetry, he was a great friend of theirs.[146]

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[143] See *Ágrip*, *ÍF 29, 36, Ágrip,* Driscoll, 1995, pp. 52-53, *Morkinskinna,* 1928-32, pp. 55-56, 74, 80-82, 170-171, 207-209, 265; *Morkinskinna,* Andersson and Gade 2000, pp. 129, 142, 145-146, 204, 227-228, 263; *Fagrskinna* (*ÍF 29*), pp. 235, 262, 264-266, 276; Finlay 2003, pp. 189, 209, 211-12, 220, *Heimskringla* (*ÍF* 28, *79, 86*, pp 119-20, 147, 175; Hollander, 1991, pp. 583, 588, 608, 626, 645; Hulda-Hrokkinskinna, Fms 6, pp. 164-6, 266, 313-15, 401, *Flateyjarbók,* 1860-8, vol. III, pp. 287-8, 301, 304-5, 344, 361-2, and 388. http://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/db.php?table=verses&id=4656&val=reykholt Accessed 8 November 2020.

[144] Kevin J. Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda: The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval Scandinavia,* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008, p. 57.

[145] Wanner, p. 57.

[146] *KHS,* Chapter 36, Magnusson and Pálsson, 1966, p. 86.

Saga accounts of Norwegian and Icelandic social and political relationships are complex and nuanced. We can see this in the characterisation of Halldór Snorrason in the two anonymously written *þættir* about his later relationship with (now) King Haraldr Sigurðarson. It has been suggested both of Halldór's *pættir* have Norwegian authors, and this could be explained by the needling attitude evident in first *þáttr* about Halldór Snorrason, where the phrase: "Halldór was quick to anger, as were most Icelanders …"[147]. The author was either creating or more likely supporting an existing parochial stereotype, that Icelanders were quickly angered. It would also imply the author was not an Icelander. Another explanation is that it could be a form of sarcastic humour, or banter – a 'big brother', versus 'little brother' rivalry between Iceland and Norway.

The trend towards chivalric literature in Norway was a further factor distinguishing the heroic warrior-traveller of the sagas, from those knightly heroes of what was now contemporary Norwegian tastes. Unlike the courtly knights featured in the new French and English chivalric literature favoured by King Hákon and the Norwegian court instead of travelling around in the pursuit and defence of honour,[148] the Icelandic warriors presented a more traditional heroic image. Halldór's first *þáttr*[149] supports the trope of the flawed hero who maintains certain noble values. On his return to Norway after serving in Constantinople, Halldór left King Haraldr's court after an argument, and went to stay with Einarr Þambarskelfir, where he commits an incredible breach of guest responsibility.[150]

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[147] "The First Story of Halldór Snorrason", in Bachman, (trans.), 1992, p. 187.
[148] In the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries skaldic poetry experienced, particularly in the Norwegian court, a reduction in its audience, leading to its virtual extinction by the early 1300s. For a detailed discussion on King Hákon's literary patronage, and cultural influences see Wanner, pp. 190, and 210-216.
[149] "The First Story of Halldór Snorrason", in Bachman, (trans.), 1992, p. 188.
[150] Einar Thambarskelf also appears in as an archer supporting King Óláf at the Battle of Svold, see *Óláfs saga Tryggnasonar*, in Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla,* Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *ÍF 26-28*, Reykjavik, 2002, vol. 1, pp. 348-368.

> Halldór's host Einar was married to Berglijot. She was the daughter of Jarl Hákon the Wicked Sigurðson,[151] the Jarl of Hlade. Halldór often went to Berglijot and told her many stories of his and King Harald's deeds in other lands. Many others often listened in on these.
>
> Kali was a younger kinsman of Einar, though not a close one, and he was ill-tempered, quite jealous, quick to insult, and very boastful … He slandered Halldór terribly and urged others to do the same, but no one would, so Kali kept on with it by himself.[152]

The sagas were specifically concerned with placing Icelanders in a superior position relative to Norwegians. We can see this when Berglijot defends Halldór's reputation by acknowledging and acclaiming Halldór's heroic status to his Norwegian audience; a public declaration, and in an international context. Again we see traditional Icelandic heroic motifs:

> "It's evil to slander strangers with insults. You shall all have your tongues yanked out of your heads by a troll! Halldór's bravery has been tried more than almost anyone's in Norway!"
>
> Kali answered, "I'm not afraid of the grease-sucker,[153] no matter how great you think he is …" [154]

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[151] Jarl Hákon the Wicked Sigurðson was the last pagan ruler in Norway; he resisted conversion many times. See Stephanie Kirby, *Examining Hákon the Jarl (Hákon Sigurdsson) in Old Norse historiography,* paper submitted as part of MA (hons) in Arabic and Mediaeval History, Fife, Scotland: University of St Andrews, pp. 1-12.

[152] "The First Story of Halldór Snorrason", in Bachman, (trans.), 1992, p. 188.

[153] This insult, common in the sagas, probably originated from the Icelanders' emphasis on animal husbandry, in Bachman, (trans.), 1992, p. 188, fn 72.

[154] "The First Story of Halldór Snorrason", in Bachman, (trans.), 1992, p. 188.

Halldór however, is not a man to be crossed. Just as the hero of the *Gesta* acts on the heroic trope "obligation of revenge", Halldór acts similarly.[155] But he is not foolhardy and seeking revenge, he is defending his honour; and perhaps it is to be implied that of Iceland.

> Halldór would not suffer these insults. He ran into the room and struck Kali his death-blow.[156]

Breaching guest responsibility by slaying one's host's kinsman was still a serious matter, even for the great Halldór. Ever the brave saga hero, Halldór offers Einar his head as compensation. Moving on from pagan heroic imagery, involving trolls and severed heads, the story concludes with the gracious Einar forgiving Halldór and paying off Kali's family, then we have a balancing of scales with Christian overtones.[157]

> "If some man does you a great wrong, so great that you would have his life at all costs, and you have him in your power, then you must give him no less freedom than I give you now."[158]

Not only does this passage convey the obvious Christian forgiveness motif, but in the case of overseas audiences, particularly those in Norway where the sagas were in circulation, the

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[155] With the *Gesta,* the heroic value represented is the "obligation of revenge", which is a very familiar theme across the sagas. See Stephen C. Jaeger, The Origins of Courtliness, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, pp. 176-189, and Jesse Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic Saga,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

[156] "The First Story of Halldór Snorrason", in Bachman, (trans.), 1992, p. 188.

[157] King Ólafr Tryggvason (*c*.960s-1000) is considered a leading figure in the conversion of Norway to Christianity, and in Einar's case it was King Ólafr who obtains Einar's pledge to reciprocate, after rescuing him from a life of slavery, after Einar was captured by the Danes, in "The First Story of Halldór Snorrason", in Bachman, (trans.), 1992, pp. 190-192.

[158] "The First Story of Halldór Snorrason", in Bachman, (trans.), 1992, pp. 190-192.

entire incident would serve to craft or cement the trope a typical travelling Icelander could, and frequently did, punch above their weight. They were proud and they should not be 'messed with', especially by Norwegians, which raises an interesting point, especially if Halldór's first *þáttr* was written by a Norwegian.[159]

Chapter Conclusion

As discussed in Chapter Two, the Icelandic sagas were recorded at a time of developing Norwegian overlordship. This in turn was a motivator for the themes and tropes evident in the characterisation of far-travelling warriors who represent a spirit of independence. They were larger-than-life heroic figures, and they served to foster a community identity and pride in the achievements of 'their own' that was unique to Iceland.

The saga authors may well have also been prompted to develop these heroic characterisations about their own far-travelling forebears and kin in response to the negative images of those who travelled east to became Varangians. The sagas present a different image of these far-travelling warriors to the Greek sources – one more heroic and civilised; less "barbarian". Despite being described as loyal warriors, the Varangians are also clearly presented in the Greek sources as barbarians, which meant you were potentially an uncivilised, dangerous outsider.   As this was an entrenched belief, the Varangians would have known they were perceived this way, and this knowledge would have returned with them to Iceland.

[159] "The First Story of Halldór Snorrason", in Bachman, (trans.), 1992, p. 188.

By characterising Icelandic far-travelling warrior heroes the way they have, the saga authors present a very different kind of warrior hero from what was conventional elsewhere. Their far-travelling warriors are independent and individualistic Icelanders. They can be difficult and taciturn, sometimes flamboyant, but they are loyal. Sometimes too, they wrestle with the conflicting values of providing paid service and giving unquestioned loyalty. But they are also successful and often not afraid to flaunt their success. And mostly they return home to Iceland. This is a very different heroic trope to the chivalrous knight, focused on honour, giving devoted service to a liege-lord, as found in the *chanson de geste* tales we know were translated into the vernacular in Norway at that time.

The saga authors, through the vehicle of far-travel and far-travellers, not only encouraged Icelanders to take pride in the achievements of their own in distant lands, but through the use of various literary tropes and motifs, they were promoting independence imagery at a time of internal turmoil, which would lead to civil war, and eventual capitulation to Norway. During these troubled times, this imagery of larger-than-life heroic far-travellers served to reassure Icelanders they were still valued by important overseas people and that they did have a place on the world stage. The international reach of the sagas would have also added value to the perceptions of what it meant to be an Icelander held by those who lived outside the borders, particularly their Norwegian audiences.

Chapter Four

Westward Far-travellers
– explorers and colonisers

For three days they sailed
with the wind from the south-west
until they saw a third land.
This land had high mountains,
capped by a glacier.
The Saga of the Greenlanders. [1]

The representation of some of the far-travellers who sailed westward, and the way the saga authors present and value journeys of discovery in this direction are very different from the warriors discussed in Chapter Three. With no foreign king or powerful lord to fight for, or significant Christian destination to visit, the motivation of those who undertook the hazardous journey west was presented as focused around exploration, appropriation of land or landnám, and explicitly on the exploitation of foreign resources. These travellers are shown to be heroic, but in a different manner to the warriors who fought with swords in far-away battles. They are heroic by association. The risks and dangers presented by the actual voyage itself is at the forefront of the narrative, and although the benefits of the journey in terms of wealth and prestige are there, they are muted and inconsistent. Despite their bravery as explorers, the sagas depict many of the journeys as failures, or describe travellers returning with little to show for their efforts, when compared to their eastern far-travelling counterparts. Other far-travellers are subtly criticised as being cowards, or their recognition and success are firmly tied to Christianity motifs, rather than to the outcomes of their voyages, or to their status as heroic explorers.

[1] "The Saga of the Greenlanders", Keneva Kunz (trans.), in *The Sagas of Icelanders,* Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), New York: Penguin Books, 2001, p. 637.

Descriptions of westward journeys can be found in the Sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*) and related *þættir*, which were composed from the late twelfth century and during the thirteenth century in Iceland. The two manuscript versions of *Eiríks saga rauða* (Saga of Eiríkr the Red),[2] and *Grœnlendinga saga* (Saga of the Greenlanders),[3] which together make up the Vínland saga, are the best known of these accounts. The tales are presented as being late Viking Age, orally transmitted stories about the community in Greenland, and the discovery and settlement of Vínland or 'wineland' *c.*1000,[4] and they survive in three compilation manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[5] As a cultural signpost, the Vínland Sagas offer a range of observations and literary themes referring to the special environmental and economic circumstances of the colonies in Greenland and Vínland, the challenges faced by the explorers and settlers, and the importance of foreign trade and connections with Norway. This study has looked widely at hegemony across the North Atlantic region, including as discussed in Chapter Two, the proposition that the exploitation of wildlife, particularly walrus ivory and hides, organised and directed by off-shore societal elites, was the primary motivator of the Icelandic landnám.[6] The theme of landnám in the discovery and settlement of Greenland and Vínland is continued in this Chapter, including

[2] I will be referencing the following translations: "Eirík the Red's Saga", Kunz (trans.), in Thorsson, 2001, pp. 654-674; "Eirík the Red's Saga", in *The Vínland Sagas,* Keneva Kunz, (trans.), London: Penguin, 2008, pp. 25-50; and "Eirík's Saga", in *The Vínland Sagas,* Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson (trans.), London: Penguin, 1965, pp. 75-105. I will be using the author's choice of spelling for Icelandic names, anglicising where indicated.

[3] I will be referencing the following translations: "The Saga of the Greenlanders", in Kunz, (trans.), in Thorsson, 2001, pp. 636-652; "The Sagas of the Greenlanders", in Kunz, 2008, pp. 3-21; "Grœnlendinga saga", in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, pp. 49-72. For additional translations of the *Grœnlendinga saga*, see *Íslenzk fornrit 4,* (to be referenced going forward as *ÍF*), E.Ó. Sveinsson and M. Þórðarson (eds.), Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag. 1935, pp 239-269, at p. 439; and "Grœnlendinga saga*",* Keneva Kunz (trans.), in *The Complete Sagas of Icelander*s, vol 1, Viðar Hreinsson, (ed.), Reykjavík: Leifur Eiriksson Publishing, 5 vols., 1997, pp. 19-32. For a discussion about Chapter 1 of *Eiríks saga* being an interpolation borrowed from a later version of *Landnámabók,* see Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 32. Kunz has not included Chapter 1 in her translations of *Eiríks saga*, see Kunz, 2008, pp. xvi-xviii.

[4] These stories include the oldest written descriptions of the North American continent, see Kunz, 2001, p. 626.

[5] See Chart 5, p. 218, of this thesis for a detailed review of the compilation manuscripts, their patrons and scribes.

[6] See Chapter Two, pp. 4-6.

how landnám success themes and the value of westward journeys have been influenced by saga author or patron motivational factors.

The Icelandic sagas' literary observation[7] on the value of travelling west, compared to voyages to the east, have been expressed through the use of heroic tropes and imagery associated with travel and journeys. Chapter Three has discussed the glory and wealth associated with far-travel particularly to Constantinople, which made journeying there very attractive or prestigious in the eyes of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Icelandic audiences. It could well have been the saga authors who first bestowed the nomenclature *víðförull* on some of these eastern far-travellers as a common characteristic of the person called by the byname *víðförull* (meaning widely travelled or far-travelling) is that their journeys took them partly or exclusively to the East.[8] For saga audiences, it was clear, those who journeyed east were larger-than-life figures whose bravery, outspokenness, and international reputations, served to increase Iceland's worth on the world stage. They were also travelling to a centre of Christianity. In contrast, no westward travellers have been called *víðförull* as an acknowledgement of their westward journeys.

Compared with those far-travellers who found their way to the royal and imperial centres of the known world, westward far-travellers were journeying to unknown, uncivilised lands at the very margins. For the far-travelling men and women who appear in the Vínland Sagas, recognition of status and personal success does not come from "discovering" new lands. Nor

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[7] The term 'literary observation', in the context of this thesis, is used in a very broad sense, as being synonymous with the dominant mentality or ideology prevalent in the Icelandic sagas at the time they were written down, i.e. twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

[8] Jakobsson surmises some of the sagas dealing with events in the East may have provided the inspiration for the *víðförla*-narratives, particularly *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar,* which is a mixture of hagiography and royal biography, in Sverrir Jakobsson, "On the Road to Paradise: Austurvegur in the Icelandic Imagination", *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature; Sagas and the British Isles*, 2 vols., preprint papers of the 13th International Saga Conference, John McKinnell, David Ashurst and Donata Kick, (eds.), Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, pp. 935-943, at p. 936.

do they exhibit the outwards trappings of eastward travel success – obvious wealth, fine clothing or other status symbols. They are clearly depicted as being independent figures, free to travel whenever and wherever, and mostly motivated by personal gain and prestige. This is a different quality of independence from that represented in the saga accounts of heroic eastward travellers. They achieve their heroic status by being successful Christian evangelists, or from being acknowledged as successful at the act of landnám. This Chapter examines the representation of some of these westward far-travelling explorers and settlers – women as well as men – whose characterisations and achievements have been used by saga authors to express a certain point of view.

What we know about Westward Travel

Scholars studying travel in a westward direction are presented with very few sources compared to those who examine primary sources for references to Varangians, or who study sagas accounts of the journeys of pilgrims or the ruling elite, which are often also documented in other sources. For those who journeyed to the west to explore and colonise, the Vínland sagas are our major written source, and there has been much discussion and scholarly debate over the veracity of these tales. A comprehensive survey of the medieval Scandinavian literary treatment of Norse Greenland was undertaken by Ólafur Halldórsson in 1978, including a complete edition of *Grænlands annál* and extracts from many other medieval sources on Greenland, as well as an essay on the relationship between *Eiríks saga rauða*, and *Grœnlendinga saga*. Both sagas also describe the discovery and settlement in North America, but they do conflict with each other in some areas, sparking academic debate

including about their dating and their relationship to other medieval sources referencing Greenland.[9]

Vínland scholarship was led by Rafn who in 1837 was the first to propose that medieval Norsemen had actually reached continental North America,[10] whereas in 1911 Nansen argued that the saga-accounts of travel to Vínland were entirely derived from previously existing classical, continental and Irish motifs of travel literature and cosmography.[11] The seminal moment for Vínland studies was Helge Ingstad's discovery of a Norse settlement site at L'Anse-aux Meadows on the northern tip of Newfoundland in 1960,[12] and Vínland is now accepted as being in North America. As for Greenland, our understanding of the medieval settlement itself was greatly advanced through the extensive archaeological excavations by Poul Nørlund in the early twentieth century.[13] Academic interest in Greenland has also focused on the decline and disappearance of the Norse Greenland settlement, which has been the subject of some debate.[14] More recent Greenland studies have combined archaeological research and literary sources, and interdisciplinary conferences with later publishing,[15]

[9] Ólafur Halldórsson, *Grænland í miðaldaritum*, Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 1978. (Greenland in Medieval Writings).
[10] Carl Christian Rafn, *Antiquitates Americanae*, Havniae, 1837.
[11] Fridtjof Nansen, *In Northern Mists: Artic Exploration in Early Times,* New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1911.
[12] Helge Ingstad, and Anne Stine Ingstad, *The Viking Discovery of America: The Excavation of a Norse Settlement in L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland*, Newfoundland: Breakwater Books, 2000.
[13] The extensive archaeological excavations in Greenland by Poul Nørlund in the early twentieth century, saw the recovery of dozens of garments from a graveyard in the Norse settlement of Herjolfsnaes that had been preserved intact for centuries by the permafrost. See Poul Nørlund, *Viking Settlers in Greenland and their Descendants*, W.E. Calvert (trans.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936, (reprinted 1971).
[14] Although his focus is more popular than academic, see Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, London: Penguin, 2006; and for a more academic approach, see Kirsten Seaver, *The Frozen Echo: Greenland and the Exploration of North America, ca. A.D. 1000-1500*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.
[15] See Knud J. Krogh, *Viking Greenland*, Helen Fogh and Gwyn Jones (trans.), Copenhagen: The National Museum, 1967; Helge Ingstad, *Land Under the Pole Star: A Voyage to the Norse Settlements of Greenland and the Saga of the People that Vanished*, Naomi Walford (trans.), London: Jonathan Cape, 1966; and Gwyn Jones, *The Norse Atlantic Saga: Being the Norse Voyages of Discovery and Settlement to Iceland, Greenland, America*, London: Oxford University Press, 1964, revised 1986.

including a conference held at Hvalsey in Greenland in 2008.[16] Vínland scholarship has generated various interdisciplinary studies including volumes generated by conferences in Reykjavík, Iceland in August 1999,[17] and Newfoundland and Labrador in September 2000.[18]

There is no doubt that Greenland and Vínland were settled by Norse explorers and settlers. The sagas describe voyages to new lands and give precise seafaring routes and geographical descriptions.[19] The idea that oral navigational instructions and other details derived from the voyages themselves were embedded in the Vínland sagas, is not new.[20] Victoria Hanelmann cautions against attaching too much reliability to the oral tradition in the Vínland sagas, due to the time distance between the events happening and being written down.[21] Jakobsson agrees that the events must be situated in the "context of the world geographic system adopted by those who told those stories".[22] This study extends this view that the Vínland sagas contain themes and character constructs of westward travel and far-travelling explorers and settlers, that have been included by the saga authors to advance their own agendas and points of view. Details like navigational instructions were possibly used by these authors to give their saga a sense of authenticity.

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[16] "Norse Greenland: Selected Papers from the Hvalsey Conference 2008", *Journal of the North Atlantic,* Special vol. 2., J. Arneborg, G. Nyegaard and O. Veisteinsson, (eds.), (2009).

[17] A. Wawn and Þ. Sigurðardóttir (eds.), *Approaches to Vínland. Proceedings of a Conference on the Written and Archaeological Sources for the Norse Settlements in the North-Atlantic Region and Exploration of America*, 9-11 August 1999, The Nordic House, Reykjavik: Stofnun Sigurður Nordal, 2001.

[18] "Selected Papers from the Viking Millennium International Symposium, 15-24 September 2000", in Shannon Lewis-Simpson (ed.), *Vínland Revisited: The Norse World at the Turn of the First Millennium*, Newfoundland: Historic Sites Association, 2003.

[19] Gisli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition,* N. Jones (trans), London: Harvard University Press, 2004, p. 269.

[20] G.J. Marcus, "The Course for Greenland", *Saga-Book of the Viking Society,* vol. 14, 1957, pp. 12-35, at p. 25.

[21] Victoria Hanselmann, "Perifera representationer: Vinlangssagorna, 'det andra' och representationens strategier", *Arvkiv for nordisk filologi* 120 (2005), pp. 83-110, at p.84.

[22] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2012, p. 493.

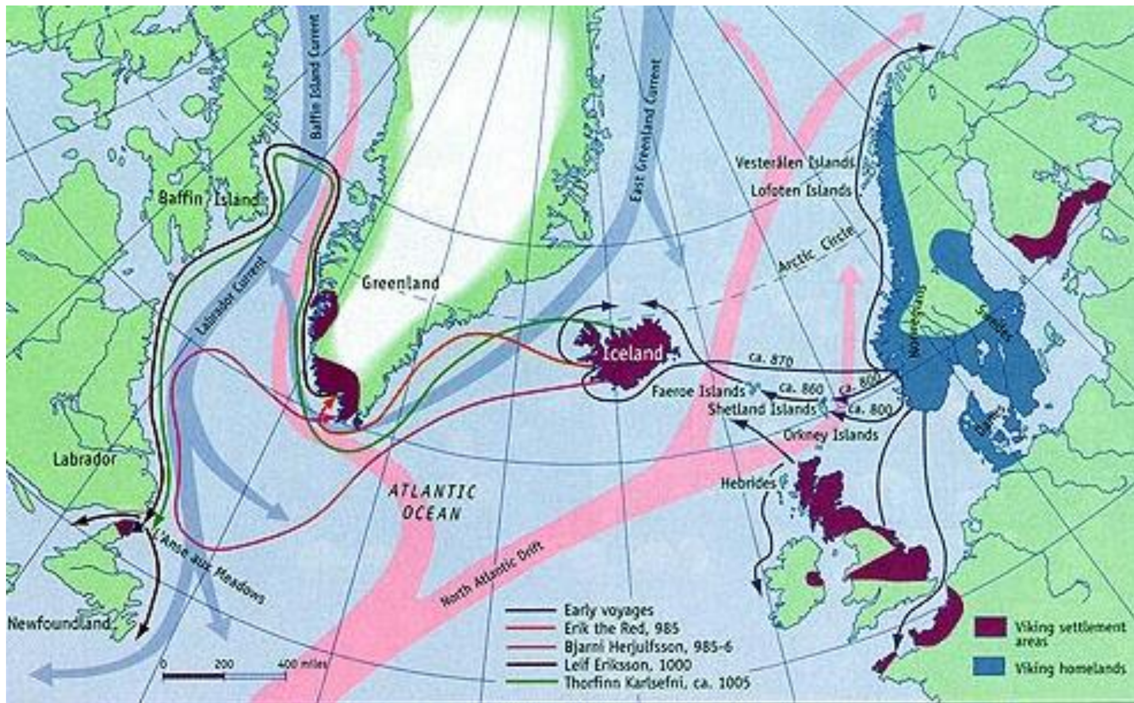

Figure 8: North Atlantic travel and trade routes.[23]

Tales of Greenland and Vínland

Discussion soon began again
of a Vínland voyage,
since the trip seemed to bring men
both wealth and
renown.

The Saga of the Greenlanders[24]

The earliest extant Icelandic record of Greenland is in *Íslendingabók* (The Book of the Icelanders). Composed by Ari Þorgilsson, *Íslendingabók* recalls the naming of Greenland by Eiríkr Þorvaldsson (950–*c.*1003). Ari is concerned to link his version of the tale to an authoritative witness. To support the reliability of his account, Ari gives his source as Þorkell Gellisson, who had once been to Greenland, where he had talked to one of the original settlers who had himself travelled there with Eiríkr.[25] This is an interesting strategy for

[23] Thomas H. McGovern and Sophia Perdikaris, "The Vikings' Silent Saga", *Natural History,* vol. 109, no. 8 (Oct. 2000), pp. 50-57.
[24] "The Saga of the Greenlanders", Chapter 7, Kunz, (trans.), 2008, p. 17.
[25] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2012, p. 495.

making what Ari has to say important and meaningful to his audience. According to Ari, Eiríkr said:

> … that it would encourage people to go there that the land had a good name.[26]

As well as giving provenance, saga stories often highlight lineage and genealogy, and this can be a fundamental aspect of the meaning of the story. Jakobsson points to *Íslendingabók*, which he writes is not just a "history of medieval European institutions, it is also the personal history of an Icelandic family, Ari's family."[27] Glorification of one's own ancestors, and perhaps also enshrining their (and therefore one's own) claim to both land and honour into saga form is a strong motif, and would be a potential motive for an author to present characters a certain way. Ari's description of Greenland's origins would spread with the flowering of the Icelandic literary tradition in the thirteenth century as the story of brave westward travelling explorers and colonisers obviously found an audience. The origins story reappears in *Landnámabók*, and in three sagas – *Eyrbyggja saga, Eiríks saga rauða*, and a passage in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*.[28] There are other sagas that make mention of Greenland. However, apart from *Fóstbrœðra saga*, all of these texts are usually classified

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[26] "kvað menn þat myndu fýsa þangat farar, at landit ætti nafn gótt", in *Íslendingabók: Landnámabók*, in *ÍF 1,* J. Benediktsson, (ed.), Reykjavík: Hið slenzka fornritafélag, 1986, p. 13. Also see "Kristni saga" in *Íslendingabók The Book of the Icelanders. The Story of the Conversion*, S. Grønlie, (trans.), London: University College, Viking Society for Northern Research, 2006, p. 7.

[27] This is evident as *Íslendingabók's* genealogies include the ninth-century Icelandic settler Auðr Djúpúðga (Aud the Deep-Minded) whose lineage is first introduced in connection with the ancestry of a later bishop. Auðr is also an ancestor of Ari's, see Sverrir Jakobsson, "Iceland, Norway and the World: Ari Þorgilsson as a Narrator of Barbarian History", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 132 (2017), pp. 75-99, at p. 96.

[28] See *ÍF 1,* p. 132, in Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, (trans.), *The Book of Settlements. Landnámabók*, 1, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1972, p. 49; also *ÍF 4*, Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1935, p. 201, in E.Ó. Sveinsson, and M. Þórðarson (eds.), "Eyrbyggja saga", pp. 201; and Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (trans), *Eyrbyggja saga,* Chapter 24, London: Penguin, 1989, p. 68. For the text in "Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar", see *ÍF 1*, p. 242, in G. Vigfússon and C.R. Unger (eds.), *Flateyjarbók: En samling af Norske Kong-Sagaer med indskudte mindre foretællinger om begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samt annaler*, vol. 1, Christiania, Norway: Malling, 3 vols.,1860-1868, p. 430; also "Eirík the Red's Saga", in Gwyn Jones, 1964, p. 165-166; and "Eirík the Red's Saga", Chapter 2, Kunz, 1997, p. 655.

under the genre of *Fornaldarsögur* (heroic sagas or fantastical works),[29] and as *Fóstbræðra saga* is not focused on journeying to Greenland or Vínland,[30] these works are not included as part of this study.

Eiríks saga rauða and *Grænlendinga saga*, which together make up the Vínland saga, recall events occurring between 970-1030 and how Eiríkr Þorvaldsson – known as Eiríkr rauði – founded the first Norse settlement in Greenland (985-986),[31] as well as happenings related to the discovery and settlement in North America, which was named Vínland. But they do conflict with each other in some areas.[32] This has generated much academic discussion and disparate points of view,[33] particularly around the two extant versions of *Eiríks saga rauða*[34], *Skálholtsbók*[35] (*c.*1420), compiled by wealthy farmer Ólafur Loftsson (*d.*1457/59),[36] and

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[29] Apart from the *Vínland sagas*, the other extant sagas referencing Greenland are *Fóstbræðra saga*, *Flóamanna saga, Króka-Refs saga*, *Bárðar saga*, *Snæfellsáss, Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls*, and *Jökuls þáttr Búasonar.* Thought to have been written from the end of the thirteenth century onwards they are considered works of varying degrees of fantasy, in Jonathan Grove, "The Place of Greenland in the Medieval Icelandic Saga Narrative" – Norse Greenland: Selected Papers from the Halsey Conference 2008, *Journal of the North Atlantic*, 2, 2009, pp. 30-51, at p. 32. Although some scholars do consider that the Vínland sagas are also best classified under the genre of Heroic Sagas, or *Fornaldarsögur,* see Claire Cavaleri, *The Vínland Sagas as Propaganda for the Christian Church: Freydís and Gudríd as Paradigms for Eve and the Virgin Mary,* Master Thesis in Nordic Viking and Medieval Studies, University of Oslo: Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies, Faculty of Humanities, May 2008, pp. 35 and 36.

[30] *The Sagas of Kormák and The Sworn Brothers,* Lee M. Hollander, (trans.), New York: Princeton University Press, 1949, pp. 83-176.

[31] Sverrir Jakobsson, "Vínland and Wishful Thinking: Medieval and Modern Fantasies", *Canadian Journal of History,* vol. 47, no. 3 (Winter, 2012), pp. 493-514, at p. 495.

[32] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2012, pp. 493-514.

[33] For an exhaustive survey of the medieval Scandinavian literary treatment of Norse Greenland, see Halldórsson, 1978. Ólafur provides, among other things, a complete edition of *Grænlands annál* and extracts from many other medieval Norse sources on Greenland, as well as an essay on the relationship between *Grænlendinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*, their dating and their relationship to other medieval sources on Greenland.

[34] The variations between two versions have long been discussed by scholars, see Gwyn Jones, 1986, p. 207-332, who discusses the significant variants from the *Hauksbók* version; and Kunz, 2001, pp. 632-635.

[35] "Skálholtsbók", *ÍF 4*, pp. 401-434. For a translation of the *Skálholtsbók* version, see Hreinsson, vol 1, pp. 1-18. Magnusson and Pálsson have also used the *Skálholtsbók* version for their translation of "Eiríк's Saga", Chapters 1-14, see Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, pp. 75-105.

[36] Ólafur Loftsson, the son of Loftur ríki Guttormsson, owned property both in Eyjafjörður and Þingeyjarsýsla. His name does not appear anywhere in the manuscript, but the same hand is found in a few letters written in the period 1420-1449, most of which concern Ólafur himself, his properties or his relatives, see *The Rhythmic Office of St Þorlákur and other Medieval Manuscripts from the See of Skálholt*. http://wayback.vefsafn.is/wayback/20091121225845/www3.hi.is/pub/sam/exhibition.html Accessed 8 November 2020.

Hauksbók (*c.*1302-1310),[37] whose compiler was Law Speaker and politician Haukr Erlendsson (*d.*1334). Haukr was also involved in composing a version of another manuscript – *Landnámabók* – a dubious register of the first Icelandic *landnámsmenn*, and a fictional record of their lands or settlements. For this work, he claims to have used a source book written earlier by Sturla Þórðarson (1214-1284). It is now also generally accepted the *Hauksbók*[38] version of *Eiríks saga rauða* was extensively edited and revised by Haukr Erlendsson and his two secretaries.[39] Some of these changes reflect societal and religious values at the time he was editing the sagas, but Haukr could well have also added in extra details passed down to him through his own family connection with Vínland settlers Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir and Þorfinnr (Karlsefni) Þórðarson; even if this is only obliquely referenced:

> Many other great people in Iceland are descended from Karlsefni and Gudríd (Guðríðr), but not recorded here. May God be with us. Amen.[40]

Referencing *Hauksbók,* Jakobsson agrees that if the compiler (Haukr Erlendsson) knew of the *Grœnlendinga saga* he did not make use of it.[41] Icelandic scholar Halldórsson concurs that the verbal similarities between the two texts are not the result of literary borrowings, or a

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[37] There are five extant versions of *Hauksbók.* Most scholars still assume, on the basis of the epilogue of one version, that they share a common, lost original which dates back to the first half of the twelfth century. The five surviving versions in order of supposed composition, are: *Sturlubók, Melabók, Skarðsárbók* and *Þórðarbók*. Haukr Erlendsson's *Hauksbók* text states he compiled the text using those written by Sturla Þórðarson (*Sturlubók)*, and one by Styrmir Karason (*d.*1245) known as *Styrmisbó*k, which is lost. Most scholars have tended to assume that where contents of sagas have been at odds with surviving versions of *Landnámábók*, they contain material taken from *Styrmisbók*. See Chris Callow, "Dating and Origins", *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas,* Ármann Jakobsson, Sverrir Jakobsson (eds.), Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017, pp. 16-17; Halldórsson, 1978, pp. 398-400, and Kunz, 2001, p. 630.
[38] *Hauksbók*, see *ÍF 4*, pp. 193-237.
[39] Jansson gives a detailed comparison of the two manuscripts, in Sven B.F. Jansson, *Sagorna om Vínland,* vol. 1, Lund: Hakan Ohlssons Boktryckeri, 1944. Also see Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson, 1965, p. 30.
[40] "Eirík's Saga", Chapter 14, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, pp. 104-105. There is also a genealogy in "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 9, pp. 71-72.
[41] Jakobsson comments: "The context of *Grœnlendinga saga* in *Flateyjarbók* is different as it is preserved in two parts and placed within a biography of King Óláf Tryggavson of Norway". See Sverrir Jakobsson, 2012, p. 496; and Sverrir Jakobsson, "Hauksbók and the Construction of an Icelandic World View", *Saga-Book 31,* London: University College, Viking Society for Northern Research, 2007, pp. 28-38, at p. 32.

written link to a common text. Instead, Halldórsson suggests they were written down independently of each other, drawing upon the same or similar traditional oral material.[42] Both of these views are supported by the *Grœnlendinga saga* author who puts forward his claim for accuracy through having had access to a direct oral history source:

> It was Karlsefni himself who told more fully than anyone else the story of all these voyages, which has been to some extent recorded here.[43]

Unlike *Eiríks saga rauða*, the *Grœnlendinga saga* only survives in one medieval manuscript.[44] This manuscript forms part of the work known as *Flateyjarbók*[45] (*c.*1382-1395). *Flateyjarbók* contains an introduction which identifies both its patron Jón Hákonarson, a wealthy farmer in Víðidalstunga in Northwest Iceland who had a great interest in literature, and the two priests who were his scribes – Jón Þórðarson and Magnús Þórhallsson.[46] *Grœnlendinga saga* was likely written earlier than *Flateyjarbók*; Keneva Kunz proffers a date of the beginning of the thirteenth century.[47]

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[42] Halldórsson's conclusions have not been challenged and are now generally accepted, in Halldórsson, 1978; also see Vésteinn Ólasson, 'Saga-teksten – forskningsstatus', in *Leif Eiriksson, Helge Ingstad og Vínland*, Jan Ragnar Hagland and Steinar Supphellen, (eds.), Trondheim: 2001, pp. 41-64. Also see Kunz, 2008, p. xvii and fn 9.

[43] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 9, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 72. There is of course, the question as to what extent these narratives do contain orally derived material from the expeditions themselves, see Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough, "Travel", in Jakobsson and Jakobsson, 2017, pp. 210-211.

[44] Its opening chapters are no longer extant and were replaced by an interpolation borrowed from a late version of *Landnámábók,* (The Book of Settlements), of which there are five surviving versions dating from the late thirteenth century. See *Landnámabók,* in *ÍF 1*, in Benediktsson, 1986.

[45] *Grœnlendinga saga* is found in *Flateyjarbók* MS (GkS 1005, fol.) where it is incorporated into the *Great Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason.* Likely compiled in the North of Iceland *c.*1382-1395, and consisting of 40 to 50 manuscripts and over 1,000 stanzas, *Flateyjarbók* was not fully published in any modern language until 2018 and then in Norwegian. The first translation in English was due for release in May 2020, but has been understandably delayed. See https://sagaheritage.com/the-artwork Accessed 8 November 2020.

[46] *Flateyjarbók* had two scribes or possibly they were redactors, Icelanders Jón Þórðarson and Magnús Þórhallsson. A wealthy farmer Jón Hárkonarson was patron. Rowe does note the possibility Jón Hárkonarson was the mastermind behind the whole work, in Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, "The Development of Flateyjarbók, Iceland and the Norwegian Dynastic Crisis of 1389", *The Viking Collection 15*, Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2005, pp. 397-402.

[47] Kunz, 2001, p. 631.

Those responsible for *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Grœnlendinga saga*, both the original anonymous oral transmitters and authors, and then the later scribes and patrons who adapted and included the tales in compilation works such as *Hauksbók*, *Flateyjarbók,* and *Skálholtsbók*, all had their own reasons for manipulating the characterisation of those who travelled to the west. Their motivators likely included the desire to promote their own connections with famous and successful forebears, to further acknowledge and legitimise the continuity and importance of the far-travellers' westward land-holding achievements, and to support and uphold their own Christian values and those of their twelfth- and thirteenth-century saga audiences.

Landnám and Far-Travel to the West

> They carried their hammocks ashore
> and put up booths.
> Then they decided to winter there,
> and built some large houses.
> ***Grœnlendinga saga***[48]

Land-holding had represented power and status since the earliest days of the settlement of Iceland. Foundation tales are characteristic of Icelandic saga narratives with the concept of landnám being "a mythically charged key point of reference in many different texts".[49] Landnám was a familiar theme to saga audiences, albeit in the case of the Vínland Sagas, it was in distant places.

Barnes identifies differences in the discovery and settlement narratives for the land west of Greenland, which she writes contains "little in the way of the traditions of landnám".[50] In her

[48] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 3, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 56.
[49] Ann-Marie Long*, Iceland's Relationship with Norway c.870-c.1100,* Leiden: Brill, 2017, p. 75.
[50] Barnes, 2001, pp. 10-11.

2017 study on Iceland's relationship with Norway from the ninth- to the twelfth-century, Long has discussed the role of landnám in connection with memory and identity. She proposes that the landnám was the first great event of early Icelandic society and "essential to the way in which the past was conceived, interpreted and constructed in early Icelandic literature".[51] The memories of those events, "inscribed in the common cultural pool of information underpinning the image of the collective past, were [later] adapted, represented and mediated."[52] This study extends Barnes' observation about the differences in landnám narratives between Iceland, Greenland and Vínland, and develops Long's argument about the connection between landnám, memory and identity, but in relation to the representation of westward far-travellers and their achievements.

According to *Landnámabók,* Gunnbjörn Úlfsson caught a glimpse of a land even farther west, after he was storm-swept into unknown waters to the west of Iceland about the year 900.[53] Likely composed before 1133 and covering the period from the settlement of Iceland up to 1120, *Landnámabók* is a purported record of Iceland's first settlers and their lands or settlements,[54] presented in topographical order clockwise, covering all of Iceland. In all, *Landnámabók* names over 3,000 settlers and more than 1,400 settlements. We know from *Landnámabók,* Gunnbjörn Úlfsson was one of those early landnámsmenn, and that his sons lived in the Westfjords. We know too, the Gunnbjörnssker are named after him.[55]

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[51] Long, pp. 71 and 254.
[52] Long, pp. 254-256.
[53] The Skerries have been identified with reasonable confidence as being the group of rocky islets off the east coast of Greenland in the region of Angmagssalik, see Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 17.
[54] Landnám is also used to refer to the act of land-grab or a land-take.
[55] See Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, "Landnámabók and its Sturlubók Version", *in Sturla Þórðarson: Skald, Chieftain and Lawman*, Jón Viđar Sigurđsson and Sverrir Jakobsson, (eds.), Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2017, Chapter 5, pp. 44-55.

The land Gunnbjörn had seen was Greenland.[56] In contrast, the Vínland sagas make scant reference to Gunnbjörn and his achievement as an explorer, he is only briefly mentioned, and only with reference to Eiríkr rauði's later journey.

> Eiríkr told them he was going to search for the land that Gunnbjörn, the son of Úlfr Crow, had sighted [nearly a century earlier] when he was driven westwards off course and discovered the Gunnbjarnar Skerries.[57]

A reference to Eiríkr and the Gunnbjarnar Skerries appears in both the *Grœnlendinga saga*, and *Eiríks saga.*[58] Although the sagas record Gunnbjörn did not attempt to sail further west towards the distant land, at least he is not portrayed as being a coward for not attempting to land, or to carry on sailing. Nevertheless, his achievement is at best muted. Perhaps, as he was an early settler, his memory, or the position of his family in highly politicised thirteenth and fourteenth century Iceland, may have merited some acknowledgement on the basis of his kin's standing at the time of writing.

The saga authors of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century were not interested so much in those who first saw a new land, instead they valued those explorers who were actively involved in landnám. This is evident in the characterisation of a later explorer, Bjarni Herjolfsson who reportedly sighted North America (*c.*985-986), but who failed three times to

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[56] A number of modern place names in Greenland commemorate Gunnbjörn, most notably Gunnbjørn Fjeld which is Greenland's highest mountain. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gunnbj%C3%B8rn_Fjeld Accessed 8 November 2020.

[57] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 1, and *"*Eirík's Saga*",* Chapter 2*,* in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, pp. 50 and 77. "Eirík the Red's Saga", Chapter 2, in Kunz, 2008, p. 27. A skerry is a small rocky island, usually too small for human habitation and these skerries, which were named after Gunnbjarnar, have with reasonable confidence between identified as a group of rocky islets off the east coast of Greenland in the region of Angmagssalik, see Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, pp. 16-17.

[58] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 1, and "Eirík's Saga", Chapter 2, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, pp. 50 and 77.

land and explore. Although Bjarni only appears in the *Grœnlendinga saga*, his background and actions are described in detail. He sails from Iceland to Greenland where his father had emigrated, but his ship becomes lost after “the fair wind failed and northerly winds and fog set in, and for many days they had no idea what their course was.”[59] Bjarni and his crew then sight three different lands:

> They closed the land quickly and saw that it was flat and wooded. Then the wind failed and the crew all said they thought it advisable to land there, but Bjarni refused. They claimed they needed both firewood and water; but Bjarni said, ‘You have no shortage of either.’ He was criticised for this by his men.[60]

He is later criticised again in Norway. *Grœnlendinga saga* tells:

> Sometime later, Bjarni Herjolfsson sailed from Greenland to Norway and visited Earl Eiríkr [Hákonarson][61], who received him well. Bjarni told the earl about his voyage and the lands he had sighted. People thought he had shown great lack of curiosity, since he could tell them nothing about these countries, and he was criticised for this.[62]

This comment about criticism may also serve to also illustrate how an Icelandic explorer’s supposed lack of heroic qualities might well have been called into disrepute by an earlier Norwegian audience. However, writing at a time after Norwegian subjugation, when the

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[59] “Grœnlendinga saga”, Chapter 1, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, pp. 52-54.
[60] “Grœnlendinga saga”, Chapter 1, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 53.
[61] Eiríkr Hákonarson was the Jarl of Lade and became governor of Norway under Sweyn Forkbeard from 1000 to 1012, see Thomas Kingston Derry, *History of Scandinavia: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, pp. 31-35.
[62] “Eirík’s Saga”, Chapter 2, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 76.

Icelandic Commonwealth is but a memory, the saga writer reports the event more as a non-judgemental observer. “He was criticised for this” in Norway;[63] (by Norwegians).

Bjarni is directly criticised for lessening the value of his family name. *Grœnlendinga saga* refers to Bjarni Herjolfsson’s father as being “a man of considerable stature”,[64] and in his younger days, Bjarni himself, is described as being “a man of much promise … he earned himself both wealth and a good reputation…”[65] The saga authors have identified that Bjarni did not live up to his early promise – something a hero would not do. By not landing Bjarni returns a failure, and is to be judged as a failure; wealth and renown had been his to lose.[66]

One of the most famous far-travelling explorers associated with Greenland is Eiríkr rauði.[67] Compared with Bjarni, his background reveals he was more the antithesis of a hero. Eiríkr was born in Norway (or possibly Iceland), and moved to Iceland around 960, under seemingly difficult circumstances.

> There was a man called Thorvald, who was the father of Eiríkr the Red. He and Eiríkr left their home in Jaederen, in Norway, because of some killings and went to Iceland.[68]

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[63] “Eirík’s Saga”, Chapter 2, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 76.
[64] “Grœnlendinga saga”, Chapter 2, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 52.
[65] “Grœnlendinga saga”, Chapter 2, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 51.
[66] Hermann and Pálsson suggest the author of “Eirík’s Saga” discarded the story of Bjarni Herjolfsson’s accidental sighting of Vínland as part of his attempt to “recast the saga entirely in the light of what he considered to be more reliable information”, but they do not reveal what this might have been, in see Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 34.
[67] Like many saga-characters’ by-names, Eirík’s is given both with the definite article (i.e. “inn” rauða) and without. I have chosen to cite by-names with the definite article.
[68] “Grœnlendinga saga”, Chapter 1, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 49.

As Icelandic landnámsmenn, Eiríkr and his father were late-comers. *Grœnlendinga saga* tells us Eiríkr would have no doubt been very aware of the disadvantages of being a late settler, as by the time he and his father arrived in Iceland, the country "had been extensively settled by then; so to begin with they made their home at Drangar, in Hornstrands".[69] At the northern end of the Westfjords Hornstrands or Hornstrandir is Iceland's northernmost peninsula. It was one of the more remote and likely less favoured settlement locations.

In the *Grœnlendinga saga*,[70] Eiríkr's was later banished for a second time, again for killings, and he was forced to leave Iceland. "Eiríkr was sentenced to outlawry at the Thorness Assembly".[71] A similar account is found in *Eiríks saga.*[72] As a result of being exiled, Eiríkr sailed west and is credited with founding the first Norse settlement in Greenland around 981-982.[73] He was somewhat of an accidental explorer, even though he credits himself for Greenland's discovery, "I am not meant to discover more countries than this one we now live in".[74] Eiríkr did not 'discover' Greenland, he knew there were lands to the west, and as he had to leave Iceland in a hurry, he decided to head in that direction; but he did start the Greenland landnám.

> He [Eirík] sailed back to Iceland the following summer and put in at Breiðafjörður. He named the country he had discovered Greenland, for he said that people would be much more tempted to go there if it had an attractive name. Eiríkr spent the winter in Iceland. Next summer he set off to colonise Greenland, and he made his home at Brattahlid in Eiríksfjord.[75]

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[69] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 1, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 49.
[70] Kunz's translation does not include the part introducing Eiríkr the Red's settlement in Iceland and Greenland, which had been included by the scribe in the previous chapter of *Óláfr*'s *saga*, using the so-called *Sturlubók* version of *The Book of Settlements,* in Kunz, 2008, p. x.
[71] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 1, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 49.
[72] "Eirík's Saga", Chapter 2, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, pp. 76-77.
[73] Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 17.
[74] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 3, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 55.
[75] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 1, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 50.

Eiríkr seemingly never lacked courage either, as the sagas portray his voyage to Greenland as being a very risky venture.

> It is said by learned men that in the summer in which Eiríkr the Red set off to colonise Greenland, twenty-five ships sailed from Breiðafjörður and Borgarfjörður, but only fourteen reached there; some were driven back, and some were lost at sea.[76]

For the other survivors, the dangerous journey was not without reward:

> The following men who went abroad with Eiríkr took possession of land in Greenland: Herjolf Bardarson took possession of Herjolfsfjord, and made his home at Herjolfsness; Ketil took possession of Ketilsfjord; Hrafn, Hrafnsjord; Solvi, Solvadale; Helgi Thorbrandsson, Alptafjord; Thorbjorn Glora, Siglufjord; Einar, Einarsfjord; Hafgrim, Hafrimsfjord and Vatna District; and Arnlaug, Arnlaugsfjord. Others went to the Western Settlement.[77]

Presumably Bjarni Herjolfsson's later voyage was similarly high risk, but Bjarni is not presented as being a brave explorer for taking on a dangerous journey. Instead, he is to be judged as being foolhardy, and this even by his own admission.

> "So I want to sail my ship to Greenland, if you are willing to come with me".
>
> They all replied that they would do what he thought best. Then Bjarni said,

[76] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 1, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, pp. 50-51.
[77] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 1, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 50.

> "This voyage of ours will be considered foolhardy, for not one of us has ever sailed the Greenland Sea."[78]

The Vínland sagas do not criticise Eiríkr rauði's charismatic personality or question his courage or even his judgement. Despite being exiled firstly from Norway and then from Iceland for treason, not possessing the same fine family pedigree or early background of success as did Bjarni Herjolfsson, Eiríkr is able to redeem his shortcomings through the success of his landnám in Greenland.

> Eiríkr the Red lived at Brattahlid. He commanded great respect, and all the people in Greenland recognized his authority …[79]

Snæbjörn galti Hólmsteinsson (*c.*910– *c.*978)[80] is another whose contribution to Greenland exploration is not acknowledged by the Vínland Sagas. Snæbjörn galti was the first Norseman to intentionally navigate to Greenland, and there was a saga written that recalled his voyage, but it has been lost over time. A summary of the saga is incorporated in *Landnámabók* and tells how Snæbjörn galti and his foster father Þóroddr after getting into legal difficulties fled Iceland in a ship Snæbjörn galti partly owned with Rolf Rørsander. This occurred about two to three years before Eiríkr rauði's first journey. After landing and wintering over on the Gunnbjarnar Skerries, a series of insults were traded, and Snæbjörn galti and Þóroddr are killed by Rolf and his companion Styrbjorn. The rest of the crew are spared and they sail back to Norway. Eventually they return to Iceland where Rolf Rørsander

[78] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 2, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, pp. 52-53.
[79] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 2, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 52.
[80] Rowlett dates the voyage as occurring in 981 or 982, in Ralph M. Rowlett, "1,000 Years of New World Archaeology", *American Antiquity*, vol. 47, no. 3 (Jul., 1982), pp. 652-654, at p. 652.

and Styrbjorn are in turn killed. This sparks another round of stereotypical Icelandic revenge killings, and no doubt Snæbjörn galti's lost saga includes this cycle of murder, family retaliation and revenge. It is also possible the absence of any mention of Snæbjörn galti in the Vínland Sagas could be as a result of the disastrous outcome of his efforts at landnám. Again supporting the supposition that exploration without a resultant land-take, was a low value, and hence low interest journey.

Karlsefni and his crew have an incident-free voyage to Vínland and are rewarded with landnám success. We see can see the imagery of this when they find "a find a ship's keel on the headland, and so they called the place Kjalarness".[81] *Groenlendinga saga* does report it a bit differently. It was Þorvaldr Eiríksson who led the second Vínland expedition, that shattered the keel of his ship in a storm. It was he, not Karlsefni, who erected the old keel on a headland, "and called the place Kjalarness".[82] As Hastrup comments in relation to Iceland, "The naming practices of particular geographical feature such as mountains, rocks, bays, beaches, and settlements are crucial for the establishment and maintenance of their identity."[83] The discrepancy between the two sagas with the competing claims as to who named the headland, shows the prestige associated with such a naming.

One character who has a leading role across all the Vínland Sagas is Leifr Eiríksson (*c*.970–*c*.1020), Eiríkr rauði's son. Leifr travelled to Greenland with his father and is credited with leading the first expedition to Vínland. As were the warriors reviewed in Chapter Three, Leifr is also characterised using larger-than-life heroic motifs.

[81] "Eirík's Saga", Chapter 8, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 94.
[82] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 5, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 60
[83] Kirsten Hastrup, "Icelandic Topgraphy and the Sense of Identity", in *Nordic Landscapes: Region and Belonging on the Northern Edge of Europe,* Michael Jones and Kenneth R. Olwig, (eds.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, p. 72.

> Leif was tall and strong and very impressive in appearance. He was a shrewd man and always moderate in his behaviour.[84]

Grœnlendinga saga tells us, as an explorer, Leifr considered himself to be superior to Bjarni Herjolfsson; again we see for reasons associated with the theme of landnám.

> Then Leif said. 'Now we have done better than Bjarni where this country is concerned – we at least have set foot on it. I shall give this country a name and call it Helluland'.[85]

The saga is very clear that a successful explorer, unlike Bjarni, is motivated to explore:

> Their curiosity to see the land was so great that they could not be bothered to wait for the tide to come in and float their stranded ship, and they ran aground where a river flowed into the sea from a lake.[86]

> When they had finished building their houses, Leif said to his companions, "Now I want to divide our company into two parties and have the country explored".[87]

Leifr was also referred to as *Leifr inn heppni* (Leifr the lucky).[88] This element of his characterisation held great meaning, which was likely to be understood by audiences in the

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[84] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 3, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 56.
[85] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 3, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 55.
[86] "The Saga of the Greenlanders", Chapter 2, in Kunz, 2008, p. 7.
[87] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 3, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 56.
[88] As Grønbech noted in Vilhelm Grønbech, *The Culture of the Teutons,* vols. 1-3, London: H. Milford, 1931; and further developed by Bettina Sejbjerg Sommer in 2007, *heppin* does not mean luck according to what would

thirteenth and fourteenth century. According to Magnusson and Palsson, good luck or conversely ill luck, were inherent qualities, part of the complex pattern of Fate.[89] Sommer writes how 'luck' in pre-Christian Iceland had a much greater significant than what would later be implied or understood by being called 'lucky'.[90] She describes *heppni* as being "at once both the cause and the expression of the success, wealth, and power of a family"; meaning Leifr's luck was not just his own. Leifr himself acknowledges he has inherited the good luck associated with his father.

> Leifr asked his father Eiríkr to lead this expedition too, but Eiríkr was rather reluctant; said he was getting old, and could endure hardships less easily than he used to. Leirfr replied that Eiríkr would still command more luck than any of his kinsmen.[91]

In *Grœnlendinga saga* Leifr's 'luck' also brings reward – an increase in reputation and status.

> Leif rescued fifteen people in all from the reef. From then on he was called Leif the Lucky. He gained greatly in wealth and reputation.[92]

Unlike the warriors who travelled east to fight in far-away places, returning to Iceland as heroes, Leifr's heroic image as a westward travelling explorer could be due more to fate and

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be a contemporary understanding, but is instead "a quality inherent in the man and his lineage, a part of his personality similar to his strength, intelligence ... at once both the cause and the expression of the success, wealth, and power of a family", in Bettina Sejbjerg Sommer, "The Norse Concept of Luck", in *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 79, no. 3 (Fall 2007), pp. 275-294, in Birgitta Wallace, "L'Anse aux Meadows, Leif Eriksson's Home in Vínland", *Journal of the North Atlantic*, Special Volume 2 (2009-10), pp. 14-125, at p . 114.

[89] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 3, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 54, fn 2.

[90] Bettina Sejbjerg Sommer, "The Norse Concept of Luck", in *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 79, no. 3 (Fall 2007), pp. 275-294, in Wallace, 2009-10, p. 114.

[91] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 3, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 54

[92] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 4, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 59.

because he inherited his father's luck. It has little to do with him as a courageous explorer of new lands, or because he bravely rescues hapless castaways.

The Vínland Sagas' World View

From as early as the twelfth century, Icelandic writers identified Greenland as a peripheral space in the Norse world, connected with Iceland, but markedly distinct and remote. The recurrence of certain conventional patterns would seem to indicate stories set in Greenland in particular, retained important thematic continuities for Icelandic saga audiences.
Groves writes that the role of Greenland in Icelandic narratives was as a "frontier space, employed to define the horizons of Icelandic self-identification".[93] He notes: "this marginalization is evident in the Vínland Sagas and developed further in the post-classical tradition, which made Greenland a place of exile in which Icelandic heroes were tested by extreme adversity in the settlements and wilderness".[94]

Icelanders were not the only ones who constructed Greenland as 'other'. German cleric and ecclesiastical historian Adam of Bremen, writing in Latin in 1070s was one of the first to point to Greenland's otherness.[95] He described Greenland as a land that had acquired its

[93] Grove, p. 32.
[94] Grove, p. 30.
[95] Around 1075, Adam of Bremen completed a massive history in Latin of the Archbishopric of Hamburg, and in the section about the history and geography of Scandinavia, Adam reported Sweyn II Estridsen (1020-*c*.1074/76) of Denmark, nephew of King Cnut the Great, had recounted, "There was another island in that ocean which had been discovered by many and was called Vínland, because vines grow wild there and yield excellent wine, and, moreover, self-sown grain grows there in abundance; it is not from any fanciful imaginings that we have learned this, but from the reliable reports of the Danes", see Adam of Bremen, *Magistri Adam Bremensis Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum. Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum, 2nd edn., Bernhard Schmeidler, (ed.), Hannover and Leipzig: Hahn, 1917, p. 274; and *Adam of Bremen. History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen. Records of Western Civilization*. F.J. Tschan, and T. Reuter (trans), New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

designation from its people, who had lived there long enough to have acquired a greenish tinge from the sea-water, and whose style of life was still entrenched in negative northern habits.

> [The] people … live in the same manner as the Icelanders except that they are fiercer and trouble seafarers by their piratical attacks.[96]

There are no references in the Vínland Sagas to the more sophisticated trappings of a successful journey to a distant place, particularly fine clothing, instead we gain a sense of alterity or 'otherness' in the unusual clothing worn by a prophetess (or seer).[97] Clearly anyone travelling to settle in Greenland or Vínland was considered to be literally journeying to the boundaries of the earth. Some experienced "prolonged difficulties and were unable to reach the seas they wanted",[98] and were forced to return. Others didn't make it;

> Bjarni and all those who were on the ship with him
> perished there in the maggot sea.[99]

Since the 1990s, several studies have looked at the Icelandic "mental maps" of various specific locations including Greenland and Vínland,[100] and have confirmed the place of Greenland and Vínland as being at the margins of Icelandic visualisation of global

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[96] *Homines … similem Islanis vitam agunt, excepto quod crudeliores sunt raptuque pyratico remigantibus infesti,* see *Adam of Bremen*, Schmeidler, 1917, p. 274; *Adam of Bremen,* Tschan and Reuter, 2002, p. 257.
[97] Her garments included a "black lambskin hood lined with white cat's-fur. She carried a staff with a brass-bound nob studded with stones", see "Eirík's Saga", Chapter 4, Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson, pp. 81-82.
[98] "Eirík's Saga", Chapter 5, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 87.
[99] "Eirík's Saga", Chapter 14, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 104.
[100] Gísli Sigurðsson, "The Mental Map of Greenland in the Icelandic Sagas", in *Áustrvega: Saga and East Scandinavia,* 2 vols., preprint papers of the 14th International Saga Conference, Agneta Ney, Henrik Williams and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist, (eds.), Sweden: Gävle University Press, 2009, p. 295, and Gísli Sigurðsson, "The Saga Map of Vínland" in *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method*, Nicholas Jones, (trans.), Cambridge (Massachusetts): The Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, 2004, Chapter 7, pp. 253-302.

geography.[101] Jakobsson has also analysed the medieval Icelandic world view, including where Icelanders placed themselves in relation to the rest of the Christian and Norse worlds. Although the focus of Jakobsson's work is on the Icelanders' conceptual position, he does discuss their geographical position, especially where it concerns marginality versus centrality.[102] He also discusses the limitations of current research around this theme; as Jakobsson wrote in 2012:

> Some aspects of the [Vínland saga] narratives remain relatively unexplored … almost all modern research has concentrated on harmonizing the evidence of the sagas with the modern belief that the journeys were directed towards North America … rather than as sources of evidence for the history of the culture of the seafarers themselves, and/or those who told stories of their journeys.[103]

His observation that the Vínland sagas should be further explored by scholars as works of cultural history, and as sources of evidence of those who wrote the stories, is addressed by the research and propositions presented in this Chapter.

Saga audiences would have understood the different the heroic standards expected from westward heroes who sailed into the unknown, and eastward journeying warriors who travelled to the centre of the known world. Building on Jacobsson's research, I argue far-travellers who journeyed to the east were portrayed as advancing Icelandic's cultural capital and reputation, whereas those who travelled to the west were considered less successful and

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[101] Simek's 1990 work is a detailed survey of all extant material, including texts, and German translations of thirty passages from primary sources, all fundamental to understanding medieval Scandinavian cosmography. Rudolf Simek, "Altnordische Kosmographie: Studien und Quellen zu Weltbild und Weltbeschreibung", *in Norwegen und Island* vom 12, bis zum 14, Jahrhundert Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990.
[102] Sverrir Jakobsson, *Við og veröldin: Heimsmynd Íslendinga 1100-1400*, Háskólaútgáfan, 2005.
[103] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2012, pp. 493-514

were less revered. But not in all respects. Their achievements were measured on a different scale and celebrated using a slightly different suite of culturally significant themes. These themes still reflect critical aspects of identity, and are what helped to make Iceland and Icelanders what they were.

Coming Home

Unlike the dangerous outbound westward journey, returning from Greenland or Vínland does not generally seem to involve the same difficulties as getting there in the first place, and although there are accounts of drownings off the Iceland coast,[104] there are no corresponding wrecks on the fearsome Atlantic lee shores of Iceland, Scandinavia, or the British Isles representing a failed return journey.[105] It would appear that once a traveller had concluded his reason for being in the west, literary indicators of remoteness and danger are no longer required.

Even so, returning home, both as a destination and as an emotional construct, is important to the saga writers and is used frequently in the Vínland Sagas:

> He and Eiríkr left their *home* in Jaederen [Norway] … made their *home* at Drangar [Iceland].[106]

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[104] For example, Þorstein Surt's ship capsized and everyone "aboard was drowned except one man who managed to make his way to shore …" in *Laxdæla saga*, Chapter 18, Kunz, (trans.), 2001, pp. 298-299. Þorstein *Cod-Biter*, a kinsman of Þorstein Surt, drowned on a fishing trip, in *Eyrbyggja saga,* Chapter 11, Pálsson and Edwards, (trans.), 1989, p. 38.

[105] An exceptional case is the account of Þorgils Ørrabeinsfóstri in Flóamanna saga chapter 26, in *ÍF 13*, pp. 229-327, who is driven by storms from Greenland to Ireland, Norway, and finally to Iceland. See also Leifr's passage to Norway in *"*Eirík's Saga*"* Chapter 5, in which storms carry him to the Hebrides.

[106] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 1, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 49.

> … he [Eiríkr] set off to colonise Greenland, and he made his *home* at Brattahlid in Eiríkr sfjord.[107]

> Leif came across some shipwrecked seamen and brought them *home* with him.[108]

The Vínland trip certainly did not offer those who ventured there, the opportunity of wealth in terms of the obvious status symbols of gold, swords and fine clothing, such as the far-travelling warriors displayed on their return to Iceland. Instead the measure of wealth as a component of success as a westward traveller, was tied to the exploitation of natural resources. Leifr Eiríksson (*c*.970–*c*.1020), who was Eiríkr rauði's son, is attributed with discovering Vínland, and he left there with a "full cargo of timber" and a tow-boat "filled with grapes".[109] Karlsefni departed from Vínland with what was described as "much valuable produce, vines and grapes and pelts".[110] He then spent the winter in Greenland waiting for the summer sailing season and presumably trading in the interim. When Karlsefni left for Norway, "no ship has ever sailed from Greenland more richly laden".[111] High praise, but specific to the quantity and perhaps uniqueness of his cargo representing the natural resources of Vínland and Greenland and also one of the few specific mentions of a successful voyage outcome reported in the Vínland Sagas. Although in Karlsefni's case, his Vínland voyage also brought renown, as when they arrived in Norway, "he and his wife were made much of by the noblest in the country".[112] This reference to Karlsefni's far-travelling success being acknowledged by powerful people is a common heroic theme in saga literature,

[107] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 1, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 50.
[108] "Eirík's Saga", Chapter 5, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 87.
[109] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 4, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 57.
[110] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 7, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 67.
[111] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 8, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 70.
[112] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 8, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 70.

and is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. For saga patrons though, it was a useful literary device and allowed them to be associated with (vague) noble people, especially through their own ancestors.

Significantly Vínland is not considered to be home for any of the far-travellers, and there is an unwillingness to return to Vínland once anyone has spent time there. Ultimately though, the Vínland sagas record that the landnám and colonisation attempt failed. The sagas reveal there was a breakdown of the social fabric caused by their isolation:

> They returned to spent their third winter in Straumfjord. Many quarrels arose, as the men who had no wives sought to take those of the married men.[113]

Karlsefni's Vínland landnám and colonisation attempt was then abandoned after just three summers, due also in part to ongoing and violent clashes with the indigenous inhabitants they called Skrælings. Karsefni announced in the spring:

> … he had no wish to stay there any longer and wanted to return to Greenland.[114]

After his lack of sustainable success as a landnámsmaðr in Vínland, Karlsefni does redeem himself through his trading success. This allows him to return to Iceland and to acquire land.

> Next spring he bought the lands at Glaumby and made his home there; he farmed there for the rest of his life and was considered a man of great stature.[115]

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[113] "Eirík the Red's Saga", Chapter 12, in Kunz, 2008, p. 48.
[114] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 9, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 70.
[115] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 9, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 70.

Not a single explorer is described making a repeat voyage to the new lands in either of the Vínland Sagas, although interest seemingly remained high amongst those who had not yet made the trip. At least the saga authors assumed so, when they describe the trip as bringing men "both wealth and renown".[116] Just as it did for the far-travelling warriors, this type of acknowledgement would still serve to increase the cultural value and larger-than-life status of these specific westward travellers.

Westward Far-Travellers and Christianity Motifs

Grœnlendinga saga and *Eiríks saga rauða,* both tell the same story about Eiríkr rauði's son Leifr Eiríksson, but in the latter version, the story has been given a Christian 'spin'.

> Leif came across some shipwrecked seamen and brought them home with him and gave them all hospitality throughout the winter. He showed his great magnanimity and goodness by bringing Christianity to the country and by rescuing these men; he was known as Leif the Lucky. [117]

Leifr's value in this version of the saga is still that of a hero, but here his 'luck' is tied to the Church and to the rescue event itself. This is possibly a response to the pre-Christian connotations associated with the concept of luck, and the nomenclature inn heppni. Leifr the Lucky and his father would have been familiar names to thirteenth- and fourteenth-century saga audiences. For his good deeds Leifr is rewarded by evangelising King Óláfr

[116] "The Saga of the Greenlanders", Chapter 7, in Kunz, 2008, p. 17.
[117] "Eirík's Saga", Chapter 5, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 87.

Tryggvason (*c.*960s-1000). Leifr's status as a hero and successful explorer of Vínland and the other lands, is now linked to the Church.

> He [Leifr] joined the court of King Óláfr Tryggvason who bestowed great honour on him and thought him a very accomplished man.[118]

In his 2018 study, Kuldkepp linked travel with religion, by analysing conceptual convergences in the Old Norse travelogue *Eiríks saga víðförla* (The Saga of Eirík the Far-Travelled),[119] comparing these with the episode of Leifr Eiríksson's discovery of Vínland in *Eiríks saga rauða*. His focus was on how the themes of travel and holiness are related in these texts.[120] This Chapter links travel with religion in relation to *Eiríks saga rauða,* but extends this connection to include *Grœnlendinga saga,* and proposes several characters, particularly Leifr Eiríksson, were constructed around Christian themes, which has qualified their representation as heroes to their contemporary saga audience. At the same time, this has somewhat detracted from their heroic images as successful westward explorers and settlers.[121]

The conflict between the old values and Christianity in relation to Eiríkr rauði and his family, is a feature of the Vínland sagas, particularly the version of *Eiríks saga rauða* found in

[118] *"*Eirík's Saga*",* Chapter 5, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 85.
[119] *Eiríkr víðförla* was a Norwegian and the son of king Thrand of Thrandheim. He made a vow to "travel the whole world" to find the Earthly Paradise or "The Land of the Living".
[120] Kuldepp also proposes the notion of distance might be useful in analysing the category of the supernatural, in Mart Kuldepp, "A Study in Distance: Travel and Holiness in Eiríks saga rauða and Eireks saga víðförla*",* in Ü. Valk, and D. Sävborg, (eds.) *Storied and Supernatural Places — Studies in Spatial and Social Dimensions of Folklore and Sagas***,** Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2018, pp. 206-219.
[121] Travel studies, specific to the North Atlantic region, include works by Zilmer who completed her doctoral dissertation on Viking Age Baltic traffic and its representation in early Nordic sources, and who has published on the role of travel in saga literature. See Kristel Zilmer, " 'He Drowned in Holmr's Sea – His Cargo-ship Drifted to the Sea-bottom, Only Three Came out Alive', Records and Representations of Baltic Traffic in the Viking Age and the Early Middle Ages in Early Nordic Sources", *Nordistica Tartuensia* 12, Tartu: University of Tartu, 2005. See also Kristel Zilmer, "Learning about Places and People: Representation of Travelling Connections and Communication Situation in the Sagas of Icelanders", *Sagas & Societies: International Conference at Borgarnes, Iceland*, September 5-9, 2002; Kristel Zilmer, "The Motive of Travelling in Saga Narrative", in Zilmer, (ed.), 2005, pp. 64-92; and Kristel Zilmer, "Icelandic Sagas and the Narrative Tradition of Travelogue", in McKinnell, Ashurst and Kick, 2006, pp. 1105-1113.

Hauksbók, where the story has been significantly altered by the later compiler. In this version, the characterisation of Leifr is less the far-travelling heroic explorer of Vínland fame, and more the Christian evangelist with God on his side. Leifr is dispatched from Norway by King Óláfr and tasked with converting the pagan settlers of Greenland, his father being prominent amongst them – to Christianity.

> He [Leifr] made land at Eiríkrsfjord and went home to Brattahlid, where he was given a good welcome. He at once began preaching Christianity and the Catholic faith throughout the country; he revealed to the people King Óláfr Tryggvason's message, telling them what excellence and what glory there was in this faith.[122]

According to Johannesson there is no historical basis for this account, and the story was invented in the late twelfth century, likely by Icelandic monk Gunnlaugr Leifsson, who was at that time engaged in writing a biography about King Óláfr Tryggvason.[123] King Óláfr only reigned between 995-1000, but during this time, whether by force or persuasion, he is credited with converting Norway to Christianity.[124] His role in the foundation of the Scandinavian Church made Óláfr a subject of great interest to clerical writers like Gunlaug Leifsson, and there is more than one extant saga story about him.[125]

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[122] "Eirík's Saga", Chapter 5, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 87.
[123] Jon Johannesson, "Aldur Graenlendinga sogu," in *Nordaela. Afmaeliskveoja til Sigurdar Nordals sjotugs 14.* September 1956, Halldór Halldórsson et al., (eds.), Reykjavik: Helgafell, 1956, pp. 149-158, at p. 155.
[124] Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, pp. 31-32.
[125] At the monastery at Þingeyrar, Oddr Snorrason and Gunnlaugr Leifsson each wrote a life of Óláfr in Latin, but these have not been preserved. In Old Icelandic there are *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (derived from the translation of Oddrs saga), there is a version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla,* and there is *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* as found in *Flateyjarbók* (which includes *Grœnlendinga saga*). There is also a substantial amount of material about King Óláfr in *Agrip af noregskonungasogum*, in *Fagrskinna*, and in the *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* and the *Historia Norwegiae*. See Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, "Review of Sveinbjörn Rafnsson's 'Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar Um gerðir þeirra, heimildir og höfunda', Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2005", in *Saga Book vol. 31,* London: University College, Viking Society for Northern Research, 2007, p. 115.

King Óláfr would have also likely been a well-known figure to saga audiences as he is credited with the Christianisation of Iceland. The influence of King Óláfr has also extended to the only extent version of *Grœnlendinga saga,* which is found in the compilation manuscript known as *Flateyjarbók*. Here it is attached to a biographical work known as *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*[126], perhaps put there deliberately as suggested by Magnusson and Pálsson.[127] The conversion status of Greenland was certainly of concern to the *Grœnlendinga saga* author, who notes that "Greenland was still a heathen country at this time".[128] As the original version of *Grœnlendinga saga* was written earlier than *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (i.e. likely before 1200), Magnusson and Pálsson suggest the later compiler was trying to minimise the discrepancy about the Christianisation of Greenland.[129] There is every likelihood they are correct. By including this apparent earlier work, *Flateyjarbók* patron Jón Hákonarson and his clerical scribes, could have been legitimising or promoting King Óláfr Tryggvason's apparent missionary success in converting Greenland, by associating it with westward travel and landnám success.

Despite the influence of clerical concerns, both Vínland Sagas present Karlsefni and his wife Guðríðr as being successful westward far-travellers, and later as respected Icelandic landholders and farmers. Politically at the time of first converting the saga stories to a written form, Iceland was involved in a period of unrest and civil war. Powerful families were aligned against each other. For the chieftains, farmers and politicians, even ecclesiastics, who sponsored the writing of sagas and the compilation of saga collections in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, they too may well have seen benefits in being

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[126] For a discussion on *Flateyjarbók*, see Halldórsson, 1978, pp. 398-400.
[127] Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, pp. 33-34.
[128] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 2, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 52.
[129] Magnusson and Pálsson note that the *Grœnlendinga saga* was written earlier than *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (i.e. before 1200) and the compiler was trying to minimise the discrepancy between the *Grœnlendinga saga* and the Óláf Tryggavson biographies regarding Leifr Eiriksson and the evangelisation of Greenland, see Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, pp. 33-34.

associated with memory of such a devout woman as Guðríðr. By recreating these characters as being associated with Christian imagery, it would follow that the new lands discovered and settled by Leifr Eiríksson could also then be tied to God's will. Given the importance of genealogy and land ownership to Icelanders throughout the period of the Icelandic Commonwealth, it would seem that saga authors and their patrons had every reason to potentially shore up or cement their own political or ecclesiastical positions using their descent from such successful, heroic and 'godly' far-travellers.

Guðríðr and Freydís

The use of westward far-travellers to drive Christian themes can also be seen in the stories of explorers Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir (*c.*980-?) known as Guðríðr *víðförla* (far-traveller), and Freydís Eiríksdottir (*c.*970-?). Guðríðr is the most prominent of the twenty women mentioned by name in the Vínland Sagas and is the only far-traveller in this study who has purposefully been affixed with the nomenclature *víðförla*. She appears in both Vínland Sagas. In *Groenlendinga saga* she sets off from Iceland for Greenland with her first husband Þórir the Norwegian, and his crew. They are all rescued by Leifr the Lucky after being shipwrecked on a reef. The same rescue story is found in *Eiríks saga rauða*, however no names are referenced.[130] Unfortunately, the following winter her husband Þórir dies after a serious disease breaks out amongst the crew. Both sagas then agree Guðríðr marries Eiríkr rauði's third and youngest son Þórstein, who intends to follow in his brother Leifr's footsteps and travel to Vínland. *Grœnlendinga saga* describes how Þórstein "selected the biggest and

[130] "Leif came across some shipwrecked seamen and brought them home with him and gave them all hospitality throughout the winter", in "Eirík's Saga", Chapter 5, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 86.

strongest men available. He took a crew of twenty-five and his wife Guðríðr as well". They set sail for Vínland, but they did not make it:

> But throughout the summer they were at the mercy of the weather and never knew where they were going. Eventually, a week before winter, they made land at Lysufjord in the Western Settlement of Greenland.[131]

Early that winter, disease breaks out amongst Þórstein Eiríksson's crew, and many die. Eventually Þórstein succumbes, and Guðríðr is again a widow. In a less Christian-influenced saga, this would be reason enough to declare a character is attracting bad luck, as up until this point, Guðríðr's voyages have been negatively weather affected, and then curtailed due to the death of one or even two husbands. But Guðríðr is a "good woman", so her luck changes. Icelander Þorfinnr Karlsefni Þórðarson, who is described in *Eiríks saga rauða* as a "sea-going merchant" and "trader of great distinction",[132] and in *Grœnlendinga saga,* as "a man of considerable wealth", arrives from Norway to spend the winter in Brattahlid. He "quickly fell in love with Guðríðr".[133]

> There were great discussions at Brattahlid that winter about going in search of Vínland where, it was said, there was excellent land to be had.[134]

Guðríðr and her husband Karlsefni feature prominently in *Eiríks saga rauða,* likely because Haukr Erlendsson, the compiler of the *Hauksbók* version of *Eiríks saga rauða*, was himself a

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[131] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 6, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 62.
[132] "Eirík's Saga", Chapter 7, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 91.
[133] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 6, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 64.
[134] In the *Hauksbók* version of "Eirík's Saga*",* Vínland is called "Vínland the Good". This is also the first mention of Vínland in Eirík's saga. See "Eirík's Saga", Chapter 8, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 93 and fn 2.

descendent of Karlsefni.[135] They lead the first attempt to establish a colony in North America,[136] where the sagas report her giving birth to a baby boy who would be named Snorri. Her characterisation particularly in *Eiríks saga rauða* is of a model woman, wife and mother.

> Guðríðr was a woman of striking appearance; she was very intelligent and knew well how to conduct herself amongst strangers.[137]

> Then Guðríðr sang the songs so well and beautifully that those present were sure they had never heard lovelier singing.[138]

Both Vínland sagas characterise Guðríðr as very much a passive voyager with her fortunes and survival tied to the men in her life. Despite her impressive adventures in Greenland and Vínland, Guðríðr was given the name *víðförla* or far-traveller, later in life, most likely to mark her pilgrimage to Rome, which she is said to have undertaken after Karlsefni's death and her son Snorri's marriage.

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[135] He writes he had access to family stories passed down through oral tradition. "It was Karlsefni himself who told more fully than anyone else the story of all these voyages, which has been to some extent recorded here", "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 9, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 72.

[136] This settlement has been tentatively identified with the remains found at Norse L'Anse aux Meadows on the northern tip of Newfoundland, Canada. Later archaeological evidence suggests Vínland may have been the areas around the Gulf of St Lawrence, and the L'Anse aux Meadows site was a ship repair station or a specialised winter camp; a base camp for further exploration and a gateway to resources, in Birgitta Wallace, "L'Anse aux Meadows, Leif Eriksson's Home in Vínland", *Journal of the North Atlantic, Special Volume 2* (2009-10), pp. 114-125, at p. 118.

[137] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 6, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 62.

[138] "Eiríks saga", Chapter 4, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 83.

> When she returned to her son's farm, he had built a church at Glaumby. After that Gudríd (Guðríðr) became a nun and stayed there as an anchoress for the rest of her life.[139]

By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Guðríðr and Karlsefni were considered a foundation family in the history of the Icelandic church. They were the great-grandparents of the twelfth-century bishops Þorlákur Runólfsson (1086–1133) of Skálholt, Björn Gilsson (1100–1162) and Brandr Sæmundarson (1120–1201) of Hólar.[140] It has been suggested the variations in their stories between the two Vínland sagas was part of an attempt, around 1200, to have Karlsefni and Guðríðr's great-grandson, Bishop Björn Gílsson, declared a saint.[141] There could be another explanation about the prominence of Guðríðr in the Vínland sagas, especially in *Eiríks saga rauda*. This saga could have been composed for the nuns of Reynines, the house founded in 1295 by Guðríðr's descendants Hallbera Þorsteinsdottir and Bishop Jorundr Þorsteinsson, and may have been intended as noble woman's guide.[142] In contrast to the saintly Guðríðr, is Freydís Eiríksdóttir, who also appears in both *Groenlendinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauda*. In the former saga Freydís plays a major role, in the latter, a minor one.

> Freydís was an arrogant, overbearing woman, but her husband was feeble; she had been married off to him mainly for his money.[143]

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[139] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 9, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 70.
[140] Grove, p. 10.
[141] Birgitta Wallace, *Karlsefni,* Canadian Encyclopaedia: Published on-line February 2006, last edited November 2018. https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/karlsefni Accessed 8 November 2020.
[142] See Kunz, 1997, p. 54, fn 20 and p. 59, fn 35; and Helgi Þórláksson, "The Vínland Sagas in Contemporary Light", 2001, in Wawn and Sigurðardóttir, 2001, pp. 63-77.
[143] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 2, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 52.

With the characterisations of dutiful wife and mother Guðríðr and troublemaker Freydís, we can clearly see the distinction between an archetypical 'good' and a 'bad' woman. Freydís, like many of the female characters in the *Íslendingasögur*, is unpleasant, even reprehensible. Unlike many of the other characters in the Vínland Sagas, she is not a Christian, nor does she become one.[144] Jesch describes Freydís as representing "the bad old days, the heathen past that, according to the author, is now mercifully gone and replaced by the light of Christianity".[145]

There is a variety of evidence that indicates in the ninth and tenth centuries, a large number of women were involved in the settlements established in previously uninhabited, or relatively sparsely inhabited areas of the North Atlantic, including north and west Scotland, the Faroes, Iceland and Greenland. Most of these women will have travelled as members of a household headed by a man, such as did Guðríðr, who travelled with all three of her husbands. There are very few accounts of women organising voyages in their own right; Auðr the Deep-Minded being one spectacular example. Auðr[146] appears in a number of sources and sagas including *Íslendingabók*,[147] *Landnámabók*, *Njáls saga*, *Laxdæla saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, and *Grettis saga*. Auðr is also included as part of Guðríðr's ancestry at the start of the

[144] "He [Eiríkr rauði] also had a daughter called Freydís, who was married to a man called Thorvard; they lived at Gardar, where the bishop's residence is now". Jesch writes that by describing Freydís as living at a place which later became Greenland's bishops' seat, confirms she is not a Christian, in Judith Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age,* Woodbrige: Boydell, 1991, p. 185.

[145] Jesch 1991, p. 185.

[146] Sometimes Auðr is referred to as Unn. Auðr was the daughter of Ketil Flat-Nose and she was married to Óláfr the White, son of King Ingjald who had named himself King of Ireland. In her old age she had a ship built and assembled her family, slaves and some friends and travelled to Iceland via the Orkeys and Faroes. She was one of the first people to settle in Breiðafjörður in Western Iceland, see Magnus Magnusson and Herman Pálsson, *Laxdæla saga*, London: Penguin, 1969, p. 265.

[147] *Íslendingabók's* genealogies include the ninth-century Icelandic settler Auðr Djúpúðga (Aud the Deep-Minded). Auðr is said to have been an ancestor of its author Ari Þorgilsson (Ari the learned), see Sverrir Jakobsson, 2017, p. 96.

Skálholtsbók version[148] of *Eiríks saga rauda,* where Auðr is said to have "been baptised and was a devout Christian".[149]

Apart from her journey to Vínland, where she was part of Guðríðr and Karlsefni's expedition, *Grœnlendinga saga* describes Eiríkr the Red's daughter Freydís leading a subsequent expedition to Vínland around 1010-1011. But Freydís was not just leading a voyage, her motivation for travelling to Vínland again was also clearly commercially driven.

> One day, Freydís Eiríkr's-daughter travelled from her home at Gardar to visit the brother Helgi and Finnbogi. She asked them if they would join her with their ship on an expedition to Vínland, sharing equally with her all the profits that might be made from it. They agreed to this.[150]

The voyage fails spectacularly. Not because they do not safely arrive, or miss the opportunity to land, but because of Freydís's direct involvement with dishonourable killings. There are a number of stories in the *Íslendingasögur* where women incite men to commit revenge killings,[151] or where they take up arms themselves to avenge close relatives, but a woman actually committing murder herself is an anomaly.

> Freydís had each of them put to death as soon as he came out.

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[148] This is the version used by the Magnusson and Pálsson for their translation of *Eiríks saga rauða.* The *Skálholtsbók* (Book of Skálholt) text, AM 557 4to, was written *c.*1420 in the North of Iceland. It is longer than the *Hauksbók* version (which is also considered to be the older version), and it is garbled in places; see Reykjavík, Árna Magnússonar AM 557 4to, in *ÍF 4,* pp. 401-434. For another translation of the *Skálholtsbók* version, see Hreinsson, vol. 1, pp. 1-18.
[149] "Eiríks saga", Chapter 1, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 75.
[150] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 8, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 67.
[151] Such as Hallgerðr and Bergþóra two female characters in Njáls saga.
Jesch describes these female inciters as "literary clichés", and there is no evidence they existed outside the sagas, in Jesch, 1991, p. 190.

> All the men were killed in this way, and soon only the women were left; but no one as willing to kill them.
>
> Freydís said, "Give me an axe."
>
> This was done, and she herself killed the women, all five of them.
>
> After this monstrous deed they went back to their house, and it was obvious that Freydís thought she had been very clever about it.[152]

Freydís is certainly nothing like Guðríðr. The *Skálholtsbók* version of *Eiríks saga rauda* does not even mention her by name as being a member of Karlsefni's expedition to Vínland, and only refers to "a man named Thorvard [Þorvaldr] who was Eiríkr the Red's son-in-law".[153] Whereas the same passage in the *Hauksbók* version records "a man named Thorvard was married to Freydís, who was an illegitimate daughter of Eiríkr the Red".[154] We do not know why her name was omitted in this passage by the *Skálholtsbók* author, maybe it was deliberately done, due to Freydís being the antithesis of religious values and womanhood compared with Karlsefni's wife Guðríðr. In both versions of *Eiríks saga rauda*, Freydís is described wielding a sword to defend against a Skrælings attack – much as a warrior would do. There are of course descriptions of combative, armed women in Scandinavian poetry and prose, including the armour-wearing, sword-brandishing Valkyries of Norse mythology.[155] The *Eiríks saga rauda* image of Freydís is also similar to the hundreds of shieldmaidens who are described by Saxo in his chronicle *Gesta Danorum*.[156] Like the Valkyries and

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[152] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 8, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 69.
[153] "Eiríks saga", Chapter 8, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 93.
[154] "Eirík the Red's Saga", Chapter 8, in Kunz, 2008, p. 40.
[155] They served the god Odin and were sent by him to the battlefields to choose which of the slain were worthy of a place in Valhalla.
[156] Examples of shieldmaidens mentioned by name in the Norse sagas include Brynhildr in the *Vǫlsunga saga*, Hervor in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, the Brynhildr of the *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, the Swedish princess Thornbjǫrg in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, Princess Hed in *Gesta Danorum*, Visna in *Gesta Danorum* and Veborg in *Gesta Danorum*.

shieldmaidens, Freydís too exhibits many other masculine qualities including wearing men's clothing (her husband's cloak).[157] Freydís is however unique amongst these warrior women; she bares her breast.

> She [Freydís] snatched up the sword and prepared to defend herself. When the Skrælings came rushing towards her she pulled one of her breasts out of her bodice and slapped it with the sword. The Skrælings were terrified at the sight of this and fled back to their boats and hastened away.[158]

This is just one of two descriptions of female nakedness to be found in any of the *Íslendingasögur*[159] – the other being a naked corpse.[160] Freydís also murders other Icelandic women. Describing a woman doing such a deed, is as rare in the *Íslendingasögur,* as is finding one naked.

Was Freydís portrayed with masculine qualities because only a male would be capable of such a foul deed, or was she dressed like a man, as only a man was capable of leading a commercially motivated journey to Vínland? Perhaps it was the author's vision of a pagan woman.[161] Whether directly as the ultimate patron, or indirectly through the influence of their position, the bishops who are named in both of the Vínland Sagas as being descendants of Guðríðr have likely had a part to play in shaping the "good" and "bad" motifs so clearly

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[157] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 8, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 68.
[158] *"Eirík's Saga",* Chapter 11, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 100.
"Eirík's Saga", Chapter 11, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 101.
[159] Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society,* New York: Cornell University Press, 1995, p. 77.
[160] "When they came to the larder, there was a tall woman, stark naked, not a stitch of clothing on her, getting a meal ready", *Eyrbyggja saga,* Chapter 51, Pálsson and Edwards, 1989, p. 134.
[161] There is much that could be read into the characterisation of Freydís around gender identification and representation, however as gender analysis falls outside the remit of this study, this topic will be left for others to further explore.

evident in these two characters.[162] It can also be argued that by its very nature as being free from social conventions, Freydís's character still represents a form of independence.

North Atlantic Hegemony and Colonisation

> Greenland is cut off from these by icy crags.
> This country, which was discovered settled
> and confirmed in the universal faith by Icelanders,
> is the western boundary of Europe,
> almost touching the African islands
> where the waters of ocean flood in.
> ***Historia Norwegiae*** (*c.*1250) [163]

From the earliest days of the various landnám the North Atlantic settlements were linked. Spheres of influence and networks stretched from Greenland and Vínland to the west, to Ireland and England to the south, and to Norway to the east. The success of each of these communities was very much connected to the politics and fortunes of their neighbours, particularly Norway. By default, this possibly included the Danes,[164] as contemporary sources reveal Denmark more or less completely controlled Norway during most of the Norwegian unification period.[165]

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[162] Barnes discusses the historiography of the voyages west in relation to Christianisation, in Geraldine Barnes, 2001, pp. 1-10.

[163] *Historia Norwegiae* and *A History of Norway and the Passion and Miracles of the Blessed Óláfr*, vol. 13, Devra Kunin (trans.), Carl Phelpstead (ed.), London: University College, Viking Society for Northern Research, 2001, p. 3. This is an English translation of two works – *Historia Norwegiae* (*c.*1250) and *Passio et miracula beati Olavi*. Both by anonymous authors. For a discussion regarding authorship of *Historia Norwegiae,* see ibid, p. xix.

[164] Bagge points to the lack of references to Danish hegemony in the Icelandic sagas and proposes the sagas have exaggerated the importance of the internal Norwegian struggles, and minimised the importance of Danish intervention in Norwegian politics, see Sverre Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom: State Formation in Norway c.900-1350,* Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2010, p. 33.

[165] Claus Krag, "The Early Unification of Norway", in Knut Helle (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia,1, Prehistory to 1520,* Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2003, pp. 187 and 466-68, in Bagge, 2010, p. 33, fn 26; Dagfinn Skre, "Towns and Markets, Kings and Central Places in South-Western Scandinavia *c.*AD 800-950, in Dagfinn Skre, *Kaupangin Skiringssal. Kaupang Excavation Project. Publication Series* 1, Aarhus, 2007, pp. 445-69, in Bagge, 2010, p. 33.

There may have also been a demand for exciting tales set in such remote places as Greenland and Vínland. There was certainly demand, including in Denmark, for exotic goods and wildlife from Greenland. In *Konungs skuggsjá* the learned father informs the attentive son how many men have braved the perils of the Greenland Sea because they have heard great wealth may be had by trading in such precious products like walrus-hide ropes, ivory and white falcons.[166] In *Auðunar þáttr vestfirzka*, (The Tale of Auðun of the West Fjords) the title character travels to Greenland and gives every penny he has to buy a white bear, so he can take it to Denmark and present it to King Sweyn II of Denmark (*r.*1047-74/76).[167]

In *Sturlunga saga,* Sturla Þórðarson wrote about the dispute between Norwegian King Hákon IV (*r.*1217-1263) and the Danish rulers concerning some compensation which Hákon believed was due to him following an earlier rebuff and which he had tried several times to collect.[168] In 1262, Sturla would make an early pledge of fealty to King Hákon IV Hákonarson of Norway (1204-1263) after being charged with treason. As Ashurst, notes, Sturla "was one of the Icelandic chieftains most notably opposed to the establishment of Norwegian rule over Iceland, had found himself obliged, in 1263, to go to Norway and swear fealty."[169] It is quite possible too, during this time, there were chieftains and community leaders in Greenland who were also expressing their own opposition to Norwegian rule. They may have had support in Iceland.

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[166] "Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra", Chapter 17, in *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda III,* Guðni Jónsson (ed.), Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1950, pp. pp. 411-24, at p. 416-17

[167] There are two extant versions of *Auðunar þáttr*, one in *Morkinskinna* (c. 1220) and another, fuller text in *Flateyjarbók*. The story was probably composed between 1190 and 1220, see *ÍF 6,* pp. cvii-cviii, in Phillip Pulsiano (ed.), *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, London: Garland, 1993, pp. 24-25.

[168] Sturla Þórðarson, *Sturlunga saga,* Gudbrand Vigfusson, (trans.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1877-88, pp. 268 and 307.

[169] David Ashurst, "The Ironies in Cardinal William of Sabinas Supposed Pronouncement on Icelandic Independence", *Saga Book vol. 31*, London: University College, Viking Society for Northern Research, 2007, pp. 39-45, at p. 39.

Some Greenlanders are depicted as being valued by the Norwegian crown, even if they are not seen in that light by local audiences. As discussed, *Grœnlendinga saga* tells us the story of early explorer Bjarni Herjólfsson, who together with his crew might have been the first Europeans to sight North America around 986 and how Bjarni was initially criticised in Norway for his "lack of curiosity, since he could tell them nothing about these countries".[170] But as *Grœnlendinga saga* then goes on to say Bjarni "was made a retainer at the earl's court"[171], before returning "to Greenland the following summer."[172]

Being made a "retainer" might not be such a strange recognition for Bjarni to be given after being criticised. Instead it could refer to Bjarni representing Norwegian commercial interests around access to Greenland's rich resources. The exploitation of Greenland's natural resources, particularly walrus tusks, by the Norwegian elite is discussed in Chapter Two. The Norwegian perspective on Greenland reflects the growing interest there in the colony during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as it was drawn into the orbit of Norwegian secular and ecclesiastical control including its assimilation into the new archdiocese of Niðarós (Trondheim), established in 1152/53,[173] and its final political submission to Norway in 1261. *Historia Norwegiae* and *Konungs skuggsjá* also refer to Greenland as a destination for merchant ships that risk adverse gales, sea-ice, and huge sea-beasts in the pursuit of trade, and alongside descriptions of sea-creatures. *Konungs skuggsjá* also notably lists the motivations of those prepared to make the long and dangerous journey west – hunger for fame, natural curiosity, and the desire for wealth.[174]

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[170] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 3, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 54.
[171] Earl Eiríkr Hákonarson, who ruled over Norway from 1000 to 1014, in "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 3, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 54, fn 1.
[172] "Grœnlendinga saga", Chapter 3, in Magnusson and Pálsson, 1965, p. 54.
[173] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2012, pp. 493-51
[174] Grove, pp. 31-32.

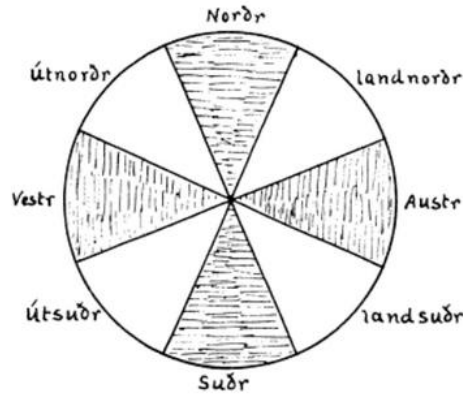

Figure 9: Norse navigation using eight cardinal points or *ættir*[175]

Descriptions of sea journeys west to Greenland were common, but Jakobsson suggests westward journeys to Vínland never became customary enough to be similarly documented.[176] The journey between Greenland and North America would also have presented medieval geographers with a dilemma as to where and how to locate Vínland, thereby creating a sense of the strangeness or "otherness" about the location. According to the *Historia Norwegiae* (*c*.1250) and later medieval Icelandic encyclopaedic texts, Greenland and Vínland were near Africa.

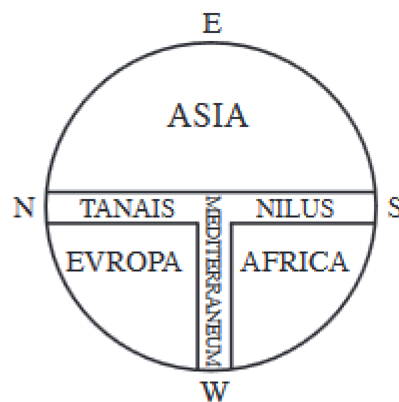

Figure 10: Isidorean mappamundi (11th century).[177]

[175] They navigated by means of the stars and the sun, see Ingstad and Ingstad, 2000, p. 2.
[176] Sverrir Jakobsson, 2012, pp. 493-514.
[177] Figure 10 depicts an eleventh-century map of the world. East is at the top, Asia fills the top half, Europe is in the bottom left hand quadrant with Africa in the bottom right hand quadrant. "Isidorean" mappamundi (11th century), of unknown origin, diameter 26 cm, in Bayerische Staatsbibliotek, Munich, Clm 10058, f. 154v, reproduced in Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla,* vol. 1, Alison Findlay and Anthony Faulkes (trans.), London: University College, Viking Society for Northern Research, 2011, Front cover.

Grove argues, in relation to Greenland and Vínland, that far-travel to the west "offered Icelandic saga-writers a particularly pertinent setting in which to exercise their abiding interest in the negotiation of political relations between their protagonists and Norwegian rulers".[178] My research extends this proposition.

Chapter Summary

Scholars now largely agree the Icelandic sagas are a mixture of historical fact mixed with fictional or imaginative material. The tales of voyages to Greenland and Vínland are no exception. As this Chapter has discussed, saga patrons, authors and scribes of the Vínland sagas crafted the representation of westward far-travel and far-travellers for a number of reasons. These include continuing societal acceptance of the superior value of travelling to the east, supporting and upholding their own Christian values, promoting their connections with famous and successful forebears, furthering, acknowledging and legitimising the continuity and importance of the far-travellers' westward landnám achievements. For some this may have been to add legitimacy to their own land-holdings. At the same time, their characters have not lost the independence of action and (mostly) exhibit behaviours that are recognisably heroic qualities.

For thirteenth- and fourteenth-century saga audiences, westward travel was a journey with rewards and recognition to be gained, but only if the far-traveller lived up to an expected standard. Travelling west was not represented by the saga authors as being as prestigious a journey as travelling to the east, and there are no descriptions of the trappings of wealth as

[178] Grove, p. 33.

were earned from journeying to one of the centres of 'civilisation'. The Vínland Sagas reveal that there was still value to be had and notoriety to be gained from a westward journey. Some far-travelling colonisers achieved this. Certainly, landnám outcomes were linked to the level of renown a westward traveller achieved. Despite their achievements in discovering and settling in remote lands, any success or renown achieved by westward far-travellers was of a different quality from that achieved by the far-travelling warriors who went east. Travelling to places considered Christian could certainly be part of the reason why westerly journeys did not hold the same literary value to the saga authors, as travelling to Christian lands. This is particularly evident with *Eiríks saga rauða.*

The Greenland and Vínland explorers and settlers' stories are fundamentally different from those of eastward-travelling warriors Halldór and Bolli, whose journeys saw them returning home to Iceland as respected and brave heroes, valued by foreign rulers, or Úlfr who became the king's brother-in-law. The founder of the Greenland settlement Eiríkr rauði's characterisation in particular, along with the dangers and strangeness of the western lands, portray otherness and strangeness; whereas, the alterity and sense of otherness displayed by Halldór, Úlfr and Bolli's journeys, achievements, or indeed their personalities, is instead moderated because they travelled east to Christian lands. Eiríkr rauði steadfastly remains his own man, tied to the old gods; Halldór, Úlfr and Bolli are presented as being Christians loyalty serving Christian rulers.

Several factors influenced why westward travel was presented as a lower value journey than travelling to the east. It was still possible to achieve wealth and renown as a far-travelling explorer and coloniser, but it was not necessarily associated with riches, or the discovery of a new land. Instead renown was gained through landnám success, such as that achieved by Eiríkr rauði in Greenland. Being associated with evangelism could also earn a westward

traveller renown, as indicated by the characterisation in *Eiríks saga rauða*, of Eiríkr's son Leifr, inn heppni. *Eiríks saga rauða* gives a similar weighting to upholding moral and Christian values earning its own reward with the characterisation of Guðríðr. In contrast, there is Freydís, the archetype 'bad' woman who defies social conventions. *Grœnlendinga saga*, which also focuses on the character of Leifr, presents him as a larger-than-life hero whose renown has been gained through inherited luck and landnám success. There are no descriptions in the Vínland Sagas of those returning from westward travel being in possession of the items of wealth, such as gold, swords and fine clothing, which were brought back to Iceland by the returning far-travelling warriors. Those who travelled west, like Karlsefni, achieved wealth as such, only by exploiting and successfully trading natural resources. These westward explorers and colonisers are not heroic in the same way as were the warriors who travelled to the east, whose heroic status was interdependent on giving service to powerful men. Seemingly free to travel whenever and wherever they choose, they are instead characterised as heroes by their independence, their single-mindedness, by their evangelism, their ability to rise above the sense of alterity attached to their location, and by making the 'best' out of the inferior value of their destination.

Chapter Five

Journey's End

Though here at journey's end I lie
In darkness buried deep,
Beyond all towers strong and high,
Beyond all mountains steep,
Above all shadows rides the Sun
And Stars for ever dwell:
I will not say the Day is done,
Nor bid the Stars farewell.

Journey's End **– J.R.R. Tolkien**[179]

The tales preserved about eleventh-century far-travelling warrior Halldór Snorrason and the other far-travellers discussed here, are part of the rich cultural history of Iceland. As the case studies have outlined both westward and eastward travel presented the saga authors and later compilers, writing several centuries later, with perfect vehicles with which to promote their personal views and to highlight their own links with the past. In doing so they created powerful literary motifs, that could have influenced the national psyche, not just by encouraging Icelanders to take pride in the achievements of their own in distant lands, but showing how these travellers, particularly warriors like Bolli Bollason, Halldór Snorrason and Úlfr Óspaksson, added value to the positive perceptions held internationally about Iceland and Icelanders.

Iceland operated as a "Commonwealth" without a king. Icelanders were free to travel and earn their fortunes elsewhere. Some made their mark as far-travellers, and their stories became part of an oral tradition that stretched through families and across time. Eventually they were written down.

[179] J.R.R. Tolkien, "Journey's End", *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, Book Six, Chapter I: "The Tower of Cirith Ungol", Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1994, p. 888.

From the Age of Settlement until the end of the Icelandic Commonwealth, Iceland was governed by powerful goðar (chieftains), whose supporters who were farmers, known as Þingmenn (assembly people). The ongoing requirement to maintain the individual goodwill of their supporters prevented any one goði from assuming princely powers, as under Icelandic law, Þingmenn could choose to support any of the goðar in their district. This lack of overlordship allowed Iceland to develop a culture of independence that was unique in Europe at that time. But the late twelfth century would see the rise of a small group of competing elite families, who would in turn be manipulated by Norwegian interests. The result was civil war, which only ended when those men who could, voted to accept the rule of King Hákon IV of Norway. Saga descriptions of the ongoing rivalry between Iceland and Norway since the Age of Settlement suggest that Iceland's capitulation to Norwegian control was not complete or unconditional.[180] The spirit of individualism and independence lived on in the sagas, and may even have reflected the cultural memory of such resistance.

The saga authors and influencers – men like Snorri Sturluson – functioned not only as transmitters of historical information, but as arrangers, compilers and interpreters of those memories and stories passed down through the generations. They were powerful and influential men, and they were also writing during times of great political upheaval and uncertainty in Iceland. The naturally heroic nature of far-travel along with the extraordinary achievements of the far-travellers, presented the saga authors with a unique opportunity to foster a national Icelandic identity at a time when both Iceland and Greenland were being brought under Norwegian overlordship. Norwegian influence was significant and ongoing

[180] The terms for Icelandic submission are detailed in two treaties from 1262-64 and 1302, that are preserved in manuscripts dating from the sixteenth century. However, Patricia Bulhosa, *Icelanders and the Kings of Norway, Mediaeval Sagas and Legal Texts,* Leiden and Boston: The Northern World 17, 2005, maintains that the treaties are fifteenth century forgeries. Supporting the traditional view of the origin of the treaty documents, see Helgi Þorlaksson, 'Review of Patricia Bulhosa, *Icelanders and the Kings of Norway', Historisk tidsskrift* 86 (2007), pp. 142-147.

from the very earliest days of the Icelandic settlement, (and likely in Greenland too); potentially more significant than is commonly acknowledged. In this context, the far-travellers of the sagas stood as larger-than-life heroes; they also represented independence ideals, which perhaps helped to soften the inevitability of the increasing political and economic influence, and final control, of the Norwegian ruling elites. In the end, both Greenland (1262) and Iceland (1262-64) would succumb to Norwegian rule, while the illusion of independence would live on in the sagas.

The depiction of eastward and westward journeys in sagas contributed different elements to the image of the heroic, independent-spirted Icelander. The far-travelling warriors who went east to Constantinople were journeying to a familiar centre of political and ecclesiastic power,[181] and the saga authors have used their journeys and characterisation as a way of linking Iceland to another, and definitely more powerful regime. Their appearance in the sagas presents what were likely very well-known local characters, as larger-than-life heroic figures, stressing the traditional heroic values of valour, independence and pragmatism. Yet the eastward travellers were also mercenaries who were paid for their services and their ventures were seemingly self-initiated and financially driven. This heroic characterisation was in direct contrast to those heroes found in other potentially competing contemporary works, such as the French chivalric tales like *The Song of Roland*[182], or the Arthurian legends, which were in circulation in Norway at that time; and likely too in Iceland. These European-centric works glorified the early chivalric Christian ideals of loyalty and service to one's liege lord and to God.[183] But there was no king ruling Iceland, and the far-travelling saga warriors

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[181] Sverrir Jakobsson, "The Schism that Never Was: Old Norse Views on Byzantium and the Rus", *Byzantinoslavica*, 2008, vol. 66 (1-2), pp. 173-188.
[182] *The Song of Roland,* Jessie Crosland (trans.), Cambridge, Ontario: In parentheses Publication, 1999.
[183] Goodman concludes that European Christian chivalry seems to have crystallised by the end of the twelfth century "as a code of conduct originally developed for a tightly defined professional group", Jennifer Goodman, 'European Chivalry in the 1490s', *Comparative Civilisations Review,* No. 26 (Spring 1992), pp. 43-72, at p.46.

are a very different type of hero. They were characterised as independently minded, and although connected with, and indeed loyal to kings and nobles from other lands not subservient to them. Instead, they represent a synthesis of Icelandic heroic ideals. Yet as larger than life, brave and loyal heroes, even if paid to serve a king, they blend a type of loyalty that chivalric texts praised, together with an independence that was unique.

In contrast, those who undertook the dangerous voyage west to Greenland and North America, were travelling to the very margins of the known world, not to a centre of power and influence like Constantinople. Independent and brave, these far-travellers had other value to offer as literary figures. As Chapter Four outlines, the Vínland sagas were heavily redacted over time, and were used by the saga authors and later compilers to advance their own political and ecclesiastical agendas, as distinct from the tales of eastward travel. The Vínland sagas also reveal how westward travel is valued. For far-travelling explorers and colonisers success is derived from landnám, not from discovering a new place. In the case of Leifr Eiríksson, it comes from being associated with evangelism and through spreading the word of God in a remote place on the margins. Westward far-travellers were also motivated by commercial interests and they came to exploit the land. Although the characterisation of explorers and settlers is very different from the image presented of far-travelling warriors, they can still be linked to independence themes. A character like Leifr's father, Eiríkr the Red, who also appears in the Vínland Sagas, signals to the saga audience that a westward traveller can be an outlaw, but by virtue of his far-travel success he is also an independent and heroic figure, 'his own man', who contributes to Greenland's individual and distinct identity. He can even stubbornly remain a pagan. The sagas treat this as uncontroversial.

The advent of uniquely Icelandic epic literature as a cultural production, responded to an emerging identity. This identity both shaped and was shaped by attitudes towards far-

travellers as cultural heroes. Sagas responded to this context, but they also attempted to intervene in it, and to influence how Icelanders saw themselves. The representation of these characters and their journeys showed their contemporary audiences that Icelanders were sought-after travellers whose journeys and adventures brought prestige to Iceland. These were home-grown, home-spun heroes; their own people, for some, their own ancestors. And over time the stories of their achievements on the international stage became increasingly more and more important to Icelandic authors and their local audiences. They were true cultural heroes to be remembered and admired by what was now a fractured society that had, or was about to lose its own independence to an aggressive neighbour. These heroes were symbolic of independence; their stories redolent of successes and renown earned in times now past. These were characters from an age of heroes; from a time when far-travelling Icelanders were valued and held in the highest esteem.

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Appendices

Chart 1

Chronology for Saga Age Iceland

c.860	Iceland is discovered
870-930	Age of Settlement – Colonisation ends when all suitable land has been occupied. Alþingi (National Assembly or Parliament) established
870-1050	**Events of the Saga Age** *Islendingasögur* (family sagas) cover this period
c.910-990	Lifespan of Egil Skallagrimsson
982-985[1]	Eiríkr rauði (the Red) is banished from Iceland. Sets sail west and 'discovers' Greenland. Far-travels of Leifr 'the lucky' Eiríksson, Guðríðr *víðförla* (far-traveller) Þorbjarnardóttir and Þorfinnr (Karlsefni) Þórðarson
1000	**Conversion to Christianity** Voted for by the lawspeaker at the Alþingi
1005	Establishment of Fifth Court or court of the appeal
1035-1066	Far-travels of Icelanders Halldór Snorrason, Úlfr Óspaksson and Bolli Bollason
1056	Isleif, appointed first native bishop
1056-1133	Lifespan of Saemund 'the Learned' – wrote in Latin
1067-1148	Lifespan of Ari Þorgilsson 'the Learned' – wrote *Islendingabok* (Book of the Icelanders) in the vernacular
1179-1241	Lifespan of Snorri Sturluson: Historian, chieftain, politician, skald, saga author
1180-1264	**Sturlung Age** – rise of the elite families. Sturlunga sagas written later in this period
1214-1284	Lifespan of Sturla Þórðarson: Chieftain, politician, saga author
1262-64	**End of the Icelandic Republic or Commonwealth** Freemen vote to accept submission to King Hákon IV of Norway
Antiq-1299	*Konungasögur* (kings' sagas) written Biographies of kings from mythical times to end of the thirteenth century, although considerations of chronology are ignored for this genre

[1] Geraldine Barnes offers a later date with Eiríkr arriving in Greenland during the reign (1015-28) of Óláfr Haraldsson, known as Óláfr inn helgi (995 -1030), in Geraldine Barnes, "Review of Andrew Wawn and Þorunn Sigurdardottir, (eds.), Approaches to Vínland: a conference on the written and archaeological sources for the Norse settlements in the North-Atlantic region and exploration of America", in *Scandinavian Studies,* Vol. 74, No. 4, (Winter 2002), p. 545. Gale Academic OneFile, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A97298281/AONE?u=monash&sid=AONE&xid=13c66f81 Accessed 30 January 2021.

Chart 2

Chronology according to Heimskringla[2]		Skaldic Source
793	First Viking raid on Northumbria	
*c.*850	Beginning of Viking settlement in England	Bragi inn gamli[3]
870	Beginning of Viking settlement in Iceland	
871	Alfred the Great becomes king of England	
*c.*885	Haraldr hárfagri becomes king of all Norway	Þjóðólfr of Hvinir Þorbjǫrn hornklofi
930	Foundation of Alþingi in Iceland	
933	Hákon góði (Aðalsteinsfóstri) becomes king	
960	Haraldr gráfeldr becomes king	
*c.*965	Division of Iceland into quarters	Eyvindr skáldaspillir
*c.*985	Beginning of settlement of Greenland	Egill, Kormakr
995	Óláfr Tryggvason becomes king of Norway	Einarr skálaglamm
999/1000	Christianity accepted in Iceland	Hallfreðr
*c.*1000	Discovery of America by Vikings	
*c.*1014	Battle of Clontarf	Sighvatr
1015	Nesjarbardagi. St Óláfr becomes king of Norway	
1030	Fall of St Óláfr at Stikla(r)staðir	Arnórr jarlaskáld
1035	Magnús góði becomes king of Norway	
1036	Death of Sveinn Knútsson	
1045	Helganesbardagi	
1046	Haraldr harðráði returns to Norway	
1047	Death of Magnús góði	
1056	First bishop at Skálaholt. Sæmundr inn fróði born	Þjóðólfr Arnórsson
1062	Battle at Niz	
1066	Fall of Haraldr harðráði in England. Battle of Hastings	
1067	Óláfr kyrri becomes king of Norway	
1067/8	Ari Þorgilsson born	
1076	Death of Sveinn Úlfsson	
1093	Death of Óláfr kyrri. Magnús berfœttr becomes king	
1095	Death of Óláfr Sveinsson	
1096	Tithe laws introduced in Iceland	
1103	Fall of Magnús berfœttr. His sons Sigurðr, Eysteinn and Óláfr become kings of Norway	
1106	First bishop at Hólar	
1116	Death of Óláfr Magnússon	
*c.*1125	*Íslendingabók* compiled	
1122	Death of Eysteinn Magnússon	

[2] Reproduced from: Snorri Sturluson, “Chronology”, *Heimskringla,* vol. 1., Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes, (trans.), London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College, 2011, p. xvi.
[3] Bragi ‘the Old’.

Chronology according to Heimskringla		**Skaldic Source**
1130	Death of Sigurðr Jórsalafari. Magnús Sigurðarson and Haraldr gilli become kings of Norway	
1135	King Magnús blinded	
1136	Haraldr gilli killed. His sons Ingi and Sigurðr become kings of Norway	
1139	Magnús blindi and Sigurðr slembir killed	
1142	Eysteinn Haraldsson returns to Norway and becomes joint king with his brothers	
1151	Rǫgnvaldr kali sets out for Jerusalem	
1153	Archbishopric established at Niðaróss	Einarr Skúlason
1155	Fall of Sigurðr Haraldson	
1157	Fall of Eysteinn Haraldsson. Hákon herðibreiðr becomes king in Norway	
1161	Fall of Ingi Haraldsson. Magnús Erlingsson becomes king in Norway	
	Eysteinn consecrated archbishop	
1162	Fall of Hákon herðibreiðr	
1164	Magnús Erlingsson becomes king	
1177	Defeat of the Birkibeinar at Ré	
1179	**Snorri Sturluson born**	
*c.*1190-1210	Sverris saga written	
1197	Jón Loptsson dies	
1215-18	**Snorri is lawspeaker**	
1217	Hákon Hákonarson becomes king of Norway	
1218-20	**Snorri's first visit to Norway**	
*c.*1220	**Snorri writes *The Prose Edda* –** story of Norse mythology	
1222-31	**Snorri is lawspeaker again**	
1226	*Tristrams saga* – story of Tristan and Iseult – chivalric genre	
1237-9	**Snorri's second visit to Norway**	
1240	Duke Skúli killed	
1241	**Snorri Sturluson killed 23rd September**	
1261	Magnús Hákonarson crowned king in Norway	
1262-4	Icelanders acknowledge the king of Norway as their sovereign	
1263	King Hákon dies	

Chart 3

Far-travelling Warriors (Chapter Three)

Halldór Snorrason	Úlfr Óspaksson	Bolli Bollason
Sagas they appear in, including authors and nationality, whether known or unknown		
Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar (found in *Heimskringla)* Author: Snorri Sturluson	***Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*** (found in *Heimskringla)* Author: Snorri Sturluson	***Laxdæla saga*** (found in *Möðruvallabók*)[4] Author: unknown Icelander[5]
Laxdæla saga[6] (found in *Möðruvallabók*) Author: unknown Icelander	***Fagrskinna*** Author: unknown but possibly an Icelander in Norway[8]	***Bolla þáttr Bollasonar***[7] (found in *Möðruvallabók*)
Morkinskinna Author: unknown Icelander	***Morkinskinna*** Author/Compiler: unknown Icelander	
Halldórs þáttr 1 [9] Author: unknown but possibly Norwegian		
Halldórs þáttr 2 [10] Author: unknown but possibly Norwegian		
Flateyjarbók[11] Patron: Jón Hárkonarson, et al[12]		

[4] Both *Laxdæla saga* and *Bolla þáttr Bollasonar* are also found in *Möðruvallabók* or AM 132 fol., a compilation manuscript containing various family sagas, which has been dated to the mid-fourteenth century. There are a number of extant fragments of *Laxdæla saga*, the oldest of which can be dated to 1250, however *Möðruvallabók* contains the most complete version.

[5] It has been suggested the *Laxdæla* author may be a woman.

[6] There is just one brief mention of Halldór Snorrason in Chapter 78 of *Laxdæla saga.*

[7] *Bolla þáttr Bollasonar* (Bolli Bollason's Tale), is a feud-based short story set in Iceland after Bolli's return from his travels. As such, it is concerned with indigenous Icelandic affairs placing it outside the far-travelling parameters for this study.

[8] There are chapters in *Fagrskinna* recalling Haraldr Sigurðarson's Varangian adventures, but the general orientation of *Fagrskinna* suggests a Norwegian origin.

[9] Known as "The Tale of Halldór Snorrason I", this þáttr featuring Halldór is preserved in *Flateyjarbók* (handsome parchment), another compilation work in the *Konungasögur* genre, although it is likely interpolated, as it forms part of "The Longest Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason". *Flateyjarbók* is a large complex compilation of sagas and numerous *þættir,* such as this one, which are not found in other extant *Konungasögur* manuscripts.

[10] "The Second Story of Halldór Snorrason", is found in both *Flateyjarbók,* where it follows "The Saga of King Magnus and King Harald", and is also found in *Morkinskinna,* in a *þáttr* titled "The Saga of Harald Hard-Ruler".

[11] *Flateyjarbók* MS (GkS 1005, fol.) was compiled *c.*1387-1394 in Iceland, and consists of 40 to 50 manuscripts and over 1,000 stanzas. It is a compilation of vernacular historiography (*Konungasögur*) and poems in the form of a genealogically structured history of the Norwegian kings.

[12] *Flateyjarbók* had two scribes, or possibly they were redactors, Icelanders Jón Þórðarson and Magnús Þórhallsson and an influential patron Jón Hárkonarson.

Chart 4

Far-travelling Explorers and Settlers (Chapter Four)

Chronology: North Atlantic Exploration [13]	
*c.*795	Irish hermits in Iceland
825	Iceland described by the Irish monk Discuil [14]
*c.*860	Norsemen discover Iceland
*c.*870	Settlement of Iceland begins
*c.*900	**Gunnbjorn Úlfsson** sights Greenland
930	Icelandic Republic established
*c.*960	Eiríkr rauði emigrates to Iceland
*c.*978	**Snæbjorn Galti**'s expedition to Greenland
*c.*981	Eiríkr rauði explores Greenland
985-986	**Eiríkr rauði** colonises Greenland
985-986	**Bjarni Herjólfsson** sights America
999	Leifr Eiríksson travels to Norway [15]
1000	Iceland adopts Christianity
*c.*1001	**Leifr Eiríksson** explores Vínland
1003-1006 (ES) [16]	**Þorfinnr Karlsefni** and **Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir** travel to Vínland [17]
1007-1009 (GS) [18]	
1010-1011	**Freydís Eiríksdottir** travels to Vínland [19]
*c.*1010	Halldór Snorrason – far travelling warrior who journeyed east, is born
*c.*1022	Iceland makes 'explorers' treaty' with Norway [20]
*c.*1034-1042	Warriors discussed in Chapter Three serve in the Varangian Guard
*c.*1075	Adam of Bremen writes about Vínland
1121	Greenland bishopric established
1124	**Bishop Eiríkr** seeks Vínland [21]

[13] Unless referenced otherwise, reproduced with some deletions, see Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson, 'Chronological Table' in *The Vínland Sagas*, Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson (trans.), London: Penguin, 1965, p. 119.
[14] Associated with King Charlemagne's court.
[15] Keneva Kunz, 'Chronology of the Vínland Sagas', in *The Vínland Sagas,* London: Penguin, 2008, p. 74.
[16] *Eiríks saga rauða*
[17] Kunz, 2008, p. 74.
[18] *Grœnlendinga saga.*
[19] Kunz, 2008, p. 74.
[20] Kunz, 2008, p. 74.
[21] Eiríkr Gnupsson left Iceland in 1112 to serve as Greenland's first bishop. *Gottskálksannáll* records in 1124, "Eiríkr Grænlendinga byskup leitade Vínlands" (Bishop Eiríkr went in search of Vínland). No news of Bishop Eiríkr was recorded after that, but the same annals note that three years later in 1124, Arnald was consecrated Bishop of Greenland. We are left with the impression that Eiríkr Gnupsson had not resumed his episcopal duties in Greenland. See Kirsten A. Seaver, *The Frozen Echo: Greenland and the Exploration of North*

Chronology: North Atlantic Exploration

*c.*1127	Ari the Learned writes *Íslendingabók*
?*c.*1190	*Grœnlendinga saga* written down
?*c.*1260	*Eiríks saga rauða* is written down
1261	Greenland comes under Norwegian rule
1262-1264	Iceland comes under Norwegian rule
1306-1308	Writing of *Eiríks saga rauða* as found in *Hauksbók* [22]
1387	Writing of *Grœnlendinga saga* as found in *Flateyjarbók* [23]
1406	Icelandic annals record last ship reaching Greenland
1410	Last ship from Greenland reaches Iceland and Norway
1420-1450	Writing of *Eiríks saga rauða* as found in *Skálholtsbók* [24]
1492	Christopher Columbus rediscovers America
*c.*1500	Norse colony in Greenland dies out [25]

America, ca. AD. 1000-1500, California: Stanford University Press, 1996, p. 33. *Gottskálksannáll,* which covers the years AD. 1 to 1578, was compiled by Gottskálk Jónsson (1524-1590 and his son Jón Gottskálksson (d.1625). The early part is a copy of an older annalistic work. The latter part derives from the contemporary knowledge of Gottskálk and Jón, in Raymond S. Bradley and Philip D. Jones, (eds.), *Climate Since A.D. 1500,* London: Routlege, 1995, p. 96.

[22] Kunz, 2008, p. 74.

[23] Kunz, 2008, p. 74.

[24] Kunz, 2008, p. 74.

[25] In the Greenland colony's prime, it has been estimated there were some 1,120 - 4,800 settlers in the Eastern Settlement and 280 - 1,200 in the Western Settlement, in Christian Madsen, *Pastoral Settlement. Farming and Hierarchy in Norse Vatnahverfi, South Greenland*, PhD dissertation, (preprint version), Denmark: University of Copenhagen, 2014, p. 16.

Chart 5

Vínland Sagas – Authors and Provenance		
Grœnlendinga saga [26] Author: unknown (one version found in ***Flateyjarbók***)	***Flateyjarbók*** [27] Patron: Jón Hákonarson [29]	***Eyrbyggja saga*** [28] Author: unknown [30] Four extant versions[31]
Eiríks saga rauða Author: unknown	***Eiríks saga rauða*** [32] Author: unknown	***Íslendingabók*** [33] Author: Ari Þorgilsson One extant version [34]
(*Skálholtsbók* version) [35] Compiler: Ólafur Loftsson [37]	**(*Hauksbók* version)** [36] Compiler: Haukr Erlendsson [38]	***Landnámabók*** [39] Author: Possibly Ari Þorgilsson

[26] The oldest surviving text of *Grœnlendinga saga* (The Saga of the Greenlanders), dates to some two hundred years after the saga was originally written down, see Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson, 'Introduction', *The Vínland Sagas,* London: Penguin Books, 1965, p. 32.
[27] *Grœnlendinga saga* is found in *Flateyjarbók* MS (GkS 1005, fol.) where it is incorporated into the *Great Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason.*
[28] There is a one chapter in *Eyrbyggja saga* (dated to the mid thirteenth century) detailing how Eiríkr is accused of murder and subsequently banished from Iceland, see *Eyrbyggja saga,* Chapter 24, Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (trans), London: Penguin, 1989, pp. 67-68.
[29] Rowe notes the possibility wealthy farmer and saga patron Jón Hákonarson was the mastermind behind the whole work, in Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, 2005, pp. 397-402
[30] Some scholars have suggested a connection with the author of the *Laxdæla saga*, or with Holyfell monastery which was established in 1184, in *Story of the Ere-Dwellers* ("Eyrbyggja Saga"), William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon (trans.), London: Bernard Quaritch, 1892, p. 9.
[31] There are four medieval vellum manuscripts of *Eyrbyggja saga* surviving, all fragmentary: AM 162 E fol. (thirteenth century), Cod. Guelf. 9.10.4to (fourteenth century), AM 445 b 4to (fifteenth century) and AM 309 4to (c. 1498); over 50 post-medieval paper manuscripts are also extant, in Emma Louise Richardson, *Manuscript Variations in Eyrbyggja saga,* Master of Research Thesis, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Department of History, 2014, p. 9, fn 25.
[32] *Eiríks saga rauða* (Eirikr the Red's saga), survives in two vellum manuscripts. *Hauksbók* (early fourteenth century), and *Skálholtsbók* (early fifteenth century). Both manuscripts are based on an original thought to have been written after 1263 – which in turn was based on an older text from the early thirteenth century, in Keneva Kunz (trans.), "Introduction" *The Saga of the Greenlanders and Eirik the Red's Saga,* in *The Sagas of Icelanders,* Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), New York: Penguin Books, 2001, p. 630.
[33] Chapter 6 in *Íslendingabók* recalls the naming of Greenland by Eiríkr rauði.
[34] *Íslendingabók* was written by cleric and chieftain Ari Þorgilsson (*c.*1067-1148), for an Icelandic audience in the third or fourth decades of the twelfth century. Originally there were two different versions, but only the more recent is extant and survives in two copies – AM 113 a fol and AM 113 b.
[35] The *Skálholtsbók* (Book of Skálholt) MS (AM 557 4to), was written *c.*1420 in the North of Iceland. It is longer than the *Hauksbók* version (which is also considered to be the older version), and it is garbled in places; see *Íslenzk fornrit,* vol. 4, Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, pp. 401-434. For a translation of the *Skálholtsbók* version, see *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, vol. 1, V. Hreinsson, (ed.), 5 vols., Reykjavík: Leifur Eiriksson Publishing, 1997, pp. 1-18.
[36] *Eiríks saga rauða* is found in *Hauksbók*., MS (AM 371 4to, AM 544 4to and AM 675 4to), *Íslenzk fornrit,* vol. 4, Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, pp. 193-237.
[37] Ólafur Loftsson (*d.*1457/59) was a wealthy farmer who owned property both in Eyjafjörður and Þingeyjarsýsla. His name does not appear anywhere in the manuscript, but the same hand is found in a few letters written in the period 1420-49.
[38] Haukr Erlendsson (*c.*1265-1334) was a Lawspeaker and a descendent of Þorfinnr *karlsefni* Þórðarson, second or third husband of Guðríðr *víðförla* (far-travellers).
[39] *Landnámabók* (Book of Settlements), is an enumeration of the first alleged settlers of Iceland (the so-called landnámsmenn), who first took possession of land in Iceland. Five extant versions, including one in *Hauksbók* See Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, "*Landnámabók* and its *Sturlubók* Version", Chapter 5, pp. 44-55, in Sturla Þórðarson: Skald, Chieftain and Lawman, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson, (eds.), Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2017, p. 44.