

Fornaldarsögur, Prosimetrum, and History-Writing in Medieval
Iceland

T. P. Rowbotham

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Abstract

In recent scholarship, the Icelandic *fornaldarsögur* – legendary, “mythic-heroic” sagas – have typically been regarded as a locus for literary fiction in medieval Iceland, owing in part to their genetic and generic relation to romance literature. This thesis aims to redirect the debate and argues for the historiographical function of these sagas. Following a discursive introductory chapter, each of the three main chapters analyses the various narrative and rhetorical strategies of individual *fornaldarsögur* in comparison with contemporaneous historiography, with particular emphasis of their prosimetrical form.

In Chapter 2 I analyse how the comic and folktale elements of *Gautreks saga* serve to historicise its moral *exempla*, and, drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Mikhail Bakhtin, argue that the saga’s representation of geography and space serves to compartmentalise its fictionality in discrete “chronotopes.” I also demonstrate how the quotation of poetry in *Gautreks saga*, modelled on the *konungasögur* (‘kings’ sagas’), serves to authenticate the prose narrative. In Chapter 3 I analyse how the author of *Völsunga saga* drew on genealogical and biographical models of historiography to expand the *Poetic Edda*’s account of the early Völsung dynasty and Sigurðr Fáfnisbani’s early life. Numerous verses in *Völsunga saga* are quoted to corroborate the prose, but, I argue, they appeal to the anonymity and continuity of the oral eddic tradition for their authority, in contrast to the skaldic tradition of the *konungasögur*. In Chapter 4 I analyse how many of the verse quotations of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* authenticate the prose narrative, despite their presentation as direct speech. I go on to analyse the significance of the Ragnarr legend in skaldic poetics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries – in particular, the remembrance of Ragnarr as a poet himself – and argue that this lent weight to the verse quotations in the saga as direct testimonials.

I conclude by analysing the geography and spatial representation, genealogical structures, and the prosimetrum of other *fornaldarsögur*, demonstrating that studying these texts in relation to medieval historiographical discourse furthers our understanding of the both the genre and thirteenth-century Icelandic literary culture more widely.

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Conventions

When quoting primary texts, I have followed the orthography of the printed edition consulted, while adopting a normalised Old Norse orthography throughout my own prose. Translations are my own, except where bibliographic details for Latin works in translation are given. For poetry quoted in *fornaldarsögur*, I have followed the orthography and editing of the particular edition of the text consulted; translations are, again, my own. For Old Norse poetry found outside of the *fornaldarsögur*, I have quoted (where possible) from their editions in the volumes of *Skaldic Poetry of Scandinavian Middle Ages*, and, deferring to the excellent and thorough work of the contributors, followed the editors' translations. Any major variations between the forms of the verses as they appear in the *SkP* volumes and in the edited medieval prose works in which they are preserved are noted, though for the most part such variations are minor enough to be of little significance for the purposes of this study.

I have also quoted Rory McTurk's edition of the poetry in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttr* in *SkP* 8, while quoting from Magnus Olsen's diplomatic edition of the saga and Finnur Jónsson and Eiríkur Jónsson's diplomatic edition of *Hauksbók* for the *þáttr*. As they appear in the primary manuscript for the saga, the verses are, in places, difficult to interpret; Olsen, following Finnur Jónsson, thus produced a normalised edition to these verses, supplemented with readings from a second, fragmentary manuscript and from *Ragnarssona þáttr* in *Hauksbók*. McTurk's edition makes extensive reference to previous attempts to interpret these verses, and the result is the most thorough and comprehensive edition of them to date. In quoting Olsen's edition of the prose and McTurk's edition of the verses, it is not my intention to gloss over the problems posed by the transmission and preservation of the medieval texts, but simply to provide the clearest reading thereof; again, where pertinent to my arguments, any variant readings will be duly noted.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is the presentation of my own research, and that I am its sole author. All primary and secondary materials I have consulted are referenced throughout this work, and full bibliographical details are provided. This work has not previously been submitted for award at this, or any other, University.

1: Introduction

Þar hefjum vér eina kátliga frásögn af einum konungi...

“Here we begin an entertaining story about a king...”

With these words begins *Gautreks saga*, a medieval Icelandic saga belonging to the corpus known as *foraldarsögur* (singular *foraldarsaga*). Known in English either as “legendary sagas” or “mythic-heroic sagas,” the *foraldarsögur norðurlanda* – literally, “sagas of the ancient age of the northern lands” – claim to narrate events that took place in Scandinavia and northern Europe before the reign of King Haraldr inn hárfagri (‘Fairhair’) of Norway and the settlement of Iceland in the late ninth century. The opening line of *Gautreks saga* could in fact describe many a *foraldarsaga*: their heroes are generally royal figures (or wealthy farmers, in the service of kings), and their pacey narratives, impressive protagonists, and ready deployment of fantastical, comedic, and even burlesque modes seem to have greatly entertained medieval and early modern audiences. *Gautreks saga* itself abounds in all of these hallmarks, yet to characterise it as nothing but a *kátlig frásögn* would be reductivist, to say the least. Much twentieth-century scholarship did view the *foraldarsögur* as a kind of escapist fantasy fiction, of rather degenerate literary quality, at that; however, in approximately the last twenty-five years scholars have re-evaluated the compositional strategies of the *foraldarsögur*, and their importance in exploring and reinforcing social norms for their contemporary audiences.

However, the historiographical function of these texts – their role in constructing and communicating events of the past, that is to say, history – has yet come under little consideration. While their narratives contain virtually no historical value in a modern, empiricist sense, we should not neglect the possibility that for the authors that composed the *foraldarsögur*, the scribes that copied them, and the audiences that read them and heard them read aloud, these sagas narrated a very real past. This historiographical function is the subject of this thesis: to what extent were these narratives thought to represent historical events and persons?

through what means did these texts communicate their function as historical representation?

As I will illustrate, the first of these questions cannot be satisfactorily answered without a thorough investigation of the second. My primary means of analysing the historiographical function of the *fornaldarsögur* in medieval Iceland is therefore a close literary analysis of select texts from the corpus – namely, *Gautreks saga*, *Völsunga saga*, and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (and the related *Ragnarssona þáttr*) – as individual case studies. The narratives, structures, and rhetoric of these three *fornaldarsögur* may be compared to contemporaneous works that are commonly accepted as firmly historiographical, and that we know – or can reasonably assume – were in circulation in medieval Iceland, especially the *konungasögur* ('kings' sagas'), Icelandic vernacular narrative histories of Norwegian and Danish kings, mostly written in the thirteenth century. Where similarities between the *fornaldarsögur* and works of historiography can be detected, we may ask if these can be ascribed to literary influence, either from one text to another, or to their conforming to a shared set of generic conventions. However, since neither direct influence – in either direction – nor shared literary features between the *fornaldarsögur* and the *konungasögur*, or other forms of historiography, are firm evidence of a shared, historiographical purpose, we must interrogate the purpose of these features where present in the *fornaldarsögur*. If we may determine that they have been deliberately employed in the *fornaldarsögur* to serve the same function as in the *konungasögur* – the authentic representation of the past – we may take this as evidence of the historiographical intent with which they were composed, and implicitly received.

In order to narrow the scope of this investigation, I focus on examples of *fornaldarsögur* that we can probably date to c.1250-1300, so that we may discuss with more confidence the contemporary literary landscape in which they were composed.¹ A second criterion for the selection of case studies is the prosimetrical form of the texts. Prose is the exclusive medium of narration in the *fornaldarsögur*, though many incorporate, to varying degrees, poetic verses, typically represented as the direct speech of characters in the narrative. Analysing the form and function

¹ Dating the *fornaldarsögur* is contentious; for this reason, a detailed discussion of the dating of each text will be given at the start of each chapter.

of these verses is a significant aspect of this study, both in comparison with the *konungasögur* – which also quote a substantial quantity of poetry – and with regard to the status of poetry and its relationship with historiography in medieval Iceland. While this analysis serves to illuminate the historiographical nature of the *fornaldarsögur*, the conclusions drawn may also have implications for our understanding of saga prosimetrum more broadly.

1.1: Definitions

Before commencing this investigation, a number of preliminaries must be dealt with, including the outlining of both the *fornaldarsögur* and medieval practices of history-writing. Further to the above description, defining a *fornaldarsaga*, as delineated from other saga literature written in medieval Iceland, is somewhat problematic. It must be stressed at the outset that the very term *fornaldarsaga norðurlanda* is a modern designation, and not attested in any medieval source. This nomenclature was first used by Carl Christian Rafn, whose three-volume *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* (1829-30) contained critical editions of thirty-one texts, the narratives of which are set in Scandinavia prior to the settlement of Iceland. But as Philip Lavender has noted, although Rafn is commonly credited with the creation of the corpus, every one of his texts had appeared, in near-identical order, in the second volume of Peter Erasmus Müller's *Sagabibliothek* (1817-20), in which they are characterised as “mythiske” and collated according to the same geographical and temporal criteria as Rafn's editions.²

The *fornaldarsögur* are a rather heterogenous group of texts; no single feature commonly ascribed to them is found present in every text regarded as a *fornaldarsaga*, and no single saga exhibits all of these. Nevertheless, the following generalisations may be made of the *fornaldarsögur*, and have been in the introductory literature. The *fornaldarsögur* are heroic narratives, insofar as their protagonists are endowed with extraordinary abilities, but are mortal; these heroes are typically either royal or aristocratic; their settings, actions, and characters may

² *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda eptir gömlum handritum*, ed. Carl Christian Rafn, 3 vols. (Copenhagen: Hævdig Fridrek Popp, 1829-1830); Philip Lavender, “The Secret History of the *Fornaldarsögur*,” *JEGP* 114, no.4 (October 2015), 531-36.

be seen as unspecific and stereotyped; motifs and narrative patterns from folklore and Continental romance literature are common; travel to distant lands is common; the laws of nature are frequently suspended, and the supernatural abounds; their contents may be inherited from older narrative traditions, or modelled thereupon; they are written in prose, though most quote some amount of poetry, mostly thought to pre-date the prose; and they are considerably shorter than, for example, *Íslendingasögur* such as *Njáls saga* and *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*.³ Taking these factors into account, as well as the chronological and temporal criteria, a handful of other texts, such as *Yngvars saga víðförla* and *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, have been argued as belonging, or related, to Rafn's corpus.⁴ The recently completed project *Stories for all time: The Icelandic fornaldarsögur*, at the Arnamagnæan Institute, University of Copenhagen, which aimed to catalogue every extant manuscript, medieval and post-medieval, containing a *fornaldarsaga*, took the following thirty-six texts as its corpus:⁵

| | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Af upplendinga konungum</i> | <i>Hálfðanar saga Brønnufóstra</i> |
| <i>Áns saga bogsvegis</i> | <i>Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar</i> |
| <i>Ásmundar saga kappabana</i> | <i>Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka</i> |
| <i>Bósa saga ok Herrauðs</i> | <i>Helga þátr Þórissonar†</i> |
| <i>Egils saga einhenda og Ásmundar berserkjabana</i> | <i>Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks</i> |
| <i>Eiríks saga víðförla*</i> | <i>Hjálmþérs saga ok Ólvis</i> |
| <i>Frá Fornljóti og ættmönnum hans</i> | <i>Hrólf's saga Gautrekssonar</i> |
| <i>Friðþjófs saga frækna</i> | <i>Hrólf's saga kraka</i> |
| <i>Gautreks saga</i> | <i>Hrómundar saga Gripssonar</i> |
| <i>Gríms saga loðinkinna</i> | <i>Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra</i> |
| <i>Göngu-Hrólf's saga</i> | <i>Ketils saga hoengs</i> |
| | <i>Norna-Gests þátr</i> |

³ See, for example, Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, *Legendary Fiction in Medieval Iceland* (Reykjavík: Heimspekideild Háskóla Íslands, Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóðs, 1971), 8-25; Stephen Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 8-32; Torfi Tulinius, "Sagas of Icelandic Prehistory (*fornaldarsögur*)," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 447-49.

⁴ Carl Phelpstead, "Adventure-Time in *Yngvars saga víðförla*," in *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og virkelighed*, eds. Agneta Ney, Ármann Jakobsson, and Annette Lassen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2009), 331-46; Philip Lavender, "*Þjalar-Jóns saga*: A Translation and Introduction," *LSE* 46 (2015), 73-113.

⁵ Matthew Driscoll et al., *Stories for all time: The Icelandic fornaldarsögur* <<http://fasnl.ku.dk/>> [accessed 01/09/2018]. * Items not counted as *fornaldarsögur* in Torfi Tulinius, *The Matter of the North: The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-Century Iceland*, trans. Randi C. Eldevik (Odense: Odense University Press, 2002). † Items not included in Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*. * Not included in *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, eds. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 3 vols. (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Forni, 1943-44). Henceforth FN.

Ragnars saga loðbrókar
Ragnarssona þátr
Sturlaug's saga starfsama
Sögubrot af nokkrum
fornkonungum í Dana ok Svíaveldi
Sqrla saga sterka
Sqrla þátr

Tóka þátr Tókasonar†
Volsunga saga
Yngvars saga víðförla†*
Þjalar-Jóns saga†^x*
Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar
Þorsteins þátr bæjarmagns†
Qrvar-Odds saga

While the tendency in recent years has been to expand the canon of what is considered a *fornaldarsaga*, several of the above texts might just as easily, and perhaps more aptly, be otherwise categorised. *Eiríks saga víðförla* and *Yngvars saga víðförla* might be considered as fantastical travel-literature; *Helga þátr Þórissonar*, *Norna-Gests þátr*, *Sqrla þátr*, and *Tóka þátr Tókasonar* are *þættir* ('threads,' short narrative units embedded within longer works) found only as part of certain *konungasögur*, in certain manuscripts; *Af upplendinga konungum* is not so much a narrative as a synoptic account of a succession of kings, found on a single leaf of a single manuscript, while *Frá Fornljóti ok ættmönnum hans* is in fact a modern composite of two similar mythological prologues to longer works, each likewise found only in this context.⁶ Nevertheless, the features that these texts share with those printed in Rafn's edition has merited their comparison, if not universally accepted admission, into the corpus. I have so far avoided describing them as a "genre," since the question of whether the *fornaldarsögur* constitute a discrete genre, or sub-genre, of saga literature is – partly owing to their heterogeneity – contentious, as I illustrate below.

To question the extent to which texts from the corpus of *fornaldarsögur* functioned as historiography, we must also outline what it meant to write history in the High Middle Ages. I wish to make clear at the outset that by "history," I mean the events of the past, and by "historiography," I mean (primarily) written accounts of the past. The forms of historiography written across Europe, throughout the Middle Ages, were multifarious and evolving, but it is the long-form literary, narrative *historiae* that are of most relevance here. On what "history" meant to medieval authors, in theory, at least, it is conventional to quote the *Etymologiae* (c.600X625) of Isidore of Seville: "Historia est narratio rei gestae, per quam ea,

⁶ Cf. Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, in Judy Quinn, et al., "Interrogating Genre: A Roundtable Discussion," *VMS* 2 (2006), 285-86.

quae in praeterito facta sunt, dinoscuntur” (‘History is the narration of things done, through which those things, which happened in the past, are discerned’).⁷ Isidore goes on to clarify that *historiae* are “res verae quae factae sunt” (‘true deeds that have happened’), distinct from *argumenta*, “quae etsi facta non sunt, fieri tamen possunt” (‘those things which although have not happened, nevertheless could happen’), and *fabulae*, “quae nec factae sunt nec fieri possunt, quia contra naturam sunt” (‘those things which neither have happened nor could happen, because they are contrary to nature’).⁸

Isidore’s *Etymologiae* was well known and extremely influential throughout medieval Europe, including Iceland; however, as Päivi Mehtonen has traced, *historia*, *argumentum*, and *fabula* were hardly stable concepts throughout the Middle Ages, and – for twelfth-century historians especially, faced with a boom in vernacular, poetic and “fictional” texts treating historical subject matter – the distinction between these forms of narrative was not always clear cut.⁹ Although *historiae* could authoritatively claim truth value, their authors were afforded considerable licence to shape their narratives according to literary and rhetorical aesthetics, to the point of fabrication, freely incorporating *argumenta* – in the form of invented direct speech, and the like – and even what could be considered *fabulae* in other literary contexts.¹⁰ Nor was Isidore’s formulation the only available theory of historiography available to medieval writers: how the past ought to be represented in written texts was ever a matter for negotiation. Indeed, Roger Ray has argued that Bede’s admittance of *fama uulgans* (‘common belief’) into his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (c.731), “quod vera lex historiae est” (‘which is a true principle of history’), is a direct rebuttal of Isidore’s impractical insistence on the primacy of eyewitness testimony, and sensitive to the historian’s occasionally necessary reliance on traditions of past events that could not be

⁷ *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum Originum Libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), I.XLI.

⁸ *Ibid.*, I.XLIV.

⁹ Päivi Mehtonen, *Old Concepts and New Poetics: Historia, Argumentum, and Fabula in the Twelfth- and Early Thirteenth-Centuries* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1996); Matthew Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History, 400-1500* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 428-41.

¹⁰ Ruth Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages: Rhetoric, Representation, and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Monika Otter, *Inventiones: Fiction and Referentiality in Twelfth-Century English Historical Writing* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

verified.¹¹ Defining medieval *historia* remains problematic, though specific examples of written history may be noted here as relevant context for thirteenth-century Icelandic historiographical practice.

In the twelfth century, much Latin historiography in Western Europe was nationalistic in character; in Anglo-Norman England, Bede's *Historia* was particularly influential with writers such as William of Malmesbury (*Gesta Regum Anglorum*, 1127) and Henry of Huntingdon (*Historia Anglorum*, 1154).¹² As the title of William's *historia* suggests, histories of a people, or *gens*, could also find expression through dynastic histories, as was also the case with Dudo of St. Quentin's *Gesta Normanorum* (996 x 1015), though they also have much in common with histories of religious institutions, such as Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (1073 x 1076). It was from this national, dynastic vein that legendary histories began to be written in the twelfth century. The foundational text here is Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c.1136); this work recounts the history of the Britons from the founding of the nation by Brutus, an exile from the Trojan War (Trojan origin accounts, modelled after Virgil's *Aeneid*, a common trope in medieval historiography), to the fall of the kingdom to the Anglo-Saxons, and containing the first lengthy account of King Arthur. Inspired largely by Geoffrey's *Historia*, Saxo Grammaticus later wrote in the first half of his *Gesta Danorum* (c.1188 x 1208) a legendary history of Denmark's ancient kings (overlapping significantly with many *foraldarsögur*, see below).

The rise of vernacular historiography in turn owes much to such Latin legendary histories, which catered to a distinctly secular, aristocratic audience. Geoffrey's *Historia* was rewritten in both Anglo-Norman and Middle English, at first in verse and later in prose, which gave rise also to romance literature concerning

¹¹ Roger Ray, "Bede's *Vera Lex Historiae*," *Speculum* 55, no.1 (January 1980), 1-21; Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, eds. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 6.

¹² For this overview I have drawn on: Charles F. Briggs, "History, Story, and Community: Representing the Past in Latin Christendom," in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol.2, 400-1500, eds. Sarah Foot and Chase F. Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 391-413; and Norbert Kersken, "High and Late Medieval National Historiography," in *Historiography in the Middle Ages*, ed. D. M. Deliyannis (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 181-215.

Arthur and the so-called “Matière de Bretagne.”¹³ In France, classical Roman history and heroic *chansons de geste* were adapted into vernacular prose histories in the early thirteenth century, while in Castile vernacular prose historiography was used in national myth-making in the court of Alfonso X (r.1252-84). What it meant, then, to write history in the High Middle Ages was contested and multivarious, even before we consider the mutations it would undergo when practiced in Scandinavia and Iceland. By the thirteenth century, “histories” could be written in Latin or in a range of vernaculars, in verse or in prose, a context that must be born in mind when considering the *fornaldarsögur* in relation to other forms of historiography available to medieval Icelandic scribes.

Historiographical works, broadly conceived, were among the earliest composed in the vernacular in Iceland, as early as the mid-twelfth century, and their importance in the burgeoning of the long prose form – parallel to contemporaneous developments in Old French – has recently been highlighted by Lars Boje Mortensen.¹⁴ By the mid-twelfth century, *Íslendingabók* (attributed to Ari Þorgilsson inn fróði, ‘the learned’) and *Landnámabók* – both recording the settlement and early history of Iceland – had probably been composed.¹⁵ By c.1200, a staggering expansion of Old Norse historiography had taken place, with the completion of: translations of world and ancient history (*Veraldar saga*, from Bede and Isidore, among other sources; *Rómverja saga*, from Sallust and Lucan; *Trójumanna saga*, from Dares Phrygius’ *De excidio Trojae*; *Breta sögur* and *Merlínusspá*, from Geoffrey’s *Historia*); biographies of Norwegian kings (*Sverris saga*, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, and several of Óláfr Haraldsson inn helgi: *Elsta saga* [‘The oldest saga of Óláfr’]; **Óláfs saga helga*; *Helgisagan* [‘The Legendary saga of Óláfr’]); histories of Orkney and the Faeroe Islands (*Orkneyinga saga* and *Færeyinga saga*); and the first legendary histories (*Jómsvíkinga saga* and **Skjöldunga saga*, for which see below). At roughly the same time in Norway were

¹³ Dennis Green, *The Beginning of Medieval Romance: Fact and Fiction, 1150-1220* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 168-87.

¹⁴ Lars Boje Mortensen, “The Sudden Success of Prose: A Comparative View of Greek, Latin, Old French and Old Norse,” *MW* 5 (2017), 3-45 (esp. 31-40).

¹⁵ For a more detailed summary and references, see Diana Whaley, “A Useful Past: Historical Writing in Medieval Iceland,” in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 161-202; Stefanie Würth, “Historiography and Pseudo-History,” in McTurk, *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, 155-172; Ármann Jakobsson, “Royal Biography,” in McTurk, *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, 388-402.

written three short, synoptic histories, covering successive reigns of Norwegian kings, two of which were in Latin: Theodoricus monachus' *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* (c.1180), *Historia Norwegie* (c.1220), and *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum* (c.1190).

Medieval Icelandic historiography reached new heights of rhetorical sophistication in the early decades of the thirteenth century, with the writing of three voluminous compilations of Norwegian royal history: *Morkinskinna* (c.1220), *Fagrskinna* (c.1220s), and *Heimskringla* (c.1230), the latter attributed to the politician and author Snorri Sturluson, who is also credited with composing the poetical treatise *Snorra Edda*, or the *Prose Edda*. These compendia integrate the chronological span of the Norwegian synoptics with the detailed, discursive narratives of the royal biographies, and frequently quote skaldic poetry. *Heimskringla* is the longest of the three, including a mythological prologue in *Ynglinga saga* and incorporating a long biography (comprising a full third of the text) of Óláfr Haraldsson.

It is such narrative *historiae*, and especially the *konungasögur*, that I compare the *fornaldarsögur* to, rather than, say, annalistic traditions of historiography. However, it is important to acknowledge that historiographical writing was not limited to such genres as these in the Middle Ages; many kinds of medieval text, including hagiography, heroic poetry, and even charters and other documentary texts, fulfilled certain historiographical functions alongside texts formally labelled *historiae*.¹⁶ A better appreciation of the historiographical function of such texts has been facilitated in no small part by the “linguistic turn” in the modern Humanities, which recognises that language – and, therefore, literary texts – cannot transparently reflect an objective reality, but always constructs and confers meaning onto that which it seeks to represent. Especially relevant in the study of history and historiography are Hayden White’s works, emphasising the narrativity, or “fictive” aspect, of all history-writing, while Ruth Morse and Gabrielle Spiegel have been prominent in applying such methodologies in the study of medieval historiography.¹⁷ Recognising the histories communicated in as broad a

¹⁶ See, for example, Elizabeth M. Tyler and Ross Balzaretto, eds., *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).

¹⁷ See especially Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Gabrielle Spiegel, *The Past as*

range of texts as we are now beginning to examine in fact brings us closer to a medieval conception of historiography; returning to Isidore's definition of *historia*, it is apparent that medieval intellectual culture understood that historical events could only be comprehended through the mediation of narrative. It is in light of this that the historiographical function of the Icelandic *fornaldarsögur* demands serious reconsideration.

The third key concept of this thesis is that of "prosimetrum" – denoting the form of texts that mix the media of prose and poetry – which characterises many of the most recognisable saga genres. Surveying Old Norse prosimetrum, Joseph Harris has stated that only "peripheral" saga literature lacks this mixed form; however, such a comment is probably more indicative of modern value judgements of the various saga genres than of their status in medieval Icelandic literary culture. Among those included in Harris' "peripheral" saga genres are *riddarasögur* and *lygisögur* (respectively, translated romances and original Icelandic romance sagas, by Harris' definition), non-Icelandic saints' sagas, and translated historiography.¹⁸ To this, we might also add approximately half the corpus of texts considered as *fornaldarsögur*, which, as Guðrún Nordal has noted, contain little to no poetry.¹⁹ There is, therefore, a vast body of saga literature that does not employ the prosimetrical form, but it is nevertheless the case that the most well-studied saga genres – *Íslendingasögur*, *konungasögur*, and *fornaldarsögur*, all generally considered to have emerged earlier in Iceland's literary history – to varying extents mix prose with verse quotation.

Rarely in Old Norse texts does the authorial voice shift from one medium to another, as it does in, for example, medieval Latin literature, such as Martianus Capella's *De Nuptiis Philoligae et Mercurii*, or some Old Irish sagas.²⁰ A partial exception to this is the prosimetrum of the *Poetic Edda*, a thirteenth-century compilation of heroic and mythological poems, in which the verses may function

Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

¹⁸ Joseph Harris, "The Prosimetrum of Icelandic Saga and Some Relatives," in *Prosimetrum: Cross-cultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*, eds. Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), 136.

¹⁹ Guðrún Nordal, "Poetic Voices in the *Fornaldarsögur*," in *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, eds. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012), 145.

²⁰ On these and other traditions, see contributions to Harris and Reichl, *Prosimetrum*.

either as narrative or as direct speech, but are interspersed with passages of prose exposition. In saga literature, however, poetry is introduced either at a diegetic level, as the direct speech of the characters, or at an extra-diegetic level, introduced by the authorial voice and external to the surrounding text, typically as evidence for the prose narrative. Scholars have long recognised this distinction, and while the nomenclature has varied, Diana Whaley's terms "authenticating" and "situational" verse are preferred here.²¹ Bjarni Einarsson's 1974 article on the subject remains a serviceable outline of this classification, which may be summarised as follows: verses introduced with either the "svá segir X" ('thus says X') or "þess getr X" ('X refers to this') formula, or some variant thereof, generally reiterate what has been stated in the prose, and can be removed without loss of coherency to the narrative (though not without compromising the aesthetics of the saga). Conversely, the formulae "þá kvað X" ('then X spoke'), or "þá kvað X vísu" ('then X spoke a verse') indicates that the verse is to be taken as part of the story. Such verses have been considered to be "more organically integrated with the surrounding prose," and often form the kernel for a scene or episode in the saga.²²

To some extent, the divide between the function of verses can be drawn along lines of saga genre, between historical *konungasögur* and the "fictional end of the spectrum of saga-literature"; in particular, Bjarni Einarsson noted the "marked qualitative difference between the role of verse in the Kings' Sagas," in which it authenticates the prose, and in the *Íslendingasögur*, in which it is largely situational.²³ While many *Íslendingasögur* contain relatively few verses, the *skáldasögur* ('sagas of poets') are rich with poetry, virtually all of which is situational, and which is often presented as dialogue or as the poet's inner voice.²⁴ Kormákr Ögmundarson's verse professing his love for Steingerðr in *Kormáks saga* may be taken as representative of this; spoken upon glimpsing Steingerðr's feet beneath a doorway, the love-verse is quoted with the introductory formula "Kormákr sá þat ok kvað vísu" ('Kormákr saw that and spoke a verse').²⁵ While

²¹ Bjarni Einarsson, "On the Rôle of Verse in Saga Literature," *MS 7* (1974), 118-25; Diana Whaley, "Skalds and Situational Verses in *Heimskringla*," in *Snorri Sturluson: Kolloquium aulässig der 750. Wiederkehr seines Todestages*, ed. Alois Wolf (Tübingen: Narr, 1993), 245-66.

²² Whaley, "Situational Verses," 251.

²³ *Ibid.*, 254; Bjarni Einarsson, "The Rôle of Verse," 124.

²⁴ Harris, "Prosimetrum of the Icelandic Saga," 149.

²⁵ *Vatnsdæla saga: Hallfreðar saga, Kormáks saga, Hrómundar þátr halta, Hrafns þátr Guðrúnarsonar*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (Reykjavík: Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1939), 207.

authenticating verses are rare in the *Íslendingasögur*, a notable exception is *Eyrbyggja saga*, the seven authenticating verses of which are quoted, according to Heather O'Donoghue, to achieve a deliberately historicising style, facilitated by the fundamental importance of poetry, especially in this manner of quotation, in the *konungasögur*.²⁶

Of the saga genres usually considered historiographical, the *biskupa sögur* ('bishops' sagas') make some, infrequent use of authenticating verse, while *Sturlunga saga* ('The saga of the Sturlungs,' on twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iceland) contains fewer verses in general, a greater proportion of which are presented situationally. The *konungasögur* alone – *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna*, and *Heimskringla*, especially – make extensive use of authenticating verse quotations, though a considerable number of situational verses are also found in these works; Whaley estimates that 120 of *Heimskringla*'s (approximately) 600 verses are presented as situational, the remaining as authenticating.²⁷ Comparing the prosimetrum of the *konungasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* is one of the key methodologies of this thesis; the form and function of verse quotation in the *konungasögur* is therefore highly pertinent to this study and will be described in more detail in Chapter 2, and throughout. For now, though, some more general observations regarding the importance of poetry in medieval Icelandic historiography may be made.

While, as O'Donoghue has observed, *Ágrip* makes no systematic use of poetry in its narrative, the quotation of verses to a limited extent in this, the oldest extant vernacular history in Scandinavia, does indicate the importance of poetry to medieval Icelandic historiography from the outset.²⁸ At around the same time, Saxo extolled the value of vernacular poetry as an historical source. In the Preface to his *Gesta Danorum*, Saxo claims to have relied on the "exquisite contextus genere... poetico" ('choice compositions of a poetical nature') of the ancient Danes, which he likens to Roman epic poetry, vouching for their reliability in the

²⁶ Heather O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 80-2.

²⁷ Whaley, "Situational Verses," 254.

²⁸ O'Donoghue, *Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 24-39.

absence of written sources.²⁹ A large quantity of poetry is presented in Books 1-8 of *Gesta Danorum* as the direct speech of figures from Denmark's heroic age, and though Saxo's Latin rendering of the poetry is demonstratively modelled on classical Latin verse – especially that of Virgil – he nevertheless claims in the Preface that this poetry is “antiquitus edita” (‘the utterance of antiquity’) and guarantees to offer “fidelem uetustatis notitiam” (‘a faithful understanding of the past’).³⁰

Returning to the vernacular historiography of Iceland, Snorri, in the Preface to *Heimskringla*, offers the most explicit argument for the historical value of poetry. Referring to the praise-poetry of skalds (Old Norse *skáld*), court poets that served Norwegian kings and other rulers, he plainly states: “Tökum vér þat allt fyrir satt, er í þeim kvæðum finnsk” (‘we take all that to be true, which is found in those poems’), adding in the Preface to his *Óláfs saga Helga in sérstaka* (‘The separate saga of St. Óláfr’) the proviso “ef rétt er kveðit” (‘if correctly recited’).³¹ The truth-value of this poetry is guaranteed, according to Snorri, by the proximity of the skalds to the kings whose deeds they memorialise, making them eyewitnesses to events, but also, as Margaret Clunies Ross has observed, through the original performance context of the poetry.³² Snorri notes that these poems were performed in front of their patrons, the subjects of the praise-poetry, and so to exaggerate or falsify their achievements would, in fact, have been “háð, en eigi lóf” (‘mockery, and not praise’).³³ While Sverrir Tómasson has suggested that Snorri's remarks were made in the face of contemporary scepticism regarding the truth-value of poetry, they nonetheless reflect the historical reality that the Viking Age poets themselves, as Judith Jesch has argued, regarded themselves as creators and curators of historical record.³⁴

²⁹ Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes*, vol.1, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen, trans. Peter Fisher (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2015), Pr.1.3; cf. Karsten Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet: Studies in the Verse Passages of Gesta Danorum* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschieder, 1987), 18-20.

³⁰ *Gesta Danorum*, Pr.1.3; Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet*.

³¹ Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (Reykjavík: Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1941), 1:5, 2:422.

³² Margaret Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), 72-78.

³³ *Heimskringla*, 1:5.

³⁴ Sverrir Tómasson, “Söguljóð – skrök – háð,” in *Úr dölum til dala. Guðbrandur Vigfússon Centenary Essays*, eds. Rory McTurk and Andrew Wawn (Leeds: Leeds Studies in English, 1989),

Snorri's remarks seem to concern skaldic poetry specifically, and not the anonymous (or pseudonymous) eddic poetry that is quoted in the *fornaldarsögur* (on this distinction, see below). Nevertheless, the status of poetry as both an historical artefact and historiographical medium in the thirteenth century is critical to the intellectual context in which the *fornaldarsögur* were written. And it is the recognition of this that has allowed an appreciation of the role of verse in evoking the past beyond the strict authenticating style of quotation in the *konungasögur*. Harris has suggested that “dramatic verses” in the *Íslendingasögur* are always evidential on some level, lending an authoritative atmosphere to the prose, if genuinely older than it.³⁵ Furthermore, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen has drawn attention to the literary convention of quoting skaldic verse in Old Norse prosimetrum, and has suggested that the actual authenticity of the verses was irrelevant; in their intricate metrical form they created a continuity with the past, and quoting even inauthentic verses – those not composed by the skald purported by the saga author – offered a better version of the past than a prose saga without verses.³⁶

1.2: *Fornaldarsögur* in Modern Scholarship

As noted, the *fornaldarsögur* were subject to much derision throughout the twentieth century. The prevailing attitude was that the *fornaldarsögur*, and other unrealistic saga genres such as the *riddarasögur* (literally, ‘knights’ sagas,’ see below), represented a decline in literary tastes and standards from the *Íslendingasögur*, known for their naturalistic style, which were held to be composed earlier than the *fornaldarsögur*, in the “Golden Age” of saga writing in the thirteenth-century.³⁷ Characteristic of such a view is Peter Hallberg’s overview of saga literature, in which he describes the *fornaldarsögur*, in the tellingly titled

317-27; Judith Jesch, “The ‘Meaning of the Narrative Moment: Poets and History in the Late Viking Age,” in Tyler and Balzaretto, *Narrative and History*, 251-65.

³⁵ Harris, “Prosimetrum of Icelandic Saga,” 156-7.

³⁶ Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, “The Prosimetrum Form I: Verses as the Voice of the Past,” in *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*, ed. Russell Poole (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001), 185-90.

³⁷ For an overview of the reception of the *fornaldarsögur* to 1991, see Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas*, 32-43.

chapter “The Decline of Saga Literature,” as “a very plebeian kind of entertainment.”³⁸ Stephen Mitchell has noted the various causes that have been suggested for such a demise, including the social and economic insecurities of later medieval Iceland, and the withdrawal of the aristocracy from literary production.³⁹ But while their literary value was decried, certain *fornaldarsögur* were the subject of much late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship, though this was largely restricted to those with analogues for their narratives from the rest of the Germanic language area in the Middle Ages. Axel Olrik examined a number of *fornaldarsögur* together with the legendary historical material in Saxo Grammaticus’ *Gesta Danorum* (‘Deeds of the Danes,’ c.1188-1208) in his attempts to reconstruct Danish heroic traditions, while Andreas Heusler, and many others, analysed the Old Norse material pertaining to the Völsung cycle – including *Völsunga saga*, a *fornaldarsaga* – as comparative material to the Middle High German epic poem *Nibelungenlied* (c.1200).⁴⁰

Early pioneers in the literary rehabilitation of the *fornaldarsögur* were Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, who translated a number of *fornaldarsögur* into English for a general audience, as well as publishing perhaps the first serious study of the *fornaldarsögur* in their own right.⁴¹ Their 1971 monograph *Legendary Fiction in Medieval Iceland* advocated the literary analysis of the *fornaldarsögur* on their own terms, and not in comparison with the esteemed *Íslendingasögur*, in order to better understand the function of their imaginative, grotesque, and satiric qualities.⁴² However, the renaissance of *fornaldarsaga* studies began in earnest in the 1990s with the publication of Mitchell’s *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* (1991) and Torfi Tulinius’ *La Matière du Nord. Sagas légendaires et fiction dans l’Islande du XIIIe siècle* (1995; English translation as *The Matter of the North: The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-Century Iceland*, 2002). Mitchell stressed in equal measure the continuity between oral heroic narratives and the written

³⁸ Peter Hallberg, *The Icelandic Saga*, trans. Paul Schach (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), 145.

³⁹ Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas*, 39.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Axel Olrik, *Danmarks Heltedigtning: En Oldtidsstudie*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Gad, 1903-10); Andreas Heusler, *Nibelungensage un Nibelungenlied: Die Stoffgeschichte des deutschen Heldenepos* (Dortmund: Ruhfus, 1920).

⁴¹ *Göngu-Hrólfs saga: A Viking Romance*, trans. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1980); *Seven Viking Romances*, trans. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (London: Penguin, 1985).

⁴² Hermann Pálsson and Edwards, *Legendary Fiction in Medieval Iceland*.

fornaldarsögur, and their aesthetic value and social function in late medieval Iceland, while the latter approach was developed significantly by Tulinius.⁴³

In *The Matter of the North*, Tulinius argued that the advent of the written *fornaldarsögur* was more or less concurrent with that of the *Íslendingasögur* in the early thirteenth century, and not a later development in saga writing (though the genre continued to evolve throughout the Middle Ages), a proposition now widely accepted.⁴⁴ It is, however, Tulinius' emphasis on the *fornaldarsögur* as vehicles for "ideology" that has had the greatest impact on scholarship since the publication of his monograph; therein, Tulinius argues that *fornaldarsaga* authors shaped their texts in ways that betray their "concepts and values, that is, how [they view] the legitimacy of power in his society, the distribution of wealth, and so forth," or their "mental realities," borrowing terminology from anthropologist Maurice Godelier.⁴⁵ Tulinius' work is, then, very much a part of the "linguistic turn," and was in fact published in the same year as Spiegel's *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France*, which similarly analyses the "social logic," akin to Tulinius' "ideology," of the earliest Old French historiographical works.⁴⁶

This approach has characterised a good deal of studies on the *fornaldarsögur* since, most evidently in the publication of articles based on papers from the 2001 symposium on the "struktur och ideologi" of the *fornaldarsögur*, held at the University of Uppsala.⁴⁷ The recent flourishing of *fornaldarsaga* studies has, however, been sustained and multifaceted; further to the aforementioned volume, Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen, and Agneta Ney have edited two subsequent volumes, addressing the themes of "myter og virkelighed" ('myths and reality') in the *fornaldarsögur*, and their "origins and development."⁴⁸ There has also been a

⁴³ Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas*; Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*.

⁴⁴ Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 46-63; Cf., for example, contributions to Quinn, et al., "Interrogating Genre."

⁴⁵ Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 38-43 (40); Maurice Godelier, *The Mental and the Material: Thought, Economy, and Society*, trans. Martin Thom (London: Verso, 1986).

⁴⁶ Gabrielle Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁴⁷ Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen, and Agneta Ney, eds., *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi: handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8-2.9 2001* (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, Institutionen för nordiska språk, 2003).

⁴⁸ Agneta Ney, Ármann Jakobsson, and Annette Lassen, eds., *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og virkelighed. Studier i de oldislandske foraldarsögur Norðurlanda* (Copenhagen: Museum

steady output of individual papers, though probably now slowing in momentum, addressing a range of topics relating to the *fornaldarsögur*, as may be found in the comprehensive *Stories for all time* project website's bibliography.⁴⁹

Another major trend in this body of scholarship, as already hinted at, has been the problematisation of the *fornaldarsögur* as a discrete genre that would have been recognisable to medieval Icelanders, feeding into a decades-old debate about saga genre more generally.⁵⁰ Kurt Schier's *Sagaliteratur* (1970) is representative of the traditional taxonomy of saga genres, which, despite resistance, continues to hold sway (though few distinguish, as did Schier, between "sagaliteratur im engeren Sinn" ['saga literature in the narrower sense'] and "im weiteren Sinn" ['in the wider sense']).⁵¹ In order to account for the heterogeneity of the corpus, the *fornaldarsögur* have often been subdivided into: "Heldensagas" ('heroic sagas'), tragic in tone and based on older, heroic poetry; "Abenteursagas" ('adventure sagas'), comic in tone and more akin to romance literature and folktales; and "Wikingersagas" ('Viking sagas'), tragic in tone but more akin to "Abenteursagas" in their narrative structures.⁵² However, such an approach is quite problematic, since almost all of the *fornaldarsögur*, to some extent, exhibit features of all three. As Stephen Mitchell has observed, the individual narrative units that comprise *Gautreks saga* are typical of heroic legend on the one hand, and adventure tale on the other, while *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, as Lars Lönnroth notes, features both the bridal-quest narrative structure of romance literature, and the traditional motif from heroic tradition, the *haugbrot* ("grave-mound breaking"); as Lönnroth suggests, to categorise any given *fornaldarsaga* as either an "heroic" or "adventure" narrative is to overlook the hybrid nature of the genre.⁵³ As such, it is

Tusculanum, 2009); Lassen, Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*.

⁴⁹ Matthew Driscoll and Silvia Hufnagel, *Fornaldarsögur norðurlanda: A bibliography of manuscripts, editions, translations and secondary literature*, updated August 27, 2018, <http://fasnl.ku.dk/bibl.aspx>.

⁵⁰ For an overview, see Massimiliano Bampi, "Genre," in *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, eds. Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (London: Routledge, 2017), 4-14.

⁵¹ Kurt Schier, *Sagaliteratur* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1970) 5-6.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 76-77.

⁵³ Stephen Mitchell, "Fornaldarsögur," in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, eds. Philip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf (New York: Garland, 1993), 206-207; Lars Lönnroth, "Fornaldarsagans genremässiga metamorfoser: mellan Edda-myt och riddarroman," in Ármann Jakobsson, Lassen, and Ney, *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi*, 39-44.

common now to emphasise the “mixed modality” of the *fornaldarsögur* (which Clunies Ross has ascribed to all saga literature, to some degree), or their “generic hybridity.”⁵⁴ That the concept of hybridity applies also to the *konungasögur* has been demonstrated by Carl Phelpstead, who has analysed the synthesis of history-writing and hagiography in the Old Norse lives of royal saints, which, drawing on the work of Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, can be expressed as “dialogue” between genres.⁵⁵

In relation to the genre debate, the relationship between the *fornaldarsögur* and the *riddarasögur* has been much commented upon. The term *riddarasaga* is used to denote both the medieval Norwegian and Icelandic translations of Continental *romans courtois*, *chansons de geste*, the *lais* of Marie de France (in *Strengleikar*), and German heroic poems (in *Piðreks saga af Bern*), and the sagas composed in Iceland in imitation of these works, variously termed “original” or “indigenous” *riddarasögur*, *lygisögur* (‘lie-sagas’), or “märchensagas” (‘folktale-sagas’).⁵⁶ These latter sagas have long been considered to have much in common, in their narrative structures and motifs, with the *fornaldarsögur*, especially those designated “adventure tales”; as early as 1985, Marianne Kalinke advocated that the “adventure tales” among the *fornaldarsögur* be regarded as *riddarasögur Norðrlanda*, “Northern romances.”⁵⁷ In her 1990 monograph *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*, Kalinke again argued against the use of the terms *riddarasaga* and *fornaldarsaga* and advocated instead the analysis of texts together according to their narrative structure, analysing sagas from both genres that are driven by the hero’s quest for a wife.⁵⁸ The relationship between the *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur* has continued to generate interest, and is

⁵⁴ Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 95-123; Marianne Kalinke, “Textual Instability, Generic Hybridity, and the Development of Some *Fornaldarsögur*,” in Lassen, Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, 201-227; Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, “Generic Hybrids: Norwegian “Family” Sagas and Icelandic “Mythic-Heroic” Sagas,” *SS* 65, no.4 (Autumn 1993), 539-554; Quinn, et al., “Interrogating Genre.”

⁵⁵ Carl Phelpstead, *Holy Vikings: Saints Lives in the Old Icelandic Kings’ Sagas* (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007).

⁵⁶ Marianne Kalinke, “Norse Romance (*Riddarasögur*),” in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. Carol Clover (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 321-25. Cf. Matthew Driscoll, “Late Prose Fiction (*lygisögur*),” in McTurk, *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, 190-204.

⁵⁷ Schier, *Sagaliteratur*, 72-73, 77-78, 105 ff.; Kalinke, “Norse Romance,” 325-32.

⁵⁸ Marianne Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

touched upon by many of the articles in Lassen, Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson's volume *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*.⁵⁹

The various positions taken by scholars today in the debate on the generic status of the *fornaldarsögur* are indicated in the recent publication of a roundtable discussion on the matter; therein, most of the contributors agree that, although the designation is problematic, it is one that we may continue to work with as a descriptor – allowing for the “multimodal” characteristics of the *fornaldarsögur*, and their overlap with other genres – though not as a pigeon-hole.⁶⁰ Whilst allowing for Ármann Jakobsson's call to analyse texts as unique entities – an approach that I have endorsed in the structure of this thesis – the present genre debate has nevertheless been instructive in the genesis of this thesis, and a debate that my research questions are in dialogue with.⁶¹ In comparing the *fornaldarsögur* to historiographical texts, especially the *konungasögur*, I hope to provide a counter-narrative to the discourse that has compared them primarily to the *riddarasögur*. While I do not dispute the very real and profound influence of romance literature on the *fornaldarsögur*, and the considerable overlap between these texts and the original/native *riddarasögur*, this by no means negates their engagement with the praxis of history-writing. Indeed, my study of the historiographical dimension of the *fornaldarsögur* will provide a valuable contribution to our understanding of precisely the “mixed modality,” or hybrid nature, of the *fornaldarsögur* in which the influence of romance literature is understood to operate in these texts.

Closely related to both the discourse concerning the “ideologies” of the *fornaldarsögur* and the debates on their generic status is the question of the fictional status of the *fornaldarsögur*.⁶² Hermann Pálsson and Edwards proposed the term “legendary fiction” for the *fornaldarsögur*, to reflect their having been shaped or invented by an authorial hand, though one senses that their shared features with other “romance” literature – not least a lack of verisimilitude – has also influenced Hermann and Edwards' understanding.⁶³ With a rather more

⁵⁹ *The Legendary Sagas*, eds. Lassen, Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, 171-370.

⁶⁰ Quinn, et al., “Interrogating Genre.”

⁶¹ Ármann Jakobsson, in Quinn, et al., “Interrogating Genre.”

⁶² For an overview of the debate on the fictionality of saga literature more generally, see Ralph O'Connor, “History and Fiction,” in Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson, *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 88-110.

⁶³ Herman Pálsson and Edwards, *Legendary Fiction*, 17.

critical eye, Vésteinn Ólason, echoed more recently by Karl G. Johansson, has argued that the literary self-consciousness of later *fornaldarsögur* (*Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, in particular) – including burlesque and comedic modes of narration, as well as narratorial intrusions – indicates their fictionality; Vésteinn does claim, however, that *Bósa saga* in particular represents a new kind of literary style distinct from the rest of the corpus of *fornaldarsögur*, while Johansson suggests that fantastical sagas – including the *fornaldarsögur* – came to function more as works of entertaining fiction over time.⁶⁴ The authorial *apologiae* and protestations of veracity, apparently anticipating the audiences' incredulity, that are found in *Bósa saga*, and other apparently late *fornaldarsögur* and "indigenous" *riddarasögur*, are often interpreted as tacit admissions of the texts' fictionality, though Ralph O'Connor has argued that these remarks in fact indicate that literary fiction was by no means universally accepted as a legitimate discourse in the late Middle Ages, and that some medieval Icelanders regarded these narratives as true and historical.⁶⁵ Else Mundal, while noting O'Connor's counterarguments, likewise regards such truth-claims as indicative of a play on the limits of believability, rather than truth *per se*, though for her it is the fantastic mode of the *fornaldarsögur* that signals their belonging not to the "real word, but [to] a world of fantasy."⁶⁶

Tulinius has also regarded the *fornaldarsögur* as fictional works, arguing that the development of the genre amounted to the "rise of literary fiction in thirteenth-century Iceland" though two understandings of the term "fiction" in fact emerge in his work.⁶⁷ On the one hand, fiction is that which is not true, or not historical, and on the grounds of two thirteenth-century references to the reception of *fornaldarsaga* material, apparently with some scepticism, Tulinius boldly claims that "what occurred between 1190 and 1230 was the foundation of literary fiction

⁶⁴ Vésteinn Ólason, "The Marvellous North and Authorial Presence in the Icelandic *fornaldarsaga*," in *Contexts of the Pre-Modern Novel: The European Tradition*, ed. Roy Eriksen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994), 114-23; Karl G. Johansson, "Narratives and Narrator on the Move: Some Examples of Change and Continuity in the Tradition of Fantastic Fiction," in Lassen, Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, 351-70.

⁶⁵ Ralph O'Connor, "History or Fiction? Truth-Claims and Defensive Narrators in Icelandic Romance-Sagas," *MS 15* (2005), 101-169.

⁶⁶ Else Mundal, "The Growth of Consciousness of Fiction in Old Norse Culture," in *Medieval Narratives between History and Fiction: From the Centre to the Periphery of Europe, c. 1100-1400*, eds. Panagiotis A. Agapitos and Lars Boje Mortensen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2012), 183-86.

⁶⁷ Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*.

and the acceptance of its legitimacy.”⁶⁸ On the other hand, Tulinius understands “fiction” in the same sense as Hermann Pálsson and Edwards: that which is deliberately constructed, narratives in which the contents “have been chosen and arranged in order to express a meaning.”⁶⁹ Neither definition, however, is unproblematic for the study of the *fornaldarsögur*, or medieval literature more generally; as Tulinius himself admits, according to the second understanding of fictionality, “we can say that every historical narrative is *ipso facto* fictional,” since all historiography – medieval and modern – is, as noted, a deliberately constructed literary artifice.⁷⁰ As O’Connor likewise observes in his criticism of Tulinius’ theorisation, such a definition of “fiction” is so broad as to render it useless in distinguishing the *fornaldarsögur* from any other saga genre in terms of their historical or fictional status.⁷¹ Whether or not the *fornaldarsögur* were regarded as “made up,” and not “true,” is no more straightforward, and certainly not as easy to determine as Tulinius would have it.

This thesis necessarily has a stake in the debate on the fictionality of the *fornaldarsögur*. However, just as I have not found it useful or necessary to refute the influence of romance literature on these sagas, it would likewise be quite unproductive to attempt to “disprove” their fictionality, beyond a brief re-examination of two well-known passages describing the reception of *fornaldarsaga*-type narratives (below).

Further to these more recent trends, the relationship between the *fornaldarsögur* and the poetry that they quote – much of it thought to be the source material to the written works – has long been the focus of a good deal of scholarship. The entire corpus of *fornaldarsögur* poetry has recently been edited and translated, with notes and introductions, in the series *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages (SkP)*, which has been an invaluable resource in the

⁶⁸ Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 63-65.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 179-87, 217-33 (187). The distinction between these two meanings of fiction has been articulated by Peter Lamarque and S. H. Olsen in *Truth, Fiction, and Literature. A Philosophical Perspective* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); it is somewhat curious that Tulinius, despite the wealth of theoretical works he consults, makes no reference in his discussion to any critical theory that deals with this problem.

⁷⁰ Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 217.

⁷¹ O’Connor, “History or Fiction?,” 104-105.

completion of this thesis.⁷² Old Norse poetry is generally categorised as either “eddic” or “skaldic,” though the distinction is a modern one; the former, strictly speaking, refers to the anonymous poems that comprise the *Poetic Edda*, including the pre-Christian mythological poems and pre- and post-Conversion heroic poetry, mostly dealing with the *Völsung* legend.⁷³ The extant manuscript for this compilation (Reykjavík, GKS 2365 4to, *Codex Regius*) is dated to c.1270, though it is thought to draw on written compilations made earlier in the twelfth century.⁷⁴ Most skaldic poetry, however, can be attributed to known poets of the Viking and Middle Ages; it is mostly composed in the complex *dróttkvætt* (‘court metre’) form, and variants thereupon, and originally developed as praise poetry delivered to secular rulers. The poetry in the *fornaldarsögur* has much in common with, and is typically regarded as, eddic poetry, in the anonymity of its composers, its use of the comparatively simple metres (*fornyrðislag*, ‘old story metre,’ *málaháttir*, ‘speeches’ form,’ and *ljóðaháttir*, ‘songs’ form’) found in the *Poetic Edda*, and in the similar poetic “genres” in the *fornaldarsögur* and *Edda*.⁷⁵

The *fornaldarsögur* have figured relatively little in analyses of authenticating and situational verse quotation, save for the occasional observation that the verses they quote are typically presented as direct speech.⁷⁶ Rather, the relationship between prose and poetry in the *fornaldarsögur* has often been explored with regard to the development of the written genre. The standard view of the development of the *fornaldarsögur*, from the heroic poetry that they quote into their extant prosimetrical forms, was neatly articulated by Anne Holtmark in 1965, using the development of the heroic poems of the *Edda* and *Völsunga saga* as an example. She argued that narrative prose likely accompanied oral eddic poetry to provide context and exposition, as do the prose passages that introduce and intersperse the heroic poems in *Codex Regius*; from this, short prose narratives quoting verses, or even lengthy poems, likely developed, with the prose narratives

⁷² *Poetry in fornaldarsögur*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 8 (Turnhout, Brepols, 2017). Henceforth *SkP* 8.

⁷³ *Eddukvæði*, eds. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, 2 vols. (Reykjavík: Íslenska Fornritafélag, 2014).

⁷⁴ Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, introduction to *Eddukvæði*, 1:19-39.

⁷⁵ On the basics of this distinction, see Clunies Ross, *Poetry and Poetics*, 1-28; on *fornaldarsaga* poetry and the *Edda*, see Brittany Schorn, “Eddic Modes and Genres,” in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, eds. Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 231-51.

⁷⁶ O’Donoghue, *Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 16-17.

gradually expanding and displacing verses; finally, originally separate poems and even personages were drawn together, often along genealogical lines, into the longer *fornaldarsögur* preserved in later manuscripts.⁷⁷ Analysing poetry preserved in *Hervarar saga* and *Qrvar-Odds saga*, Lönnroth arrived at a very similar conclusion on the development, and, with admittedly less focus on the oral prehistory of the written saga, Jeffrey Scott Love has recently analysed the clusters of verse-quotations in *Hervarar saga* with regard to the saga's composition out of its poetic source material.⁷⁸

Studies of the function of poetry in the *fornaldarsögur* have often been related to the apparent poetic "genres" to which the quoted verses belong. As such, Clunies Ross has focussed on the role of first-person, retrospective monologues in the *fornaldarsögur*, derived from the *ævikviða* ('life-poem,' a kind of autobiographical retrospective typically spoken at the end of a hero's life), while Judy Quinn has examined verse quotations as a medium for curses, spells, and prophecies, more commonly associated with female figures in the *fornaldarsögur*.⁷⁹ Such studies, as well as broader surveys of saga prosimetrum, emphasise the importance of poetry in representing direct speech in the *fornaldarsögur* – by far the most common mode of verse quotation – which Clunies Ross likens to the use of poetry in *Gesta Danorum*, and to the speech acts represented in *Beowulf*.⁸⁰ Indeed, ideas about the role of poetry in the *fornaldarsögur* have developed relatively little in recent scholarship, and Clunies

⁷⁷ Anne Holtsmark, "Heroic Poetry and Legendary Sagas," in *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Studies: 1965* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1966), 14-21. It must be stressed, however, that narrative in oral plain speech – that is, not poetry – is not the same as *prose*, properly: see Kristin Hansen and Paul Kiparsky, "The Nature of Verse and its Consequences for the Mixed Form," in Harris and Reichl, *Prosimetrum*, 17-22.

⁷⁸ Lars Lönnroth, "Hjálmar's Death-Song and the Delivery of Eddic Poetry," *Speculum* 46, no.1 (January 1971), 1-20; Jeffrey Scott Love, "The Organisation of Poetic Quotations in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*," in Lassen, Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Developments*, 153-69.

⁷⁹ Margaret Clunies Ross, "Poetry and *Fornaldarsögur*," in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature. Sagas and the British Isles: Preprint Papers of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference, Durham and York, 6th-12th August, 2006*, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 180-87; Margaret Clunies Ross, "Poetry in *Fornaldarsögur*: Origins, Nature and Purpose," in Lassen, Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, 121-38; Judy Quinn, "'Ok verðr henni ljóð á munni'" – Eddic Prophecy in the *Fornaldarsögur*," *Alvíssmál* 8 (1998), 29-50; Judy Quinn, "Trust in Words: Verse Quotation and Dialogue in *Völsunga saga*," in Ármann Jakobsson, Lassen, Ney, *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi*, 89-100.

⁸⁰ Clunies Ross, "Poetry in *Fornaldarsögur*," 121-27. The similarity between poetry in the *fornaldarsögur* and in *Gesta Danorum* is well documented: see Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet*.

Ross' suggestion that verse quotation in the *fornaldarsögur* answered a late-medieval taste for "poetic introspection" echoes Lönnroth's comparison of *fornaldarsögur* poetry to operatic arias.⁸¹

Finally, it is also worth mentioning the 2012 doctoral thesis of Helen Leslie-Jacobsen (née Leslie), which examined the prose contexts of eddic poetry, especially the *fornaldarsögur*. Leslie-Jacobsen's study is comprehensive, analysing, in varying detail, the function of poetry in every prosimetrical *fornaldarsaga*; her conclusions are manifold, though she is primarily concerned with the development of the written prosimetra. Leslie-Jacobsen argues that while some *fornaldarsögur* (*Hervarar saga*, *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*) grew from the assemblage of longer poems, the prose accompaniments of which may have been sparse, most developed out of oral prosimetrical "episodes," in which dialogue was rendered in verse.⁸² Regarding its function, Leslie-Jacobsen notes the propensity for verse quotations to heighten emotions, and also to appear in dialogues between human and supernatural figures.⁸³

1.3: Approaches to "historicity"

Counter both to the views of the *fornaldarsögur* as fundamentally "fictional" literature, and to traditional accounts of their evolution from heroic poetry, the learned origins of the *fornaldarsögur* and the influence of Latin historiography thereupon have increasingly come into focus in recent scholarship. Foremost among these Latin works is Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, the first nine books of which cover what is now regarded as "legendary history," and contain a great many parallels with other medieval sources of Scandinavian myth and legend, including much of the same narrative material as that which is found in the *fornaldarsögur*; in particular, *Gesta Danorum* provides lengthy accounts of Rollo and his champion Biarco (Hrólfr kraki and Boðvarr Bjarki in the Norse tradition [Book II]), Starcatherus (Starkaðr inn gamli, 'the old' [Book VI]), and Regnerus (Ragnarr loðbrók) and his sons (Book IX), each the subject of (or major figures in) their own

⁸¹ Lönnroth, "Hjálmar's Death-Song," 7.

⁸² Helen Leslie, "The Prose Contexts of Eddic Poetry, Primarily in the *Fornaldarsögur*" (Ph.D. diss., University of Bergen, 2012).

⁸³ *Ibid.*

fornaldarsaga (*Hrólfs saga kraka*, *Gautreks saga*, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttur*).⁸⁴ It is well established that Saxo had vernacular sources for this material, both Danish and Old West Norse (Norwegian, Icelandic), prose and poetry, though their extent and precise nature is uncertain. In addition to the aforementioned heroic poetry that Saxo cites in the Preface to *Gesta Danorum*, he also credits contemporary Icelanders as superb curators of historical traditions, which he freely admits borrowing extensively from.⁸⁵ The veracity of these claims is evinced not only in the parallels between narrative materials in *Gesta Danorum* and Icelandic sources, but also in the poetry that Saxo quotes throughout, which, despite Saxo's reworking, was patently based on Old Norse sources.⁸⁶

The comparative material in *Gesta Danorum* is taken as evidence both of the early circulation of prosimetrical *fornaldarsaga*-type narratives and of the influence of Latin historiography on the written *fornaldarsögur* themselves, and in the latter case, recent articles have drawn attention to the parallels between *Gesta Danorum* and the *fornaldarsögur* not only in subject matter, but also in style and structure.⁸⁷ Gottskálk Jensson has argued that *Gesta Danorum* – along with the original twelfth-century Latin *Yngvars saga víðförla*, which the extant saga claims was written by Oddr munkr and claims to have copied – provided a model for the vernacular *fornaldarsögur*, while Lassen further argues that *Gesta Danorum* was known in medieval Iceland through Bishop Páll Jónsson of Skálholt, who probably met Saxo in Denmark in 1195.⁸⁸ Páll is believed to have been the author of **Skjöldunga saga* (c.1200), a dynastic chronicle of the Skjöldung kings of Denmark (the Scyldings of the Old English tradition); this work is now lost, but fragments of it can be postulated from the medieval works that derived from it, as well as *Rerum*

⁸⁴ The division between Books I-IX and Books X-XVI does not reflect Saxo's structuring of the work, but is rather a modern distinction between the "mythical" and "historical" past, which medieval historians and their readership may have conceptualised rather differently: see Friis-Jensen, introduction to *Gesta Danorum*, XXXVI-XXXIX; Lars Boje Mortensen, "The Status of the 'Mythical' Past in Nordic Latin Historiography (c.1170-1220)," in Agapitos and Mortensen, *Medieval Narratives between History and Fiction*, 103-139.

⁸⁵ *Gesta Danorum*, Pr.1.3-4.

⁸⁶ Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet*, Bjarni Guðnason, "The Icelandic Sources of Saxo Grammaticus," in *Saxo Grammaticus: A Medieval Author between Norse and Latin Culture*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 1981), 79-93.

⁸⁷ Karsten Friis-Jensen, "Saxo Grammaticus og Fornaldarsagaerne," in Ney, Ármann Jakobsson, and Lassen, *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og virkelighed*, 67-77.

⁸⁸ Gottskálk Jensson, "Were the Earliest *fornaldarsögur* Written in Latin?," in Ney, Ármann Jakobsson, and Lassen, *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og virkelighed*, 79-91.

Danicarum fragmenta, a seventeenth-century Latin paraphrase by Arngrímur Jónsson.⁸⁹ While Bjarni Guðnason previously argued that Saxo used **Skjöldunga saga* as a source for his own work, Lassen raises the possibility that the direction of influence was, in fact, the opposite.⁹⁰

It is important to also note the relationship between the *fornaldarsögur* and *Ynglinga saga*, the mythological prologue to Snorri Sturluson's vast chronicle of the Norwegian kings, *Heimskringla* (c.1230), which traces the ancestors of Haraldr hárfagri and his descendants – the Fairhair dynasty – back to a euhemerised Óðinn. Snorri locates the mythological home of the gods, Ásgarðr, in Asia, whence Óðinn emigrates, his progeny settling “um norðrhálfu heimsins” (‘in the northern half of the world’); this clearly imitates the Trojan origin myths of Virgil's *Aeneid* and the medieval works it inspired, for instance, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, and places *Ynglinga saga* firmly in the medieval genre of *origo gentis*.⁹¹ But while its style and structure are quite different to those of the *fornaldarsögur* (see Chapter 5), the shared chronological and geographical settings indicate the place of the *fornald* in medieval Icelandic historiographical traditions.⁹²

The emerging view that the *fornaldarsögur* developed from historiography, coupled with the consensus that they increasingly came to resemble romance literature, suggests a development of the genre parallel to emergence of romance fiction from historical writing that Dennis Green has suggested took place in England and Continental Europe. Green suggests that lacunae in historical narrative provided space for invention, from the non-fictional – as Geoffrey's *Historia* filled the narrative gaps in British and English historiography, a process Mortensen has described as “mythopoiesis” – to the “fully fictional works of Arthurian romance,” ostensibly occupying the periods of peace in Arthur's reign mentioned in Geoffrey's account, and in Wace's *Roman de Brut*, but divorced from

⁸⁹ Annette Lassen, “*Origines Gentium* and the Learned Origin of *Fornaldarsögur Norðalanda*,” in Lassen, Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Developments*, 46.

⁹⁰ Bjarni Guðnason, “Icelandic Sources,” 87-89; Lassen, “Learned Origin of *Fornaldarsögur*,” 47-52.

⁹¹ *Heimskringla*, 1:14.

⁹² Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, “Ynglinga saga mellom fornaldarsaga og kongesaga,” in Ney, Ármann Jakobsson, and Lassen, *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myer og Verkelighed*, 49-59.

the historical framework set out by these works.⁹³ Mundal has suggested that this model has little relevance to the development of fiction in Iceland, noting *Hrólfs saga kraka* as one of very few examples of a “fictional” text (in her view) developing directly from historiography (**Skjöldunga saga*).⁹⁴ While I do not wish to push the analogy too far – for imagining the *fornaldarsögur* as part of a teleological continuum leading to fully fledged fiction may in fact risk glossing over their historiographical dimension – the impulse to “fill in the gaps” may be more relevant to the *fornaldarsögur* than Mundal allows; while only a handful of examples may have close parallels in written historiography, many more could be seen as fleshing out oral traditions relating to the legendary past, including genealogies and, especially, heroic poetry. But important though it is to consider the literary context and influence of learned traditions – Latin and vernacular – as well the older, oral narratives the *fornaldarsögur* developed from, how the *fornaldarsögur* themselves functioned as historiography remains to be seen.

The evidence provided by the manuscript contexts in which we find *fornaldarsögur* can be illuminating for the study of their reception, though not without its limits. Ármann Jakobsson has analysed the extant medieval manuscripts containing *fornaldarsögur*, concluding that only in the fifteenth century – when they are grouped together in a number of manuscripts, along with *riddarasögur* – did these kinds of text seem to coalesce as a “large romance genre.”⁹⁵ But as Ármann notes, the manuscript evidence for the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries – when most of the *fornaldarsögur* are regarded to have been written – is sparse indeed.⁹⁶ The oldest manuscript containing a *fornaldarsaga* is *Hauksbók* ([1302 x 1310] Reykjavík, AM 371 4to, Copenhagen, AM 544 4to, Copenhagen, AM 675 4to) in which *Hervarar saga*, *Ragnarssona þáttr*, and *Af upplendinga konungum* are found among encyclopaedic and philosophical treatises, histories of the settlement and conversion of Iceland (*Landnámabók* and *Kristni saga*), translated works of legendary history (*Breta sǫgur* and *Trójumanna*

⁹³ Dennis Green, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance: Fact and Fiction, 1150-1220* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 187-201; Lars Boje Mortensen, “The Status of the ‘Mythical’ Past,” 131-33.

⁹⁴ Mundal, “The Growth of Consciousness of Fiction,” 192-93.

⁹⁵ Ármann Jakobsson, “The Earliest Legendary Saga Manuscripts,” in Lassen, Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, 21-32.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

saga), and other works. The inclusion of such eclectic texts as these – a number of which the manuscript’s owner, Haukr Erlendsson, may have composed or redacted himself – suggests that the manuscript was a sort of “personal library,” the logic of which has been examined by Sverrir Jakobsson. Sverrir has little to say specifically on the *fornaldarsögur* in *Hauksbók*, but it is clear that in this context they were included as works of legendary history.⁹⁷ Another early fourteenth-century manuscript – Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket Perg. nr 7 4to – places three *fornaldarsögur* (*Ásmundar saga kappabana*, *Orvar-Odds saga*, and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*) together with *Jómsvíkinga saga*, *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* and a *riddararsaga*, *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* (fragmentary), perhaps indicating a generic cohesion, but little can be definitively concluded as to how the sagas in this manuscript were received by audiences.

Finally, external references to the performance and reception of *fornaldarsögur* in other medieval works may offer some insight on the matter, but again, the evidence is rather scant, and hardly conclusive. Two passages in the medieval Icelandic textual corpus seem to give an idea of how what appear to be *fornaldarsaga*-type narratives were received; by far the most commented upon is a scene in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* in the compilation *Sturlunga saga* (assembled c.1300), describing the entertainments held at a wedding in Reykjahólar in 1119:⁹⁸

Frá því er nökkut sagt, er þó er lítil tilkváma, hverir þar skemmtu eða hverju skemmt var. Þat er í frásögn haft, er nú mæla margir í móti ok látast eigi vitat hafa, því at margir ganga duðir ins sanna ok hyggja þat satt, er skrökvat er, en þat logit, sem satt er: Hrólfur frá Skálmarnesi sagði sögu frá Hröngviði víkingi ok frá Óláfi liðsmannakonungi ok haugbroti Þráins berserks ok Hrómundi Gripssyni – ok margar vísur með. En þessari sögu var skemmt Sverri konungi, ok kallaði hann slíkar lygisögur skemmtligastar. Ok þó kunna men at telja ættir sínar til Hrómundar Gripssonar. Þessa sögu hafði Hrólfur sjálf saman setta. Ingimundur prestur sagði sögu Orms Barreyjarskálds ok vísur margar ok flokk góðan við enda sögunnar, er Ingimundur hafði ortan, ok hafa þó margir fróði menn þessa sögu fyrir satt.

⁹⁷ Sverrir Jakobsson, “Hauksbók and the Construction of an Icelandic World View,” *Saga-Book* 31 (2007), 22-38. However, cf. Gunnar Harðarson, who has argued that the texts that comprise *Hauksbók* may have been bound together quite some time after their writing: “Hauksbók og Alfræðirit Miðalda,” *Gripla* (2016), 127-55.

⁹⁸ *Sturlunga saga*, eds. Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason, and Kristján Eldjárn (Reykjavík: Sturlunguútgáfan, 1946), 1:27.

About this [the wedding] there is something said – which is, however, little significant – about who entertained there, and what the entertainments were. What is said is now contradicted by many who maintain that they have never believed it, because many go about in ignorance of the truth and think true that which is fabricated, and falsified that which is true: Hrólfr from Skálmarness told the saga of Hróngviðr the *víkingr* and about Óláfr Warriors' King and the mound-breaking of Bráinn the *berserkr* and of Hrómundr Gripsson, with many verses. And these sagas were enjoyed by King Sverrir, and he called such lie-sagas the most entertaining. Yet knowledgeable men reckon their genealogy to Hrómundr Gripsson. Hrólfr had put together this saga himself. Ingimundr the priest told the saga of Ormr Barreyjarskáld, with many verses and a good *flokkr*, which Ingimundr himself had composed, at the end of the saga, although many learned men believe this saga to be true.

The extant *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar* is post-medieval, based on the *rímur* [lit. 'rhymes,' a ballad cycle] called *Griplur*, but contains no verse quotation.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, the first half of *Griplur* is thought to have followed the lost **Hrómundar saga* quite closely, preserving more or less the same contents as the saga described in this passage – the *haugbrot*, vikings, and *berserkir*, all common *fornaldarsaga* motifs.¹⁰⁰ **Orms saga Barreyjaskálds*, however, is thought to be closer to the *skáldasögur*, such as *Kormáks saga*.¹⁰¹

Much has been made of this passage, and what it can tell us about the composition of sagas; as Peter Foote argued in his seminal article on this passage, the phrase *saman setja* (lit. 'to put together: to compile') entails Hrólfr's "authorship" of the saga only insofar as the story had not been told before, not that its contents were made up by Hrólfr.¹⁰² As Foote notes, *setja saman* was also commonly used to describe the composition of firmly historiographical works, indicating the collection of source materials and formation of a narrative therefrom, though he does argue that the author of this passage equates the saga *saman setta* by Hrólfr with "þat...er skrökvat er" ('that which is made up').¹⁰³ This passage

⁹⁹ On the post-medieval traditions, see Katarzyna Anna Kapitan, "Studies in the transmission history of *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar*" (Ph.D. diss., University of Copenhagen, 2018).

¹⁰⁰ Judith Jesch, "Hrómundr Gripsson Revisited," *Skandinavistik* 14 (1984), 96-9.

¹⁰¹ Harris, "Prosimetrum of Icelandic Saga," 135.

¹⁰² Peter Foote, "Sagnaskemtan: Reykjahólar, 1119," *Saga-Book* 14 (1953-7), 233.

¹⁰³ Foote, "Sagnaskemtan," 234. Cf. O'Connor, "History or Fiction?," 136. Kapitan has provided a comprehensive list of references to scholarship on this: "Transmission History of *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar*," 27.

is also taken as indicative of the oral circulation of prosimetrical *fornaldarsögur* in at least the early thirteenth century, if not the early twelfth century, when the wedding celebrations described may have taken place.¹⁰⁴ It is, however, the discourse on truth and lying in this passage that is most pertinent here. It is this passage that Tulinius, as noted above, takes as evidence for the fictional status of the *fornaldarsögur*, and their function as entertainment, as early as the turn of the thirteenth century when *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* was composed; though they are “lygisögur,” the author of *Þorgils saga* seems to legitimise them by referring to King Sverrir’s taste for such tales.¹⁰⁵

O’Connor, however, has cautioned against reading this scene as evidence for the advent of fictional writing, and I am broadly in agreement with his rebuttal. As O’Connor notes, we are informed that King Sverrir is said to have been entertained by such *lygisögur*, not of an author-audience contract of the suspension of disbelief, required for literary fiction.¹⁰⁶ In fact, the only reaction to the truth-value of such sagas evidenced in this passage is that of the author of *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* himself. O’Connor concludes that *lygisaga* in this passage does seem to be used pejoratively, but it in no way maps onto modern definitions of fictionality, nor does it indicate that any given saga with a *berserkr* or a *haugbrot* was regarded as untrue; it cannot thus be read as applicable across the board to what we now call *fornaldarsögur*.¹⁰⁷ It is telling also that “learned men” reckoned Hrómundr among their ancestors, suggesting that the saga, regardless of its truth-value, was thought to have some basis upon an historical personage; it is unclear whether the narrator here is sceptical of such claims, but in the second sentence of this passage he does disparage the ignorance of his peers.

This passage is, then, extremely problematic for studying the reception of the *fornaldarsögur* as either historical or fictional. In fact, it is no more telling of the broader reception of **Hrómundar saga* than are William of Newburgh’s comments, in the prologue to his *Historia de rebus anglicis*, for the reception of Geoffrey of

¹⁰⁴ Judith Jesch, “Hrómundar saga Gripssonar,” in Pulsiano and Wolf, *Medieval Scandinavia*, 305. Dating the composition of *Þorgils saga*, and the reliability of this passage for the events it describes, are contentious: see Foote, “Sagnaskemtan,” 227-33.

¹⁰⁵ Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 65.

¹⁰⁶ O’Connor, “History or Fiction?,” 135-38.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Monmouth's *Historia*; William, famously, argues at length against the veracity of Geoffrey's *Historia*, calling its contents "ridicula... figmenta" ('laughable fictions') and its author a "fabulator" ('fabler'), though this work was both immensely popular in the Middle Ages and widely regarded as historical.¹⁰⁸ There is a strong moralistic component to William's criticisms of Geoffrey – primarily for contradicting Bede, "de cuius sapientia et sinceritate dubitare fas non est" ('whose wisdom and sincerity it is sacrilegious to doubt') – and likewise in the passage from *Borgils saga ok Hafliða*.¹⁰⁹ In criticising the lack of discretion in his day, the author contrasts *satt* ('truth') with that which is *skrökvat* ('fabricated') or *logit* ('falsified'), the latter a past participle of *ljúga* ('to lie, to treat falsely'), which carried in Old Norse the strong negative connotations of immorality one would expect.¹¹⁰ Clearly, the author's moral agenda, whatever that may have been, must be factored into our reading of this passage.

A very different moral tone, however, is struck later in *Sturlunga saga*, in a second scene that seems to depict the performance of a *fornaldarsaga*-type narrative. In *Sturlu þáttur*, "Hvamm"-Sturla Þórðarson ('Sturla from Hvammr') is said to have told a certain *Huldar saga*, about a *tröllkona* ('troll-woman'), to the crew on board the ship of King Magnús lagabœtir ('law-mender,' r. 1263-80), after which the queen requests that Sturla recite it again for her. We are told that Sturla told this saga "betr ok fróðligar" ('better and more knowledgably') than the men had heard it before, that they thought it "góð sagan, enda er vel frá sagt" ('a good saga, and indeed well told'), and that Sturla was regarded as a "góðr drengur" ('good fellow') and "fróðr maðr ok vitr" ('a learned and wise man'), drawing on, as Gottskálk Jensson has observed, the topos of the "knowledgeable Icelander," propagating the Icelandic self-image of their role as cultural custodians.¹¹¹ This passage does not suggest that Sturla composed **Huldar saga*, only that his telling was well received, but the vocabulary used to convey this is noteworthy. That Sturla's

¹⁰⁸ William of Newburgh, *The History of English Affairs: Book I*, eds. and trans. P. G. Walsh and M. J. Kennedy (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1988), 28-29, 36-37; for an introduction to the reception of Geoffrey's *Historia*, see Julia Marvin, "The English *Brut* Tradition," in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Helen Fulton (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell 2009), 221-34.

¹⁰⁹ *History of English Affairs I*, 36-37. On William's attack on Geoffrey, see Otter, *Inventiones*, 95-97; Anne Lawrence-Mathers, "William of Newburgh and the Northumbrian Construction of English history," *JMH* 33 (2007), 339-57.

¹¹⁰ Cleasby/Vigfusson, s.v. "LJÚGA," 396.

¹¹¹ *Sturlunga saga*, 2:232-33; Gottskálk Jensson, "The Earliest *Fornaldarsögur*," 86-89.

recitation of the saga was “vel frá sagt” and “betr” than other versions that certain among the crew had heard probably indicates that its narrative was more enjoyable, or aesthetically pleasing, but that it was also told “fróðligar” than other versions suggests an almost empiricist mindset; if the story could be told in a more or less knowledgeable way, it may have been understood that there was some objective truth to the narrative against which the telling could be measured. Furthermore, it is on the basis of his performance of the saga that he seems to others “fróðr maðr ok vitr.” There does, however, seem to be a relationship between Sturla’s good standing, as a “góðr drengr,” and the truth-value of the tale, the two factors mutually bolstering each other. Taken together, the evidence of *Porgils saga ok Hafliða* and *Sturlu þáttur* are extremely ambiguous. It seems that *fornaldarsaga*-type narratives could equally be regarded either as true or untrue, depending equally on both the author, or reciter, and the audience. With no other roughly contemporaneous external evidence for the reception of the *fornaldarsögur*, it is to the texts themselves that we must turn if we are to understand their potential as historiographical works.

1.4: Thesis Outline

The three chapters of this thesis will each offer a detailed analysis of a single text (Chapter 4 examining two closely related texts). Each will approach a unique aspect of the text(s) at hand to investigate how their authors engaged with historiographical discourses available to them at the time of writing, and the extent to which they communicated an historiographical purpose. The single most significant dimension of the *fornaldarsögur* that I will explore is their prosimetrical structure, the analysis of which will comprise approximately half of each chapter. The relationship between the *fornaldarsögur* and their quoted poetry has been extensively examined, and while Leslie-Jacobsen’s thesis has applied the authenticating/situational paradigm to the verse quotations of the *fornaldarsögur* (noting the occasional use of authenticating verse, indicating the influence of the *konungasögur*), a thorough analysis of the historiographical function of the poetry in the *fornaldarsögur* is wanting. As hinted at already, this analytical framework is not without its problems, and recent studies have problematised the strict

differentiation between the two styles of verse quotations. Nevertheless, the authenticating/situational paradigm draws attention to the integration of verse and prose in saga literature, and therefore remains a helpful starting point for the analysis of *fornaldarsaga* prosimetrum. I will therefore examine the poetry in *Gautreks saga*, *Völsunga saga*, and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttr* according to this paradigm, while bearing in mind the authenticating and historicising potential for verse quotations however they are framed in the prose.

Further to the form and function of verse quotation, in Chapter 2 I will analyse two related aspects of *Gautreks saga*: its folktale-like elements, and its representation of space and geography. Structurally, *Gautreks saga* is rather disjointed, with two of its component *þættir* more comical, and similar to folktales, than the more tragi-heroic third *þáttur*; nevertheless, in their context in the work as a whole, I argue that these *þættir* function to memorialise the past. I also analyse the topographical descriptions in *Gautreks saga* in the light of historiographical traditions in which geography figured prominently, and, employing Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the "chronotope," analyse how the text creates a space for fiction.

In Chapter 3, after reviewing the development of *Völsunga saga* from the poems of the *Edda*, I will consider how the genealogical and biographical narrative structures of Old Norse historiography were used by the author to shape the narrative materials in his sources and create new narratives. These historiographical structures, I argue, were particularly influential in shaping the parts of the saga where the poetic tradition was more sparse; early generations of the Völsung dynasty seem to have been written into the saga tradition, in accordance with the genealogical organisation of history in medieval Iceland, while the account of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani's conception, birth, and upbringing seems to have been influenced by royal biographical writing.

In Chapter 4 I will attempt to contextualise my analysis of the poetry quoted in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttr* by examining the significance of Ragnarr loðbrók and his legend in the field of skaldic poetics in thirteenth-century Iceland. Medieval Icelanders' faith in Ragnarr's historicity is attested in the numerous genealogies in which he figures, but his association with the

composition of poetry in the learned tradition of poetics specifically reinforces the authenticity of the prosimetrical saga tradition, and the poetry attributed to him therein.

Finally, I will conclude this thesis with a discussion of how the above themes may be applied to the analysis of other examples of *fornaldarsögur*. This is intended not only as a broad survey of how the genre developed under the influence of historiographical writing, but also as an interrogation – and justification – of my own methodologies and their applicability for the study of the *fornaldarsögur*. Further to the detailed re-evaluation of four significant texts from the corpus, the trends and tensions across the *fornaldarsögur* and other saga genres that emerge in the course of this concluding survey may also further our understanding of how medieval Icelanders conceptualised history, and the task of narrating it.

2: *Gautreks saga*

The first case study in this thesis will be *Gautreks saga*, written c.1300, which contains narratives concerning the kings of Vestra-Gautland (West Götland) and the legendary hero, Starkaðr inn gamli. The extant versions of this saga can be grouped into two redactions, distinguished primarily by length. The short redaction of this manifestly composite saga contains two distinct *þættir* – *Dalafífla þáttir* ('tale of the fools of the dale') and *Gjafa-Refs þáttir* ('Gift-Refr's tale'), titles found in some seventeenth-century manuscripts – which are loosely connected by the figure of King Gautrekr.¹ In *Dalafífla þáttir*, King Gauti is given hospitality at the isolated farmstead of a miserly family; perceiving their wealth to be diminished, the farmer, his wife, and their sons leap off Ætternisstapi ('Family Cliff') in the hope of going to Óðinn, while Gauti fathers a child, Gautrekr, with the daughter, Snotra, who are brought to Gauti's court. In *Gjafa-Refs þáttir* the young, unpromising *kolbítr* ('coal-biter', or 'ashlad') Refr steals his father's prize ox and gives it to the miserly jarl Neri; Neri begrudgingly accepts and guides Refr through a series of gift exchanges with legendary kings, beginning and ending with King Gautrekr, through which Refr accumulates great wealth. To this, the long redaction adds *Víkars þáttir*, named for the poem known as **Víkarsbálkr*, probably composed in the twelfth-century, which is interwoven with the prose. This *þáttir* narrates the early life of Starkaðr, who is fostered by a certain Hrosshárs-Grani ('Grani Horse-Hair,' Óðinn in disguise) before serving King Víkarr of Hǫrðaland in several battles, whom he is tricked into sacrificing by Grani/Óðinn. *Víkars þáttir* is made to link to *Gjafa-Refs þáttir* by making Neri the son of Víkarr.²

In 1900, Wilhelm Ranisch produced an edition of both redactions of *Gautreks saga*, but found the manuscript tradition of the short redaction too fragmentary to produce a critical text.³ As such, most subsequent studies have, implicitly or explicitly, focussed either on a single *þáttir* or on the long redaction.⁴

¹ *Die Gautrekssaga in zwei Fassungen*, ed. Wilhelm Ranisch (Berlin: Mayer and Müller, 1900). For the long redaction, see 1-49; for the short redaction, see 50-73.

² *Gautreks saga*, 23.

³ Ranisch, introduction to *Gautreks saga*, CXI-CXII.

⁴ Massimiliano Bampi, "What's in a Variant? On Editing the Longer Redaction of *Gautreks saga*," in *On Editing Old Scandinavian Texts: Problems and Perspectives*, eds. Fulvio Ferarri and Massimiliano Bampi (Trento: Università degli studi di Trento, Dipartimento di studi letterari,

The narrative of the long redaction is extremely disjointed, having, as Elizabeth Ashman Rowe has described it, “no protagonist, chronological plot, and a haphazard assortment of characters and settings.”⁵ Tonally, the tragic, heroic mood of *Víkars þáttir* also seems at odds with the more comic tone of *Dalafífla þáttir* and *Gjafa-Refs þáttir*. However, Rowe, and others, have demonstrated a strong thematic unity to the saga, suggesting that these loosely connected *þættir* have been arranged in such a fashion as to emphasise particular subjects. For Paul E. Durrenberger, the unifying theme is reciprocity, generosity, and miserliness, but both Rowe and Dennis Cronan further identify sacrifice to Óðinn, generosity and luck in kingship, relationships between a king and his subjects, and the socialisation of young males as themes connected to that of reciprocity.⁶ My study will likewise examine the long redaction of *Gautreks saga*, since it is the inclusion of *Víkars þáttir* – markedly different in tone to *Dalafífla þáttir* and *Gjafa-Refs þáttir* – that is of the most interest regarding the text’s historiographical function.

2.1: Textual History

Owing to their complex textual history, dating either redaction of *Gautreks saga* is extremely problematic, and no definitive answer can be established. In its two redactions, *Gautreks saga* was immensely popular in the early modern period and beyond; of the sixty-four manuscripts catalogued by Matthew Driscoll and Silvia Hufnagel, sixty-two are dated to the year 1600 or later, with just two medieval manuscripts extant.⁷ Copenhagen, AM 567 XIV γ 4to (1380-1420) comprises three defective leaves containing the first four chapters of the short redaction of

linguistici e filologici, 2009), 58. For example, Paul E. Durrenberger, “Reciprocity in *Gautreks Saga*: An Anthropological Analysis,” *NS* 19 (1982), 23-37; Dennis Cronan, “The Thematic Unity of the Younger *Gautreks saga*,” *JEGP* 106, no.1 (January 2007), 81-123; Michael Chesnutt, however, specifically addresses the short redaction, using the title *Gjafa-Refs saga* to refer to both original *þættir*: “The Content and Meaning of *Gjafa-Refs saga*,” in Ney, Ármann Jakobsson, and Lassen, *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og virkelighed*, 93-106.

⁵ Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, “Folktale and Parable: The Unity of *Gautreks Saga*,” *Gripla* 10 (1998), 155.

⁶ Durrenberger, “Reciprocity in *Gautreks Saga*,” 23-37; Rowe, “Folktale and Parable,” 155-6; Cronan, “Thematic Unity,” 81-123.

⁷ Matthew J. Driscoll and Silvia Hufnagel, *Stories for all time*.
<http://fasnl.ku.dk/bibl/bibl.aspx?sid=gsgr&view=manuscript>.

Gautreks saga, and two leaves of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*.⁸ The long redaction is extant later still, in Reykjavík, AM 152 1, fol. (1500-1525); this manuscript contains a number of *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*, as well as two *Íslendingasögur*, and 196v-201v contain *Gautreks saga* in full.⁹ It is, of course, very likely that a version of this saga was composed quite some time before the sixteenth century; Massimiliano Bampi cites the “commonly-held opinion” that the short redaction was composed in the thirteenth century, while Ranisch’s suggestion that the long redaction was composed shortly thereafter, around the end of the thirteenth century, has continued to hold sway.¹⁰ This is entirely in accordance with Tulinus’ dating of the *fornaldarsögur* as a genre, though it is possible that, as Bampi has noted, the extant saga is “the result of a process of reworking of a previous version.”¹¹

Assuming that it was written after the short redaction, we can only confirm that the long redaction was composed between the hypothesised thirteenth-century date of the short redaction and the extant sixteenth-century manuscript. Though it is most likely an earlier form of the saga, the extant leaves of the short redaction in AM 567 cannot logically provide a *terminus post quem* for the composition of the long redaction. Even after the long redaction of the saga was recorded in AM 152, and subsequently copied into a number of the seventeenth-century manuscripts, the *þættir* comprising *Gautreks saga* were still separable; Reykjavík, AM 164 h fol. (1600-1650) contains *Gjafa-Refs þátr* (rubricated ‘Sagan af GiafaRef’), followed by *Dalafífla þátr* (rubricated ‘Gauta þáttur’), but *Víkars þátr* is neither included in AM 164 nor alluded to.¹² This demonstrates the continued circulation of multiple versions of *Gautreks saga*, and just as the long redaction in

⁸ Driscoll and Hufnagel, “AM 567 XIV 4^{to},” *Stories for all time*. <http://fasn1.ku.dk/browse-manuscripts/manuscript.aspx?sid=QQBNACAANQA2ADcAIABYAEkAVgAgADQAdABvAA2>.

⁹ Driscoll and Hufnagel, “AM 152 1 fol.,” *Stories for all time*. <http://fasn1.ku.dk/browse-manuscripts/manuscript.aspx?sid=QQBNACAAMQA1ADIAIAAxACAAZgBvAGwALgA1>.

¹⁰ Massimiliano Bampi, “Between Tradition and Innovation: The Story of Starkaðr in *Gautreks Saga*” in *The Fantastic in old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles: Preprint Papers of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference, Durham and York, 6th-12th August, 2006*, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Durham University, 2006), 89; Ranisch, introduction to *Gautreks saga*, I-XVIII; Rowe, “Folktale and Parable,” 155.

¹¹ Tulinus, *The Matter of the North*, 46-63; Bampi, “Between Tradition and Innovation,” 89;

¹² Driscoll and Hufnagel, “AM 164 h fol.,” *Stories for all time*. <http://fasn1.ku.dk/browse-manuscripts/manuscript.aspx?sid=QQBNACAAMQA2ADQAIABoACAAZgBvAGwALgA1>.

Incidentally, *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* is alluded to in the explicit of *Dalafífla þátr* (3v), but we are told “hún sé he(r) e(kk)j s[...]” (‘it is not [written?] here’).

AM 152 predates the short in AM 164, an earlier long redaction may still have predated the earliest extant short in AM 567. Neither the late witnesses of the long redaction of *Gautreks saga*, nor the existence in the fourteenth century of the short redaction, can therefore firmly demonstrate its composition in the late Middle Ages. We may proceed, therefore – though not without caution – by following the consensus that the long redaction of the saga was composed c.1300.

Further complicating the textual history of *Gautreks saga*, there is uncertainty regarding its relationship with *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*; the beginning of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* duplicates the last chapter of the short redaction of *Gautreks saga*, in which the aged Gautrekr remarries and fathers two sons, Ketill and Hrólfr, and proceeds to narrate Hrólfr's own adventures.¹³ In a number of extant manuscripts, these two sagas are found directly after one another, occasionally with a single rubric; this is the case in Copenhagen, AM 590 b-c 4to (1600-1699), which contains both sagas under the heading: "Saga af Hrölfe Gautrekssyne."¹⁴ It has been suggested both that *Gautreks saga* was written as a prologue to *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, as the rubric of AM 590 may suggest, and vice versa, though the most recent scholarship has favoured the theory proposed by Lee M. Hollander, that *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* was written as a continuation of *Gautreks saga*, which was later adapted to better fit its sequel.¹⁵

This is of significant import to the dating of *Gautreks saga*, since a near-complete manuscript of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* (Perg. nr 7) is extant from the early fourteenth century, indicating its composition at the end of the thirteenth century; this provides a *terminus ante quem* for the composition of the earliest redaction of *Gautreks saga*, if its priority over *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* is accepted.¹⁶ Though we may be reasonably confident, therefore, in dating the earliest version of *Gautreks saga* to the thirteenth century, there is nevertheless no

¹³ *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, in *Zwei Fornaldarsögur (Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar und Ásmundar saga kappabani) nach Cod. Holm. 74to*, ed. Ferdinand Detter (Halle: Niemeyer, 1891), 1-7.

¹⁴ Driscoll and Hufnagel, "AM 590 b-c, 4^{to}," *Stories for all time*. <<http://fasnl.ku.dk/browse-manuscripts/manuscript.aspx?sid=QQBNACAAANQA5ADAAIABiAC0AYwAgADQAdABvAA2>>.

¹⁵ Paula Vermeyden, "Gautreks saga," in Pulsiano and Wolf, *Medieval Scandinavia*, 224; Chesnutt, "The Content and Meaning of *Gjafa-Refs saga*," 96-97; Lee M. Hollander, "The Relative Age of the *Gautrekssaga* and the *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*," *ANF* 29 (1913), 120-34.

¹⁶ Hans-Peter Naumann, "Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar," in Pulsiano, *Medieval Scandinavia*, 303-304.

indication as to whether the long redaction of *Gautreks saga* predates or postdates *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*. Because no textual relationship between them can be established, it seems that both texts represent independent outgrowths of a short, thirteenth-century *Gautreks saga*, and it remains plausible, therefore, to date the long redaction of *Gautreks saga* contemporaneously with *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, c.1300.

2.2: Folktale and History in *Gautreks saga*

From the middle of the last century to the present, scholarship on *Gautreks saga* has often fallen into two thematic strands. On the one hand, the story of Starkaðr in the long redaction's *Víkars þáttir* has consistently drawn scholarly attention, often in comparison to Saxo Grammaticus' long account of the hero's life; common themes that emerge in these studies are Starkaðr's monstrosity and his relation to giants, and the three great crimes he is condemned to commit.¹⁷

More numerous, however, have been studies— such as Durrenberger's, Cronan's, and Rowe's — dedicated to identifying themes common to all three *þættir* of *Gautreks saga*, though often focussing on *Dalafífla* and *Gjafa-Refs þættir*, and a number of these have drawn explicit comparisons between these two *þættir* and the structure and motifs of Indo-European folktales. Prior to Rowe's aforementioned study, "Folktale and Parable: The Unity of *Gautreks saga*" (1998), James Milroy drew comparisons between a number of motifs in *Gautreks saga*, focussing on *Dalafífla þáttir*, and wider European literary and folktale parallels.¹⁸ Marianne Kalinke has since argued that the *Dalafífla þáttir* of the short redaction should be read not as part of a *fornaldarsaga*, but as a *märchen* warning against endogamy.¹⁹

¹⁷ Noteworthy studies here include: Marlene Ciklamini, "The Problem of Starkaðr," *SS* 43, no.2 (Spring 1971), 169-188; Margaret Clunies Ross, "Poet into Myth: Starkaðr and Bragi," *VMS* 2 (2006), 31-43; Russell Poole, "Some Southern Perspectives on Starcatherus," *VMS* 2 (2006), 141-66; William Layher, "Starkaðr's Teeth," *JEGP* 108, no.1 (January 2009), 1-26.

¹⁸ James Milroy, "The Story of the *Ætternisstapi* in *Gautreks saga*," *Saga-Book* 17 (1966-69), 211-22.

¹⁹ Marianne Kalinke, "Endogamy as the Crux of the "*Dalafífla þáttir*,'" in Ney, Ármann Jakobsson, and Lassen, *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og Virkelighed*, 107-122.

Reading *Dalafífla þáttir* and *Gjafa-Refs þáttir* as folktales has evidently been a productive framework for interpreting their social function, and has contributed much to our understanding of *Gautreks saga*, and of the *fornaldarsögur* more generally. But the proximity of folktale to fictional writing need not preclude a role played by *Dalafífla þáttir* and *Gjafa-Refs þáttir* in medieval Iceland's imagining of an ancient past, nor a dialogue between *Gautreks saga* and traditional models of Norse historiography. I will therefore begin my analysis of *Gautreks saga* by reviewing some of the above interpretations of these two *þættir* and suggesting revised interpretations that allow for both an historiographical and social function of these narratives.

The first of *Gautreks saga's* *þættir* introduces Gautrekr's father, King Gauti of Vestra-Gautland; outside of the *Gautreks saga* tradition, Gauti is named by *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* as the father of King Hringr of Eystra-Gautland, the brother of Gautrekr inn mildi ('the mild/generous').²⁰ Although *Bósa saga's* genealogical claims have been seen as merely affecting an historiographical discourse, a certain Gaut, from whom Gautland is said to take its name, is also named as the father of Gautrekr hinn mildi in Snorri's *Ynglinga saga* in *Heimskringla*.²¹ *Dalafífla þáttir* is thus tied to the canonical legendary history of the North through the name of King Gauti, and provides an origin-story, fictional or otherwise, for his likewise legendary-historical son, Gautrekr, but the narrative itself does not immediately suggest that it was composed with any degree of historicity. Indeed, taking at face value the opening remark of *Dalafífla þáttir* – and this thesis – that characterises it as a *kátlig frásögn*, it has been extrapolated that the entire saga was intended solely as entertainment.²² Of course, such a view of the whole saga seems unwarranted in the light of those analyses that, while accepting the saga's fictionality, suggest a social function to the narrative beyond entertainment, but it remains the case that *Dalafífla þáttir*, in style and content, in no way resembles the traditional model of Norse historiography.²³

The case for reading *Dalafífla þáttir* as a folktale has, however, been well established. Milroy has argued that it represents a variant on a common story type

²⁰ *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* in *FN*, 2:465.

²¹ Vésteinn Ólason, "The Marvellous North," 117 (see also Chapter 5); *Heimskringla*, 1:64.

²² Vermeyden, "Gautreks saga," 224.

²³ For example, Cronan, "Thematic Unity"; Rowe, "Folktale and Parable."

– the birth of a hero – citing a number of motifs common to both these stories and *Dalafífla þátr*: the preface of a king lost while hunting, a herdsman and his dog guarding the house the hero encounters, and (most importantly) death by propulsion from a high place – *Ætternisstapi* in *Dalafífla þátr*.²⁴ A number of folktale motifs are also observed, somewhat more systematically, by Rowe, who identifies them with entries from Inger M. Boberg’s *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature* (1966), such as J1744 (‘Ignorance of Marriage Relations’) and J2518.1-2 (‘Foolish Extremes’), and their non-Scandinavian parallels in Stith Thompson’s *Motif-index of Folk-literature* (1957).²⁵ In a structural analysis of *Dalafífla þátr*, however, Rowe finds the analogous Aarne-Thompson tale type AT1544 (‘The Man Who Got a Night’s Lodging’) to have been inverted; it is the guest, King Gauti, that is generous and good in *Dalafífla þátr*, and havoc is caused not by his trickery but by the host’s miserliness, reversing the roles of a typical AT1544 tale.²⁶

In its range of borrowed motifs, and inversion of a “typical” plot structure, *Dalafífla þátr* may not resemble any one particular folktale-type, but there is certainly a strong enough sense of folklore here to suggest a fictional rather than historiographical impulse on the part of the writer, and therefore the corresponding reaction on the part of the audience. Yet it should be noted that the events narrated would not have necessarily been seen by a medieval audience as implausible; Herman Pálsson and Edwards find a parallel to the suicides in *Dalafífla þátr* in Bede’s *Historia*, and they argue that the tale could easily reflect “neurotic fears in an isolated community.”²⁷

Nevertheless, it seems that the chief purpose of this text is far from historiographical; aside from its folkloric motifs, the *þátr* reveals a strong sense of dark comedy in its presentation of the family of backwoodsmen. Humour seems to lie in the application of a number of folktale motifs concerning the family’s ignorance and foolishness: in addition to the aforementioned J1744 and J2518.1-

²⁴ Milroy, “The Story of the *Ætternisstapi*,” 213-19.

²⁵ Rowe, “Folktale and Parable,” 159-60. Cf. Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, 6 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966); Inger M. Boberg, *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1966).

²⁶ Rowe, “Folktale and Parable,” 156-9. Cf. Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1961).

²⁷ Herman Pálsson and Paul Edwards, introduction to *Gautreks saga and Other Medieval Tales* (London: University of London Press, 1968), 16-7; *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, iv.13.

2, Rowe identifies J1919.7 ('Absurd Disregard of Facts'), J1810 ('Physical Phenomenon Misunderstood'), and J2119.3 ('Absurd Short-sightedness'), of Boberg's *Motif-Index*.²⁸ The almost farcical nature of this *þáttur* certainly suggests that it was intended primarily as a *káttligr frásögn*, but even this comedic folktale, tied loosely to history only through the name of a legendary king, may have conceivably served some function in remembering the specifically pre-Christian past. It has become well established through a number of studies that the theme of sacrifice and devotion to Óðinn, barely present in the short redaction's version *Dalafífla þáttur*, is amplified considerably in the long redaction; the connection between leaping from Ætternisstapi and "going to Óðinn" in Valhöll is made just once by the family in the shorter redaction, but appears a further five times in the long redaction, and is made a major motivation for the suicides.²⁹ It is, therefore, worthwhile exploring what this *þáttur* tells us about medieval perceptions of pre-Christian religious practices in Scandinavia.

It goes without saying that this thirteenth-/fourteenth-century saga can tell us very little of genuine pre-Christian beliefs about Óðinn and Valhöll, but whilst denying that *Dalafífla þáttur* in any way reflects genuine pre-Christian practices, Milroy suggests that the reviser of the long redaction of *Gautreks saga* took an antiquarian approach to the narrative he found, attempting to link the suicides in *Dalafífla þáttur* to his conception of Scandinavia's ancient past, and perhaps more specifically that of Gautland's past.³⁰ Such an antiquarian approach would accord with Clunies Ross' view of the *fornaldarsögur* as "fantastic ethnographies," which attempt to offer a detailed account of an alien society, and to preserve cultural knowledge – genealogies, poetry, and the like. As preserved in the long redaction, *Dalafífla þáttur* seems to adopt an ethnographic mode at various points in the text: the geographical description that opens the saga (see below) describes the reclusive nature of the inhabitants of Gautland's "stórar merkr" ('great forests'), but in particular, Snotra's description of her family's custom, leaping from Ætternisstapi "þegar oss þikir stór kynsl við bera" ('when it seems to us that great wonders occur'), offers an insight into the social structure of the forest family, whose elders

²⁸ Rowe, "Folktale and Parable," 159.

²⁹ Milroy, "The Story of Ætternisstapi," 210-12; Cronan, "Thematic Unity," 98-100.

³⁰ Milroy, "The Story of the Ætternisstapi," 219-22

thus die without burdening younger generations.³¹ Relating this practice more explicitly to Óðinn-worship, the author of the long redaction would seem to be reframing the chronologically ambiguous account in the short redaction as an ethnography of pre-Christian Gautland.

Rowe, however, refutes Milroy's interpretation, and suggests that the Óðinnic practices represented are purely satirical, thus meant to provide entertainment, and in no way "authenticating," but these positions need not be incompatible.³² In recent studies on the medieval reception of pre-Christian belief, Clunies Ross has noted the denigration of pagan worship in many *fornaldarsögur*, while Lassen has highlighted the naivety of pagan peoples and their practices as depicted, "with all [their] absurdities," in historiographical works such as *Gesta Danorum* and the *konungasögur*.³³ In its treatment of the "Dale-fools," *Dalafífla þáttr* certainly seems to embody the latter phenomenon, perhaps indicating an alignment with such historiographical writing. However, a further layer to the satirical and antiquarian function of *Dalafífla þáttr* may be postulated. The absurdity of the family's suicides may be amusing enough *ipso facto*, but *Dalafífla þáttr's* comedic effect may have been greater still due to its particular cultural context – high- and late-medieval Iceland – in which a normative conception of Óðinn-worship existed. The *konungasögur* witness an association in thirteenth-century Iceland between pre-Christian warrior elites and Óðinn – see, for example, *Fagrskinna's* quotation of *Eiríksmál*, in which Eiríkr blóðøx is welcomed into Valhöll by Óðinn – perhaps making the notion that such miserable farmers as the Dalafífl might join Óðinn in the afterlife seem all the more ridiculous.³⁴ The foolish pagans of *Dalafífla þáttr* are thus ignorant of even their own religious norms, let alone the true religion of Christianity.

Kevin J. Wanner has offered an alternative reading of this episode, proposing that *Dalafífla þáttr* in fact sympathises with the "forest family," whose

³¹ *Gautreks saga*, 1, 5.

³² Rowe, "Folktale and Parable," 159-60.

³³ Margaret Clunies Ross, "The Reception in Saga Literature," in *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: Research and Reception*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, vol.1 *From the Middle Ages to c. 1830* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 174-76; Annette Lassen, "The Reception in Medieval Historiography," in Clunies Ross, *Pre-Christian Religions of the North*, 159-69 (169).

³⁴ *Fagrskinna – Nóregs Konunga Tal*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson (Reykjavík: Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1985).

conception of suicide as a means of entering Valhøll, usually reserved for kings and warriors, subverts the royal and martial aristocratic monopoly of a good afterlife.³⁵ Wanner draws parallels between the family's suicides "while in a state of financial solvency" and references in *Ynglinga saga* to one's wealth and possessions granting entry to Valhøll; but while this may hold true for Skafnartungur and his wife – who die with their *þræll* ('slave') – the argument is critically undermined by the deaths of the brothers Gillingr, Fjølmoðr, and Imsigull, who kill themselves only after they perceive their inheritance to be diminished.³⁶ Compounded by the fact that Fjølmoðr and Imsigull are said to kill themselves for the most trivial of reasons – snails had crawled over Fjølmoðr's gold, and a bird had eaten a single grain of Imsigull's corn – *Dalafífla þáttur's* mockery of the family and their peculiar beliefs remains the most plausible reading. Nevertheless, for *Dalafífla þáttur* to be subversive of royal and aristocratic primacy, as Wanner proposes, a normative conception of Valhøll and the cult of Óðinn is still required; that is, the text would still require a widespread, shared understanding in thirteenth-century Iceland of heathen practices in the pre-Christian past. The evidently foolish and comic self-sacrifice of the Dalafífl seems to be a dark jest at the customs of Scandinavia's pre-Christian past, and so the ethnographic account of the pagan past in this *þáttur* serves the purpose of enabling its amusement, and is, therefore, an integral part.

Gjafa-Refs þáttur adopts a similarly light-hearted tone to *Dalafífla þáttur*, and perhaps also a similarly fictional mode. The humour in *Gjafa-Refs þáttur*, however, is distinct from the absurd, dark comedy of ignorant peasants killing themselves, and rather lies in the more cheerful tale of a simple man – the *kolbítur* Refr, admittedly guided by the parsimonious but shrewd Jarl Neri – outwitting famous and powerful kings, including Gautrekr himself, by playing their generosity against one another, each king wishing to equal or surpass the others' generosity in the previous gift exchange. *Gjafa-Refs þáttur* lacks the numerous recognisable motifs that tie *Dalafífla þáttur* to the narrative genre of folktale, but nevertheless conforms to a particular story type, and a parallel may be drawn between *Gjafa-Refs þáttur* and a particular group of *þættir* found primarily in the *konungasögur*. In two articles

³⁵ Kevin J. Wanner, "Adjusting Judgements of *Gauta þáttur's* Forest Family," *SS* 80, no.4 (Winter 2008), 397-405.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 401-3; *Heimskringla*, 1:20, 22; *Gautrekssaga*, 9-11.

examining the structure and themes of some *þættir*, Joseph Harris has identified a discrete genre of approximately thirty *Íslendinga þættir* that examine the relationship between a Norwegian king and one of his Icelandic subjects, most of which are structured on dispute and reconciliation with “humane and conciliatory themes.”³⁷ Though Ármann Jakobsson has seriously problematised the notion of the *þáttir* as a literary genre, this body of “King-and-Icelander *þættir*” has endured into recent scholarship as a recognisable story type.³⁸

At the outset, a few notable differences may be seen between *Gjafa-Refs þáttir* and these *Íslendinga þættir*; in *Gjafa-Refs þáttir*, the setting is the same ancient Scandinavia of the *fornaldarsögur*, rather than the courts of firmly historical Norwegian kings (Óláfr Tryggvason and Haraldr inn harðráði Sigurðarson, for example), and the protagonist Refr is not Icelandic but Norwegian. Also, *Gjafa-Refs þáttir* is not exactly that of the dispute/reconciliation type (though Refr does eventually marry King Gautrekr’s daughter and become his jarl), but is rather structured upon a series of gift-exchanges. In this regard, however, it does resemble three *þættir* that Harris identifies as altering the basic dispute/reconciliation structure, by contrasting the courts of two different kings.³⁹ To this group belongs perhaps the most well-known of the *Íslendinga þættir*, *Auðunar þáttir vestfirzka* (‘Tale of Auðunn of the West Fjords’), in which the protagonist Auðunn plays the generosity of King Haraldr Sigurðarson and King Sveinn Úlfsson of Denmark against each other.⁴⁰ Indeed, persuasive comparison between *Gjafa-Refs þáttir* and *Auðunar þáttir* has been made by Rowe, though her assertion that *Auðunar þáttir* was used as source material for *Gjafa-Refs* is less than certain.⁴¹

³⁷ Joseph Harris, “Genre and Narrative Structure in some *Íslendinga þættir*,” *SS* 44, no.1 (Winter 1972), 1-27; “Theme and Genre in some *Íslendinga þættir*,” *SS* 48, no.1 (Winter 1976), 1-28 (23).

³⁸ Ármann Jakobsson, “The Life and Death of the Medieval Icelandic Short Story,” *JEGP* 112 (2013), 257–91; Elizabeth Ashman Rowe and Joseph Harris, “Short Prose Narrative (*þáttir*),” in McTurk, *Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, 463.

³⁹ Harris, “Genre and Narrative Structure,” 17-20.

⁴⁰ *Auðunar þáttir vestfirzka* is first attested in *Morkinskinna*, though it is the *Flateyrbók* (c.1387) redaction that has recently been translated in William Ian Miller’s influential study. *Morkinskinna*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, (Reykjavík: Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 2011), 1:217-23; William Ian Miller, *Audun and the Polar Bear: Luck, Law, and Largesse in a Medieval Tale of Risky Business* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

⁴¹ Rowe, “Folktale and Parable,” 161-64.

Gjafa-Refs þátr can therefore be seen as resembling a widespread story type, akin to the *Íslendinga þættir*, yet the ubiquity of this kind of narrative need not rule out the possibility of some historiographical function. There is certainly nothing historical about Auðunn, or the *þátr* in which his gift of a polar bear earns him wealth and respect, but the kings he visits – Haraldr Sigurðsson and Sveinn Úlfsson – are certainly historical, and in its extant manuscript contexts – in *Morkinskinna* and *Flateyjarbók* – *Auðunar þátr* is integrated into historiographical works. The attachment of this fictional narrative to historical kings exemplifies what Marlene Ciklamini has termed the “historicised folktale,” and the Norse impulse to anchor *exempla* such as this to a “recognisable historical time-frame and setting.”⁴² The moral and didactic message of the tale is thus given weight through a plausibility attained by attaching it to an authoritative text. Furthermore, we may regard many *þættir*, including *Auðunar þátr*, as not only historicised by their setting (though by implication, still essentially fictitious), but as an integral part of historiography itself; Ármann Jakobsson has made numerous arguments that the many *þættir* of the *Morkinskinna* are “vital” to the way the saga narrates history, their didactic message being dependent on their validation of the saga’s characterisation of individual kings.⁴³

Given the similarity between the narratives, it is conceivable that this has also been the case with *Gjafa-Refs þátr*; its didactic message is less immediate than that of *Auðunar þátr*, with its devout Christian protagonist’s pilgrimage to Rome, but Cronan and Rowe both identify, though to varying extents, a proto-Christian morality bestowed retrospectively on the protagonists of this tale.⁴⁴ However, the consensus on both *þættir* is that they are, at their core, *exempla* for both king and subject on how to navigate relationships built on gift-exchange and reciprocity.⁴⁵

The setting of *Gjafa-Refs þátr* is less concretely historical, by modern empiricist standards, than that of *Auðunar þátr*, but the kings Refr visits – Hrólf

⁴² Marlene Ciklamini, “Exempla in an Old Norse Historiographic Mold,” *Neophilologus* 81, no.1 (January 1997), 71-87.

⁴³ Ármann Jakobsson, “King and Subject in *Morkinskinna*,” *Skandinavistik* 28 (1998), 111-12; see also Ármann Jakobsson, “Life and Death.”

⁴⁴ Cronan, “Thematic Unity,” 117-9; Rowe, “Folktale and Parable,” 162-3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*; Miller, *Audun and the Polar Bear*.

kraki, Ella of England – belong as much to Nordic historiographical traditions of pre-Christian Scandinavia as to legendary fictions, and an ÆElla is widely attested as an historical king of Northumbria. The certain King Óláfr that Refr visits in the *þáttr* is less readily identifiable, but Jarl Neri’s description of his character is telling:⁴⁶

Jarl mællti: “...Konungr heitir Óláfr ok liggr í hernaði; hann hefir átta tigu skipa; hann liggr úti vetr ok varmt sumar á sjó.”

The jarl spoke: “...There is a king called Óláfr, who is constantly out raiding. He has eighty ships. He spends the winter and warm summer lying out at sea.”

From this description, it seems clear we are to identify this Óláfr as a *sækonungr* (‘sea-king’) of the kind that Snorri Sturluson describes in *Ynglinga saga*:⁴⁷

Í þann tíma herjuðu konungar mjök í Svíaveldi, bæði Danir ok Norðmenn. Váru margir sækonungar, þeir er réðu liði miklu ok áttu engi lǫnd. Þótti sá einn með fullu heita mega sækonungr, er hann svaf aldri undir sótkum ási, ok drakk aldri at arinshorni.

In those times [after Hrólfr kraki’s death] kings raided a great deal in Sweden, both Danes and Northmen [Norwegians]. Many were sea-kings, those who commanded a great army but owned no lands. A man was thought to truly be called a sea-king, if he never slept under a sooty beam, and never drank in the hearth corner.

That Óláfr “liggr úti vetr ok varmt sumar á sjó” corresponds to the characterisation that a *sækonungr* “svaf aldri undir sótkum ási, ok drakk aldri at arins horni.” Óláfr is furthermore depicted as especially warlike – he “liggr í hernaði” and is “hinn frægazti herkonungr” (‘the most famous war-king’), and the gift that Refr requests of Óláfr is not material wealth, but the command of his ships and army – which reflects the reputation Snorri ascribes to the *sækonungar* as raiders.⁴⁸ No Óláfr is named by Snorri in the list of *sækonungar* that appears in his *Edda*, though from his description in *Gautreks saga* Óláfr seems to represent a certain model of king thought to belong to this period of Scandinavia’s history; the proliferation of *sækonungar*, contemporary to Hrólfr kraki, is evident in the above quote, and

⁴⁶ *Gautreks saga*, 43.

⁴⁷ *Heimskringla* 1:59-60.

⁴⁸ *Gautreks saga*, 43-46.

numerous other named *sækonungar*, from *Ynglinga saga*.⁴⁹ If any divide between the legendary and historical past can be drawn – which Mortensen has cautioned against – then the setting of *Gjafa-Refs þátr* certainly belongs to the former.⁵⁰ But it is nevertheless firmly anchored in a *specific* legendary past, identifiable by the names of kings canonical in Norse historiography, and an archetypal figure representative of a model of kingship that characterised the period in the imagination of Iceland’s preeminent historian.

As I have suggested, it seems likely that this same phenomenon – tying a seemingly fictitious parable to the legendary past – has taken place in the development of *Dalafífla þátr*. Further to the emphasised role of Óðinn in the long redaction, Milroy raises the possibility that the narrative of *Dalafífla þátr* originally had nothing to do with Gautrekr, his father Gauti, or Gautland; in both the long and short redactions of the saga, Gauti is named just a few times in the *þátr*, usually at the beginning and end, and is otherwise referred to simply as “konungr,” as if the composer or editor of the saga has added these direct references to Gauti “in the most convenient places to a story that was not originally about him.”⁵¹ According to the pattern of “historicised folktale” that Ciklamini advocates, the tale of an anonymous protagonist encountering the backwoodsmen of the *Dalafífla þátr* may have at some point become attached to the legendary-historical King Gauti, perhaps when the saga was committed to writing, but in any case under the same impulse to historicise such folktales.

2.3: Geography in *Gautreks saga*

It is not only Old Norse saga-literature that is embedded with, and indeed indebted to folktales and other orally transmitted stories, but also many European medieval literatures, including, as Catherine Cubitt has demonstrated, Anglo-Saxon hagiography.⁵² It emerges in Cubitt’s study that the incorporation of elements from folktales and other oral stories is intrinsically tied to highly localised saints’ cults;

⁴⁹ Snorri Sturluson, *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), 1:100.

⁵⁰ Mortensen, “The Status of the ‘Mythical’ Past.”

⁵¹ Milroy, “The Story of the *Ætternisstapi*,” 219-20.

⁵² Catherine Cubitt, “Folklore and Historiography: Oral Stories and the Writing of Anglo-Saxon History,” in Tyler and Balzaretto, *Narrative and History*, 189-223.

such a degree of localisation, in turn, could offer authentication to narratives that incorporate fictive elements, as Monika Otter has demonstrated with regard to the specific topographical references in the *passio* of Saints Alban and Amphibalus.⁵³ Throughout her study, Otter draws attention to the spatial frame of reference of the many episodes that challenge, by introducing folktale or otherwise fictional elements, the reliability of twelfth-century historiographical works; in doing so, she demonstrates that on a macro and micro level, geography and topography are crucial to these texts' maintenance and destabilisation of truthfulness. Thus, Otter argues, toponyms are used by Geoffrey of Monmouth to anchor the narrative of his *Historia Regum Britanniae* to the "storied" British landscape, while subterranean "other worlds" are used by a number of authors to create fictional, self-referential spaces within the text.⁵⁴ These examples point to a connectedness between the places and spaces represented in a text and its folktale or otherwise apparently fictional elements; it is therefore worth interrogating how the geographical and spatial frames of reference in *Gautreks saga* function in establishing the historicity and fictionality of its narratives.

In the following section, I will argue that the representation of the geographic and spatial settings of *Gautreks saga* creates multiple levels of historicity and fictionality in the text, anchoring parts of the narrative to the textual world of Norse historiography. My framework for this analysis will be Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope (literally, 'time-space'), which stresses the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" and the effect one axis has upon the other. Bakhtin notes, for example, that the abstract sense of "adventure time" – in which romance-heroes encounter or seek out adventure, outside of any definite timeline – requires an abstract alien world, and that the spatial "castle" setting imbues the Gothic novel with an archaic, historicised sense of time; crucially, the chronotope is argued to have significant import for the genre of a text.⁵⁵

⁵³ Cubitt, "Folklore and Historiography, 190-96. Otter, *Inventiones*, 45-51.

⁵⁴ Otter, *Inventiones*, 69-70, 98-110.

⁵⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84-258.

From the establishment of the corpus in the nineteenth century, the *fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* have been defined, in the loosest terms, by their temporal and spatial setting. Recently, however, Phelpstead has offered a more sophisticated reading of the representation of time and space in the *fornaldarsögur* according to Bakhtin's principles of the chronotope, and has convincingly argued that *Yngvars saga víðförla*, in its representation of achronological "adventure time," ought to be regarded as a *fornaldarsaga*, despite its setting in eleventh-century Garðaríki (the Kievan Rus').⁵⁶ The chronotope is, therefore, a demonstrably productive framework for analysing genre in Old Norse literature, specifically the *fornaldarsögur*, and in analysing its spatial dimension we may situate *Gautreks saga* generically closer to the historiographical *konungasögur* than has hitherto been recognised.

Gautreks saga begins with King Gauti ruling over Vestra-Gautland, a kingdom belonging to both legendary and medieval Scandinavian history, but the core narrative of *Dalafífla þáttur* takes place "á morkinni" (broadly 'the forest,' though also a 'march' or border land).⁵⁷ The *þáttur* ends briefly with Snotra and her son returning to Gauti's court, where Gautrekr becomes king over Gautland, before the saga takes us "norðr í Noreg" ('north to Norway') where most of *Víkars þáttur* is set.⁵⁸ After Starkaðr has travelled to the kings of Uppsala, *Gjafa-Refs þáttur* turns briefly once more to Gautrekr's rule over Gautland, before Refr visits Jarl Neri in Upplönd, southern Norway; Refr is then sent by Neri to Gautland, England, Denmark, and finally Gautland again, where he becomes a jarl under Gautrekr.⁵⁹

Among these numerous named locations, "the forest" of *Dalafífla þáttur* alone stands out as uniquely anonymous, and it is no coincidence that this should be the case for the *þáttur* of *Gautreks saga* that most resembles a folktale. The remoteness of the farmstead is emphasised by the saga author in the aforementioned quite lengthy description of the forest in which it lies; its inhabitants "flýit hofðu af almannaveg" ('had flown from the well-peopled path') and "lifðu svó út allan sinn alldr, at þeir fundu öngva aðra menn en þá, sem hjá þeim vóru" ('lived out all their lives thus, that they met no other men than those who

⁵⁶ Phelpstead, "Adventure-Time in *Yngvars saga víðförla*."

⁵⁷ *Gautreks saga*, 2; Cleasby/Vigfusson, s.v. "MÖRK," 444.

⁵⁸ *Gautreks saga*, 11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 30-49.

were with them').⁶⁰ The isolation of the farmstead Gauti visits is central to the characterisation of its inhabitants and to the narrative of the *þáttr*, but it also serves to detach the narrative from the familiar geographies of *Íslendingasögur*, *konungasögur*, and even the legendary worlds of other *fornaldarsögur*, placing it in an entirely anonymous locale and thus emphasising its fictionality.

Indeed, the circumstances by which Gauti finds himself among these backwoodsmen are near identical to those by which Gibbon finds adventure in the more demonstrably fictional *Gibbons saga*, a *riddarasaga* that combines the motifs of a bridal-quest and marriage to a fairy.⁶¹ In both sagas the protagonist pursues a stag while hunting in a forest, and becomes separated from his party; Gibbon is then magically transported to Greece, while Gauti in *Gautreks saga*, somewhat more plausibly, encounters the isolated farmstead. The use of this motif in *Gautreks saga* has been described as a “parody of that commonplace of romance, the hero finding adventure when he becomes lost in the forest during a hunt” by Rowe, who argues that a “serious” reading of the episode is invalid, as Gauti remains “unchanged and unchallenged” throughout the *þáttr*.⁶² Nevertheless, the motif of the protagonist isolated when hunting is, like much of *Dalafífla þáttr*, one well used in folklore: Thompson’s motif N771 (‘King (prince) lost on hunt has adventures’) is found in a number of Indo-European folktales, and Milroy likewise identifies this motif as a commonplace specifically in medieval romance.⁶³ The use of this motif, perhaps familiar to a medieval audience from the more palpably fictional narratives of folktale and romance, may have therefore indicated to the audience the fictionality of the narrative that followed in *Dalafífla þáttr*.

Yet before *Dalafífla þáttr* is truly underway, there is an attempt by the author to anchor this folktale setting to a specific, real geography; Gauti’s kingdom of Vestra-Gautland, belonging to both legendary and contemporary Scandinavian history, is placed “milli Noregs ok Svíþjóðar fyrir austan Kjölu alla, ok skilr Gautelfr milli Upplanda ok Gautlands” (‘between Norway and Sweden in the east of the Kjölur [‘keel,’ the Scandinavian Mountains], and the Gaut River separates Upplönd

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶¹ *Gibbons saga*, ed. R. I. Page (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1960).

⁶² Rowe, ‘Folktale and Parable’, 157.

⁶³ Thompson, *Motif-Index*, 5:130-1; Milroy, ‘The Story of the *Ætternisstapi*’, 214.

and Gautland’).⁶⁴ This precise geography gives the impression of a knowledgeable, authoritative narrator, one that may well have impressed an untraveled Icelandic audience. The added detail of “stórar merkr” (‘great forests’), impassable except when the ground is frozen, may have further impressed the narrator’s authority, and thus reliability, upon the audience, but more importantly heightens the reality of the setting.⁶⁵

It has been proposed above, following Milroy’s suggestion, that *Dalafífla þáttur* was historicised by its attachment to the legendary-historical figure of King Gauti. Gauti, and his son Gautrekr, locate this *þáttur* in a distant but distinct past, and to an even greater extent than their title as kings of Vestra-Gautland, the geographic survey at the beginning of the saga locates it in reality on a spatial axis. Furthermore, the location of *Dalafífla þáttur* in Gautland seems particularly relevant to its theme of heathen practices and dedication to Óðinn. Useful comparison may be made here with two verses of the eleventh-century poem *Austrfararvísur*, composed by the skald Sigvatr Þórðarson about his diplomatic mission to Sweden on behalf of King Óláfr Haraldsson. According to Snorri’s account in *Óláfs saga helga* in *Heimskringla*, Sigvatr is denied hospitality on four occasions as he travels east, and several of the farmers he encounters are overtly portrayed as heathen, fearing Óðinn and conducting *álfablót* (‘elf worship,’ or ‘sacrifice to the elves’):⁶⁶

Síðan fóru þeir um Gautland, ok kómu at kveldi á þann bæ, er Hof heitir. Þar var byrgð hurð, ok kómust þeir eigi inn. Hjónin segja, at þar var heilagt. Braut hurfu þeir þaðan. Sigvatr kvað:

Réðk til Hofis at hœfa;
hurð vas aptr, en spurðumk,
– inn settak nef nenninn
niðrlútt – fyrir utan.
Orð gatk fæst af fyrðum;
(flögð baðk), en þau sǫgðu,
– hnekkðumk heiðnir rekkar –
heilagt (við þau deila).

⁶⁴ *Gautrekssaga*, 1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Heimskringla*, 2:136-37; R. D. Fulk, ed. “Sigvatr Þórðarson: *Austrfararvísur* 4-5,” in *SkP* 1, 589-91.

Pá kom hann at ǫðrum garði. Stóð þar húsfreyja í durum, bað hann eigi þar inn koma, segir, at þau ætti álfa blót. Sigvatr kvað:

‘Gakkat inn,’ kvað ekkja,
‘armi drengr, en lengra;
hræðumk ek við Óðins,
– erum heiðnir vér – reiði.’
Rýgr kvazk inni eiga
óþekk, sús mér hnekkði,
álfablót, sem úlfi
ótvín, í bæ sínum.

Afterwards, they went through Gautland, and came in the evening to that farm, which is called Hof. The door there was shut, and they did not go in. The servant said that it was a holy day; they turned toward the road from there. Sigvatr spoke:

I resolved to aim for Hof; the door was barred, but I made enquiries from outside; resolute, I stuck my down-bent nose in. I got very little response from the people, but they said [it was] holy; the heathen men drove me off; I bade the ogress bandy words with them.

Then he came to another farm; there the wife stood in the doorway, and asked him not to come in there, saying that they held an *álfablót*. Sigvatr spoke:

‘Do not come any farther in, wretched fellow,’ said the woman; ‘I fear the wrath of Óðinn; we are heathen.’ The disagreeable female, who drove me away like a wolf without hesitation, said they were holding a sacrifice to the elves inside her farmhouse.

Sigvatr’s *Austrfararvísur* itself does not locate these encounters in Gautland by name, though the third verse following those which I have quoted is located “fyrir austan | Eiðaskog” (‘east of Eiðaskog’ [Eidskog, south-westernmost Norway]), which can only indicate Gautland.⁶⁷ It is presumably this reference that prompted Snorri to locate this leg of Sigvatr’s journey in Gautland in his prose account. The place-name Hof in the first stanza cited is also noteworthy; Snorri identifies it as the name of a farm in Gautland, and alone or as part of a compound it is a common enough place-name. However, as a common noun *hof* also refers frequently to a pre-Christian temple or building in which worship is conducted.⁶⁸ Of

⁶⁷ Fulk, ed. “Sigvatr Þórðarson: *Austrfararvísur* 8,” in *SkP* 1, 594-95.

⁶⁸ Cleasby/Vigfusson, s.v. “HOF,” 277; Judith Jesch, *The Viking Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2015), 121-26.

course, it is of secondary interest whether these eleventh-century verses authentically reflect contemporary pre-Christian practices, but, to judge from Snorri's use of them in *Heimskringla*, it was clearly natural for a thirteenth-century historian to associate Gautland with sacrifice and worship of Óðinn. Gautland seems, therefore, to have carried a reputation in medieval Iceland for such practices, which *Gautreks saga* clearly makes use of in locating the Dalafífl in Gautland, and which in turn may have been sustained by *Gautreks saga*.

The content alone of this geographical survey is enough to suggest that the author of *Gautreks saga* sought to imbue his *kátligri frásögn* about Gauti with a sense of reality, by locating it in relation to a real geography. Equally significant, however, maybe the very inclusion of a geographic digression itself (and digression is an apt description of this passage; the geographical survey and description of the “stórar merkr,” inhabited by bandits, is bookended by the promise of a “kátliga frásögn af einum konungi, þeim er Gauti hét” and the story itself which begins: “Þessi konungr Gauti, er fyrr nefndum vér” [‘this king Gauti, whom we named before’]).⁶⁹

Such surveys are something of a topos of medieval historiography; Otter has identified the geographical *descriptio Britanniae*, borrowed from early British historians such as Bede and Gildas, ultimately owing to Orosius's *De temporum ratione*, as highly significant in twelfth-century English historiography, and has treated at length its metaphorical function in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and the histories it influenced.⁷⁰ While the short passage in *Gautreks saga* does not seem to function in the way that Otter identifies, it may nonetheless be appropriate to view it in the context of a historiographical tradition. Geoffrey's *Historia* was among the first Latin texts translated in Iceland, in the late twelfth century, and Bede's *Historia* may have also been translated.⁷¹ Certainly Geoffrey's *Historia* was highly influential in Norse literature, and the topos of the

⁶⁹ *Gautreks saga*, 1-2.

⁷⁰ Otter, *Inventiones*, 71-92. See also A. H. Merills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁷¹ Stefanie Würth, “Historiography and Pseudo-Historiography,” 157. The evidence for Bede's *Historia* in Icelandic is, in fact, more circumstantial than Würth acknowledges, and rests on a probable quote from the *Historia* in Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók*. “Beda Venerabilis (ca. 672/3-735),” *Íslandia Latina*, ed. Gottskálf Jónsson <<http://islandialatina.hum.ku.dk/Show.aspx?Author=16>>.

geographical survey was adopted into some of the earliest extant Scandinavian historiography; *Historia Norwegie* begins with a lengthy geographical description, which Stefanie Würth has suggested was borrowed from Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*.⁷²

The geographic survey, with its somewhat ethnographic description of the inhabitants of Gautland's forests, serves then to anchor the anonymous, folkloric space of *Dalafífla þáttr*, "á mörkinni," to a real and plausible geography; the details provided in the description help make the setting more immediate, and appear to engage with an historiographic tradition of geographic *descriptions*. In light of this, we may suggest that the pursuit of the stag represents movement from a plausible, "real" world into a fictional space within it, demonstrating, as Phelpstead's application of Bakhtinian chronotopes has for *Yngvars saga víðförla*, the possibilities for multiple spatial and temporal settings operating in a single text, offering differing levels of fictionality.⁷³

In the quite self-conscious transition between *Dalafífla þáttr* and *Víkars þáttr*, when the saga author takes the audience back "norðr í Nóregs," we are also taken back into the saga's concrete Scandinavian geography, and perhaps therefore out of the folktale and back into an historical chronotope. The characters introduced as *Víkars þáttr* opens are rulers of petty kingdoms – Upplönd, Hǫrðaland, and Þeimerkr – all in the relatively close geography of southern Norway.⁷⁴ The geography of *Víkars þáttr* therefore bears a much closer resemblance to that of the *konungasögur*, and the movements between these petty kingdoms is both in keeping with the wars of their rulers in *Gautreks saga* and the structure of historiographical sagas such as *Heimskringla*. The following quote from the latter text (from *Haralds saga hárfagra*, concerning the resistance to Haraldr's rise to supremacy in Norway) is illustrative of the close correspondence between the geographies of *Gautreks saga* and the Icelandic historiography of Norway's kings – I have italicised those kingdoms that are also named in *Víkars þáttr*.⁷⁵

⁷² *Historia Norwegie*, eds. Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen, trans. Peter Fisher (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2006), 52-75; Würth, "Historiography and Pseudo-Historiography," 159.

⁷³ Phelpstead, "Adventure-Time in *Yngvars saga víðförla*."

⁷⁴ *Gautreks saga*, 11.

⁷⁵ *Heimskringla*, 1:114.

Tíðendi þau spurðusk sunnan ór landi, at *Hǫrðar* ok *Rygir*, *Egðir* ok *Pilir* sǫmnuðusk saman... Váru þeir upphafsmenn *Eiríkr Hǫrðalandskonungr*... *Kjǫtvi* inn auðgi, konungr af *Qgðum*... af *Þelexmǫrk* bræðr tveir, *Hróaldr hrygggr* and *Haddr* inn harði.

News arrived from the south of the country, that the men of *Hǫrðaland* and the men of *Rogaland*, the men of *Agðir* and the men of *Þelexmǫrk* gathered together... the instigators were King *Eiríkr of Hǫrðaland*... *Kjǫtvi* the Wealthy, king of *Agðir*... two brothers from *Þelexmǫrk*, *Hróaldr* the Sad and *Haddr* the Harsh.

We might tentatively suggest that the close correspondence between the spatial axis of *Heimskringla* – that is, its geography, demonstrated here – and that of *Víkars þáttur* invited a similar reception of the texts. This analysis is strengthened, furthermore, by the fact that *Víkars þáttur* barely strays from this familiar geography of the *konungasögur*.

Of peoples and places further afield than Sweden and Norway, we hear only of King *Sísarr* of *Kænugarðr* (*Kiev*), whom *Víkarr* and *Starkaðr* defeat in battle not in *Garðrriki* (the *Kievan Rus'*), but on the more familiar *Lake Vænir*, Sweden.⁷⁶ This King *Sísarr*, otherwise unattested in medieval Icelandic literature, may not have been a reference to a specific figure, real or legendary, in the (probably) twelfth-century verses quoted in *Víkars þáttur*, but rather may have stood for a generic king of the *Rus'*, and thus demonstrate the breadth of enemies *Víkarr* and *Starkaðr* defeated. The author of *Víkars þáttur*, turning the *Víkarsbálkr* verses into prose, is simply following his source material in the inclusion of this *Sísarr*, and so it is unclear whether in *Gautreks saga* this figure was regarded with any historicity, but he seems to fulfil the same function as in the verses. We might, therefore, call this battle against *Sísarr* an *argumentum* – a victory that did not occur but conceivably could have, exemplary of *Starkaðr's* prowess.

Finally, we have in *Víkars þáttur* a passing reference to *Álfheimr*, where *Starkaðr's* grandfather and namesake, *Starkaðr Áludrengr*, is said to have kidnapped King *Álfr's* daughter *Álfhildr*.⁷⁷ We must note, first of all, that the *Álfheimr* referenced here is almost certainly the legendary-historical kingdom and not the “Elf-World” of Norse pre-Christian cosmology, the evidence for which is

⁷⁶ *Gautreks saga*, 19.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

scant indeed; it is mentioned only in the Eddic poem *Grímnismál*, in which Þórr is said to preside over it, and in Snorri's *Edda*, though his construction of the *álfar*, as Terry Gunnell has noted, seems to have been based on the Christian mythology of angels and demons.⁷⁸

In contrast to this, the kingdom of Álfheimr is considerably better attested in historiography, where in *Heimskringla* Snorri places it “millum Raumelfar ok Gautelfar” (‘between the Raum River and Gaut River’), and further references a number of its kings in *Ynglinga saga*, *Halfdanar saga svarta*, and *Haralds saga ins hárfagri*.⁷⁹ The majority of references to the legendary-historical Álfheimr come, however, from the historiographic tradition of the Battle of Brávellir, in which kings of Álfheimr and their progeny are said to have fought. In *Gesta Danorum*, Saxo lists among the companions of Haraldr hilditǫnn (‘wartooth’) at the battle the sons of a certain king Gandal – “aduenerant et editi Gandal Sene, quos Haraldi familiares clientela uetus effecerat” (‘the sons of Gandalf the Old had also arrived, intimate acquaintances of Haraldr through their longstanding dependence on him’) – an account which is largely mirrored in *Sögubrot af nokkrum fornkonungum* (‘Fragment of a saga about certain ancient kings’), which confirms the presence of Gandálfr’s sons by Haraldr’s side.⁸⁰ Finally, in the genealogies found in *Sögubrot* and in the genealogies that follow the short text in *Flateyjarbók* (Reykjavík, GKS 1005 fol.) known as *Hversu Noregr byggðst* (‘How Norway was settled’), Ragnarr loðbrók is connected to Álfheimr, through marriage of his father (Sigurðr Hringr) to a certain Álfhildr, daughter of either Álfr or Gandálfr.⁸¹

The traditions of Álfheimr are, therefore, quite confused and at times contradictory, but the royal line of this kingdom is consistently tied to traditions of two of the most canonical landmarks of Norse legendary history – the Battle of Brávellir and the Danish king Ragnarr loðbrók. The weight of evidence strongly suggests, therefore, that in the context in which *Gautreks saga* was written and

⁷⁸ Terry Gunnell, “How ‘Elvish’ were the *Álfar*?” in *Constructing Nations, Reconstructing Myth: Essays in Honour of T. A. Shippey*, eds. Andrew Wawn with Graham Johnson and John Walter (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 121-29.

⁷⁹ *Heimskringla*, 1:79.

⁸⁰ *Gesta Danorum*, viii.2.8; *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, in *Danakonungasögur: Skjöldunga saga, Knýtlinga saga, Ágrip af sögu Danakonunga*, ed. Bjarni Guðnason (Reykjavík: Íslensk fornritafélag, 1982) 62.

⁸¹ *Sögubrot*, 58-59, 70; *Flateyjarbók*, ed. Sigurður Nordal (Akraness: Flateyjarútgáfan, 1944), 1:27.

read, the kingdom of Álfheimr belonged firmly to historiography and not mythology. However, it is at least possible that, in its name, Álfheimr retained certain mythological or supernatural connotations; Gunnell considers that the two realms may not have been differentiated, noting *Sögubrot*'s testimony of the uncanny beauty of the *álfar*.⁸²

þat er kunnigt í ǫllum fornum frásögum um það folk, er Álfar hétu, at þat var miklu fríðara en engi ǫnnur mannkind á Norðrlöndum, því at allt foreldri Álfhildar, móður hans, ok allr ættbálkr var kominn frá Álfi gamla. Þat vǫru þá kallaðar Álfa ættir.

it is known in all ancient stories of those people, who are called *Álfar*, that they were much more beautiful than any other human beings in the Northern lands, because the parents of Álfhildr, his [Ragnarr loðbrók's] mother, and indeed the entire extended family goes back to Álfr the Old. They were called the *gens* of Álfr.

It may not be coincidental, therefore, that it is in relation to the kings and daughters of Álfheimr that the god Þórr slays Starkaðr's eight-armed grandfather, the giant Starkaðr Áludrengr, an overtly mythological and supernatural tale in the hero's family history. A more fantastic atmosphere is therefore lent to this passage in the inclusion of Álfheimr, its king, and his daughter, despite their belonging to historiographic traditions. Nevertheless, the mythological associations remain peripheral to the narrative of *Víkars þátt*, as a prologue to Starkaðr's life; certainly, with its place in legendary history firmly attested, the reference to Álfheimr here does not detract from the striking resemblance of *Víkars þátt*'s geography to that of the *konungasögur*.

2.4: Verse Quotation in *Gautreks saga*

As I set out in Chapter 1, one of the key methodologies of this thesis will be analysing the verse quotations in the *fornaldarsögur* as either authenticating or situational, according to how they are framed in relation to the prose, following the application of these categories to the *Íslendingasögur* and *konungasögur*. Since the objective of this study is to argue for the historiographical function of the *fornaldarsögur*, the form and function of verse quotation in the *konungasögur* will be my primary point of comparison, and so I will first describe this in brief, before

⁸² *Sögubrot*, 70. Gunnell, "How 'Elvish' were the *Álfar*?" 126-27.

turning to the verse quotations in *Gautreks saga*. For ease of reference, we may take Snorri's *Heimskringla* as our chief example of the *konungasögur*, demonstrating what has been considered the most sophisticated use of authenticating verse.⁸³ Generally speaking, we see Snorri quote an excerpted verse from a longer poem of a known skald, corroborating what has been stated in the prose. To give just one example from the hundreds of authenticating verses in *Heimskringla*, we see in *Óláfs saga helga* a verse of Óttarr svarti's *Höfuðlausn* ('Head-ransom') quoted to verify Snorri's account of Óláfr's raids in Sweden. According to the prose, Óláfr sailed to Gotland one autumn and was offered payment in return for peace, which he accepted; Snorri then quotes the verse, using the formula "Svá segir Óttarr":⁸⁴

Gildir, komt at gjaldi
 gotneskum her, flotna;
 þorðut þér at varða
 þjóðlond firar røndu.
 Rann, en maðr of minna
 margr býr of þrek (varga
 hungur frák austr) an yngvi,
 Eysýslu lið (þeyja).

Supporter of seafarers [RULER], you forced the Gotland host to [pay] tribute; the men did not dare to defend the nation's lands against you with the shield. The people of Saaremaa ran, and many a man possesses less courage than the king. I heard the hunger of the wolves to be diminished in the east.

A great number of verse quotations in *Heimskringla* are used in this manner to verify battles fought by a Norwegian king, and were often composed by a skald in the king's ranks. It is typical of Snorri's historiographical style to not only name the skald, but often to also name the poem when first citing a verse from it. Recording the death of Haraldr gráfeldr ('greycloak') in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, Snorri cites a verse attributed to the poet Glúmr Geirason, introducing it thus: "Svá segir Glúmr Geirason í Gráfeldardrápu" ('as Glúmr Geirason says in Gráfeldr's *drápa*').⁸⁵ It must be noted, however, that nowhere in *Heimskringla* does Snorri name the

⁸³ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes, introduction to Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, vol.1, *The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason*, trans. Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2011), XI.

⁸⁴ *Heimskringla*, 2:9; Matthew Townend, ed. "Óttarr svarti: *Höfuðlausn* 7," in *SkP* 1, 749.

⁸⁵ *Heimskringla*, 1:198,

poem *Höfuðlausn* as his source for Óttarr's poetry, nor are other *konungasögur* quite so methodical in naming their sources as Snorri often is in *Heimskringla*. Numerous verses from Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson's poems are cited throughout *Morkinskinna*, but the poems themselves are not named and most of the verses are introduced simply with "sem Arnórr segir."⁸⁶

Though less frequent than the authenticating verses, the situational verses of the *konungasögur* have received considerable attention in scholarship, much of which has revealed that, when scrutinised, the distinction between authenticating and situational verses is less than clear cut. O'Donoghue has viewed the inherent fictionality (or *litérarité*, as she prefers) of situational verses as competing with historiographical style in the *konungasögur*, but Whaley has offered a compelling argument for the authenticating role of a great many situational verses in *Heimskringla*, many of which are clustered in *Óláfs saga helga*.⁸⁷ In analysing these verses as forms of speech act, Whaley assessed that the majority (around two-thirds) of situational verses in *Heimskringla* function as "assertives" or "representatives," usually reporting a specific event, often a battle, and are commemorative in tone.⁸⁸ Likewise, verses spoken as "directives," such as those offering advice or requesting a gift, and "commissives," such as pledges or oaths, committing the speaker to a course of action, are found to often differ quite little from authenticating verses, echoing or demonstrating the prose narrative.⁸⁹ As such, even verses introduced by the "þá kvað" formula, especially when the contextual details of the utterance are not explicated, may still fulfil an authenticating function.⁹⁰

Illustrative of this phenomenon is a verse attributed to Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld, who is said to have fought with Óláfr Haraldsson at the battle of Stiklastaðir. In the prose of *Heimskringla's Óláfs saga helga*, the mortally wounded skald retreats from the battle to a nearby farm, where he speaks the following verse:⁹¹

⁸⁶ *Morkinskinna*, 1:21, 44, 47, for example.

⁸⁷ O'Donoghue, *Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 10-77; Whaley, "Situational Verses," 251-63.

⁸⁸ Whaley, "Situational Verses," 257-58.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 258-9.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 260-63.

⁹¹ *Heimskringla*, 2:390. R. D. Fulk, ed. "Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld: *Lausavísur* 23," in *SKP* 1, 838.

Þá kvað Þormóðr:

Ort vas Óleifs hjarta
óð framm konungr – blóði
rekin bitu stól – á Stiklar
støðum, kvaddi lið bōðvar.
Élpolla sák alla
Jǫlfuðs nema gram sjalfan
– reyndr vas flestr í fastri
fleindrifu – sér hlífa.

Then Þormóðr spoke:

Óláfr's heart was energetic; the king pressed forward at Stiklastaðir, rallied his host to battle; steel weapons inlaid with blood bit. I saw all the firs of the storm of Jǫlfuðr [Óðinn > BATTLE > WARRIORS] shelter themselves except the leader himself; most were tested in the ceaseless missile-blizzard [BATTLE].

This verse can be summarised as describing Óláfr's courage in battle, its referential content nearly identical to that of the many authenticating verses that describe the battle of Stiklastaðir. Furthermore, this verse is framed as Þormóðr's contribution to the talk at the farm about the battle, and thus as an eyewitness account of Haraldr's bravery. Save for the formula "þá kvað," as opposed to "svá segir," there is, therefore, little to differentiate this quotation from the earlier example of Óttarr svarti's authenticating verse. The similarity in content between this verse and a typical authenticating verse demonstrates Clunies Ross' observation that the two categories are a secondary distinction, reflecting the saga writers' use of the verse but without bearing on the composition of the verse itself. However, we might further suggest, in light of the above analysis, that even the function of authenticating and situational verse in prose sagas can overlap.⁹²

While the authenticating style of verse quotation maybe taken quite unproblematically as indicative of an historiographical style, there is nevertheless demonstrable potential for situational verses in the *konungasögur* (and *Íslendingasögur*, see Chapter 1) to historicise the prose narratives in which they are quoted. Given this, it is important that we consider how verse quotations in the *fornaldarsögur* may have also worked towards evoking the past and historicising

⁹² Clunies Ross, *Poetry and Poetics*, 78-80.

the narrative. As noted (Chapter 1), it has been well observed that by far the majority of the verses in the *fornaldarsögur* are presented as direct speech; *Gautreks saga*, however, is the notable exception to this, with many of the verses in *Víkars þáttur*, attributed to Starkaðr, introduced in an explicitly authenticating manner. Although a handful of verses are also quoted in *Dalafífla þáttur* and *Gjafa-Refs þáttur*, it is with *Víkars þáttur* that I will begin to explore how poetry in the *fornaldarsögur* offered medieval Icelanders access to the past, in the way that has been so clearly established for the *konungasögur* and, to some extent at least, the *Íslendingasögur*. Following a discussion of the dating and preservation of the poetry, my analysis of the prosimetrum of *Víkars þáttur* will consider the verses' thematic and narrative importance, while ultimately seeking to address their function in historicising the narrative.

In Ranisch's edition (though their manuscript attestation varies), a total of forty verses are quoted in the long redaction of *Gautreks saga*, thirty-three of which, all attributed to Starkaðr, appear in *Víkars þáttur*, where they play a pivotal role in the rhetoric of the text.⁹³ The majority of the verses in *Víkars þáttur* are introduced with the formula “svá segir Starkaðr” (‘as Starkaðr says’), and closely echo their immediate prose context; five are said to be spoken by Starkaðr himself *in situ*, and are introduced as “...kvæði þat, er heiti Víkarsbálkr” (‘that poem, which is called *Bálkr* about Víkarr’).⁹⁴ It is customary to refer to all verses in this *þáttur* as a single poem, by the name **Víkarsbálkr*.⁹⁵

A firm dating of these verses has proven elusive, and only a loose consensus has been reached; they are almost certainly older than the prose of *Víkars þáttur*, which appears to have been composed – as is characteristic of the *fornaldarsögur* – out of the verses, but the posited dates for **Víkarsbálkr*'s composition vary.⁹⁶ At the earliest, Heusler and Ranisch suggested that

⁹³ I follow Ranisch's numbering of the verses, since this reflects the order in which they are quoted in the prose of the long redaction, rather than the numbering in *SkP* 8, in which the verses in *Gjafa-Refs þáttur* precede those in *Víkars þáttur*. I follow *SkP* in regarding *Gautreks saga* v.6 as two verses, and not one (as does Ranisch), but for the sake of consistency with Ranisch's numbering label them as vv.6a-b.

⁹⁴ *Gautreks saga*, 31.

⁹⁵ Margaret Clunies Ross, introduction to “*Gautreks saga*,” in *SkP* 8, 243. I use **Víkarsbálkr* to refer to the hypothetical existence of the complete poem predating the saga, and *Víkarsbálkr* to refer to the five verses quoted in the saga under this heading.

⁹⁶ Clunies Ross, introduction to “*Gautreks saga*,” 242-43.

**Víkarsbálkr* was composed in the eleventh century, serving as a “prototype” for two twelfth-century poems: Gísl Illugason’s *Erfikvæði um Magnús berfœtt* (‘Memorial Poem about Magnús Barefoot’) and Ívarr Ingimundarson’s *Sigurðarbálkr* (‘*Bálkr* about Sigurðr’).⁹⁷ Comparing the language and expression in **Víkarsbálkr* and these same two twelfth-century poems, and the *lausavísa* of Ingimarr af Aski Sveinsson, Axel Olrik suggested that **Víkarsbálkr* was composed in the first half of the twelfth century, perhaps between Ingimarr’s *lausavísa* in 1134 and Ívarr’s *Sigurðarbálkr* in 1138; Finnur Jónsson, however, suggested a thirteenth-century composition of the verses, dismissing Olrik’s arguments for the twelfth century as insufficient, but substantiating his own claim no further.⁹⁸

Recent scholarship has been generally more reticent to date these verses; Bampi draws attention to the range of dates that have been suggested, from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, while William Layher refers his reader to Ranisch’s case for the late-eleventh or early-twelfth century.⁹⁹ Paula Vermeyden, however, has been more definite in suggesting that **Víkarsbálkr* was composed in the twelfth century; prompted by correspondences between Saxo’s and *Gautreks saga*’s accounts of Starkaðr, Vermeyden raises the possibility that they share a source in **Víkarsbálkr*, which would then give us *Gesta Danorum*’s completion – no later than 1219 – as a *terminus ante quem* for its composition.¹⁰⁰ In the most recent edition of the verses that comprise **Víkarsbálkr*, Clunies Ross concludes that while many verses exhibit characteristics of fourteenth-century *fornyrðislag* poetry – such as the addition of personal pronouns to lines, making them unmetrical – there are elements of the poetry that “probably go back to an oral substrate,” which also informed Saxo’s Latin poetry attributed to Starkaðr.¹⁰¹ While allowing for some alteration in their transmission, it therefore seems reasonable enough to follow Olrik and Ranisch’s attempts to date **Víkarsbálkr* and suggest a composition sometime in c.1100-1150. In any case, we may be confident that

⁹⁷ Andreas Heusler and Wilhelm Ranisch, eds. *Eddica Minora: Dichtungen eddischer Art aus den Fornaldarsögur und anderen Prosawerken* (Dortmund: Ruhfus Verlag, 1903), XXXIII. See Kari Ellen Gade, “Gísl Illugason: Erfikvæði about Magnús berfœtt” and “Ívarr Ingimundarson: Sigurðarbálkr,” in *SkP* 2, 416-30, 501-27.

⁹⁸ Alex Olrik, *Danmarks heltehistorie: En oldtidsstudie*, vol.2, *Starkad den Gamle og den yngre Skjoldungsrække* (Copenhagen: Gad, 1910), 206-10; Finnur Jónsson, *Den Oldnorske og Oldislandske Litteraturs Historie*, vol.2 (Copenhagen: Gad, 1923), 159.

⁹⁹ Bampi, ‘Between Tradition and Innovation,’ 89; Layher, “Starkaðr’s Teeth,” 14 (n.31).”

¹⁰⁰ Vermeyden, ‘Gautreks saga,’ 224.

¹⁰¹ Clunies Ross, introduction to “*Gautreks saga*,” 242-43.

these verses were composed a considerable time after Starkaðr was supposed to have lived, and before the prose of *Gautreks saga* was written.

Though the name **Víkarsbálkr* has been used in the above scholarship to refer to all of Starkaðr's verses in *Víkars þáttur*, there is some uncertainty as to whether they all belong to an original poem predating the saga. Ranisch concluded, primarily on metrical grounds, that vv.21-28 were not original to **Víkarsbálkr*, but were interpolations made by the author of the long redaction, and Clunies Ross has recently followed this position.¹⁰² The verses of **Víkarsbálkr* are mostly in *fornyrðislag*, occasionally interspersed with some lines in *kviðuháttur*, while the analogous *Sigurðarbálkr* of Ívarr Ingimundarson is purely in *fornyrðislag*; this prompted Ranisch to suggest that the *kviðuháttur* lines in **Víkarsbálkr* were later interpolations, and that vv.21-8, predominantly in *kviðuháttur*, were interpolated in their entirety. This is plausible, but by no means certain – metrical irregularities could have crept in throughout the poem's oral and written transmission, as Clunies Ross suggests – though the use of the third-person voice in vv.21-24, v.26, and v.28 (the rest of **Víkarsbálkr* using the first-person) may also suggest their later provenance. For the purposes of this analysis, examining the interplay between verse and prose in *Víkars þáttur*, which verses may have constituted the hypothetical ur-text, or archetype of the poem is not of great concern; nevertheless, examining the structure of **Víkarsbálkr* as it appears in *Gautreks saga* affords the opportunity to outline the content of the verses and their role in structuring *Víkars þáttur*.¹⁰³

In vv.6a-b, Starkaðr recalls the death of his father Storvirkr, a retainer of King Haraldr of Agðir; vv.7-8 relate that King Herþjófr of Hǫrðaland killed King Haraldr and that Hrósshárs-Grani abducted the young Starkaðr.¹⁰⁴ In vv.9-11 the *kolbítr* Starkaðr is taken into Víkarr's service, and in vv.12-16 they gain victory

¹⁰² Ranisch, introduction to *Die Gautrekssaga*, LVXXXV-IX; Clunies Ross, introduction to "Starkaðr gamli Stórvirksson, *Víkarsbálkr* 17-24," in *SkP* 8, 270.

¹⁰³ The adoption of New Philological methodologies into Old Norse scholarship has made the reconstruction of ur-texts rather less fashionable than it once was, though studies of the *skáldasögur* have shown that attempting to reconstruct the longer poems from which *lausavísur* are quoted can further our understanding of saga composition. See Kirsten Wolf, "Old Norse – New Philology," *SS* 65, no.3 (Summer, 1993), 338-48; Edith Marold, "The Relation Between Verses and Prose in *Bjarna saga Hítödelakappa*," in Poole, *Skaldsagas*, 74-124; Russell Poole, "The Relation Between Verse and Prose in *Hallfreðar saga* and *Gunnlaugs saga*," in Poole, *Skaldsagas*, 125-171.

¹⁰⁴ *Gautreks saga*, 13-15.

together over Herþjófr.¹⁰⁵ Verses 17-20 form a coherent unit about Starkaðr and Víkarr's victory against Sísarr of Kænugarðr at Lake Vænir; though v.18 alone names Sísarr and Lake Vænir, the verses share an exaggerated emphasis on detailing the injuries sustained on both sides.¹⁰⁶ Verse 21 stands alone, proclaiming Víkarr's victory over Geirþjófr, Herþjófr's brother, and vv.22-3 are something of a digression; Starkaðr names Víkarr's two sons, the younger of whom being the miserly Jarl Neri of *Gjafa-Refs þátr*.¹⁰⁷ Verses 24-28 form another coherent unit, about another of Starkaðr and Víkarr's battles, recounting the negotiations and eventual victory over Friðþjófr, the second brother of Herþjófr.¹⁰⁸ Starkaðr marks the end of his service to Víkarr in v.29, and in vv.30-35 narrates in order his sacrifice of Víkarr and subsequent flight from Norway to Uppsala, ending with his arrival there.¹⁰⁹ **Víkarsbálkr* ends with vv.35-37, in which Starkaðr reflects upon the mockery he faces at Uppsala.¹¹⁰

At first glance, then, it appears as though the prose of *Gautreks saga* closely reproduces the original order of **Víkarsbálkr*'s verses. The prose between vv.6-9 fills in certain narrative gaps (that Starkaðr was fostered by Haraldr, and that Hrósshárs-Grani was in Herþjófr's army), but these verses may be taken together as the logical beginning of an autobiographical poem by Starkaðr. The poem transitions smoothly from Starkaðr's childhood to his career with Víkarr through vv.10-17, by way of their vengeance against King Herþjófr (who had been responsible for their abductions in the previous verses), and establishes a pattern in the verses that sees Starkaðr and Víkarr also defeat Herþjófr's brothers, Geirþjófr (v.21) and Friðþjófr (vv.24-27).

Between the battles against these brothers are vv.18-20, recounting the battle against Sísarr of Kænugarðr, and vv.22-23, naming Víkarr's sons; these latter verses stand out amongst the numerous verses recounting Starkaðr and Víkarr's battles, and it is perhaps likely that, as Ranisch suggested, they were inserted by the author of the long redaction of *Gautreks saga* solely to tie *Víkars*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 15-19.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 23-25.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 28, 31-32.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

þáttir to *Gjafa-Refs*.¹¹¹ The authenticity of vv.18-20 has not been questioned, but their placement seems to disrupt Víkarr's campaign against the three brothers, which would perhaps lie more naturally in direct sequence. Verse 21 is, however, explicit that Geirþjófr's defeat was Víkarr's third battle.¹¹²

Lét þreksamr
þriðja sinni
hildar leik
háðan verða
áðr Upplönd
unnin yrði
ok Geirþjófr
um gefinn helju.

The bold one had the game of Hildir <valkyrie> [BATTLE] fought a third time, before Upplönd was won, and Geirþjófr given over to Hel.

The common element *-þjófr* in the three brothers' names, and the numbering in v.21, may suggest that the verses pertaining to Herþjófr, Geirþjófr, and Friðþjófr are indeed of a single provenance, though their sequence in *Víkars þáttir* may be rearranged to suggest a more intuitive order to **Víkarsbálkr*: the battle against Herþjófr (vv.12-17) ought to remain Víkarr's first, motivated by the former's kidnapping of Víkarr, and in turn motivating the following battles; the battle against Friðþjófr (vv.24-28) would follow, and the battle against Geirþjófr (v.21) would remain Víkarr's third. The battle against Sísarr could then follow this neat sequence of Víkarr's three victories, against the three brothers. Aside, then, from vv.22-23, none of the verses of *Víkars þáttir* seem out of place or poorly integrated into the prose narrative.

Including or excluding any or all of vv.21-28, **Víkarsbálkr* is difficult to generically categorise, as it seems to fall somewhere between an *ævikviða*, a retrospective of Starkaðr's life, and an *erfíkvæði*, a memorial poem, for Víkarr. Indeed, *Víkarsbálkr* has been compared to both genres of poem; I have noted already the parallels between *Víkarsbálkr* and both *Sigurðarbálkr* and Gísl Illugason's *Erfíkvæði um Magnús berfœtt*, both examples of the *erfíkvæði* genre. However, it is clear from vv.6-8 and vv.30-38 that the poem is more about Starkaðr

¹¹¹ Ranisch, introduction to *Gautrekssaga*, LXXXV.

¹¹² *Gautrekssaga*, 22.

himself than Víkarr, and even in his battles alongside the king he is as much the subject (consider v.27/7-8: “hjó ek brynjulauss | báðum hǫndum,” ‘unarmoured, I hewed/with both hands’).¹¹³ Indeed, **Víkarsbálkr* has been compared by Bampi to *ævikviður* common to a number of *fornaldarsögur*, such as *Qrvar-Odds saga*, and also *Grettis saga*.¹¹⁴

Hitherto I have declined to translate *bálkr*, but it is here worth pausing over for the insight the title of the poem may provide regarding its genre. As a common noun, *bálkr* refers to a partition or dividing wall, but as a technical legal term it refers to a section of law, for example, *þjófa bálkr* (‘criminal law’), *Kristindóms bálkr* (‘ecclesiastical law’).¹¹⁵ *Bálkr* is also used by Snorri in *Háttatal* to denote groups of related verse-forms.¹¹⁶ *Víkarsbálkr* may therefore legitimately be translated as “The Section of Víkarr,” as Clunies Ross has opted for, perhaps implying that it is one “section,” concerning Starkaðr and Víkarr, of a once longer *ævikviða*.¹¹⁷ The title *Sigurðarbálkr* would suggest otherwise, since this poem is quite clearly an *erfíkvæði* for its subject, Sigurðr slembidjárn Magnússon (d.1139), but it is worth considering that the title *Víkarsbálkr* may not refer to the entirety of the poem that *Víkars þáttr* quotes.¹¹⁸ Rather, *Víkarsbálkr* is used in *Gautreks saga* to introduce only the five verses concerning the death of Víkarr, and the apparent use of *stefjabálkr* in some Old Norse texts to refer to a run of verses separated by a *stef*, a refrain, typically relating to a single topic, would indeed imply that *Víkarsbálkr* ought only to refer to these verses.¹¹⁹ It is perhaps a stretch, therefore, to suggest that Víkarr is the subject of the poem in its entirety, and so the genre of *ævikviða* may be a more apt categorisation than *erfíkvæði*. However, this discussion has highlighted some of the difficulties in attempting to apply rigid definitions of technical poetical terminology – even that which is attested in medieval texts – to the corpus of Old Norse poetry; such categories may be helpful

¹¹³ *Gautreks saga*, 25.

¹¹⁴ Bampi, “What’s in a Variant,” 62. It is also interesting to note that Grettir Ásmundarson’s *ævikviða* is also in *kviðuhátttr*, supporting the presence of this metre in **Víkarsbálkr*.

¹¹⁵ Cleasby/Vigfusson, s.v. “BÁLKR,” 54.

¹¹⁶ Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Háttatal*, ed. Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1999), 36.

¹¹⁷ Clunies Ross, *Poetry and Poetics*, 11.

¹¹⁸ Gade, introduction to “*Sigurðarbálkr*,” 501.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

insofar as they further our understanding of the poetry itself, but we should not unduly allow them to colour our reading of the poetry in its prose context.

Before turning to an analysis of the function of the verses in *Víkars þáttr*, we must briefly consider their attestation in the extant manuscripts. Ranisch's critical edition of the text makes use of three manuscripts, which attest significant variance in the relationship between verse and prose. AM 590 is the earliest manuscript to contain all of Starkaðr's verses; Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket Papp. nr 11 8vo (c.1650) contains the fewest verses (eleven in total, but just five from **Víkarsbálkr*), but the retention of the formula "svá segir Starkaðr" indicates the presence of most of **Víkarsbálkr* in the scribe's exemplar; AM 152 – the earliest witness to the complete prose of the long redaction of *Gautreks saga* – contains twenty-five verses (nineteen from **Víkarsbálkr*).¹²⁰ Given this variance – and its potential import for interpreting the saga – Bampi raises the question of whether these three manuscripts should be considered as separate redactions of the saga, rather than variants of the text; no answer to this is given, but Bampi advocates that any future edition of *Gautreks saga* should record these three versions side by side.¹²¹

Though the manuscript tradition certainly problematises any analysis of *Gautreks saga*'s post-medieval reception, it may still be considered legitimate to use a critical edition of the text – with all forty verses included – to study the medieval saga. The retention of the "svá segir Starkaðr" formula in Papp. nr 11 is testament to the presence of all Starkaðr's verses in its exemplar (the same, perhaps, as that of AM 590), at least prior to the seventeenth century. Given that most, if not all, of the verses of *Víkars þáttr* probably belong to a single poem, it is unlikely that the scribe of this exemplar added any of his own compositions, though it is possible to hypothesise that the exemplar scribe knew of more verses belonging to **Víkarsbálkr* than the scribe of AM 152 or his exemplar. Nevertheless, as Clunies Ross has observed, almost all Old Norse poetry is recorded in a narrative prose context; it is, therefore, highly unlikely that the full complement of *Víkarsbálkr*'s verses in the extant manuscripts was inherited from any sources

¹²⁰ Bampi, "What's in a Variant?", 66-7.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 60-63.

other than earlier versions of *Gautreks saga*.¹²² Even Ranisch concluded that those verses which he considered as spurious were likely inserted by the original author of the long redaction, and are therefore as old as the c.1300 saga. It does not, therefore, seem improper to analyse *Víkars þátr* as it has been edited, with its full complement of verses.

Having summarised the order and content of the verses in *Víkars þátr*, it is apparent that, while the structure of *Gautreks saga* as a whole is complex and disjointed, the structure of *Víkars þátr* itself is markedly simpler, following what seems to be a straightforward autobiographical account of Starkaðr's life in the poetry. However, the verses of *Víkarsbálkr* function further than to simply structure the *þátr*, and have significant import for the historicity with which *Gautreks saga* was regarded.

As noted above, just five of Starkaðr's thirty-two verses (vv.30-34) are said to be spoken *in situ*, and these are grouped together as a single utterance. The remaining twenty-seven verses (vv.6a-29 and vv.35-37) are quoted in a total of twenty utterances throughout the prose; most are introduced with the formula "svá segir Starkaðr," or some variation thereof, and once with the formula "þess getr Starkaðr" ('Starkaðr refers to this').¹²³ If the use of these formulae over the "þá kvað" formula can tell us anything, it is that these verses function as authentication. This may not be surprising, given that *Víkars þátr* has quite evidently been composed around the older source material of the *Víkarsbálkr* verses, and the use of the "sem segir hér" formula for the evidentiary citation of heroic poems in some *fornaldarsögur* has not gone unnoticed.¹²⁴ Yet close analysis of the twenty-seven "svá segir Starkaðr" verses will reveal that they are remarkably similar in style and function to the authenticating verses of the *konungasögur*.

If evidencing the battles of a king, whom the quoted skald is said to have served, is a characteristic of authenticating verse in the *konungasögur*, it is one shared by nine of the verses in *Víkars þátr*; vv.14-16 evidence Víkarr's battle against Herþjófr, vv.17-20 his battle against Sísarr, v.21 against Geirþjófr, and

¹²² Clunies Ross, *Poetry and Poetics*, 69-70.

¹²³ *Gautreks saga*, 22.

¹²⁴ Bjarni Einarsson, "The Rôle of Verse," 124. See above.

vv.27-8 his battle against Friðþjófr.¹²⁵ A further five verses refer to preparations for battle, vv.12-13 listing the twelve warriors by Víkarr's side – “allir kappar ok hólmgöngumenn” (‘all champions and duellists’) – and vv.24-6 recounting the negotiations before the battle with Friðþjófr.¹²⁶ Stylistically, the battle-verses in *Víkars þáttur* offer dramatic details of the fighting, as is illustrated in the account in v.15 of the battle against Herþjófr: “hjuggum hjálma | með höfuðgnípum | brynjur sneiddum | ok brutum skjöldu” (‘we hewed helmets along with the peaks of heads; we sliced mail-coats and broke shields’).¹²⁷ These lines clearly lack the complexity of the kennings that characterise battle descriptions in skaldic verse, but nevertheless contain essentially the same referential content – weapons striking armour – and fulfil the same function, corroborating the surrounding prose account of the battle with an eyewitness testimony.

Further to this, in a number of instances throughout *Víkars þáttur*, quite specific details of Starkaðr's life and career with Víkarr are ostensibly corroborated by the verse. Several examples of this will be seen in the course of this analysis, but here may be illustrated with another battle verse. In the prose preceding v.14, Víkarr and Starkaðr come to Herþjófr's estate, force their way inside, and begin fighting Herþjófr's men, at which point the verse is introduced with the usual formula:¹²⁸

Svó segir Starkaðr:

| | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| “Svó kvómu vér | seggir stóðu, |
| til konungs garða | kostumgóðir |
| [hristum grindr, | fyr konungi; |
| hjuggum gætti;] | [þó var um aukit |
| brutum borglokur, | öllum þrælum |
| brugðum sverðum | verkalýðum |
| þar er sjautigir | ok vatndrögum.] |

As Starkaðr says:

“So we came to the king's hold, we shook the gate and hewed the door frames; we broke the fortress locks and we drew swords, there where seventy good warriors

¹²⁵ *Gautrekssaga*, 17-22, 25.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16-17, 23-25.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 17-18

stood, we turned before the king; though there [they were] increased, with many slaves, workers, and watercarriers.”

As presented by the saga narrator, the verse confirms the exact details of his prose account – that Herþjófr’s force of seventy warriors was bolstered by labourers and farm-hands, and that Víkarr’s force battered the gates down – at times in closely or exactly corresponding language, “verkalýðr ok þjónustumenn” (‘workers and servants’) and “hristu grindr” (‘they shook the gate’) in the prose agreeing with “verkalýðum | ok vatndrögum” and “hristum grindr” in the verse. Of course, it is illusory that the verse independently verifies the prose account, since there is little doubt that the verse is itself the source material for this part of the narrative. The same may be said, however, of the *konungasögur*, in which the authenticating verses may either be read as corroborative, or a verbatim quote from the historian’s source material; it seems, then, clear that quotations such as these in *Víkars þáttur* are part of a deliberate strategy of imitating the historiographical style of verse quotation in the *konungasögur*.

It goes without saying that these verses have no value as historical sources for pre-Christian Scandinavia. However, even the question of plausibility – whether a medieval Icelander would have believed these verses to be Starkaðr’s own compositions, for which we have no real indication – is perhaps insignificant, since the crucial effect of the verses is the historicising style that they lend to the prose. As Meulengracht Sørensen has argued, the citation of verse, regardless of its authenticity, was the established mode of representing the past in medieval Iceland; thus, even the quotation of pseudonymous verses, whether framed as authenticating or situational, made for a more “authentic” representation of the past.¹²⁹ However, it was in the *konungasögur* that the most scholarly, source-referencing style of verse quotation was employed, and which we see replicated in *Víkars þáttur*, most of which is interspersed with authenticating verses. This stylistic imitation of the *konungasögur*, as may also be seen in *Víkars þáttur’s* representation of geography, strongly suggests that this *þáttur* of *Gautreks saga* at least invited a reception similar to that of contemporary historiography with regards to the narrative’s veracity.

¹²⁹ Meulengracht Sørensen, “Verses as the Voice of the Past,” 190.

Though the majority of Starkaðr’s verses follow the pattern of authenticating verse in the *konungasögur*, introduced by the “svá segir” formula, the important exception to this is the cluster of verses Starkaðr is said to have spoken at Uppsala. Following his betrayal and sacrifice of Víkarr, Starkaðr travels to the court of the kings Eirekr and Alrekr, who ask him to introduce himself – from here, it is worth quoting the saga in full:¹³⁰

... þá orti Starkaðr kvæði þat, er heitir Víkarsbálkr; þar segir svó frá drápi Víkars konungs:

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| “Fylgda ek fylki, | lagða ek geiri |
| þeim er framazt vissak, | gram til hjarta, |
| þá unda ek bezt | þat er mér harmazt |
| æfi minni, | handverka. |
| áðr fóru vér – | Þaðan vappaða ek |
| en því flögð ullu – | viltar brautir, |
| hinnzta sinni | Hörðum leiðr |
| til Hörðalandz. | með huga illan |
| Þess eyrendis | hinga vanr |
| at Þórr um skóp | ok hróðrkvæða, |
| mér níðings nafn, | dróttinlauss, |
| nauð margs konar | dapr allz hugar. |
| hlaut ek óhróðigr | Nú sótt ek |
| illt at vinna. | til Svíþjóðar, |
| Skylda ek Víkar | Ynglinga sjöt, |
| í viði háfum | til Uppsala; |
| Geirþjófsbana | hér láta mik |
| goðum um signa; | sem ek lengi man, |
| | þoglan þul, |
| | þjóðans synir. |

... then Starkaðr composed that poem, which is called *Víkarsbálkr*; there the death of King Víkarr is thus told of:

“I accompanied the king, whom I knew [to be] foremost, then I was most content in my life, before we went – and thus ogres swelled – for the last time to Hörðaland.

From this business, Þórr ordained for me the name of a villain, distress of many kinds – slandered, I suffer – [and] to commit evil.

¹³⁰ *Gautrekssaga*, 31-32.

I was made to dedicate Víkarr – slayer of Geirþjófr – high in the tree to the gods; I thrust a spear to the heart of the king; that is to me [my] most sorrowful deed.

From there I wandered uncertain roads – hateful to the people of Hǫrðaland – with an ill mind, lacking rings [gold] and praise poems, without a lord, downcast in spirits.

Then I proceeded to the nation of the Swedes, to the seat of the Ynglings, to Uppsala; here the king's sons set me, the silent poet – I remember long ago.”

That these verses are presented as situational is immediately obvious, not only from the phrase “*pá orti Starkaðr kvæði þat*” (‘*then Starkaðr composed [yrkja – to make, compose verses] that poem*’ [emphasis my own]) – clearly indicating its composition *in situ* – but also from the fact that the verses are framed as a response to a direct question. This exemplifies Bjarni Einarsson’s observation that verse in the *fornaldarsögur* is often presented as a poetic response to a question or some other verbal cue, but also meets Whaley’s criteria for a fully situational verse: that the poet is brought to the forefront of the narrative is a given, since this *pátttr* is primarily about Starkaðr; the physical setting for the verse – Eirekr and Alrekr’s court at Uppsala – is provided by the prose; and the verse is made part of a dialogue.¹³¹ Whaley observes that very few of *Heimskringla*’s situational verses meet all three of these criteria, and that only these verses can really be called situational, with no authenticating function.

From this initial assessment, vv.30-34 of *Víkarsbálkr* can only be considered situational, and their historicising function is not immediately obvious. The recitation of poetry at a royal court is by no means implausible, and it is evident that royal and aristocratic courts were the original contexts for the performance of much skaldic poetry, but as O’Donoghue has noted, the impromptu composition of verse – and *Víkars pátttr* is, as noted, unequivocal that *Víkarsbálkr* was composed on the spot – is considerably less naturalistic than the delivery of a poem already composed and memorised.¹³² Though the impromptu composition of Starkaðr’s metrically simple *fornyrðislag* verses is perhaps more

¹³¹ Whaley, “Situational Verse,” 260-61.

¹³² Stefanie Würth, “Skaldic Poetry and Performance,” in *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, ed. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 264-68; Clunies Ross, *Poetry and Poetics*, 40-45; O’Donoghue, *Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 12.

plausible than that of a strict and complex *drápa* in *dróttkvætt*, this feat is nevertheless marked as extraordinary in *Víkars þáttur*. Such poetic prowess is bestowed upon Starkaðr by Óðinn himself, who pronounced “Ek gef honum skáldskap, svó at hann skal ei seinna yrkja en mæla” (‘I give him the art of poetry, so that he shall not compose verse slower than speak’).¹³³

In an illuminating work on European traditions of prosimetrum, Peter Dronke has drawn attention to what seems to be a culturally common impulse to compose “poets’ sagas,” narrating the biographies of poets and the circumstances of their compositions.¹³⁴ In classical and medieval examples of such narratives – in texts as disparate as the second-century Pseudo-Herodotus’ *Vita Homeri* and the thirteenth-century Icelandic *Kormáks saga* – the contexts in which a poet’s works were composed are often drawn from a multifarious, at times contradictory, pre-existing narrative tradition and arranged with considerable artistic licence.¹³⁵ Yet the authorial freedom evident does not necessitate the conclusion that these accounts of poetic composition held no truth value for medieval audiences. Medieval historiography was expected to contain certain poetic truths about its principal actors – thus, valiant, pious, and sinful men should be made to appear so – and as poets such as Homer and Kormákr alike were known to medieval audiences, either through the survival of their works or from reputation alone, any “true” written account of their lives would necessarily include the composition of verses. It is, however, curious to note that the Icelandic *skáldasögur* do not generally record the composition of their formal *drápur* in praise of Norwegian kings, which are perhaps their most famous and prestigious works (Kormákr’s *Sigurðardrápa* is cited in *Heimskringla* and the poetical treatise *Laufás Edda*, but not in *Kormáks saga*); nevertheless, the depiction of their ability to speak in verse as easily as natural speech testifies to their poetic skill. In the same manner, through the depiction of Starkaðr composing and speaking these verses in the narrative, a biographical “truth” core to Starkaðr’s characterisation as a poet is expressed.

¹³³ *Gautrekssaga*, 29. Óðinn’s role here, of course, echoes Snorri’s account of Óðinn acquiring the mead of poetry and imparting it to the Æsir and mankind. *Skáldskaparmál*, 3-5.

¹³⁴ Peter Dronke, *Verse with Prose Form Petronius to Dante: The Art and Scope of the Mixed Form* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 53.

¹³⁵ Dronke, *Verse with Prose*, 54-65.

As Clunies Ross has demonstrated, Starkaðr was remembered in medieval Scandinavia as a prototypical poet and progenitor of native poetic arts; he is listed first in *Skáldatal* ('catalogue of poets') – which reads: “Starkaðr hinn gamli var skáld. Hans kveði eru fornast þeirra er men kunnu nú” ('Starkaðr the Old was a skald. His poems are the most ancient of those which men now know') – and is characterised by his poetry in *Gesta Danorum*, though the verses are most certainly Saxo's own composition.¹³⁶ Clunies Ross remarks surprisingly little upon **Víkarsbálkr*, but Starkaðr's verses in *Gautreks saga* are compelling evidence in support of her conclusions. The authenticating verses throughout *Víkars þátr* evince the extent of Starkaðr's poetic productivity, but it is the scene in which Starkaðr is shown to compose and personally deliver the poem *Víkarsbálkr* that brings this to the fore. It may be noted that one principle of medieval historiography and saga writing alike was to make the past immediate and “create an image of [it] in all its fullness,” as Matthew Kempshall observes, and by depicting Starkaðr's composition of *Víkarsbálkr* before Kings Eirekr and Alrekr, *Gautreks saga*'s author offers the audience the opportunity to witness much more intimately his poetic ability.¹³⁷ Though the scene is invented and perhaps less naturalistic, it expresses a truth central to Starkaðr as both a character in legend and historical figure – that he was the foremost poet of the heroic past.

More than any other verse utterance in *Víkars þátr*, the situational verses in which Starkaðr performs *Víkarsbálkr* convey an historical truth not based upon facts of events, but one of Starkaðr's character. Nevertheless, there is potential in these verses for some authenticating function, since they broadly follow the same narrative structure of the prose account of Víkarr's death. Verse 30 records Starkaðr's journey to Hǫrðaland with Víkarr, during which he sacrifices the king, but adds a sense of foreboding absent from the prose; the line “en því flögð ullu” ('and thus ogres swelled') in the verse associates *flögð* (singular *flagð*, a malevolent, supernatural being; ogre, giant, troll, or female practitioner of witchcraft) with the journey, hence Hermann Pálsson and Edwards' translation of the second *helmingr*: “...before we went out on our ill-starred and last trip to

¹³⁶ Clunies Ross, “Poet into Myth,” 31-5; Snorri Sturluson, *The Uppsala Edda*, ed. Heimir Pálsson, trans. Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2012), 100.

¹³⁷ Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History*, 265-349; Mundal, “The Growth of Consciousness of Fiction,” 170.

Hordaland.”¹³⁸ Starkaðr relates in v.31 that Þórr ordained him to commit the betrayal – “illt at vinna” – that earns him the “níðings nafn,” which corresponds to the scene in the prose in which Þórr and Óðinn pronounce their judgements on Starkaðr, though here it is Óðinn that bids Starkaðr to kill Víkarr.¹³⁹ Verse 32 more straightforwardly references the sacrifice itself, including the detail of Starkaðr stabbing Víkarr to the heart with a spear, and vv.33-34 correspond to his flight from Norway – the line “Hǫrðum leiðr” (‘hateful to the people of Hǫrðaland’) agreeing with the prose “varð Starkaðr mjök óþokkaðr af alþýðu, ok...landflótti af Hǫrðalandi” (‘Starkaðr became disliked by the common-folk, and... fled from Hǫrðaland’) – and his arrival at Uppsala.¹⁴⁰ Verse 33 even seems to echo several of the curses lain upon Starkaðr, “hringa vanr | ok hróðrkvæða” (‘wanting [without] rings [gold] and praise-poems’) recalling that, for all the wealth Óðinn ordains, “hann skal alldri þykkjast nóg eiga” (‘he shall never think himself to have enough’), and that “hann skal ekki muna eptir, þat er hann yrkir” (‘he shall not remember afterwards that which he composes’).¹⁴¹

Each of these verses could have easily been inserted into the prose account of Starkaðr’s sacrifice of Víkarr in the usual authenticating manner; however, in echoing the structure of this scene they form a coherent unit of narration in and of themselves. In their referential content they memorialise Starkaðr’s deed, and – to again employ Whaley’s categorisation of situational verse – may be called “assertive” or “representative” verses (those which report an event retrospectively, or as it unfolds), here commemorating in full the climax of *Víkars þáttr* and thus still authenticating the narrative.

Furthermore, in the structural and linguistic correspondence between the prose account of the sacrifice and Starkaðr’s recital at Uppsala, the latter scene becomes metatextual, as the tale of how Starkaðr betrayed his lord is told within the *þáttr* concerned with the very same narrative, and the legend reinforces its existence within itself. In the Latin intellectual milieu of medieval Europe, where the invention of narrative material was (in theory, if not in practice) tantamount to

¹³⁸ *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* (University of Copenhagen, 2010)

<http://onp.ku.dk/english/onp_about/>; *Gautreks saga*, trans. Hermann Pálsson and Edwards, 41.

¹³⁹ *Gautrekssaga*, 29.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

lying, the rhetorical device of referring to a narrative's source material was commonly employed to avoid the charge of falsifying an account; thus, Saxo cites in the prologue to *Gesta Danorum* not only the Norse poetry that doubtless informed his history, but also runic inscriptions of "acta patrii" ('deeds of their ancestors'), recalling the *liber vetustissimus* Geoffrey of Monmouth claimed to translate in his *Historia regum Britanniae*.¹⁴² Such a practice is likewise attested in medieval Icelandic literature, by the "appeals to *auctoritates*," either named poets or anonymous written sources, that O'Connor has identified in a number of "romance sagas."¹⁴³ Though such claims, generally found in late sagas, may of course have been intended as a parody of the topos – though O'Connor, while not ruling out the possibility of a learned in-joke, makes a convincing case otherwise – Starkaðr's recital of *Víkarsbálkr* appeals to the existence of the narrative independent of the text of *Gautreks saga*. Together with the corroborative verses cited throughout *Víkars þáttr*, this establishes that the legend of Starkaðr presented in the text, far from being the invention of any writer, has been told and retold since Starkaðr himself reflected upon his deed.

As something of a continuation of the reflection in these verses, a final poetic epilogue to *Víkars þáttr* is given in vv.34-37. After the five verses of *Víkarsbálkr* spoken *in situ* by Starkaðr, the prose returns to the usual "svá segir" formula for the final three verses, which are cited by the saga author to corroborate the prose account of the taunting Starkaðr faces at Uppsala:¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² *Gesta Danorum*, Pr.1.3; Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain: An Edition and Translation of the De gestis Britonum [Historia Regum Britanniae]*, ed. Michael D. Reeve, trans. Neil Wright (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2007), 4-5.

¹⁴³ O'Connor, "History or Fiction?," 128-131.

¹⁴⁴ *Gautreks saga*, 32-33.

Starkaðr var þogull, en berserkir kǫlluðu hann endrborinn jǫtun ok níðing, svó sem hér segir:

| | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| Hér settu mik | er Hlórriði |
| sveina milli, | fyr hamar norðan |
| heldr hæðinn | Hergrímsbana |
| ok hvítbráan, | hǫndum rænti. |
| skelkja skatnar | Hlæja menn, |
| ok skop draga, | er mik séa, |
| ofs óframir, | ljótan skolt, |
| at jǫfurs greppi. | langa trjónu, |
| Sjá þikjast þeir | hár úlfgrátt, |
| á sjálfum mér | hangar tjálgur, |
| jǫtunkuml | hrjúfan háls, |
| átta hana, | húð jótraða. |

Starkaðr was sullen, and the berserkers called him a reborn giant and a villain, as it says here:

They set me here between the lads, quite scoffed at and white-browed;
overly reticent men mock and hold the king's skald to ridicule.

They think they can see on me the giant-marks, of eight arms, when
Hlórriði [Þórr], north of the crag, robbed the arms of Hergrímr's slayer
[Starkaðr].

Men laugh when see me, [at my] ugly jaw, long snout, wolf-grey hair,
hanging branches [arms], rough neck, [and] scarred hide.

Though the “svá segir” formula indicates that we are to read these verses as authenticating, they are markedly different in tone to the previous authenticating verses in *Víkars þáttur*; their function does not seem to be to verify an historical event, as in the previous accounts of Starkaðr and Víkarr's exploits, but rather to present a kind of moral truth – that Starkaðr, for his *níðingsverk*, is reviled. This is comparable to the use identified by O'Donoghue of a number of verses in *Ágrip*, the corroborative function of which is to “merely confirm a broad impression of [Óláfr kyrrí and Sigurðr Jórsalafari's] reigns” in a manner reminiscent of the citation of classical verse in Latin historiography.¹⁴⁵

The difference in tone between these and the more straightforwardly authenticating verses does not, therefore, necessarily undermine their historicising

¹⁴⁵ O'Donoghue, *Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 29-39 (39).

function. Furthermore, to a greater extent than any other authenticating verse in *Víkars þáttur*, they function to characterise Starkaðr, as both a literary and an historical figure, for while they are presented as evidential, they seem to represent Starkaðr's personal reaction to the scene of the prose narrative, in which the *berserkir* taunt him. They are, as such, notably more introspective, and in a recent paper, Jonathan Hui has analysed the way in which vv.30-34 and vv.34-37 together instil in the audience pity for Starkaðr, both groups of verse providing him with a reflective, inner voice (in contrast to the earlier verses, more heroic in tone) and explicating the mockery he faces.¹⁴⁶ As noted, poetic introspection is characteristic of much of the verse in the *fornaldarsögur* as a genre; as such, these verses conform to the broad conclusion drawn by Kristin Hanson and Paul Kiparsky, that verse in prosimetrical works adds lyrical expression to the narrative prose.¹⁴⁷ In expressing the poet's inner voice, Starkaðr's vv.34-37 – despite their authenticating formula – appear to function more as situational verse, but we should bear in mind that this does not necessarily detract from the historicity of this *þáttur*, given Meulengracht Sørensen's conclusions on the situational verse in the *Íslendingasögur*, especially the *skáldasögur*, and the *konungasögur*, which (he argues) bring the past to life.¹⁴⁸

We may be able to discern a historicising function in these verses, making the past more immediate, but they also contribute to a discourse throughout *Víkars þáttur* relating to Starkaðr's monstrosity and connection to giants, which has been the subject of considerable scholarly interest.¹⁴⁹ The legends of Starkaðr circulating in medieval Scandinavia indicate a connection with giants, perhaps as a means of explaining his extraordinary prowess; either he is said to be a giant or to have descended from them. In the oldest redaction of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, found in *Hauksbók* (AM 544), the eight-armed Starkaðr Áludrengr is killed by Þórr, after he abducts Álfhildr, daughter of King Álfr, and a later redaction preserves his giant origins: "hann var kominn af þussum og hann var þeim líkur að afli og edli"

¹⁴⁶ Jonathan Hui, "Svá segir Starkaðr: Manipulating Memorialisation in *Gautreks saga*" (paper presented at The Bergen-Cambridge Postgraduate Symposium in Old Norse Studies, Bergen, Norway, April 15-16, 2015). I am grateful to Hui for kindly offering access to the unpublished written paper.

¹⁴⁷ Clunies Ross, "Poetry in *Fornaldarsögur*," 135. Hanson and Kiparsky, "The Nature of Verse," 34-7.

¹⁴⁸ "Verses as the Voice of the Past," 185-90.

¹⁴⁹ See especially Ciklamini, "The Problem of Starkaðr," 169-88.

(‘He was descended from giants and he was like them in strength and nature’).¹⁵⁰

Such stories are referenced in *Gesta Danorum*, which relates, as “tradunt enim quidam” (‘some folk say’), that Starkaðr was born with many arms, all but two having been ripped off by Þórr; however, Saxo is explicit in discrediting these:¹⁵¹

Fabulosa autem et uulgaris opino quedam suer ipsius ortu rationi in consentanea
atque a ueri fide penitus aliena confinixit.

But a preposterous common conjecture has invented details about his origins
which are unreasonable and downright incredible.

Similarly, *Gautreks saga* makes reference to these legends but also attempts to distance from them its historiographical account of Starkaðr. The start of *Víkars þáttr* closely mirrors the account in *Hervarar saga*, that Starkaðr Áludrengr – a “hundvíss jötunn” (‘very wise giant’) – kidnapped Álfhildr, whose father Álfr sent Þórr to kill Starkaðr; however, *Gautreks saga* uniquely claims that this Starkaðr Áludrengr was the grandfather and namesake of the famous hero.¹⁵² Absent from this account is the detail of Starkaðr Áludrengr’s multiple arms, but this aspect of the legend is of course referenced in v.36, in the “jötunkuml | átta handa” (‘giant-marks/of eight arms’) that the *berserkir* mock Starkaðr for.¹⁵³ Having distanced Starkaðr from the perhaps earlier legends in which he was himself a giant, *Víkars þáttr* gives us only the testimony of the *berserkir* for this aspect of the Starkaðr legend, and so the *jötunkuml* “sjá þeir þykkjast” (‘they think they see’) on Starkaðr seem unfounded. Rather than his giant-nature, v.36 therefore seems to attest the circulation of more fantastic legends about Starkaðr; like vv.30-34, v.36 becomes almost metatextual, evidencing the existence of the narrative within the world of the saga itself.

In spite of this, Starkaðr’s grotesque, physical monstrosity remains at the heart of his characterisation, in *Gautreks saga* and other witnesses to the Starkaðr legend; Layher has drawn particular attention to Starkaðr’s monstrously large teeth

¹⁵⁰ *Heiðreks saga: Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, ed. Jón Helgason (Copenhgen: Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, 1924), 2, 90.

¹⁵¹ *Gesta Danorum*, vi.5.2.

¹⁵² *Gautreks saga*, 12. The likeness of the intensifier *hund* and the noun *hundr* (‘dog’) suggests that *hundvíss* was used pejoratively; ‘dog-wise,’ ‘cunning;’ Cleasby/Vigfusson, s.v. “hund-víss,” 292. Cf. Bampi, who suggests that *Gautreks saga*’s author himself may have inherited a tradition in which Starkaðr Áludrengr was the grandfather of Starkaðr, “What’s in a Variant,” 92.

¹⁵³ *Gautreks saga*, 33.

– said in *Norna-Gests þáttur* to have been knocked from his mouth by Sigurðr Fáfnisbani – as a physical relic of the legend in the later Middle Ages.¹⁵⁴ Layher also suggests that the tension between Starkaðr’s giant-nature and his hard life of battle as explanations for his grotesqueness is never fully resolved; however, the above analysis regarding the giant legends attached to Starkaðr supports Kaaren Grimstad’s conclusion that *Gautreks saga* attempts to rationalise and humanise this characteristic.¹⁵⁵ As such, Starkaðr’s grotesque physicality is expressed in relation to his battles alongside Víkarr, and almost exclusively through verse. In particular, vv.18-19, recounting Víkarr’s battle with Síðarr of Kænugarðr, detail Starkaðr’s many scars and grisly injuries:¹⁵⁶

| | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| Mik lét sverði | Ok á síðu |
| sáru höggvinn, | sverði beitti |
| skarpegguðu, | mér oflugr |
| skjöld í gengum, | fyrir mjöðm ofan |
| hjálma af höfði, | en í aðra |
| en haus skorat | atgeir lagði |
| ok kinnkjálka | köldum broddi |
| klofinn í jaxla; | svó at á kafi yddi |
| [en it vinstra | þau sér merki |
| viðbein lamit]. | á mér groin. |

[Síðarr] let wounds be struck on me with a sharp-edged [sword] through the shield, [struck] helmet from head, and sliced my skull and cheekbone, my molars cleaved into and my left collarbone crushed.

And on my side above the hip the powerful [warrior] bit with his sword, and on the other side lay his halberd with its cold point, it thus sank in and out the other side; those healed scars can be seen on me.

In light of this, the physical deformities listed in vv.35-7 seem to attest the disfigurement Starkaðr suffered in battle; the “jötunkuml | átta handa” the *berserkir* see on Starkaðr may well be the healed wounds Starkaðr refers to in v.19. In recalling the injuries previously detailed in the *Víkars þáttur*, vv.35-7 present

¹⁵⁴ Layher, “Starkaðr’s Teeth,” 1-9.

¹⁵⁵ Layher, “Starkaðr’s Teeth,” 9-20; Kaaren Grimstad, “The Giant as a Heroic Model: The Case of Egill and Starkaðr,” *SS* 48, no.3 (Summer 1976), 284-98. Grimstad contrasts this rationalisation with Egill Skalla-Grímsson, whose physical monstrosity is used to reinforce his supernatural strength; “Egill and Starkaðr,” 294-95.

¹⁵⁶ *Gautreks saga*, 20-21.

Starkaðr's own body as evidence of the martial feats he has accomplished throughout the narrative, and thus authenticate the narrative of Starkaðr's martial prowess up to this point in the *þáttur*.

Further to these disfigurements, the description of Starkaðr in vv.35-7 also attests more generally his long, hard years, and his *hvít brá* and "hár úlfgrátt" in particular serve to age Starkaðr.¹⁵⁷ As well as the hardships he endures, the verses of *Víkars þáttur* also attest his long years, and impart to the narrative a sense of the passage of time through the course of Starkaðr's life. Argument in favour of reading **Víkarsbálkr* as an *ævikviða* lies in the evident retrospective tone of the poem; this is established by the narrative context in which Starkaðr is said to deliver *Víkarsbálkr* – prompted by Alrekr to recount his life – but is also discernible in a number of verses throughout the prose. The first line of Starkaðr's first verse – "þá var ek ungr" ('I was young then') – draws immediate attention to the temporal distance between the event narrated (his father's death) and the poet's voice, which is further emphasised by the careful counting of time in v.8 and v.29:¹⁵⁸

*Prévetran mik
þaðan of flutti
Hrosshársgrani
til Hǫrðalandz;
nam ek á Aski
upp at vaxa,
sákat niðja
á níu sumrum.*

Hrosshárs-Grani then carried me, *three winters old*, to Hǫrðaland; I began to grow up on Ask; I didn't see my family for *nine summers*.

¹⁵⁷ *Gautrekssaga*, 33.

¹⁵⁸ *Gautrekssaga*, 14-15, 28. Emphasis my own.

Mér gaf Víkarr
valamálm,
hring enn rauða,
er ek á hendi ber,
mér þrímerking,
en ek þrumu honum
fylgda ek fylki
fímtán sumur

Víkarr gave me foreign gold, the red ring which I wear on my arm, weighing three marks; but I [gave] Þruma Island to him; I accompanied the chieftain for *fifteen summers*.

As authenticating verses, the saga author uses the chronological details they provide to inform his narrative. Taking Starkaðr's three years of age when Hrosshárs-Grani abducts him, and the nine years he spent on Áskr, the prose following v.9 states that Starkaðr was twelve years old when Víkarr took him into service, and the prose before v.29 likewise quotes the chronology provided; "Hann var fímtán sumur með Víkari konungi" ('he was with King Víkarr for fifteen summers').¹⁵⁹ These verses therefore furnish the prose with a more precise chronology than is typically found in the *fornaldarsögur*, or indeed the rest of *Gautreks saga*; this may lend *Víkars þáttr* to a more historiographical reading, but more generally the explicit attention to the passage of time amplifies retrospective tone considerably.

This careful, precise counting of years stands in contrast, however, to the notably vaguer sense of time in the situational verses spoken at Uppsala, v.33 beginning: "Þaðan vappaða ek | villtar brautir." The verb here, *vappa*, a phonetically assimilated form of *vafra*, ('to hover about, roam'), together with the "villtar brautir" ('uncertain roads') implies not a deliberate, measurable journey, but one spatially and temporally indeterminate; with the signs of Starkaðr's age in the following vv.35-37, the impression given is one of a lengthy period of banishment from the people of Hǫrðaland before reaching Uppsala.¹⁶⁰ There is, therefore, a cumulative effect of aging Starkaðr throughout the poetry of *Víkars þáttr*; his body carries the physical marks of a long, hard life, and the passing of time, at first

¹⁵⁹ *Gautrekssaga*, 27.

¹⁶⁰ *Gautrekssaga*, 32; Cleasby/Vigfusson, s.v. "vafra," 673; s.v. "vappa," 679.

quantifiable, later becomes immeasurable. This reinforces the image of Starkaðr as the eternally aged warrior, a characteristic noted by a number of scholars, evidencing the “blessing” bestowed by Óðinn that “hann skal lifa þjá mannzaldra” (‘he shall live three lifespans’).¹⁶¹ Starkaðr therefore not only belongs in the ancient past, but he is furthermore ancient himself, and perhaps in his status as a warrior *par excellence* embodies the medieval Icelandic conception of Scandinavia’s heroic age.

2.5: Summary

This chapter began by examining the folktale elements of *Dalafífla þátr* and *Gjafa-Refs þátr*, which are typically regarded as indicative of a social function other than historiographical. In a contemporary scholarly discourse that regards “märchensagas” as pure fiction, these elements seem antithetical to an historiographical purpose in these *þættir*. *Dalafífla þátr* is perhaps best understood as folk-tale, but in its humour, it also seems to have been a remembrance of the pagan past, which both requires and perpetuates a certain cultural understanding in later medieval Iceland about the pre-Christian cult of Óðinn. In *Gjafa-Refs þátr* we have a narrative that bears a strong resemblance to the *Íslendingaþættir* that are found in *konungasögur*, such as *Morkinskinna*; as with the *exempla* in these historiographical compendia, the historical contextualisation of *Gjafa-Refs þátr*, achieved through its references to famous figures of the *forn öld*, is necessary for imparting its social function. The situation of such “fictional” elements – in *Dalafífla þátr* especially – in what I argue is an historiographical work can be made sense of by turning to the representation of geography and space. The ethno-geographical excursus places the saga in the context of medieval historiographical discourse, and anchors the narrative to a real-world geography, while the shared Norwegian geography of *Víkars þátr* and the *konungasögur* may suggest a shared, historical chronotope. The movement from this real-world geography to the remote, anonymised location of *Dalafífla þátr*, “á mörkinni,” highlights the distance between the folktale and the historical,

¹⁶¹ *Gautrekssaga*, 29.

but also suggests that the fictional space of the former could exist within the latter in a single text.

Analysing the verse quotations in *Víkars þáttur* according to the authenticating/situational paradigm applied primarily to the *Íslendingasögur* and *konungasögur*, the historiographical purpose of *Gautreks saga* becomes more evident. The “svá segir Starkaðr” formula used to introduce the poetry is demonstrably modelled on the authenticating formulae of the *konungasögur*, and the close verbal correspondences between Starkaðr’s verses and the events narrated in the prose likewise mirrors the strictly historiographical form of saga prosimetrum. While the five situational verses of *Víkars þáttur* reiterate the preceding narrative, and could have been integrated as authenticating quotations, the presentation of Starkaðr’s recital of *Víkarsbálkr* creates a rather different effect. In these verses, Starkaðr’s reputation as a progenitor of poetry is made manifest, as is his authorship of the poetry quoted in the saga. The scene works, therefore, to create the impression that the narrative tradition that underpins *Víkars þáttur* is one that can be traced back directly to the characters and events represented in the saga’s text.

My analysis of these distinct aspects of *Gautreks saga* reflects the text itself, which exemplifies the “mixed modality” or “generic hybridity” that critics have identified in the *fornaldarsögur*. However, in arguing that each of the saga’s *þættir* engages with a particular mode of representing the past, my analysis makes the case for the cohesion of *Gautreks saga*, not only in its thematic unity (as Rowe, Cronan, and others have argued), but also in the historiographical purpose throughout the text.

3: *Völsunga saga*

Among the *foraldarsögur*, *Völsunga saga* has long enjoyed a privileged position in scholarship, as well as a wider reception in the modern era than any other *foraldarsaga*, a popularity attributable in no small part to the parallel of its subject matter in the c.1200 Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*, and its adaptation in Richard Wagner's operatic cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. *Völsunga saga* itself draws on the heroic poems of the *Poetic Edda*, some of which may be as old as the ninth century, and relates legends rooted deep in Germanic tradition: the feats of the dragon-slayer Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, his ill-fated love triangle, and his death, the fall of the Burgundian royal house, as played out by the deaths of Gunnarr and Högni Gjúkason at the court of Atli, and the vengeance of their sister, Guðrún.

Despite its popular and scholarly reception in the last two centuries, the extant manuscripts of *Völsunga saga* do not indicate that this text was any more popular in medieval or early modern Iceland than any other *foraldarsaga*. However, the probable composition of *Völsunga saga* in the mid-thirteenth century makes it one of the oldest extant *foraldarsögur*, and thus an obvious subject for analysis in investigating the generic affiliation between these sagas and historiographical writing in Iceland. Furthermore, it is evident that the subject matter of *Völsunga saga*, regardless of the importance of the saga itself, was well known in intellectual and antiquarian circles in medieval Iceland, as elements of the narrative cycle are found in a number of significant texts.

The most important of these is the *Poetic Edda*, approximately half of which is comprised of the same poetry used as source material by the saga author. A further two texts, however, are worth noting as witnesses to the prominence of this material in Old Norse literary culture. In *Skáldskaparmál* in Snorri's *Edda*, the origin of Fáfnir's treasure is narrated at some length to explain the gold-kenning *otrjǫld* ('otter-payment'), followed by a digression summarising the rest of the Völsung and Gjúkung cycle, because, as Snorri informs us, "eptir þessum sögum hafa flest skáld ort ok tekit ymsa þáttu" ('most skalds have composed poems based on these stories and taken

various strands from them').¹ Sigurðr's accomplishments, and the deaths of Sigurðr and Brynhildr, are also related in *Norna-Gests þáttur*, an *exemplum* incorporated into *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* in *Flateyjarbók*. In this *þáttur*, the eponymous guest of Óláfr Tryggvason claims to have been Sigurðr's retainer and to have witnessed events first-hand, and quotes a number of verses from several poems of the *Poetic Edda*.²

Owing to its parallels in medieval literature, much previous scholarship on *Völsunga saga* has been concerned with its relationship to other texts, especially the *Nibelungenlied* and *Poetic Edda*, as well the antecedent oral tradition. In the early twentieth century, numerous studies were especially concerned with the literary pre-history of *Völsunga saga*, foremost among which are Heusler's *Die Lieder der Lücke im Codex Regius der Edda* (1902) and *Nibelungensage und Nibelungenlied* (1922); somewhat more recently, Theodore Andersson has sought to revive the study of the legendary tradition beyond the extant written sources, and remains the authority on these matters in present scholarship.³ More recent scholarship has sought to analyse the text of *Völsunga saga* itself, outside of a comparative framework, addressing the saga's compositional strategies and textuality, the function of its mythological content, and a number of themes explored within the saga, including gender, loyalty, and the power of the spoken word.⁴ However, the legendary tradition behind *Völsunga saga*,

¹ *Skáldskaparmál*, 45-50 (50).

² *Flateyjarbók*, 1:384-98.

³ Theodore M. Andersson, *The Legend of Brynhild* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980); "The Lays in the Lacuna of Codex Regius," in *Speculum Norroenvm: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, eds. Ursula Dronke et al. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1981), 6-26; "Beyond Epic and Romance: *Sigurðarkviða in meiri*," in *Sagnaskemmtun: Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson on his 65th birthday, 26th May 1986*, eds. Rudolf Simek, Jónas Kristjánsson, and Hans Bekker-Nielsen (Wien: Böhlau, 1986), 1-11.

⁴ See, for example, Stefanie Würth, "The Rhetoric of *Völsunga saga*," in Ármann Jakobsson, Lassen, and Ney, *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi*, 101-113; Manuel Aguirre, "Narrative Composition in the Saga of the Volsungs," *Saga-Book* 26 (2002), 5-37; Judy Quinn, "The Realisation of Mythological Design: The Early Generations of the Völsung Dynasties," in Ney, Ármann Jakobsson, and Lassen, *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og verkelighed*, 123-42; Agneta Ney, "Genus och ideologi i *Völsunga saga*," in Ármann Jakobsson, Lassen, and Ney, *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi*, 113-122; Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 139-58; Quinn, "Trust in Words."

and its manifestations in other texts, as well as in Viking Age and medieval iconography, also continue to generate interest.⁵

Despite the wealth of scholarship on *Vǫlsunga saga*, there are yet avenues of research that can provide fresh insight into the text; this chapter will examine two aspects of *Vǫlsunga saga* that, hitherto, have received relatively little attention, and may suggest the influence of historiographical writing on its composition. The first section of this chapter will analyse the two areas in which *Vǫlsunga saga* offers a significantly more expansive account than the *Poetic Edda*: the saga provides a longer genealogy of the Vǫlsung dynasty than is found in the poems of the *Edda*, and also significantly embellishes the biography of Sigurðr, especially his early life, including his birth and conception. In both of these areas, genealogy and biography, the influence of *konungasögur* may be detected. These areas of expansion also alter the overall structure of the narrative cycle, for which models in contemporaneous saga writing may also be sought. Perhaps overshadowed by the question of *Vǫlsunga saga*'s relation to the *Poetic Edda*, little has been written on the direct quotation of eddic verse in the saga; the second section of this chapter will therefore analyse verse quotation in *Vǫlsunga saga*, according to the authenticating/situational paradigm, to consider the role of verse in historicising the prose narrative. Close reading of individual verses quoted from the poems of the *Edda* may also further our understanding of the relationship between this source material and the extant *Vǫlsunga saga*. Before turning to these questions, however, we must first address the age and textual history of *Vǫlsunga saga*, and, briefly, consider some of the major questions regarding the relationship of *Vǫlsunga saga* to its sources, first and foremost among which is the *Poetic Edda*.

⁵ Elena A. Melnikova, "Germanic Heroic Epic in Medieval Scandinavia: Actualization of the Tradition," in *Skemmtligastar Lygisögur: Studies in Honour of Galina Glazyrina*, eds. Tatjana N. Jackson and Elena A. Melnikova, (Moscow: Dmitriy Pozharskiy University, 2012), 122-137; Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, "The Origin and Development of the *Fornaldarsögur* as Illustrated by *Völsunga saga*," in Lassen, Ney and Ármann Jakobsson, *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, 59-81.

3.1: Textual History

Völsunga saga survives in forty-seven post-medieval manuscripts, all of which ultimately derive from the single extant medieval witness, Copenhagen, NKS 1824 b 4to, compiled c.1380-1420 in Iceland.⁶ Editing the saga, R. G. Finch deemed that the numerous seventeenth-century manuscripts had no independent textual value, since they closely follow the text of NKS 1824, including where NKS 1824 diverges from the text of *Codex Regius* (which singularly preserves the eddic poems used by the saga author). Furthermore, these seventeenth-century copies of *Völsunga saga* contain readings of the text that Finch argues have resulted from the inability of earlier copyists to read the illegible and defective passages in NKS 1824.⁷ Indeed, the confidence in the derivation of the paper manuscripts from NKS 1824 is such that Kaaren Grimstad has used one of them – Copenhagen, AM 6 fol. (1600-1699) – to substitute readings of the text where the sole medieval manuscript has since become illegible, in her diplomatic edition of the NKS 1824 text of *Völsunga saga*.⁸ However, like many sagas, and the *foraldarsögur* in particular, there is ample reason to suppose that *Völsunga saga* was composed considerably earlier than its earliest manuscript attestation c.1400. By analysing the relationship between the saga and the *Poetic Edda*, it is possible to date *Völsunga saga* to the middle of the thirteenth century, but first a more general overview of *Völsunga saga*'s relationship to the *Poetic Edda* must be given.

Though the direct quotation of eddic verse is relatively infrequent in *Völsunga saga*, much of the saga renders in prose the heroic poems of the *Poetic Edda*. The correspondences between chapters, verses, and individual passages of *Völsunga saga* and its extant written sources have been mapped out as an appendix to Finch's edition of the text, but are broadly outlined in Table 1:

⁶ *Stories for all time* <<http://fasnl.ku.dk/bibl/bibl.aspx?sid=vs&view=manuscript>>.

⁷ R. G. Finch, introduction to *Völsunga saga: The Saga of the Volsungs*, ed. and trans R. G. Finch (London: Nelson, 1965), xxxviii; Finch's normalised edition of the Old Norse is referred to throughout; translations are my own.

⁸ *Völsunga saga / The Saga of the Volsungs: The Icelandic Text according to MS Nks 1824 b, 4to*, trans. and ed. Kaaren Grimstad (Saarbrücken: AQ Verlag, 2000), 68-69.

| <i>Völsunga saga</i> chapter(s) | Extant literary source(s) | Comments |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| 1-8 | Unknown | May draw on a hypothesised * <i>Sigurðar saga Fáfnisbana</i> . ⁹ |
| 9-14 | <i>Helgakviða Hundingsbana I</i> ; <i>Frá dauða Sinfjötla</i> | |
| 14-20 | <i>Fáfnismál</i> ; <i>Reginismál</i> ; <i>Grípisspá</i> | |
| 21-22 | <i>Sigrdrífumál</i> | Sixteen verses of the poem directly quoted. |
| 23 | <i>Þiðreks saga af Bern</i> | Possibly a later interpolation into <i>Völsunga saga</i> . ¹⁰ |
| 24-31 | Unknown | Thought to derive from now-lost poems in the lacuna of the <i>Poetic Edda</i> . ¹¹ |
| 32 | <i>Sigurðarkviða in skamma</i> ; <i>Brot af Sigurðarkviða</i> | |
| 33-40 | <i>Guðrúnarkviða II</i> ; <i>Atlamál</i> ; <i>Atlakviða</i> | |
| 41 | <i>Guðrunarhvöt</i> | |
| 42-44 | <i>Hamðismál</i> | |

Table 1: Extant literary sources of *Völsunga saga*.

This outline highlights the overwhelming dependence of *Völsunga saga* on the lays found in the *Poetic Edda*, though ascertaining the source material for chs.1-8 and chs.24-31 is problematic, since the written sources (if, indeed, any existed) are no longer extant.

⁹ Finch, introduction to *Völsunga saga*, xxxvi-vii.

¹⁰ See Finch, introduction to *Völsunga saga* xxxvii; Carolyne Larrington, “*Völsunga saga*, *Ragnars saga*, and Romance in Old Norse: Revisiting Relationships,” in Lassen, Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, *Legendary Sagas: Origins and Developments*, 256, 264.

¹¹ Andersson, “The Lays in the Lacuna of *Codex Regius*,” 26.

It has long been considered that a **Sigurðar saga Fáfnisbana*, no longer extant, existed in the thirteenth century, and was the source of some, or all, of the material in chs.1-8; Finnur Jónsson proposed that the prose passages of the *Poetic Edda* and the first eight chapters of *Völsunga saga*, as well as the Völsung material found in *Snorra Edda*, were derived from such a **Sigurðar saga*.¹² The major arguments in twentieth-century scholarship as to the contents of **Sigurðar saga* are summarised by Andersson, and the question of the sources for the early chapters of *Völsunga saga* will be addressed in more detail in my analysis of the Völsung genealogy included therein.¹³

Though the sources for chs.24-31 (detailing Sigurðr's betrothal to Brynhildr, his marriage to Guðrún and that of Brynhildr to Gunnarr, and the confrontation of Brynhildr and Guðrún that eventually leads to Sigurðr's death) are no longer extant, we can be quite confident that they were lays in the *Poetic Edda* that are now lost or only partially extant.¹⁴ The unique manuscript in which the *Poetic Edda* is preserved – *Codex Regius* – is incomplete, apparently missing an entire gathering of eight leaves; the poems either side of this lacuna are therefore incomplete, and we are missing the end of *Sigrdrífumál* (though modern editions supplement *Codex Regius* with a further nine verses found in later paper manuscripts)¹⁵ and the beginning of a poem now known as *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu* ('Fragment of *Sigurðarkviða*,' henceforth *Brot*), which with its reconstructed beginning has been called **Sigurðarkviða in forna* ('The older *Sigurðarkviða*,' henceforth **Forna*).¹⁶ Heusler's extensive work on the contents of *Codex Regius'* lacuna (among other sources of the Nibelung legend), and later emendations by scholars such as Hermann Schneider and Per Wieselgren, has been critiqued by Andersson, but there is a firm consensus among all these scholars that a third poem was found in the lacuna of *Codex Regius*, whose contents can be surmised by the narrative of *Völsunga saga* chs.24-33. This third poem has been

¹² Finnur Jónsson, "Sigurðarsaga og de prosaiske stykker i Codex Regius," *Aarbøger for nordisk oldkundighed og historie* (1917), 16-36.

¹³ Andersson, *The Legend of Brynhild*, 99-102.

¹⁴ *Völsunga saga*, 41-53.

¹⁵ *Eddukvæði*, 2:319-21.

¹⁶ Andersson, "The Lays in the Lacuna of *Codex Regius*," 6.

designated **Sigurðarkviða in meiri* ('The longer *Sigurðarkviða*,' henceforth **Meiri*, as opposed to the surviving *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*,' henceforth *Skamma*).¹⁷

The reconstruction of the poems in the lacuna is too complex and involved to detail here, but there remain significant enough internal discrepancies in *Vǫlsunga saga* chs.24-31 (covering Sigurðr's betrothal to Brynhildr, his wooing her on behalf of Gunnarr, the quarrel between Guðrún and Brynhildr, and Sigurðr's murder) to suggest more than one missing poetic source for this material: that is, both the remainder of **Forna*, of which we possess *Brot*, and the entire of **Meiri*.¹⁸ The inclusion of poetic source material now lost indicates, as Andersson notes, that *Vǫlsunga saga* must have been composed "at a time when the Eddic collection was still complete," but he fails to elaborate further; the textual relationship between *Vǫlsunga saga* and the *Poetic Edda* is, however, rather more complex, and bears upon how we date the saga.¹⁹

Thanks to the survival of the saga's source material in the *Poetic Edda*, an apparent *terminus post quem* for the composition of *Vǫlsunga saga* would be the composition of *Codex Regius* in c.1270. However, we can not only be certain that the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* used as a source an intact copy of the *Edda*, as Andersson notes, but it furthermore seems likely that the saga author used a version of the *Edda* other than that which has survived, negating the use of *Codex Regius* in dating *Vǫlsunga saga*. Finch observed that some of the verses of the poems of the *Edda* are found in fuller form in *Vǫlsunga saga* than in *Codex Regius*, from which he concludes that the saga author used a version of the *Edda* antecedent to *Codex Regius*, and that the saga was therefore composed before c.1270.²⁰ The obvious flaw in this line of reasoning is that it is entirely possible that an earlier thirteenth-century manuscript

¹⁷ Andersson, "The Lays in the Lacuna of *Codex Regius*"; Anderson, *The Legend of Brynhild*, 24-77. Heusler, and later critics, also proposed the existence of a further two poems in the lacuna, identified as *Falkenlied* and *Traumlied*, respectively containing Sigurðr's meeting with Brynhildr at Heimir's residence, and Brynhildr's interpretation of Guðrún's prophetic dream (cf. *Vǫlsunga saga* chs.24-25, ch.27). I am, however, convinced by Andersson's argument that these poems in fact belonged to the same, single poem as **Meiri*.

¹⁸ Andersson, "Lays in the Lacuna," 12-14.

¹⁹ Andersson, *The Legend of Brynhild*, 21.

²⁰ Finch, introduction to *Vǫlsunga saga*, XXXVIII.

could have been used as a source by an author working after c.1270, perhaps in the fourteenth century. Still, it is worth briefly considering the evidence that, according to Finch, suggests that *Völsunga saga* used an earlier version of the *Poetic Edda* than that which is preserved in *Codex Regius*. The verses and prose passages in question are: *Völsunga saga* v.11, part of a long poetic quotation in which Brynhildr imparts runic wisdom to Sigurðr, which reproduces the defective *Sigrdrífumál* 9; and *Völsunga saga* ch.18, which renders in prose the dialogue between Sigurðr and Fáfnir in *Fáfnismál*, including the defective v.3 and v.18. The correspondences between these verses and prose passages are illustrated in Table 2:

| <i>Völsunga saga</i> ²¹ | <i>Codex Regius</i> ²² |
|---|---|
| <p>[v.11] Full skaltu signa ok við fári sjá ok verpa lauk í lög; Þá ek þat veit at þér verðr aldri meinblandinn mjöðr.</p> <p>A full goblet you shall sign, and watch against evil, and throw garlic into the liquid; then I know this, that poisoned mead will never befall you.</p> | <p>Full skaltu signa ok við fári sjá ok verpa lauki í lög.</p> <p>A full goblet you shall sign, and watch against evil, and throw garlic into the liquid.</p> <p>[<i>Sigrdrífumál</i> 9]</p> |
| <p>[ch.18] Fáfnir svarar “Ef þú átt engan feðr né mœðr, af hverju undri ertu þá alinn? Ok þótt þú segir mér eigi þitt nafn á banadægri mínu, þá veiztu at þú lýgr nú.”</p> <p>Fáfnir replied “If you have no father nor mother, then from what wonder were you born? And though you do not tell me your name on my death-day, you know that you are now lying.”</p> | <p>Veiztu, ef föður né áttat sem fira synir af hverju vartu undri alinn?</p> <p>Do you know, if you had no father, as do the sons of men, from what wonder you were born?</p> <p>[<i>Fáfnismál</i> 3]</p> |

²¹ *Völsunga saga*, 37; 31-32.

²² *Eddukvæði*, 2:315; 2:304, 306.

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>[ch.18] Enn mælti Fáfnir "...siðan ek lá á arfi míns bróður, ok svá fnýsta ek eitri all vega frá mér í brott at engi þorði at koma í nánd mér, ok engi vápn hrædumk ek, ok aldri fann ek svá margan mann fyrir mér at ek þættumk eigi miklu sterkari, en allirt váru hræddir við mér."</p> <p>Still Fáfnir spoke "...since I lay on my brother's inheritance, and thus I blew out poison in all directions away from myself, so that none dared come near me, and I feared no weapon, and I never found so many men before me that I didn't think myself to be much stronger, and all were frightened of me."</p> | <p>Eitri ek fnoesta, er ek á arfi lá miklum míns fður."</p> <p>I blew out poison, when I lay on my father's great inheritance.</p> <p>[Fáfnismál 18]</p> |
|--|--|

Table 2: *Völsunga saga* and the defective verses of *Sigrdrífumál* and *Fáfnismál*.

Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason's edition of the *Poetic Edda* supplements *Sigrdrífumál* 9 with the second half of the verse found in *Völsunga saga*, but the reading of *Sigrdrífumál* in *Codex Regius* simply omits the second half of the verse and runs immediately into the following verse.²³ As Finch suggests, this does seem to indicate that the author of *Völsunga saga* had access to a version of *Sigrdrífumál* that contained the whole verse, which appears to have been curtailed in *Codex Regius*. It is less obvious from the prose of *Völsunga saga* ch.18 that the saga author had access to a fuller version of *Fáfnismál* than is extant in *Codex Regius*; however, comparison between other verses in *Fáfnismál* and their corresponding prose in *Völsunga saga* does indicate that the saga author did not elsewhere embellish the dialogue between Sigurðr and Fáfnir. In *Fáfnismál* 2, for example, Sigurðr states that he is called "göfugt dýr" ('noble beast'), that he has no mother and no father, and that he travels alone; in the corresponding prose in *Völsunga saga* the same information is relayed, with the addition of Sigurðr's statement that "Ætt mín er mǫnnum ókunnig" ('My family is unknown to men').²⁴ This latter statement is not, however, the invention of the saga author, but is in fact a paraphrase of the first lines of *Fáfnismál* 4. The

²³ *Eddukvæði*, 2:315; Reykjavík, GKS 2365 4to 32r, www.handrit.is
<[http://handrit.is/en/manuscript/imaging/is/GKS04-2365/31v-32v#page/31v++\(1+of+3\)/mode/2up](http://handrit.is/en/manuscript/imaging/is/GKS04-2365/31v-32v#page/31v++(1+of+3)/mode/2up)>.

²⁴ *Eddukvæði*, 2:303; *Völsunga saga*, 31.

author of *Vǫlsunga saga* has reorganised some of the contents of *Fáfnismál*, as it is now extant, but has added no new material, which does suggest that those passages of *Vǫlsunga saga* ch.18 that have no counterpart in *Fáfnismál*, as shown in Table 2, do in fact preserve the contents of a version of the poem that contained the full stanzas of v.3 and v.18, of which only the first half-stanzas were copied into *Codex Regius*.

All this is to suggest that the comparison in Table 2 does indicate that the saga author had at his disposal a version of the *Edda* slightly different to that which is preserved in *Codex Regius*; given that this version of the *Edda* appears to have been slightly fuller in places, it is likely that it is antecedent to our extant copy, perhaps even *Codex Regius*' exemplar. But though we may suggest that *Vǫlsunga saga* used an earlier version of the *Edda* than our extant copy, it is by no means as certain as Finch would have it that c.1270, when *Codex Regius* was compiled, is the *terminus ante quem* for the composition of *Vǫlsunga saga*. Again, there is no reason why the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* could not have used an earlier copy of the *Poetic Edda* still circulating after the completion of *Codex Regius*, in the late thirteenth or fourteenth century.

Nevertheless, the mid-thirteenth century remains a plausible date for the composition of *Vǫlsunga saga*, given the literary historical context; this period witnessed an arousal of interest in the legendary past, as Tulinius has documented, which, as Lassen has argued, likely reflects the broader European fashion for writing legendary *origines gentium*.²⁵ Given the importance of the *Vǫlsung* cycle in Old Norse literary culture, *Vǫlsunga saga* would be an obvious candidate for one of the earliest *fornaldarsögur* to be composed; indeed, literary engagement with the *Vǫlsung* material in the early- to mid-thirteenth century, in addition to the circulation of the eddic poems themselves, is evinced by **Sigurðar saga Fáfnisbana* (c.1200), *Snorra Edda* (c.1220-41), and by *Piðreks saga*, a translation or adaptation of Middle High German legends about Dietrich von Bern, which also includes material relating to Sigurð and Brynhildr, Guðrún, Gunnarr and Högni, and Atli, and which is usually

²⁵ Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*; Lassen, "Learned Origin of *Fornaldarsögur*," 33-58.

dated to the reign of King Hákon Hákonarson of Norway (1217-63).²⁶ This latter text has been regarded as of particular import to the dating of *Völsunga saga*, since *Völsunga saga* ch.23, depicting Sigurðr as a chivalric knight, detailing his arms and accoutrements, is demonstrably borrowed from *Þiðreks saga* (see Table 1).²⁷ We cannot, however, conclude that *Völsunga saga* must have been composed after *Þiðreks saga* was completed, since, as Finch noted, *Völsunga saga* ch.23 may well be a later interpolation into the text.²⁸

The circulation of *Þiðreks saga* may yet have influenced the literary development of *Völsunga saga*; Klaus von See has suggested that the combination of *Völsunga saga* with *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, as they stand in NKS 1824, was an effort to resituate Sigurðr in a distinctly Scandinavian heroic milieu, around the year 1250, in response to *Þiðreks saga*.²⁹ Carlyne Larrington has offered some support for this claim, in suggesting that *Völsunga saga* critiques the courtly, southern world of the Gjúkungs as a place of treachery and deceit.³⁰ The theory that *Völsunga saga* did not exist except as a prologue to *Ragnars saga* is generally disregarded – Larrington, for example, notes the stylistic variation between the two texts – and if we assume that *Völsunga saga* was written before being attached to *Ragnars saga*, it would follow that, if also accepted, von See’s proposed date of c.1250 for the combination of the two sagas would provide a *terminus ante quem* for the composition of *Völsunga saga*.³¹

At this point in the argument, the attempt to date *Völsunga saga* has become rather conjectural, dependent on several assumptions that cannot be definitively proven. What we can state with confidence, however, is that the middle of the thirteenth century was a time of particular interest in the Völsung material in medieval

²⁶ The origins of the Norwegian *Þiðreks saga* are uncertain, but Andersson proposes that it was a translation of a written German amalgam of legends: *The Legend of Brynhild*, 21-22.

²⁷ *Völsunga saga*, 40-41.

²⁸ Finch, introduction to *Völsunga saga*, XXXVII. Finch also notes that the derivation from *Þiðreks saga* of three, shorter passages in *Völsunga saga* is doubtful.

²⁹ Klaus von See, “Die Kulturideologische Stellung der *Völsunga ok Ragnars saga*,” in *Studien zum Altgermanischen: Festschrift für Heinrich Beck*, ed. Heiko Uecker (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994), 584-85.

³⁰ Larrington, “*Völsunga saga*, *Ragnars saga*, and Romance,” 253-65.

³¹ See Chapter 4 for the dating of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*.

Iceland, and seems an appropriate context in which to situate the composition of *Vǫlsunga saga*. Aside from the aforementioned studies, recent scholarship has been largely silent on the dating of *Vǫlsunga saga*; Andersson's works remain the most comprehensive and authoritative on the legend's development, but his interest in *Vǫlsunga saga* itself is chiefly where the reconstruction of the lost eddic poems is concerned.³² More recently, Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir has sought to trace the development of the narrative material in its visual, as well textual, attestations, and while her study must be commended for the breadth of material it surveys, she does not offer any analysis on the textual history of *Vǫlsunga saga*.³³ Generally speaking, recent scholarship, as well as editions and translations of the text, follow Finch in dating *Vǫlsunga saga* to c.1250, and having examined what circumstantial evidence bears upon the issue, this does indeed seem to be a reasonable estimate.³⁴

Though it seems likely that several other sources were used in the composition of *Vǫlsunga saga* – probably a **Sigurðar saga*, and perhaps *Þiðreks saga* – the *Poetic Edda* was certainly the most important of the author's source materials. Understandably, much debate has focussed on the relationship of *Vǫlsunga saga* to the *Poetic Edda*, not only in relation to the textual history of the saga, but also with regard to the saga's aesthetic qualities. In the scholarly rehabilitation of the *fornaldarsögur* of recent years, Würth has sought a better understanding of *Vǫlsunga saga* as a text in its own right, challenging the consensus she identifies as regarding it as "an inferior paraphrase of the heroic eddic poems."³⁵ As such, Würth argues that *Vǫlsunga saga* does not represent *scripted* oral tradition – a transposition of narrative "from the phonic to graphic medium" – but a *textualised* version of the narrative, one steeped in the rhetoric and style of contemporary literary, textual culture; the saga is, therefore, not merely an attempt to synthesise the multiple, and sometimes

³² Andersson, *The Legend of Brynhild*, esp. 36-62.

³³ Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, "The Origin and Development of the *Fornaldarsögur*."

³⁴ Finch, introduction to *Vǫlsunga saga*, XXXVII-XXXVIII. See, for example, Tulinius, *Matter of the North*, 139; Grimstad, introduction to *Vǫlsunga saga*, 14; Jesse L. Byock, introduction to *The Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer* (London: Penguin, 1999), 3.

³⁵ Würth, "The Rhetoric of *Vǫlsunga saga*," 101-113.

conflicting, narratives of the *Poetic Edda*, but a scholarly, “hermeneutic interpretation” of them.³⁶

Exemplifying the scholarship that has regarded *Vǫlsunga saga* merely as a prosified synthesis of the eddic poems, Würth cites Andersson’s *The Legend of Brynhild*, though Andersson himself in fact has little to say on how *Vǫlsunga saga* handles its source material. More representative of this approach are Finch’s works in this area. In his introduction to the saga, Finch denigrates the aesthetics of the *fornaldarsögur* as a genre, and ascribes what he regards as the “structural weaknesses” of *Vǫlsunga saga* (including, for example, the repetition of Brynhildr and Sigurðr’s betrothal) to either the “failure of the compiler” or a “less skilled interpolator”; in either case, his disparaging view of *Vǫlsunga saga vis-à-vis* the *Poetic Edda* is abundantly clear.³⁷ However, Finch viewed *Vǫlsunga saga* more favourably in subsequent studies, praising the “generally high quality” of the saga’s handling of its eddic source material, describing the work as a “unified prose narrative that lacks neither a certain vigour, nor yet considerable consistency.”³⁸ Though in his later study Finch prefers the term “saga-writer” to “compiler,” he nevertheless consistently viewed the task of the hand behind *Vǫlsunga saga* as the creation of a “synoptic prose version” of the eddic lays.³⁹

In light of this, Würth’s need to stress *Vǫlsunga saga*’s independence, as a literary work, from the *Poetic Edda* – and to stress its *textuality* – seems justified, but such a view of the saga is hardly new. In this regard, Würth’s assessment of *Vǫlsunga saga*’s textuality concurs with Anne Holtsmark’s much earlier conclusions that *Vǫlsunga saga* leaves nothing “either to the audience’s imagination or to the performer’s ability to ... improvise,” and is far removed from the oral style of the *Poetic Edda*, which she regards as “as close to oral tradition as we can get.”⁴⁰ Still,

³⁶ Würth, “The Rhetoric of *Vǫlsunga saga*,” 102, 109.

³⁷ Finch, introduction to *Vǫlsunga saga*, IX.

³⁸ R. G. Finch, “Treatment of Poetic Sources by the Compiler of *Vǫlsunga saga*,” *Saga-Book* 16 (1962-65), 353; R. G. Finch, “*Atlakviða*, *Atlamál*, and *Vǫlsunga saga*: A Study in Integration and Combination,” in Dronke et al., *Speculum Norroenvm*, 138.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Holtsmark, “Heroic Poetry and Legendary Sagas,” 12-15.

none of this contradicts the merits of a comparative approach to *Vǫlsunga saga* such as that exemplified by Finch, nor does a comparative approach deny or undermine the textuality of the saga. Indeed, the marriage of these two approaches ought to offer significant insight into the saga, and the intentions of its author, in both areas identified for analysis in this chapter. Analysing the form and function of verse quotation in *Vǫlsunga saga* is pertinent, first and foremost, to the composition of the text itself, in relation to the prosimetrum of historical saga writing in thirteenth-century Iceland, but for quite obvious reasons this approach may benefit from consideration of the eddic contexts from which the verses were drawn. Furthermore, the analysis of how *Vǫlsunga saga* develops the narrative material found in its sources necessarily demands comparison of the saga to other texts, principally the *Poetic Edda*, to which we may now turn.

3.2: Genealogy, Biography, and Structure

I will begin this analysis with the saga's opening chapters, in which the generations of the Vǫlsung line preceding Sigurðr are narrated. Here Sigurðr's patrilineal line is said to extend from his father Sigmundr to the eponymous Vǫlsungr, Rerir, and Sigi, who is, we are told in ch.1, "kallaðr at héti sonr Óðins" ('said to be called Óðinn's son').⁴¹ The same genealogy is found in the Prologue to *Snorra Edda*, though it is not narrativised, but this information is not found in *Vǫlsunga saga*'s primary source, the *Poetic Edda*.⁴² It is important to stress, therefore, that much of the account of Sigurðr's ancestry is unique to *Vǫlsunga saga*, and though the purpose here is to analyse its function in the extant saga, the extent to which this genealogical material was drawn from existing oral traditions and/or literary sources must be considered.

Starting from the generations closest to Sigurðr, it is certain that the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* had ample source material for Sigurðr's half-brothers, Sinfjǫtli and Helgi Hundingsbani. While *Vǫlsunga saga* offers a fuller version of the narrative, the

⁴¹ *Vǫlsunga saga*, 1.

⁴² Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2005), 5.

account of Sinfjötli's death is manifestly derived from the prose passage of the *Poetic Edda*, *Frá dauða Sinfjötla*. As noted in Table 1, the end of ch.8 and all of ch.9 closely follow the narrative of *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* (*HH I*), and though Helgi's accomplishments bear little relation to the rest of *Völsunga saga*'s narrative (he is quickly written out of the saga at the end of ch.9 – “[Helgi] gerðisk frægr konungr ok ágætr, ok er hann hér ekki síðan við þessa sögu,” ‘[Helgi] became a famous and excellent king, but he is not afterwards here in this saga’), he seems to have always been counted among the Völsungs.⁴³ The relation between Helgi and the Völsung dynasty must be at least as old as the verses of *HH I* and *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (*HH II*) – probably the late eleventh century, though the relative age of these poems is disputed – in which he is referred to as “bur[r] Sigmundar” (‘Sigmundr’s son,’ *HH I* 6, 11; *HH II* 12, 50’), “syni Sigmundar” (*HH II* 12), and “brœðr Sinfjötla” (‘Sinfjötli’s brother,’ *HH I* 8).⁴⁴ Finally, Helgi and Sinfjötli are together referred to as *Ylfingar* in *HH I* 34 and *HH I* 48; in this context, as we are told in the prose introduction to *HH II*, the Ylfings are to be understood as synonymous with the Völsungs, though according to Snorri the Ylfings were a different line of kings.⁴⁵

For the earlier Völsung generations, and indeed for most of *Völsunga saga*'s account of Sinfjötli, it is considerably more challenging to ascertain the extent to which the saga author drew on existing sources, and what these might have been. As noted, Sigmundr is named as the father of Helgi and Sinfjötli in *HH I* and *HH II*, as well as in *Frá Dauða Sinfjötla* (which also ascribes to him another son, Hámundr), and he is equally well attested as the father of Sigurðr, who is referred to as the son of Sigmundr in *Grípisspá* 3, *Reginismál* 14, *Fáfnismál* 4, *Sigrdrífumál* 2, and *Skamma* 39.⁴⁶ It is evident that Sigmundr himself was also a well renowned heroic figure in Germanic legend, since the heroic exploits of one Sigemund Wælsing, which include the slaying of a dragon, are recalled in *Beowulf* 874b–897; indeed, it has been thought that Sigemund/Sigmundr was the original dragon slayer of the legendary

⁴³ *Völsunga saga*, 17.

⁴⁴ *Eddukvæði*, 2:248-49, 253, 256, 273-74, 282. For the dating of *HH I* and *HH II*, see Vésteinn Ólason, introduction to *Eddukvæði*, 2:18-19, 33.

⁴⁵ *Skáldskaparmál*, 103.

⁴⁶ *Eddukvæði*, 2:286, 299, 304, 313, 342.

cycle, a role that became attached to Sigurðr later in the legend's development.⁴⁷ However, for the narrative material relating to Sigmundr in *Völsunga saga*, parallels must be sought in the Old Norse corpus.

We learn of Sigmundr's marriages to Borghildr and Hjörðís, and of his death, in *Frá Dauða Sinfjötla*, but this accounts for relatively little of *Völsunga saga*'s account of his life, the majority of which concerns the treachery of his brother-in-law, Siggeirr, the birth and upbringing of his son, Sinfjötli, and his vengeance against Siggeirr. No source for this material is extant, though there are allusions in the *Poetic Edda* and in *Snorra Edda* to the marital relations between Siggeirr and the Völsungs. In *Skáldskaparmál*, Snorri lists a number of royal dynasties that may be used in skaldic verse as *heiti* for a king, and here Siggeirr is referred to as "mágr Völsungs" ('[son/father/brother]-in-law of Völsungr'); in the *Poetic Edda*, Sinfjötli is referred to as "stjúpr Siggeirs" ('Siggeirr's step-son') in *HH I 41*.⁴⁸

These external references suggest an existing tradition from which *Völsunga saga*'s account for Sigmundr may have been drawn, but the clearest evidence for an antecedent to this narrative is found within the saga itself: a verse is quoted when Sigmundr and Sinfjötli are imprisoned in a burial-mound, appearing to refer to their escape, which evinces a direct textual borrowing from some other source, though its nature and extent are unknown. This verse is not found in any known eddic poem, though it is possible that poetry not included in the *Edda* was available to the author of *Völsunga saga* – the prose of *HH II* attributes a number of its verses to an otherwise unattested *Völsungakviða in forna* ('Old Poem of the Völsungs'), indicating that the poems contained within the *Edda* do not account for the entire corpus of poems concerning the Völsung dynasty.⁴⁹ A more popular theory, however, is that some, or all, of the material in chs.1-8, including this verse, is derived from the

⁴⁷ *The Beowulf Manuscript: Complete Texts and The Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. and trans. R. D. Fulk (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, Harvard University Press, 2010), 142-44. Catalin Taranu, "Who was the Original Dragon-Slayer of the Niblung Cycle?," *Viator*, 46, no.2 (2015), 24-30.

⁴⁸ *Skáldskaparmál*, 1:103; *Eddukvæði*, 2:255, 355-56.

⁴⁹ *Eddukvæði*, 2:273.

**Sigurðar saga Fáfnisbana* referenced in *Norna-Gests þátttr*, and which may have also informed Snorri's account of Sigurðr in *Skáldskaparmál*.⁵⁰

Finnur Jónsson first proposed that this **Sigurðar saga* was the source for the prose passages of the *Poetic Edda*, as well as *Vǫlsunga saga* chs.1-8, a position that has been since adopted by Finch.⁵¹ The major arguments as to contents of this **Sigurðar saga* are summarised by Andersson, who describes it as “a necessary assumption to account for the large body of supplementary prose in the Eddic collection and the full account of Sigurd's ancestry in the early chapters of *Vǫlsunga saga*.”⁵² It must be said, however, that Andersson's confidence in the use of **Sigurðar saga* as source material by the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* is not universally held; Mitchell lists **Sigurðar saga Fáfnisbana* as a “probable” lost *fornaldarsaga*, but is reticent to conclude that it informed *Vǫlsunga saga*, while Tulinius suggests that chs.1-8 were first composed by the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* himself; the principal argument for this claim is that in these chapters, the saga author foregrounds themes of faithfulness and treachery that are important to the story of Sigurðr and the Gjúkungur.⁵³ Finch also argued that the Sigmundur material in *Vǫlsunga saga* was modelled on later events in the cycle – Gunnarr and Högni's death at Atli's court, and Guðrún's vengeance – claiming that “literary influence is unmistakable.” The similarities, in Finch's own words, are as follows:⁵⁴

In both a king sends a treacherous invitation to his brothers-in-law who are warned by their sister, the king's unloving wife, but are overpowered, captured and given over to a cruel death. The sister takes vengeance on her husband: their two sons are slain and the hall goes up in flames.

While it does appear that the Sigmundur material, by the time it was incorporated into *Vǫlsunga saga*, had come to mirror the Gjúkung material, the hypothesised **Sigurðar*

⁵⁰ *Flateyjarbók*, 1:391.

⁵¹ Finnur Jónsson, “Sigurðarsaga”; Finch, introduction to *Vǫlsunga saga*, XXXVI-VII.

⁵² Andersson, *The Legend of Brynhild*, 99-102. The verse quoted in *Vǫlsunga saga*, ch.8, seems irrefutable evidence for some missing written source, though it must be stressed that the *saga Sigurðar Fáfnisbana* referred to in *Norna-Gests þátttr* may not necessarily be the source of this verse, nor even be a written text.

⁵³ Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads*, 70, 185; Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 141-44.

⁵⁴ Finch, introduction to *Vǫlsunga saga*, XXXIV-V.

saga remains a plausible source both for the verse quoted in *Vǫlsunga saga* ch.8 and the narrative in these early chapters. It is also possible that Snorri made use of this **Sigurðar saga* for the Vǫlsung material in his *Edda*.⁵⁵

Though it is uncertain how far back into the mythological past **Sigurðar saga* projected the Vǫlsung line, evidence in *Snorra Edda* and the *Poetic Edda* does yet suggest a tradition of the Vǫlsungs' descent from Óðinn, through Sigi, Rerir, and the eponymous Vǫlsungr, as is found in *Vǫlsunga saga* chs.1-2. The name Vǫlsungr appears in the *Poetic Edda* as Sigmundr's patronym ("Vǫlsungsson," used in both *Frá Dauða Sinfjötla* and the prose of *HH II*), and in *Snorra Edda*, Vǫlsungr is named as the progenitor of the Vǫlsung line.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the Prologue to *Snorra Edda* – containing Snorri's euhemeristic account of Óðinn's descent from King Priam of Troy – lists Sigi and Rerir as descendents of Óðinn, and states that "Þeir langfeðgar réðu þar fyrir er nú er kallað Frakland, ok er þaðan sú ætt komin er kǫlluð er Vǫlsungar" ("this dynasty ruled over what is now called France, and descended from this line are those who are called the Vǫlsungs').⁵⁷

Again, it seems likely that Snorri drew on **Sigurðar saga* for this genealogy, but regardless, the relative dating of *Snorra Edda* and *Vǫlsunga saga* indicates that the tradition of the Vǫlsungs' descent from Óðinn predated the saga's composition. It is possible that the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* knew only of the names of these early Vǫlsungs, and that the narratives attached to Sigi and Rerir were his own composition, but there are elements within chs.1-3 that suggest some pedigree; Catharina Raudvere has considered a number of the motifs in these chapters – such as the apple given by Óðinn that allows Rerir and his wife to conceive – as preserving genuine fragments of pre-Christian ritual and belief.⁵⁸ If we accept Raudvere's proposition then we must ask where the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* learned of these

⁵⁵ See Faulkes, introduction to *Prologue and Gylfaginning*, XXIV; Andersson, *The Legend of Brynhild*, 99-100.

⁵⁶ *Eddukvæði*, 2:270, 280; *Skáldskaparmál I*, 103.

⁵⁷ *Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 5.

⁵⁸ Catharina Raudvere, "Myt, genealogi och berättande: En religionshistorisk läsning av några motiv i *Völsungasagan*," in Ármann Jakobsson, Lassen, and Ney, eds., *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi*, 158-60.

motifs; this in turn invites the possibility that the early genealogy of the Vǫlsung existed in some narrative form that included these motifs, whether orally transmitted or preserved in a written source, prior to its inclusion in *Vǫlsunga saga*.

From these various fragments, we may conclude that the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* very likely drew on an existing tradition of the early generations of the Vǫlsung dynasty, including a significant amount of material that was not contained in the *Poetic Edda*. The existence of **Sigurðar saga Fáfnisbana* is the simplest explanation for the source of this material in *Vǫlsunga saga*, but that the author did not compose Sigurðr's genealogy himself need not negate any analysis of its role in the saga. Indeed, the function of Sigurðr's genealogy in shaping the structure and character of *Vǫlsunga saga* is striking, and reveals a major difference between the compositional strategies of the two figures responsible for *Vǫlsunga saga* and the *Poetic Edda*. Furthermore, recognising that *Vǫlsunga saga*'s genealogy was indebted to an existing saga tradition may in fact aid our understanding of its place in the extant text.

Both the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* and the compiler of the *Poetic Edda* locate the narrative cycle's origins in the mythological past, but in remarkably different ways. As Vésteinn Ólason has noted, the formula "ár var alda," or "ár var," denoting "a long time ago," is used in the opening lines and stanzas of a number of the heroic poems of the *Poetic Edda*, and recalls the creation of the world "long ago" according to the mythological poem *Vǫluspá*.⁵⁹ Though it is indisputable that the poems of the *Edda* are clearly divided between those set in the world of the gods and those set in the world of men, this lexical echo may be interpreted as locating the heroic world in the same mythological past as that of the poems of the first half of the *Edda*, and not the same kind of historical past as that which we encounter in, for example, the *konungasögur* and *Íslendingasögur*. In tracing the Vǫlsung lineage back to Óðinn, the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* also projects the narrative back into a mythological past, but does so in a manner that is reminiscent of a number of learned Icelandic works.

⁵⁹ Vésteinn Ólason, "The Poetic Edda: Literature or Folklore?," in *Along the Oral-Written Continuum: Types of Texts, Relations and Implications*, eds. Slavica Ranković, Leidulf Melve, and Else Mundal (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 240-42.

Óðinn appears as the founding father of a number of prominent dynasties in several works of Icelandic historiography, and it is worth noting that, when he appears in these contexts, the god is, to varying extents, euhemerised and historicised as a mortal ruler. The two most well-known accounts of Óðinn as an earthly king are both found in the works of Snorri Sturluson, in the Prologue to his *Edda* and in *Ynglinga saga*.⁶⁰ Both works witness a thoroughly intellectualised account of Óðinn's origins and his progeny, from whom a number of renowned dynasties are descended; only in his *Edda* does Snorri relate Óðinn's descent from Trojan stock, but in *Ynglinga Saga* Óðinn is euhemerised by Snorri's equation of Ásheimr, or Ásaland, with Asia. *Ynglinga saga* offers the most fully narrativised version of Óðinn's patronage in the northern lands, in which he is the founder not only of a royal dynasty, but also of a people, settling "um norðrhálfu heimsins" ('in the northern half of the world') with a great crowd of followers, not unlike Virgil's Aeneas and Geoffrey of Monmouth's Brutus.⁶¹

Snorri was, however, by no means the first Icelandic historian to claim Óðinn's origins in Asia. There is no indication that the poem *Ynglingatal*, the basis for most of *Ynglinga saga*, made this claim; rather, Snorri seems here to have been influenced by *Íslendingabók* and **Skjöldunga saga. Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta* claims that, according to Norwegian histories, Óðinn, "ex Asia a[d]ventantem" ('arriving from Asia'), conquered most of the northern parts of Europe and bequeathed Denmark and Sweden to his sons.⁶² In the genealogy at the end of *Íslendingabók*, Ari traces the Yngling line, ancestors of his own kin, the Breiðfirðings, not to Óðinn (via Yngvi-Freyr, as does Snorri), but simply to the eponymous Yngvi; nevertheless, Ari calls this Yngvi "Tyrkjakonungr" ('King of the Turks'), and is thus witness to a tradition of intellectualising and historicising genealogies that, like the Völsung dynasty, began with a mythological figure.⁶³

⁶⁰ *Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 5-6; *Heimskringla*, 1:9-22.

⁶¹ *Heimskringla*, 1:14.

⁶² *Danasaga Arngríms lærdæ*, in *Danakonungasögur*, 3.

⁶³ Ari Þorgilsson, *Íslendingabók*, in *Íslendingabók: Landnámabók I*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson (Reykjavík: Íslensk Fornritafélag, 1986), 27. Cf. Gro Steinsland, who interprets Ari's use of *Tyrkjakonungr* as a reference to the Trojan origin myth common to many historiographical traditions: "Origin Myths and

In tracing Sigurðr's line back to Óðinn, the genealogy that appears in the beginning of *Vǫlsunga saga* does not, therefore, transport the narrative into the world of mythology – the context in which, in the thirteenth century at least, the poetic iteration of the narrative was placed. Rather, through its deployment of a trope well attested in Icelandic historiography, the saga tradition of the Vǫlsungs (both *Vǫlsunga saga* and, probably, **Sigurðar saga*) indicates that this narrative belongs to an historical past, legendary or otherwise. However, the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* does not explicitly euhemerise the figure of Óðinn, who appears throughout the saga in a role that Lassen has identified as typical of the *fornaldarsögur*, directly intervening in the fates of the characters; we may therefore question the extent to which Óðinn's presence in the Vǫlsung genealogy really links the saga to contemporary historical traditions.⁶⁴

Two other *fornaldarsögur* refer to Óðinn in his role as a progenitor, and both make explicit reference to the euhemerising myth of the god's origin in Asia; in *Bósa saga*, Herraúðr is said to have descended from King Gauti, a son of Óðinn's, who himself "konungr var í Svíþjóð ok kominn var utan af Asíam" ('was a king in Sweden and had come out of Asia').⁶⁵ No characters in *Sturlaug's saga starfsama* are said to be descended from Óðinn, but the saga begins with the statement that:⁶⁶

Allir men, þeir sem sannfróðir eru at um tíðendi, vita, at Tyrkir ok Asíamenn byggðu Norðrlönd. Hófst þá tunga sú, er síðan dreifist um öll lönd. Formaðr þess fólks hét Óðinn, er menn rekja ætt til.

All men, those who are truly knowledgeable in events, know that Turks and men of Asia settled the Northern lands. Then originated that language which afterwards spread all around the lands. The leader of these people was called Óðinn, whom men reckon their ancestry to.

Rulership. From the Viking Age Ruler to the ruler of Medieval Historiography: Continuity, Transformations and Innovations," in *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes*, eds. Gro Steinsland, Jón Víðar Sigurðsson, Jan Erik Rekdal, and Ian Beuermann (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 19-20.

⁶⁴ Annette Lassen, "Óðinn in Old Norse Texts other than *The Elder Edda*, *Snorra Edda*, and *Ynglinga saga*," *VMS* 1 (2005), 98-100.

⁶⁵ *Bósa saga*, 2:465.

⁶⁶ *Sturlaug's saga starfsama*, in *FN*, 2:311.

Regardless of the perceived truth-value of such statements in these sagas, which I will not debate here, it is evident that they are intended to evoke the kind of learned origin myth found in *Íslendingabók*, **Skjöldunga saga*, and Snorri's works. Without such explicit reference as this, the same cannot definitively be said of *Vǫlsunga saga*, but it is at least possible that an association with the euhemerised accounts of Óðinn may have been made by audience members familiar with them. Indeed, if we are to take at face value *Sturlaug's saga's* claim that "allir men ... vita, at Tyrkir ok Asíamenn byggðu Norðrlönd," it may well have been obvious to *Vǫlsunga saga's* audience that this origin myth was being invoked.

Aside from this specific myth, however, Óðinn's place at the head of the *Vǫlsung* genealogy invites a more general comparison with wider traditions of medieval historiography. Though we cannot prove that *Vǫlsunga saga*, much less **Sigurðar saga* preceding it, drew on such sources, it is nevertheless interesting to note the role of Woden in Anglo-Saxon, and subsequently Anglo-Norman, historiography. Like their Icelandic counterparts in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Anglo-Saxon historians, writing in Latin and the vernacular, appropriated pre-Christian origin myths in their royal genealogies, which were especially important to the ideology of the West Saxon dynasty.⁶⁷ Bede is the first writer known to incorporate such myths into his work, and in his *Historia* he claims that Hengist and Horsa, legendary founders of the Kentish royal house, were descended from Woden, "de cuius stirpe multarum prouinciarum regium genus originem duxit" ('from whose stock the family of the kings of many provinces reckon their origin').⁶⁸ Following Bede, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* gives the genealogies for a number of royal houses, including those of Wessex, Bernicia, Deira, and Mercia, and in a number of its redactions the *Chronicle* is prefaced by the Wessex genealogy.⁶⁹ These genealogies continued to be

⁶⁷ C. R. Davis, "Cultural Assimilation in the Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies," *Anglo-Saxon England* 21 (1992), 23-36.

⁶⁸ *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, i.15.

⁶⁹ The relation between the different versions of the *Chronicle* and its extant manuscripts are too complex to discuss here. For the sake of ease, I refer to the oldest extant version, MS A, the so-called Parker Chronicle. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition III: MS A*, ed. Janet M. Bately (Cambridge: Brewer, 1986). The Bernician genealogy appears in the entry for 547 (p.22); Deira in 560 (p.23); Mericia in 626 and 755 (pp.28, 38); and Wessex in 552, 597, and 855 (pp.22, 25, 45-46).

of importance in historiographical writing, and were subsequently adopted by later Anglo-Norman historians; William of Malmesbury, for instance, echoes Bede in his *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, claiming that “omnium pene barbararum gentium regium genus lineam trahit” (‘almost all the royal families of the barbarian peoples reckon their lineage’) from Woden, but also relates specifically that the kings of Wessex, Kent, Mercia, Northumbria, the East Angles, and the East Saxons, were descended from Woden.⁷⁰

The use of these sources in the composition of the Vǫlsung dynasty may seem unlikely, given the lack of any other discernible borrowings from Latin historiography in *Vǫlsunga saga*; however, if the genealogy preceding the eponymous Vǫlsungr – for which we have no evidence in the extant poetic corpus – was composed for either *Vǫlsunga saga* or **Sigurðar saga*, then it remains a tantalising possibility that Anglo-Saxon genealogies may have influenced it. There is certainly no lack of evidence that at least some of the aforementioned Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman works were known in Iceland, and their influence on Norse historiography has not gone unnoticed. In the most recent study of the subject, Paul White has argued that both *Gesta Regum Anglorum* and some version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* were known in Iceland by the early twelfth century, and were used as sources for Insular history in *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*.⁷¹ It is also generally accepted that Ari Þorgilsson knew Bede’s *Historia*, though the only evidence for this is the similarity between the *Historia* and *Íslendingabók*’s account of Pope Gregory the Great’s death.⁷²

While it is possible that the Vǫlsungs’ descent from Óðinn may have been inspired by the place of Woden in any one of these texts, there is yet further evidence of the direct influence of English genealogies on Norse historiographical traditions. Several of the names of Óðinn’s descendants (his sons Beldegg and Veggdegg, and

⁷⁰ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, vol.1, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thompson, and M. Winterbottom, i.5.3; i.16.1, i.44.3, i.45.1, i.74.1, i.97.1, i.98.1. Naming Æthelwulf of Wessex’s ancestors, William of Malmesbury later draws on the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (A, sub anno 855) in claiming Woden’s descent from Noah: ii.116.1.

⁷¹ Paul White, *Non-Native Sources for the Scandinavian Kings’ Sagas* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 93-109.

⁷² Jakob Benediktsson, introduction to *Íslendingabók* (1968), XXIV-VI; White, *Non-Native Sources*, 39-41.

their sons) in the Prologue to his *Edda* attest to Snorri's familiarity with the Anglo-Saxon tradition.⁷³ Indeed, Anthony Faulkes has demonstrated that this information was transmitted via a collection of genealogical tables that is now extant in a thirteenth-century Icelandic manuscript, Copenhagen, AM 1 e β II fol., which contains a number of genealogical tables of Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon dynasties, each with Óðinn at the head.⁷⁴ As Faulkes notes, neither these genealogies, nor the Anglo-Saxon tradition from which they were drawn, claimed that Woden was of Trojan or Asian origins – this was a uniquely Scandinavian innovation in the Óðinn genealogies.⁷⁵ While the omission of references to Troy or Asia in *Völsunga saga* is curious when compared to other Icelandic works, it is in harmony with the English genealogical tradition; and with the circulation of both genealogical tables as well as narrative sources, such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, we ought to consider the possibility that Óðinn's place at the head of the Völsung dynasty was inspired by the Anglo-Saxon tradition. At the least, *Völsunga saga*'s account of Sigurðr's descent from Óðinn places the work in a context of both Scandinavian and English historiographic traditions, well known in thirteenth-century Iceland, that traced dynastic origins to the euhemerised god.

There seems, therefore, to have been an historiographical influence on the extended Völsung genealogy included in *Völsunga saga*, which evidently was not found in the *Poetic Edda*. However, a more direct influence from the *konungasögur* can be discerned in the expanded biography of Sigurðr in *Völsunga saga*, in particular the account of his conception and birth, and upbringing in chs.11-20. The contents of these chapters are for the most part derived from the *Poetic Edda*, with the poems *Reginismál* and *Fáfnismál* informing much of the account of Sigurðr's fosterage with Reginn, and his killing of Fáfnir. In a number of places, however, *Völsunga saga* offers a significantly expanded account of Sigurðr's youth from that given in the eddic poems; in such instances, it seems that the saga author has taken cues from scant

⁷³ *Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 5.

⁷⁴ Anthony Faulkes, "The Genealogies and Regnal Lists in a Manuscript in Resen's Library," in *Sjötfú ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni: 20. Júlí 1977* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977), 1:177-90.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 84-87.

details offered in the *Poetic Edda* and created micro-narratives from them. This process of expansion is no better evidenced than in *Völsunga saga*'s account of Sigurðr's conception and birth, and in examining its contents we may consider its possible models and influences.

It is first necessary to summarise *Völsunga saga*'s account of Sigurðr's conception and birth, noting where the author has embellished the details offered in the *Poetic Edda*. According to *Völsunga saga*, Sigmundur falls in battle to King Lyngvi Hundingsson, a rival suitor to his wife, Hjörðís Eylímadóttir; mortally wounded, Sigmundur tells Hjörðís that she is pregnant with their child, Sigurðr, and forecasts his greatness. Hjörðís is then captured by *víkingar*, but hides her identity by exchanging clothes with her bondswoman; she is brought to King Hjálprekr and held in high esteem after her nobility is discovered. Hjörðís then gives birth and marries Hjálprekr's son, Álfr, and Sigurðr is raised in Hjálprekr's household.⁷⁶ Beyond *Völsunga saga*, very little is said of the circumstances of Sigurðr's birth, which is related in *Frá Dauða Sinfjötla* almost as an epilogue to Sigmundur and Sinfjötli's part in the *Völsung* cycle:⁷⁷

Fór Sigmundur þá suðr í Frakkland til þess ríkis er hann átti þar. Þá fekk hann Hjörðísar, dóttur Eylíma konungs. Þeira sonr var Sigurðr. Sigmundur konungr fell í orrostu fyr Hundingssonum, en Hjörðís giptisk þá Álfi, syni Hjálpreks konungs. Óx Sigurðr þar upp í barnæsku.

Then Sigmundur went south to France to the kingdom that he owned there. Then he married Hjörðís, daughter of King Eylími. Their son was Sigurðr. King Sigmundur fell in battle before the sons of Hundingr, and Hjörðís was then married to Álfr, son of King Hjálprekr. Sigurðr was raised in childhood there.

In this brief account, no competition for Hjörðís' hand frames Sigmundur's death (Hundingr's sons remain anonymous, the reason for battle presumably explained by the animosity between the *Völsungs* and *Hundings* established in the *Helgi* poems), and neither Hjörðís' capture nor her attempt to conceal her identity mentioned.

⁷⁶ *Völsunga saga*, 19-23.

⁷⁷ *Eddukvæði*, 2:284-5.

Finally, there is no suggestion in *Frá Dauða Sinfjötla* that Sigurðr was born in Hjálprekr's court after his father's death.

Elsewhere in the *Poetic Edda*, Sigurðr's fostering with Hjálprekr is referenced in *Fáfnismál* 7-8, in which Sigurðr rebuts Fáfnir's taunts of having been raised a servant away from his relatives, stating "eigi em ek haptr/pótt ek væra hernumi" ('I am no bondman | though I was taken in war').⁷⁸ The implication here is that Sigurðr himself was taken captive, presumably with Hjörðís, not that he was born a captive in Hjálprekr's court, an important detail to which I will return. *Snorra Edda* tells us nothing of Sigurðr's birth, and the account in *Norna-Gests þáttur* is as ambiguous as the *Poetic Edda*, quoting *Frá Dauða Sinfjötla* almost verbatim but adding the otherwise unattested detail that all of Sigmundur's sons were with Hjálprekr.⁷⁹ The fundamental details of the birth and parentage of Sigurðr remain stable through all of our extant sources, but in *Völsunga saga* alone are they dramatised, having been expanded into a micro-narrative.

The core of this account is the competition for Hjörðís' hand, and her remarriage to Álfr at Hjálprekr's court, and certain specifics of this narrative are reminiscent not of historiography, but of romance and folktale. Hjörðís' concealed identity, for example, is faintly reminiscent of a number of entries in Thompson's *Motif-Index* related to "Deception by disguise or illusion," including examples such as K1812.10 "King disguised as peasant flees battle."⁸⁰ Likewise, Boberg noted that motifs related to the recognition of royalty, either by external or personal characteristics, are found widely throughout Old Norse literature, though here we must stress that such motifs are by no means antithetical to historiographical writing.⁸¹ Though Hjörðís' identification in *Völsunga saga* is assigned its own entry (H.38.2.2 'Recognition of a substituted bride by her habitual conversation'), the related motif H.41 'Recognition of royalty by personal characteristics or traits' in particular appears in both *konungasögur* and other *fornaldarsögur* alike.⁸² The role of

⁷⁸ *Eddukvæði*, 2:304-305.

⁷⁹ *Skáldskaparmál* I, 46; *Flateyjarbók*, 1:387-88.

⁸⁰ Thompson, *Motif-Index*, 5:431.

⁸¹ Boberg, *Motif-Index*, 147-8.

⁸² *Ibid*, 148.

Lyngvi Hundingsson, significantly younger than Sigmundur, as a rival for Hjördís' hand recalls the rival suitors that appear in a number of *riddarasögur*, and Kalinke has compared it specifically to the aged King Gautrekr's bridal quest in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*.⁸³ Of course, as Kalinke has noted, the priority of *Völsunga saga*'s composition suggests that it was the inspiration for the later *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, and not *vice versa*; *Völsunga saga*'s source for the rivalry between a youthful and aged suitor is unknown.⁸⁴

These features of Sigurðr's conception and birth in *Völsunga saga* – the rival suitors, Hjördís' ruse, and her subsequent identification – yield little insight into the author's possible model for this expansion of the eddic source material, but the widespread occurrence of these motifs may at least serve to remind us of the dialogue between different saga genres in thirteenth-century Iceland, from the *konungasögur* to romance literature, which was read and translated in Norway and Iceland from the middle of the century. However, to return to Sigurðr's posthumous birth – after the death of his father, Sigmundur – this seemingly minor innovation in *Völsunga saga* is much more revealing of the saga author's influences, as it seems to have been based on a trope drawn directly from contemporary historiographical works in Iceland.

The legend of the birth of Óláfr Tryggvason varies in detail according to his various biographies, but each begins with the murder of his father, Tryggvi Óláfsson, and results in his capture as a child in Estland. In *Historia Norwegie*, Tryggvi's wife Ástríðr flees to Orkney after his death, where she gives birth to their son, and whence they travel in exile to the Baltic; *Ágrip*, however, records that Óláfr was already three years old when Ástríðr fled with him to Orkney.⁸⁵ Matthew Driscoll suggests that this is the more probable version of events, but it is the story of Óláfr's birth in exile that gained currency in Icelandic historiography.⁸⁶ In *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, translated c.1200 from Oddr Snorrason's Latin biography of Óláfr, Ástríðr flees after Tryggvi's

⁸³ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, 27-29.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum*, ed. M. J. Driscoll (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2008), 27; n.50. *Historia Norwegie*, 88-91.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 93, n.50;

death and gives birth to Óláfr in a boatshed by a lake somewhere in Norway; after an extended account of their flight through the country from the antagonistic Queen Gunnhildr, who is bent on killing the young Óláfr, they eventually find refuge and hospitality with King Hákon gamli in Sweden.⁸⁷ This version of Óláfr's birth is found in similar detail in Snorri's *Heimskringla*, and in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* in *Flateyjarbók*.⁸⁸

As is evident from the later versions of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, it was the significantly expanded narrative of Óláfr's birth that became established in Icelandic historical remembrance, and it is by no means implausible that the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* was familiar with this story. To my knowledge, no comparison has previously been made between this version of Óláfr's birth and *Vǫlsunga saga*'s account of Sigurðr's birth, and though the parallels are not exact, they are noteworthy nonetheless, and may be summarised as follows:

Ástríðr is a fugitive after Tryggvi's death, while Hjǫrdís is captured, though both may be said to be in exile.

Both kings are born after their fathers' deaths, though in quite different social circumstances, Sigurðr as the fosterling of another king, Óláfr himself as a fugitive.

Both mothers and sons find refuge in the court of another king, though Hjǫrdís is taken in by Álfr before giving birth, while Ástríðr and Óláfr remain fugitives before finding sanctuary.

A major difference in these narratives lies in Ástríðr and Óláfr's flight from Gunnhildr, which accounts for Óláfr's exile for a period of time after his birth, though the reason for this divergence is self-evident. It has been noted that Ástríðr's exile in this version, and Gunnhildr's intent to kill the infant king, has clear overtones of Herod's pursuit of Mary and Christ; though *Vǫlsunga saga*'s author shows considerable creative freedom in his account of Sigurðr's birth, he apparently had no impetus to model it on that of Christ, as did Oddr Snorrason.⁸⁹ The similarity between Sigurðr and Óláfr's

⁸⁷ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, in *Færeyinga saga / Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar eptir Odd Munk Snorrason*, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson (Reykjavík: Íslenzka fornritafélag, 2006), 130-38.

⁸⁸ *Heimskringla*, 1:225-229; *Flateyjarbók*, 1:75-81.

⁸⁹ Theodore M. Andersson, introduction to Oddr Snorrason, *The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 29.

circumstances at birth may not be close enough to suggest the direct imitation of Oddr's work by the author of *Vǫlsunga saga*, but it may yet be plausible that this account of Óláfr Tryggvason's birth served as an archetype for that of Sigurðr. Though much of this account was found in the saga author's source material, the added detail of Sigurðr's posthumous birth, specifically, would seem a somewhat curious innovation to the story – and a striking coincidence, just half a century later than the same development in the biography of Óláfr – if we are to discount any influence of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*.

It is perhaps no coincidence that the most celebrated king in Icelandic historiography, Óláfr Haraldsson, is also said to have been born after the death of his father. Snorri records in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* that Haraldr grenski was killed in Sweden, upon the orders of the dowager queen there, Sigríðr, whom he had attempted to woo; shortly thereafter, his wife in Norway, Ásta, gave birth to their son, the future Óláfr helgi, and raised him in the court of her own father.⁹⁰ This has less of the mythologised character of the account of Óláfr Tryggvason's birth, but it is nevertheless an interesting parallel development in the historiography of Óláfr Haraldsson.

The most detailed account of Haraldr grenski's death comes in Snorri's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in *Heimskringla*, but passing reference to these events is also made in Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. Oddr cites Sigríðr's burning of Haraldr in order to explain the queen's epithet, *stórráða* ('ambitious, imperious'), but no mention is made of Haraldr's wife or the birth of their son.⁹¹ In Oddr's work, the significance of this episode is to demonstrate Sigríðr's spiteful nature, which is critical to the circumstances of Óláfr Tryggvason's death – Óláfr's own two attempts to woo Sigríðr incur her animosity, and she later incites her second husband, King Sveinn tjúguskegg ('Forkbeard') of Denmark, to attack Óláfr – but Oddr is unconcerned with the circumstances of Óláfr Haraldsson's birth.⁹² Sigríðr plays a similar role in Óláfr Tryggvason's demise in both *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*, though the latter text

⁹⁰ *Heimskringla*, 1:287-89.

⁹¹ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, 226.

⁹² *Ibid*, 226-27, 237-38, 294-97.

makes no reference to Haraldr grenski's failed romance and death; indeed, Haraldr grenski is simply named in *Fagrskinna*, along with *Ágrip* and *Historia Norwegie*, as the father of Óláfr Haraldsson, with no further detail provided.⁹³

To summarise the above, of the major historical works of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, only *Heimskringla* and Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* contain accounts of Haraldr grenski's death in Sweden. Of these two authors, Snorri alone connects Haraldr's death to the birth of Óláfr, and so we may regard Snorri as responsible for the innovative claim that Óláfr Haraldsson was born after his father's death. In *Heimskringla*, a parallel is thus drawn between the births of Norway's two missionary kings, and it is possible that Snorri drew inspiration from the account of Óláfr Tryggvason's posthumous birth for his account of Óláfr Haraldsson's birth. Snorri evidently found the posthumous birth of a king to be a compelling motif, choosing to incorporate this version of Óláfr Tryggvason's birth into his history, rather than the more pedestrian account found in *Ágrip*, and embellishing Óláfr Haraldsson's biography with this motif.

In connecting Haraldr grenski's death to Óláfr's birth, Snorri exemplifies the same proclivity for expanding historical narrative as we witness in Oddr Snorrason's dramatisation of Óláfr Tryggvason's birth, which Snorri likewise incorporated. Evidently, the births of the royal protagonists of Icelandic historiography were apposite sites for narrative expansion, and it is in this context that we must view the narrativisation of Sigurðr's birth in *Vǫlsunga saga*. That the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* was directly influenced by this trend in historical writing is suggested by his specific claim that Sigurðr was born after his father, a motif common to several narrative histories of Óláfr Tryggvason, and in *Heimskringla* applied to the accounts of both Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson's births. We can only speculate, but given the highlighted prominence of the posthumous birth motif in *Heimskringla*, it would be no surprise if this very work served as a model for *Vǫlsunga saga*'s account of its central protagonist's birth.

⁹³ *Fagrskinna*, 167; *Ágrip*, 35; *Historia Norwegie*, 87.

The lack of information found in the *Poetic Edda* regarding the early generations of the Vǫlsung dynasty, and the details of Sigurðr's early life, birth, and conception, allowed the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* (or the author of **Sigurðar saga*, before him) considerable compositional freedom, and where the saga tradition was at liberty to expand upon the version of the narrative found in the *Poetic Edda*, we encounter quite unmistakable signs of the influence of historiographical writing. The very inclusion of a genealogical preface betrays this influence, since genealogies – of royal houses and of Icelandic families alike – were themselves inherently historiographical texts, and the mythological, divine descent of the Vǫlsung line indicates the influence of learned traditions both native to Icelandic historiography and from further afield, directly or indirectly, from Anglo-Saxon and Norman England. In fully “narrativising” the *Poetic Edda*'s rather allusive account of Sigurðr's early life, *Vǫlsunga saga* reveals a leaning towards biographical writing that had its roots in historiographical literature, offering a much fuller biographical treatment of the narrative's central hero, and mirroring developments in the writing of both Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson's lives.

Individually, both the genealogical and biographical leanings in *Vǫlsunga saga* indicate the influence of historiographical writing, the *konungasögur* in particular, but their integration in the saga is also suggestive of this influence. As noted, the compendia of *konungasögur* – *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna*, and *Heimskringla* – combined the antecedent forms of vernacular historiography, royal biography and synoptic history. *Heimskringla* is a prime example of this integration, in which genealogical descent became increasingly important in the synoptic narration of the succession of Norwegian kings. *Heimskringla* is regarded as originating with Snorri's *Óláfs saga helga in sérstaka* ('the separate saga of St. Óláfr'), which was revised and supplemented to incorporate accounts of the preceding Fairhair dynasty of kings, establishing Óláfr's royal pedigree, and his subsequent descendants (Magnus Ólafsson; Haraldr Sigurðarson and the Haradrada dynasty; and the Gille dynasty), and situating a number of quite lengthy biographies in a genealogical framework.⁹⁴ While

⁹⁴ Jon Gunnar Jørgensen has argued that Snorri himself was not responsible for revising *Óláfs saga Helga in sérstaka* and incorporating it into the compendium *Heimskringla*, but the same integrative

Völsunga saga's sources were quite unlike those of *Heimskringla*, the developments in the first half of *Völsunga saga* that I have outlined indicate that the author was guided, to an extent, by the same structural principles of genealogical and biographical writing embodied in *Heimskringla*.

The overarching structure of *Völsunga saga* has been the subject of numerous studies, and the episodic nature of *Völsunga saga* has prompted scholars to partition the saga into distinct sections. Finch viewed the saga as divided into: Part I, comprising (a) the history of the early generations of the Völsungs, (b) Sigurðr's youthful exploits and pledge to marry Brynhildr, (c) the marriages of Sigurðr to Guðrún and Brynhildr to Gunnarr, and Sigurðr's death; and Part II, comprising (d) Guðrún's marriage to Atli and the deaths of Gunnarr and Högni, and (e) Guðrún's marriage to Jónakr, and the deaths of her daughter Svanhildr, and sons Hamðir and Sǫrli, at the hands of King Jǫrmunrekr.⁹⁵ More recently, Grimstad has proposed that *Völsunga saga*'s structural framework rests on the marriages of the three principal female characters, Signý, Brynhildr, and Guðrún: "framed by the stories of Signy and Gudrun's later marriage, the peak of the drama occurs in the central episode relating the disastrous alliances of Brynhild and Gudrun to Gunnarr and Sigurd."⁹⁶ Probably the most widely accepted structural scheme in the saga, however, is the partition of the legendary/mythological and courtly/romance realms, represented by the first and second halves of the saga; in contrast to Finch's partition, this bipartite structure takes as its point of division Sigurðr's wooing of Brynhildr, rather than their deaths, and is marked by the chivalric description of Sigurðr borrowed from *Piðreks saga*.⁹⁷

However we interpret the saga author's programme, it is evident that the structure of *Völsunga saga* offers a much more deliberate presentation of the same material than in the *Poetic Edda*. Indeed, the additional genealogical and biographical

methodology seems to have been at work regardless of the author's identity. Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, "Passio Olavi og Snorre," in *Olavslegenden og den latinske historieskrivning i 1000-talets Norge* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2000), 157-69. Cf. Ármann Jakobsson, "Royal Biography," 397; Phelpstead, *Holy Vikings*, 17-19.

⁹⁵ Finch, introduction to *Völsunga saga*, XIII-XVI.

⁹⁶ Grimstad, introduction to *Völsunga saga*, 22.

⁹⁷ Agneta Ney, "Genus och ideologi"; Würth, "The Rhetoric of *Völsunga saga*," 105; Larrington, "*Völsunga saga*, *Ragnars saga*, and Romance," 256-60.

material in *Vǫlsunga saga* not found in the *Poetic Edda* invites still one further structural interpretation of the saga. This additional material allows us to view *Vǫlsunga saga* as a tripartite text, comprised of three sections of comparable length: I. Sigurðr's ancestors, II. Sigurðr's life and death, and III. death of the Gjúkungs. Similarly, Phelpstead has observed that a "tryptic" structure is also found in three major historiographical sagas – *Heimskringla*, *Knýtlinga saga*, and *Orkneyinga saga* – and that the central "panel" in each of these tryptical works is a biographical account of the most distinguished figure in the succession of each kingdom (or earldom), of similar length to the preceding and following accounts of the ruler's predecessors and successors, upon which the rest of the work hangs.⁹⁸ The structure of *Vǫlsunga saga*, in which the biography of Sigurðr forms the middle third of text, clearly parallels this, and it is possible to suggest that the saga author was directly influenced by either *Heimskringla* or *Orkneyinga saga*'s structure (*Knýtlinga saga* was written c.1250, roughly contemporaneous to *Vǫlsunga saga*'s composition).

Vǫlsunga saga differs from these three works in that the final third of the text concerns the fate not of the central protagonist's descendants, but of the royal line he marries into, the Gjúkungs, though this is easily explained by the fact that the subject matter was dictated by the antecedent poetic iteration of the narrative cycle. That said, Svanhildr (murdered by Jǫrmunrekr in ch.42) is said to be Guðrún's daughter by Sigurðr, and Gunnarr and Högni may be thought of as Sigurðr's successors in their inheritance of the Rhine gold.⁹⁹ Furthermore, when *Vǫlsunga saga* was paired with *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, as it is found in NKS 1824, the Vǫlsung line was continued through Áslaug, Sigurðr's daughter by Brynhildr, and the sons of Áslaug and Ragnarr loðbrók. But what is perhaps more significant to note is that it is the additional biographical and genealogical material in *Vǫlsunga saga* (and the relatively brief treatment of *Hamðismál* and *Guðrúnarhvöt* at the end of the saga) that produces the roughly even tripartite division of the text. The influence of the *konungasögur* in these areas of *Vǫlsunga saga* is unmistakable, and their integration gives the work a distinct

⁹⁸ Phelpstead, *Holy Vikings*, 33-38.

⁹⁹ *Vǫlsunga saga*, 74-76.

structure, compared to the *Poetic Edda*, that also suggests the influence of thirteenth-century Icelandic historiography.

3.3: Verse quotation in *Vǫlsunga saga*

In the following analysis of verse quotation in *Vǫlsunga saga*, I will continue to employ as a methodological framework the paradigm of “authenticating” and “situational” verse, usually applied to verse quotation in *konungasögur* and *Íslendingasögur*. My analysis of verse quotation in *Gautreks saga* has demonstrated the applicability of this paradigm to the *fornaldarsögur*, while also highlighting the overlap in function between authenticating and situational verses and, crucially, the potential for quoted poetry, however framed, to historicise the prose narrative. Before applying this approach to the verse quotations in *Vǫlsunga saga*, it may be helpful to list the verses in the order in which they appear in the prose, noting their introductory formula, and (where known) their eddic source:

| Verse number | Chapter (page no.) | Introductory formula | Source |
|--------------|--------------------|----------------------|---|
| 1 | 8 (13) | “sem kveðit er” | Unknown |
| 2-3 | 14 (25-26) | “Þá Loki mætti” | <i>Reginismál</i> 1-2 |
| 4 | 14 (26) | “Þá kvað Loki” | <i>Reginismál</i> 6 |
| 5 | 17 (29) | “Hann svarar” | <i>Reginismál</i> 19 |
| 6-20 | 21 (35-39) | “Brynhildr... mætti” | <i>Sigrdrífumál</i> 6-7, 11, 13, 8-9, 10, 12, 14, 16-21 |
| 21 | 21 (39) | “Sigurðr svarar” | <i>Sigrdrífumál</i> 22 |

| | | | |
|-------|------------|-----------------------------|--|
| 22-23 | 29 (48-49) | “svá er kveðit” | Unkown: *Forna, *Meirí? ¹⁰⁰ |
| 24 | 30 (52) | “svá sem kveðit er” | Unknown |
| 25 | 31 (56) | “svá segir í Sigurðarkviðu” | Unknown |
| 26 | 32 (58) | “sem skáldit kvað” | <i>Brot</i> 4 ¹⁰¹ |
| 27 | 34 (62) | “sem kveðit er” | <i>Guðrúnarkviða II</i> 19 |
| 28-29 | 34 (63) | “sem hér segir” | <i>Guðrúnarkviða II</i> 22-23 |
| 30 | 44 (77) | “sem kveðit er” | <i>Hamðismál</i> 28 |

Table 3: Verse quotations in *Völsunga saga*.

From this survey, we may initially note that a total of twenty verses, in five poetic utterances, are presented as situational; the remaining ten verses, in eight poetic utterances, are introduced in the prose by a formula – “sem kveðit er,” or some variant thereof – that marks them as external to the narrative. We may for now categorise the latter group of verses as authenticating, but the ways in which they corroborate the prose account remain to be analysed, and closer inspection will reveal in several of these verses a complicated relationship with speech and dialogue in the narrative. While the number of situational verses is double that of authenticating verses, the majority appear in a single quotation: the fifteen verses of *Sigrdrífumál* attributed to Brynhildr. Aside from this, the number of quotations and individual verses presented as authenticating is exactly double that of the situational verses. Despite the wealth of scholarship on *Völsunga saga*, and its relationship to the poetry it quotes, the prosimetrical form of the saga itself has attracted little attention. Quinn

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Andersson, *The Legend of Brynhild*, 24-70.

¹⁰¹ “VS st.26 is a poor and incomplete variant.” Finch, *Völsunga saga*, Appendix C, “The General Correspondence between *Völsunga saga* and its Extant Literary Sources,” 86.

has analysed the situational verse quotations alongside prose direct speech in the saga, revealing its interest in “wise counsel, curse and spell and the trustworthiness of characters’ words,” while Leslie-Jacobsen has given a comprehensive analysis of the verse quotations in *Vǫlsunga saga*, focussing on the oral and written development of the saga.¹⁰² Though Leslie-Jacobsen does note the possible influence of the *konungasögur* on the use of authenticating verse in *Vǫlsunga saga*, much remains to be said about the historicising role of poetry in *Vǫlsunga saga*.

Of the poetry in the saga, the long quotation of *Sigrdrífumál* has attracted the most scholarly attention. Quinn has analysed Brynhildr’s fifteen verses with regard to the saga’s theme of spoken wisdom and oaths, noting that Brynhildr offers in the scene counsels that, had he observed them, could have saved Sigurðr’s life: she warns against swearing false oaths, the treacherous love of women, and the trickery of one’s friends. We might also add that the *ǫlrúnar* offered in v.10 guard against betrayal from another man’s wife, and that v.11 advises on the protection against poisoned mead.¹⁰³ For Würth, the importance of this quotation is structural, marking the division between the mythological and courtly, the oral and written worlds of the first and second halves of the saga, though, as I will explore below, such a division is problematised by the verse quotations that follow Brynhildr’s monologue, which allude to the orality of the eddic tradition.¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, the medial placement in the saga of such a lengthy poetic utterance does suggest a formal division here, perhaps between the mythological and courtly, within the tryptical structure I have suggested. The quotation of a poem of this extent in Old Norse prosimetrum is not in itself unparalleled, though such quotations are typically at the end of a narrative section of a saga: the brief account of King Eiríkr blóðøx in *Fagrskinna* ends with the quotation of nine stanzas from the anonymous *Eiríksmál*, and Snorri ends his much longer *Hákonar saga góða* in *Heimskringla* with sixteen verses of Eyvindr skáldaspillir’s *Hákonarmál*, referring to the death of King

¹⁰² Quinn, “Trust in Words”; Leslie, “Prose Contexts of Eddic Poetry,” 263-81.

¹⁰³ *Vǫlsunga saga*, 35-39 (37-38).

¹⁰⁴ Würth, “Rhetoric of *Vǫlsunga saga*,” 106.

Hákon.¹⁰⁵ Within the corpus of *fornaldarsögur*, *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* concludes with Oddr reciting an *ævikviða* of seventy-one verses before his death.¹⁰⁶ These examples seem to conform to the narrative practice of including “flokk góðan við enda sögunnar,” (‘a good *flokkr* at the end of the saga’), as described in *Þorgils saga ok hafliða*, which Leslie-Jacobsen notes was conventional in the *fornaldarsögur* and may have been carried over from their oral development.¹⁰⁷ Quoting fifteen continuous verses in the middle of the text (sixteen, including Sigurðr’s immediate response), the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* may well have indicated a structural break in the work.

Significant though Brynhildr’s monologue is, it is to the quotations I have provisionally categorised as authenticating that we must turn in order to interrogate the historicising function of the poetry in *Vǫlsunga saga*. As indicated, several of the quotations introduced by the “sem kveðit er” formula are remarkable for their unique relation to direct speech and integration into the saga, which I will explore after establishing the potential for authentication signalled by the “sem kveðit er” formula. To demonstrate this, we may examine *Vǫlsunga saga* v.25, which is quoted after Brynhildr and Sigurðr’s emotionally charged exchange. Throughout this prose dialogue, Brynhildr remains obstinate in her grief, and we are told that Sigurðr is so distressed that “svá þrútnuðu hans síður at í sundr gengu brynjuhringr” (‘his sides heaved so greatly that the rings of his hauberk snapped’), and both Sigurðr’s grief and the detail of the rent armour are corroborated in verse:¹⁰⁸

Svá segir í Sigurðarkviðu:

| | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| Út gekk Sigurðr | svá at ganga nam |
| andspjalli frá | gunnarfúsum |
| hollvinr lofða | sundr of síður |
| ok hnipnaði | serkr járnofinn. |

¹⁰⁵ *Fagrskinna*, 77-79; *Heimskringla*, 1:193-97.

¹⁰⁶ *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, ed. R. C. Boer (Leiden: Brill, 1888), 195, 198-208.

¹⁰⁷ *Sturlunga saga*, 1:27 (cf. Chapter 1); Leslie, “Prose Contexts of Eddic Poetry,” 465.

¹⁰⁸ *Vǫlsunga saga*, 56.

As [it] says in *Sigurðarkviða*:

Out went Sigurðr from the conversation, the loyal friend of men, and became so downcast that the iron shirt snapped from the sides of the battle-eager one.

If the explicit naming of a skald and poem, from which an authenticating verse is drawn, represents the most strictly historiographical use of verse in Norse prosimetrum, then v.25 would be the closest instance in *Vǫlsunga saga* to such a style, as the sole instance of the author naming his source. Of course, the explicit naming of source material and its authors is problematised in the *fornaldarsögur*, as the anonymity of eddic poetry prohibits reference to a named poet. Nevertheless, the introductory formula of v.25 more closely resembles those of authenticating verses in historiographical texts not only in the naming of *Sigurðarkviða* as a source, but also in its exact phrasing, where the active voice of the “svá segir” formula – typical of authenticating verse – perhaps implies a specificity that the passive construction “sem kveðit er” lacks. Finally, v.25 is, from a functional perspective, quite clearly used to corroborate the prose account, echoing the events narrated there.

Compelling though this may be as evidence for the authenticating use of verse in *Vǫlsunga saga*, the ascription of v.25 to a named poem is the sole exception to the predominant pattern of extra-diegetic verse introduced by the vaguer formula “sem kveðit er.” This is used to introduce v.1, v.27, and v.30, and minor variations are found before vv.22-23, v.24, and v.28-29 (Table 3); we may therefore analyse v.27 as representative of the extra-diegetic verses in *Vǫlsunga saga*, and the extent to which they may be regarded as authenticating. This verse is quoted as the prose narrates the arrival of Grimhildr and her sons at the hall of King Hálfir in Denmark, where Guðrún had stayed after Sigurðr’s death:¹⁰⁹

Þeir hófðu ok ágæta men með sér. Þar var Valdamarr af Danmörk ok Eymóðr ok Jarisleifr. Þeir gengu inn í holl Hálfis konungs. Þar váru Langabarðar, Frakkar, ok Saxar. Þeir fóru með ǫllum herbúnaði ok hófðu yfir sér loða rauða, sem kveðit er:

Stuttur brynjur,
steypa hjálma

skálmum gyrðir
ok hófðu skarar jarpar.

¹⁰⁹ *Vǫlsunga saga*, 62.

They also had valiant men with them. There was Valdamarr of Denmark, and Eymóðr and Jarisleifr. They went inside King Hálfrr's hall. There were Langobards, Franks, and Saxons. They travelled fully war-equipped and had red fur cloaks over themselves, as is said:

Short mail coats, forged helmets, girded with short swords, they had shorn chestnut [hair].

In content, this verse dwells on the martial accoutrements of absent though implied subjects, and thus functions to corroborate the prose account of the Gjúkung's arrival at King Hálfrr's court fully armed. The verse quoted is *Guðrúnarkviða II* 19/9-12; the first two thirds of the verse relates the arrival of Valdamarr, Jarisleifr, Eymóðr, a certain Jarizskárr, and an army of Langobards, wearing red cloaks.¹¹⁰ This is evidently the source material for the preceding prose, so we may be sure that *Vǫlsunga saga's* author had the verse to hand and could have quoted it in its entirety, substantiating further details of the prose account. It may be that this once was the case, and that the scribe of NKS 1824 omitted the first half of the stanza, but as there is no positive evidence for this we must analyse the text as it stands. Finch noted that the "compiler" of *Vǫlsunga saga* generally avoids unnecessary repetition in the prose rendering of the eddic poems, and in the case of v.27 this seems to extend to the quotation of verse; as it is quoted, this verse avoids the repetition of specific details – the names of Valdamarr, Jarisleifr, and Eymóðr, and their red cloaks – but nevertheless corroborates the account of the Gjúkung's arrival, as well as furnishing a poetic description of their heroic appearance.¹¹¹ Arms and armour are, of course, common referential material in the skaldic verses deployed as authentication in the *konungasögur*; any number of verses may be selected to exemplify this, but in his account of the Battle of Nesjar in *Heimskringla*, Snorri quotes a verse of Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Nesjavísur* specifically to corroborate that Óláfr Haraldsson's men were well equipped.¹¹² Though *Vǫlsunga saga* v.27 remains unattributed to either a poetic voice or even a named poem, the formula "sem kveðit er," with the conjunctive *sem*

¹¹⁰ *Eddukvæði*, 2:356.

¹¹¹ Finch, "Poetic Sources," 325-28.

¹¹² *Heimskringla*, 2:62; Russell Poole, ed. "Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Nesjavísur* 5" in *SkP* 1, 563.

inviting comparison between the prose and verse, nevertheless suggests that the verse is to be interpreted as authenticating, and in echoing the preceding prose narrative appears to function exactly so.

From this example, it is apparent that the “sem kveðit er” formula in *Völsunga saga* indicates the authenticating function of a quoted verse, as may be said for the variations on this formula found throughout the text. Again, typical of the authenticating style of verse quotation adopted in *Völsunga saga* are vv.22-23. This pair of verses, introduced by the formula “svá er kveðit,” is quoted after Sigurðr, in the guise of Gunnarr, rides through the flames surrounding Brynhildr’s hall, and corroborates a number of details in the prose account, as illustrated in Table 4 (emphasis my own):

| Prose (<i>Völsunga saga</i> , 48) | Verse (<i>Völsunga saga</i> , 49) |
|--|---|
| “Login stóð við himin.” (‘the fire stood to the sky’) | v.22 “ok hár logi við himni gnæfa” (‘the fire towered high to the sky’) |
| “Þá lægðisk eldrinn” (‘then the fire died down’) | v.23 “eldr sloknaði ... logi allir lægðisk.” (‘the fire went out...all the flames died down’) |
| “Síðan ríðr Sigurðr ok hefr Gram í hendi ok bindr gullspora á fœtr sér. Grani hleypr fram at eldrinn er hann kenndi sporans” (‘Then Sigurðr rode with Gramr [the sword] in hand, and golden spurs bound on his feet. Grani leapt forward towards the fire when he felt the spurs’) | v.23 “Sigurðr Grana sverði keyrði ... Bliku reiði er Reginn átti” (‘Sigurðr, with a sword, spurred Grani on...the harness, which Reginn had owned, gleamed’) |

Table 4: Prose and verse correspondence, *Völsunga saga* vv.22-23.

The correspondence between vv.22-23 and the preceding prose likewise points to the conclusion that “sem kveðit er”-type formulae indicate the corroborative function of quoted verse in *Völsunga saga*. But while these verses differ little in their function in the prose narrative to the authenticating verses typical of the *konungasögur*, the variation of their introductory formulae from the usual historiographical style may yet indicate that the author, while surely influenced by the use of authenticating verse in

the *konungasögur*, was not slavishly following the precise model, as represented by texts such as *Heimskringla*, *Morkinskinna*, and *Fagrskinna*.

As noted, *Vǫlsunga saga* v.25 is the only verse quoted with an introductory formula that closely resembles the typical historiographical style of verse quotation in thirteenth-century saga writing, being the only occasion in which the author names his source. It is quite curious, then, that in the remainder of the authenticating verse quotations the saga author elects not to explicitly name his source, which raises the possibility that the “sem kveðit er”-type formulae were intended to deliberately obscure the author’s source material. Of course, the simple explanation for these anonymous citations would be that the saga author did not know the title of the other eddic poems he cited – after all, many of the titles fixed to the texts in modern editions of the *Poetic Edda* are, to varying degrees, post-medieval apparatus – however, I would contend that the author could certainly have named most, or all, of his poetic sources, had he been inclined.

Given the evidence available from the near-contemporaneous manuscript *Codex Regius*, it seems likely that the saga author could have named his sources explicitly in three further verse quotations, *Vǫlsunga saga* v.27, vv.28-29, and v.30, quoting *Guðrúnarkviða II* 19, *Guðrúnarkviða II* 22-23, and *Hamðismál* 28. The beginning of the latter poem in *Codex Regius* (44v) is rubricated *Hamðismál*, which seems to function as a title to the text, and a line of prose at the end of the poem states “Þetta eru kǫlluð Hamðismál in fornu” (‘this is called The Old Lay of Hamðir’).¹¹³ There is no guarantee that either instance of the title was found in the copy of the *Edda* used by the author of *Vǫlsunga saga*, but we may postulate that the title would have been known among the literate in thirteenth-century Iceland: if the scribe of *Codex Regius* copied the title from an exemplar, it could well have also appeared in the saga author’s copy of the *Edda*; if the title was attached to the poem in its oral circulation, it must have been known more widely in c.1270 than to the *Codex Regius* scribe alone. Quinn has analysed the practices of naming eddic poems in *Codex Regius* and in other manuscript contexts, and suggests that the longer of

¹¹³ *Eddukvæði*, 2:405, 413.

Hamðismál's two titles “represents a popular appellation for the work, which the compiler formally abbreviated in his title *Hamðismál*,” surely implying that the title was indeed known beyond the immediate circle of the *Codex Regius* scribe, and quite conceivably to the author of *Vǫlsunga saga*, either through textual or oral channels.¹¹⁴ Her analysis is rather brief, but Quinn further suggests that the shorter title functioned as a “textual identifier,” within the manuscript itself, while the longer title functioned “extra-textually”; quite what this means is unclear, but, assuming the resonance of the “popular appellation,” the longer title may well have been suitable as an *inter-textual* reference, precisely the kind we might expect to indicate the provenance of a verse quoted in a prosimetrical saga.¹¹⁵ In this light, the lack of an explicit reference to *Hamðismál* in *Vǫlsunga saga* appears to have been a deliberate omission.

On similar grounds, it seems just as likely that the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* knew of a name attached to the poem we refer to as *Guðrúnarkviða II*. The poem itself is rubricated *Guðrúnarkviða* in *Codex Regius*, and seems, furthermore, to be referred to as “Guðrúnarkviða in forna” in the prose that follows *Brot* in the manuscript.¹¹⁶ Again, it is possible that neither the rubric nor the reference in *Brot* were found in *Vǫlsunga saga*'s exemplar for the poems, but there is no reason to assume, *a priori*, that this was so. By process of analogy with Quinn's view of *Hamðismál*'s multiple appellations, we might suggest that *Guðrúnarkviða II* was widely known as *Guðrúnarkviða in forna*, and that the abbreviated rubric in *Codex Regius* is of the compiler's own devising. It is interesting to note that the scribe of *Codex Regius* felt no reason to differentiate *Guðrúnarkviða II* from *Guðrúnarkviða I* and *III*, which are rubricated *Guðrúnarkviða* and *kviða Guðrúnar* respectively; Quinn speculates that the impulse towards narrative continuity in the compiler's treatment of these poems may explain the lack of distinction between them, but also argues that the epithet *in forna* (despite its varying, contextual implications) did not, in the case of

¹¹⁴ Judy Quinn, “The Naming of Eddic Mythological Poems in Medieval Manuscripts,” *Parergon* 8, no.2 (December 1990), 104.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Eddukvæði*, 2:328, 352. The prose of *Brot* declares that in one *Guðrúnarkviða in forna*, Sigurðr is killed at, or *en route* to, a *þingi*, which seems to accord with *Guðrúnarkviða II* 4/1-4: “Grani ran at þingi | gnýr var at heyra | en þá Sigurðr | sjálfr eigi kom” (‘Grani ran to the assembly | a din could be heard | and then Sigurðr | himself did not come’). *Eddukvæði*, 2:353.

Guðrúnarkviða II, indicate its age relative to the two other *Guðrún* poems.¹¹⁷ Finally, it is also worth noting, as does Quinn, that *Norna-Gests þáttur* refers to a *Guðrúnarræða*, which may be identical with *Guðrúnarkviða II*.¹¹⁸ Harris is confident that this is the case (*Guðrúnarræða* being a title of the *þáttur* author's own devising), which would indicate that the names of eddic poems were not, in the thirteenth century at least, firmly fixed.¹¹⁹ Given the above, it is most likely that the author of *Völsunga saga* either knew of a name attached to the poem he quotes three verses of, or could have devised his own appellation to refer to this work, if he had so wished.

Since we lack parallel texts for the remaining verses introduced in *Völsunga saga* with the “sem kveðit er”-type formula, it is not worth speculating on how these may have been rubricated, in *Codex Regius* or other eddic manuscripts. However, if the saga author either knew of titles attached to *Hamðismál* and *Guðrúnarkviða II*, as seems likely, or was at liberty to devise his own appellations, the lack of a more explicit source reference in the “sem kveðit er”-type formulae perhaps ought to be regarded as a conscious authorial decision, raising the question of the intended rhetorical or stylistic effect. Regardless, the explicit attribution of *Völsunga saga* v.25 to a named poem is clearly anomalous, and demands explanation. Leaving aside the possibility that the saga author invested no special importance to these introductory formulae, and that they are therefore of no import to our analysis of the text, we may posit two scenarios to reconcile the discrepancy between the “sem kveðit er”-type formulae and the explicit source-naming of v.25. Firstly, it is possible, though entirely conjectural, that *Völsunga saga* did not originally cite *Sigurðarkviða* explicitly, and that a later redactor or scribe, recognising the verse and aware of its provenance, added the reference. Secondly, we might consider whether *Völsunga saga* originally

¹¹⁷ *Eddukvæði*, 2:329.

¹¹⁸ Quinn, “The Naming of Eddic Poems,” 110. Gestr refers to *Guðrúnarræða* in his account of account of Sigurðr's death at the *þing*, seemingly borrowed from the prose following *Brot in Codex Regius*. This reading is only found in Copenhagen, AM 62 fol.; *Flateyjarbók* records “igðurnar” (‘the small birds,’ perhaps alluding to the *igður* that Sigurðr overhears, having eaten Fáfnir's heart) in place of *Guðrúnarræða*, presumably a scribal error. *Die Prosaiche Edda im Auszuge nebst Volsunga-saga und Nornagests-þáttur*, ed. Ernst Wilken (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1877), 253; *Flateyjarbók*, 1:393.

¹¹⁹ Joseph Harris, “*Guðrúnarbrögð* and the Saxon Lay of Guðrún's Perfidy,” in “*Speak Useful Words or Say Nothing*”: *Old Norse Studies*, eds. Susan E. Deskis and Thomas D. Hill (Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 2008), 189-225.

contained more verses quoted verbatim, rather than rendered into prose, and that more of the introductory formulae explicated the poetic source. This is an attractive proposition since it not only accounts for the seemingly arbitrary distribution of authenticating verses, but also invites comparison with *Snorra Edda*, the only other major text written in thirteenth-century Iceland to extensively quote verses found in the *Poetic Edda*.

In *Gylfaginning*, Snorri quotes verses from *Hávamál*, *Völuspá*, *Völuspá inn skamma*, *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Grímnismál*, *Fáfnismál*, *Lokasenna*, and *Heimdallargaldr*. Within the narrative structure of the work, a dialogue between King Gylfi of Sweden and Hár, Jafnhár, and Þriði (all pseudonyms of Óðinn's), these verses are presented occasionally as the direct speech of the two parties (for example, Hár's quotation of the names of dwarves given in *Völuspá* 15-16), and sometimes as the direct speech of the Æsir, as narrated by Hár-Jafnhár-Þriði (for example, the two verses, from an unknown source, placed in the mouths of Njǫrðr and Skaði).¹²⁰ The majority of eddic verses quoted in *Gylfaginning*, however, are quoted in an authenticating manner, framed with a variety of introductory formulae, only some of which name the provenance of the verse – “svá segir í Völuspá” – with others simply introduced by “svá segir hér,” “svá er sagt,” and similar variations.¹²¹ Leslie-Jacobsen has noted the irregularity of Snorri's source-naming in *Gylfaginning*, and suggested that, where verses from a single poem form a block quotation, or are clustered with minimal intervening prose, or are quoted sequentially in a block of prose, the audience might be expected to recognise that they are of a single provenance; the verses most often attributed to a named source are those, Leslie-Jacobsen observes, which stand “out on a limb” in the prose from other verses from the same poem.¹²² If *Völsunga saga* did once contain more verse quotations than are preserved in our extant redaction, it is possible that the saga author explicitly named his sources more frequently, perhaps

¹²⁰ *Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 16-17, 24.

¹²¹ Such formulae are found throughout *Gylfaginning*, but for examples see *Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 17-19.

¹²² Leslie, “Prose Contexts of Eddic Poetry,” 207-209.

when first quoting from a poem, with subsequent or proximate verses from the same poem left unattributed.

If *Vǫlsunga saga* once included a greater number of explicitly source-referencing authenticating verses, we could more easily attribute the verse quotation to an historiographical approach, with a comparable parallel to be found in a learned, antiquarian work. However, as it is preserved, the general pattern of authenticating verse quotation is one of obfuscation, in which the provenance of the verses quoted is deliberately (or so it seems) omitted. The use of “sem kveðit er”-type formulae distances *Vǫlsunga saga* from the historiographical style of the *konungasögur*, and it appears that the saga author has sought to deliberately eschew the “bookish” practice of source-referencing employed by literary historiographers in the thirteenth century, perhaps in an attempt to evoke the orality of the narrative tradition on which *Vǫlsunga saga* was based.

If we may speak of it as a conscious authorial strategy, such an attempt to create a sense of orality in the saga would accord well with the thematic importance of the spoken word that Quinn identifies in *Vǫlsunga saga*. The interplay between, and cumulative effect of, these two aspects of the saga – the significance of dialogue within the narrative, and the allusions to oral tradition – merits further consideration, and may aid our understanding of the function of verse quotation in the saga. Regarding this, it is worth briefly analysing the lexis of the introductory formulae of the authenticating verses in *Vǫlsunga saga*, in comparison with other texts. The “sem kveðit er”-type formulae in *Vǫlsunga saga* differ from the authenticating formulae found throughout the *konungasögur* not only in their passive construction, but in the use of the verb *kveða*, rather than the use of *segja* in the “svá segir” formulae in the *konungasögur*. Semantically, both *kveða* and *segja* imply a vocal act, and both are used in saga literature to introduce direct speech, but in the context of medieval Iceland as a literate society, *segja* – in its primary meaning, ‘to tell, report’ – could also signify a written act of communication. The *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* records the usage of *segja* in constructions such as *bók segja/segja á bók* (‘to say in a book’), *segja í bréfi* (‘to say in a letter’), and *rita ok segja* (‘to write and say’);

granted, the majority of these occurrences are found in later medieval manuscripts, but the earliest recorded use of *bók segja* is found in a copy of *Klements/Clemens saga*, a translation of Iohannes Hymmonides' *Vita Sancti Clementis*, in a manuscript from c.1220 (Copenhagen, AM 645 4to.), attesting the possible influence of Latin literacy on the semantic development of the verb *segja*.¹²³

The textual semantics of *segja* in medieval Iceland are further evinced by the construction *segja hér*, used in prose texts to refer to the contents of verse quotations. The *segja hér* construction is used only occasionally in *Heimskringla*, one instance being in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*, concerning a truce settled between Haraldr and King Sveinn of Denmark, in which three consecutive verse quotations are introduced with the formula "svá sem hér segir."¹²⁴ However, such phrases appear more frequently in *Fagrskinna*, though their distribution throughout the text is uneven. To cite just one example, Þorbjörn hornklofi's *Haraldskvæði (Hrafnsmál)* is quoted extensively to begin *Fagrskinna*'s account of Haraldr hárfagri, and the verses are referred to with such formulae as "hér er þat sýnt..." ('here it is shown'), "...svá sem hér segir" ('as it says here'), and "hér er ok sagt..." ('here it is also said').¹²⁵ Finally, we may note that the *segja hér* construction is used not only in the *konungasögur*, but also frequently in *Gylfaginning*, in which a total of twenty verse quotations are referred to in such a way.¹²⁶ In these phrases, the addition of the adverb *hér*, indicating location, draws attention to the textuality of the quoted verse, by referring the reader of the text to the physical space occupied by the verse on the manuscript page; this clearly attests to the act of written communication that the accompanying verb *segja* can signify.

Kveða, on the other hand, is used exclusively in Old Norse prose to signify a vocally articulated communication, but not only is the verb used to introduce direct speech in prose, it is also strongly associated semantically with poetry; contextually, *kveða* can also indicate the recital or performance, or the composition, of a poem or

¹²³ ONP, s.v. "segja"; *Islandia Latina*, "Iohannes Hymmonides" <<http://www.islandialatina.hum.ku.dk/Show.aspx?Author=65>>.

¹²⁴ *Heimskringla*, 3:160-61.

¹²⁵ *Fagrskinna*, 61, 63-64.

¹²⁶ *Prologue and Gylfaginning*, for instance, 10-12, 18-20.

verse, hence its use in the common introductory formula preceding situational verses in saga literature, “þá kvað.”¹²⁷ The predominant use of *kveða* in the authenticating formulae in *Vǫlsunga saga* thus blurs the distinction between the situational and authenticating verses in the saga, but also serves to highlight the orality of the saga’s source material. “Sem kveðit er” may just as accurately be translated as “as is composed” or “as is recited,” acknowledging a debt to eddic poets of the antecedent narrative tradition, and to the oral performance context of the poems.

The interpretation that the saga author sought to evoke the orality of eddic poetry in the verse quotations in *Vǫlsunga saga* may seem compromised by two of the authenticating verses, which, further to v.25, use introductory formulae more akin to those accompanying authenticating verses in the *konungasögur* and in *Snorra Edda*. It was noted that the “svá segir hér”-type formulae draw attention to the textuality of the quoted verse, and it seems that the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* cannot help but betray his reliance on written source materials, for vv.28-9, concerning the poisoned drink given to Guðrún by Grímhildr, are introduced with the formula “sem hér segir.”¹²⁸ *Vǫlsunga saga* v.26 corroborates the account of Gunnarr and Högni feeding wolf and serpent flesh to their brother Guttormr, to steel him for the deed of murdering Sigurðr, and quotes *Brot* 4 with the unique introductory formula: “sem skáldit kvað” (‘as the skald said’).¹²⁹ At first glance, it appears that the saga author has sought to imitate the typical authenticating “svá segir” formula, but, constrained by the anonymous nature of eddic poetry, was required to substitute the name of the poet with an unnamed *skáld*. However, the use of the verb *kveða*, rather than *segja*, in the introductory formula places this verse in the context of those introduced with “sem kveðit er”-type formulae, and, like these latter verses, *kveða* here is suggestive of the composition and performance of the poetry. In light of this it might be suggested that the formula “sem skáldit kvað” was deliberately intended to draw attention to the anonymous nature of eddic tradition, and that the *skáld* in question is a stand-in for the composers and reciters of eddic poetry.

¹²⁷ Cleasby/Vigfusson, s.v. “KVEÐA,” 360-61.

¹²⁸ *Vǫlsunga saga*, 63.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

With the exception of v.1, the authenticating verses of *Vǫlsunga saga* are all clustered in the second half of the saga, which prompts us to consider their use in relation to the structure of the text.¹³⁰ Having distinguished between its two halves, Würth's analysis of *Vǫlsunga saga*'s textuality concludes that the first, mythological half of the saga references and imitates the oral tradition behind the narrative – through phrases such as “svá er sagt, at” (‘it is said that’) and “þat er ein dag, er” (‘one day it happened that’) – but that the second, courtly half exposes the saga's textuality, revealing the language of orality to be an illusory façade.¹³¹ However, this conclusion is undermined by the analysis of verse quotation in *Vǫlsunga saga*. From a prosimetrical perspective, the multiple citations of an anonymous poetic tradition, in the “sem kveðit er”-type formulae, demonstrate the author's evocation of oral tradition in the second half of the saga. Taking the verse quotations together with the imitative oral-formulae identified by Würth, there seems to be a sustained effort to evoke the orality of the antecedent narrative tradition throughout the saga; that this is realised in verse quotation in the second half of the text may simply reflect the source material available to the author. As noted in the first section of this chapter, the saga author's poetic sources were rather more sparse for the earliest chapters of the saga than the later; use of a **Sigurðar saga Fáfnisbana* notwithstanding, this evidently allowed for considerably more authorial freedom, but precluded allusion, for the most part, to the poetic tradition, leaving the author to replicate the style of oral narrative through prose formulae such as those Würth identifies.

It is important to stress, of course, that the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* did not draw directly on oral poetic sources. It seems certain that the author drew on a written compilation of eddic poetry, and we must agree with Würth's conclusions, and Holtsmark's before her, that it is prudent to think of *Vǫlsunga saga*, from a compositional perspective, as having “little in common with oral tradition.”¹³² Nevertheless, the saga author seems aware of the oral history of his source material,

¹³⁰ *Vǫlsunga saga*, 13.

¹³¹ Würth, “The Rhetoric of *Vǫlsunga saga*,” 103-6.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 109. Cf. Holtsmark, “Heroic Poetry and Legendary Sagas,” 14.

and the verse quotations in *Vǫlsunga saga* evince a discernible strategy of evoking, however artificially, this tradition.

In their relation to the prose narrative, the authenticating verses of *Vǫlsunga saga* seem to fulfil the same function as those typical of the *konungasögur*, reiterating what has been stated in prose with intent to corroborate the prose account. To be certain, these quotations constitute a reference to material external to the text of the saga; however, the “sem kveðit er”-type formulae – if this three-word phrase may bear the weight of such significance – indicate that the authority appealed to in these verse quotations is of a rather different nature to that of the skalds quoted in the *konungasögur*, who were, supposedly, eyewitnesses to the events described, or at least contemporaries of the kings whose deeds are narrated. The corroborative citation of poetic source material was, most likely, influenced by the *konungasögur*, but it seems that the authenticating verses of *Vǫlsunga saga* were intended to reflect the oral dimension of the eddic poetry to which the author was indebted, and perhaps constitute his deferral to this tradition.

While many of the verses of *Vǫlsunga saga* might be legitimately viewed as authenticating in their function, it is evident that the authenticating/situational paradigm falls short of fully explaining the function of verse quotation in *Vǫlsunga saga*. We may recall that Whaley has demonstrated that this is not, in any case, a strict dichotomy – much of the situational verse in *Heimskringla* serves to authenticate the prose – and I argued in Chapter 2 that that *Gautreks saga* vv.34-7, though presented as authenticating, nevertheless give Starkaðr the kind of “inner voice” that we might expect of situational verse.¹³³ Likewise, a number of verse quotations in *Vǫlsunga saga*, though presented as authenticating, nevertheless appear to give a poetic voice to the characters of the narrative. First- and second-person pronouns appear in *Vǫlsunga saga* v.24, vv.28-9, and v.30 – verses that otherwise seem to corroborate the prose narrative – indicating in each instance that the verse may be placed in the mouth of a character identified in the prose context. Distinct from the sense of orality alluded to in the use of the “sem kveðit er”-type formulae, these three

¹³³ Whaley “Situational Verses,” 251-63.

verse quotations convey a sense of what might be termed “vocality,” drawing attention to the prominent use of the verse form as direct speech in the eddic tradition.¹³⁴

This phenomenon is clearly demonstrated in *Völsunga saga* v.28, which, with v.29, is quoted after Grímhildr gives Guðrún a “meinsamligan drekka” (‘poisonous [lit. ‘hurtful’] drink’) in order to erase the memory of her grief and marry her to Atli:¹³⁵

...sem hér segir:

| | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| Váru í því horni | Váru þeim bjóri |
| hvers kyns stafir | þöl mǫrg sama: |
| ristnir ok roðnir, | urt alls viðar |
| ráða ek né máttak: | ok akarn brunninn, |
| lyngfiskr langr | umdöggr arins, |
| lands haddingja | iðrar blótnar, |
| ax óskorit | svíns lifr soðin, |
| innleið dýra. | því at sakar deyfði. |

...as [it] says here:

In this horn were all kinds of runes, carved and reddened – I could not read them: the long ling-fish of the land of the Haddingjar, uncut ear of corn, entrails of animals.

In that beer were many misfortunes together: herbs of all the forest and burnt acorns, dew of the hearth, sacrificial entrails, boiled pigs liver, for soothing wrongs.

These verses correspond to *Guðrúnarkviða II* 22-23, in which Guðrún relates her woes to King Þjóðrekr in Atli’s court.¹³⁶ In their context in *Völsunga saga*, the speaker is less immediately apparent, and Quinn simply notes that the verse is ascribed an “unidentified first-person voice.”¹³⁷ But while the prose context does not positively identify the speaker, the content of the verse is highly suggestive; that the speaker is unable to comprehend the runes – “ráða ek né máttak” – implies the voice of Guðrún, who was apparently unaware that the drink was poisoned, rather than that of

¹³⁴ On this, see, for example, Terry Gunnell, *The Origins of Drama in Medieval Scandinavia* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995), 186-194.

¹³⁵ *Völsunga saga*, 63.

¹³⁶ *Eddukvæði*, 2:357.

¹³⁷ Quinn, “Trust in Words,” 90.

Grimhildr, who presumably mixed the drink and cut the runes. With Guðrún's own voice latent in this verse, there is an immediacy in this utterance that might be expected of situational verse, but the use of first-person by no means precludes its authenticating function. As I noted in Chapter 2, the use of first-person pronouns and verbal forms in Starkaðr's verses in *Gautreks saga* facilitates the author's use of the poetry as Starkaðr's own testimony of the events narrated in prose. Given this, it is perhaps noteworthy that *Vǫlsunga saga*'s author does not choose to present the verse as Guðrún's first-hand account of this scene. Just as the authenticating formulae in *Vǫlsunga saga* obscure the source of the verses they introduce, the identity of the speaker of this verse also seems to have been deliberately omitted, since there can be no doubt that the saga author knew to whom this verse was ascribed in its context in *Guðrúnarkviða II*. Anonymising the verse in this manner, rather than using a situational formula – such as *þá kvað Guðrún* – allows for it to function as authentication, corroborating the noxious contents of the drink given to Guðrún, and the bloodied runes carved on the drinking horn. Nevertheless, and despite the textuality implicit the formula “sem *hér* segir [italics my own],” the spoken quality of these verses – their “vocality” – is conveyed through the use of the first-person pronoun in v.28.

In the example of vv.28-29, the presence of a first-person pronoun does not diminish the corroborative function of the verse quotation, but the distinction between the situational and authenticating quotation of verse is more clouded in the cases of *Vǫlsunga saga* v.24 and v.30, where the speaker is quite obvious. In ch.44, Guðrún's sons Hamðir and Sǫrli fail to kill King Jǫrmunrekr as a result of having killed their own brother on their journey. Hamðir's realisation of this, having managed to mutilate, but not kill, Jǫrmunrekr, is presented as direct speech in prose, and echoed in v.30, as follows:¹³⁸

Þá mælti Hamðir: “Af mundi nú hǫfuðit ef Erpr lifði, bróðir okkar, er vit vágum á leiðinni, ok sámm vit þat of síð.” Sem kveðit er:

¹³⁸ *Vǫlsunga saga*, 77-78.

Af væri nú hofuðit,
ef Erpr lifði,
bróðir okkar inn þöðfrækni
er vit á braut vágum.

Then Hamðir spoke: “The head would now be off if Erpr lived, our brother, whom we slew on the journey, but we saw this too late.” As is said:

The head would now be off, if Erpr lived, our brother the battle-valiant, whom we slew on the road.

The verse quoted here is the first *helmingr* of *Hamðismál* 28. In its context in the *Poetic Edda*, the speaker of this verse is unclear; *Hamðismál* 26 is attributed to Hamðir – “hitt kvað þá Hamðir | inn hugumstóri” (‘Then said Hamðir the strong-minded’) – but its accusation of goading Jǫrmunrekr would make more sense as levelled against Hamðir by Sǫrli, since it is Hamðir who, in v.24, taunts the mutilated king. *Hamðismál* 27 addresses Hamðir in the second person – “hug hefir þú, Hamðir” (‘you would have had a mind, Hamðir’) – and so can also be attributed to Sǫrli, but v.28 could conceivably be read either as a continuation of Sǫrli’s address, or as Hamðir’s reply.¹³⁹ Though the verse is introduced anonymously in *Vǫlsunga saga*, the use of the first person plural pronouns in reference to Erpr – “bróðir okkar ... er vit á braut vágum [italics my own]” – indicates that the verse belongs to one of Guðrún’s sons, and its precise correspondence to the direct speech in prose attributed to Hamðir identifies him as the speaker of this verse.

If the ascription of this verse to Hamðir is made more clear cut in *Vǫlsunga saga* than in *Hamðismál*, we might then question why the author nevertheless introduces it with the anonymising, authenticating formula “sem er kveðit,” and how we should regard its function in the saga. As was seen in vv.28-29, the use of first-person pronouns in v.30 alone is insufficient to categorise it as situational, despite the ease with which we may identify Hamðir as the speaker. Indeed, the precise correspondence between Hamðir’s prose speech and verse in *Vǫlsunga saga* strengthens the case for reading the latter as authenticating. We have seen in the

¹³⁹*Eddukvæði*, 2:412.

cases of vv.22-23, v.26, and v.27 that authenticating verse in *Vǫlsunga saga* is often used to confirm precise details in narrative prose, as is the case in the authenticating quotation of verse in historiographical *konungasögur*, and the same may be said of v.30. Here, the saga author appears to use the verse to authenticate his account of Hamðir's declaration, the details corroborated being the exact words Hamðir is supposed to have said. We may conclude from this that the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* deliberately anonymises this verse, like *Vǫlsunga saga* vv.28-29, in order to cite it corroboratively. However, a strong sense of "vocality" is palpable here, in the use of first-person pronouns in the verse and its echoing of Hamðir's direct speech in prose; furthermore, with the "sem kveðit er" formula, this verse is suggestive not only of Hamðir's own voice, but also that of the eddic performer. Bearing in mind, as does Würth, that sagas in medieval Iceland were, for the most part, read aloud, and thus received aurally, verse quotations such as *Vǫlsunga saga* v.30 must have quite successfully recalled the antecedent oral eddic tradition.

The "vocality" of *Vǫlsunga saga* vv.28-29 and v.30 does not hinder their corroborative function; indeed, the authorial choice to omit the speaker's identity from the introductory formulae suggests that this aspect of the quotations cannot be overlooked. Nevertheless, the distinction between authenticating and situational verse that can be applied, however maladroitly, to all prosimetrical saga literature, appears to break down almost entirely in light of the "vocality" of these verses. The remaining instance of this phenomenon in *Vǫlsunga saga*, v.24, is perhaps the most complex. Verse 24 – in which Sigurðr, having slain Fáfnir and ridden through the fire surrounding Brynhildr's hall, is compared favourably to Gunnarr – is quoted in the dispute between Guðrún and Brynhildr that precipitates the plot to kill Sigurðr.¹⁴⁰ This verse is preceded by Brynhildr's insistence in direct, prose speech that Sigurðr is more worthy than Guðrún's brother Gunnarr, as follows:¹⁴¹

Brynhildr svarar: "Sigurðr vá at Fáfni, ok er þat meira vert en allt ríki Gunnars konungs," – svá sem kveðit er:

¹⁴⁰ *Vǫlsunga saga*, 51-52.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Sigurðr vá at ormi
en þat siðan mun
engum fyrnask
meðan ǫld lifir.
En hlýri þinn
hvárki þorði
eld at ríða
né yfir stíga.

Brynhildr replied, “Sigurðr slew Fáfnir, and that is more worthy than all of King Gunnarr’s power” – as is thus told:

Sigurðr slew the serpent, and that will afterwards never be forgotten, as long as men live. But your brother dared neither to ride the fire, nor overcome it.

Again, this verse is introduced “sem kveðit er,” indicating its corroborative function. Indeed, it may be regarded as doubly authenticating, since it not only corroborates the details of Brynhildr’s direct speech, with its parallel comparison of Sigurðr and Gunnarr, and the exact verbal echo of “Sigurðr vá at ormi,” but its referential content reiterates two of the most significant acts in the saga and in heroic legend – Sigurðr slaying Fáfnir, and Gunnarr’s failure to ride through the flames. However, in its context in the midst of a dialogue, and its direct address in the second-person pronoun “þinn,” it is possible to read this verse as a continuation of the dialogue between Brynhildr and Guðrún, again problematising the association I have identified between authenticating verse and the “sem kveðit er”-type formulae. This verse is not extant outside of *Vǫlsunga saga*, and is thought to belong to *Meiri of the lacuna of *Codex Regius*; its poetic context is therefore unknown, but, as it appears in the prose of *Vǫlsunga saga*, it is not difficult to identify Brynhildr as the speaker of this verse, or that it is directed at Guðrún.¹⁴² The brother referred to (“hlýri þinn”) is clearly Gunnarr, who fails to ride through the flames surrounding Brynhildr in *Vǫlsunga saga* ch.29, which identifies Guðrún as the addressee. That Brynhildr is the speaker of this verse is not only suggested by the general context of this dialogue – in which Brynhildr

¹⁴² This verse may have belonged to *Meiri, in the lacuna of the *Codex Regius*, which may have been the same “Sigurðarkviða” as that which v.25 is ascribed to. Andersson, “The Lays in the Lacuna of *Codex Regius*,” 12-17; *Eddukvæði*, 2:322-23.

bemoans her marriage to the inferior Gunnarr, having pledged herself to the more heroic Sigurðr – but specifically in its relation to the direct speech in prose that immediately precedes it. The verse follows from the prose direct speech, introduced “Brynhildr svarar,” suggesting that it is a continuation of the same utterance.

Verse 24 has, therefore, an immediacy in its narrative context that would be expected of situational, rather than, as the formula “svá sem kveðit er” suggests, authenticating verse. Save for the introductory formula, this verse meets all of the criteria Whaley proposes as necessary for truly situational verse; its narrative context, including the physical *mis-en-scène* – the dispute between Brynhildr and Guðrún “í skemmu sinni” (‘in her bower’) – is clearly established, and the prominence of the speaker, identifiable as Brynhildr, is self-evident. The integration of this verse into the dialogue, however, is somewhat awkward, for although it answers Guðrún’s claim that Sigurðr and Gunnarr are equally eminent, its echo of Brynhildr’s prose direct speech is hardly naturalistic.

That v.24 should be read as a continuation of Brynhildr’s direct speech is advocated by Quinn, who characterises it as “an unusual instance of the same speaker modulating between prose and verse to distinctive rhetorical effect.”¹⁴³ Quinn proposes that the formula “svá sem kveðit er” indicates that Brynhildr is “apparently quoting her eddic self,” though it is not clear that the introductory formula is to be read as part of Brynhildr’s direct speech, and editors and translators of *Völsunga saga*, including Finch, cited above, have excluded it from the quotation marks enclosing the direct speech.¹⁴⁴ It is of course worth noting, as Grimstad’s diplomatic edition reminds us, that neither direct speech in prose nor verse quotation are marked by any punctuation or line separation in NKS 1824; the only scribal markers of verse quotation are the introductory formulae, which in the case of situational verse, as we have seen, are identical to the presentation of direct speech, whereas the authenticating “sem kveðit er”-type formula is only used for verse quoted by the author himself.

¹⁴³ Quinn, “Trust in Words,” 89-90.

¹⁴⁴ Byock, *The Saga of the Volsungs*, 83; Grimstad, *Völsunga saga*, 178-79.

This palaeographic observation stresses the significance of the introductory formulae, which throughout *Vǫlsunga saga* indicate authorial, rather than diegetic, verse quotation, in light of which Quinn’s claim that Brynhildr is quoting herself seems unconvincing. Nevertheless, Quinn’s observation that the “stratification of voices” represented by v.24 offered audiences an eddic and thirteenth-century prosaic version of Brynhildr is astute, reflecting the same “vocality” that is conveyed in *Vǫlsunga saga* vv.28-29 and v.30.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, we may add yet another layer to this “stratigraphy,” that being the voice of the eddic performer, which, just as in v.30, is evoked in the introductory formula preceding the verse.

3.4: Summary

I began this chapter by analysing the structural logic of *Vǫlsunga saga*. While many *fornaldarsögur* were composed using earlier eddic poetry as source material, the content of *Vǫlsunga saga* was dictated to a far greater extent by the poetry it drew from; however, significant influence from the *konungasögur* can be detected in the structural arrangement of this material, and in the expanded contents of the saga where the source material was more sparse. The *Poetic Edda* is not especially interested in Sigurðr’s genealogy, but *Vǫlsunga saga* is written as a dynastic history, and in placing Óðinn at the head of the Vǫlsung line the saga author situates the work in the context of both Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon written historiography. Sigurðr’s early life is also considerably expanded, providing a much fuller biographical account of the hero. Of course, the *konungasögur* were not the only sagas to use the biographical form, but the particular use in *Vǫlsunga saga* of the “posthumous birth” motif – which likewise became canonical in the biographies of Óláfr Tryggvasonar and Óáfr Haraldsson – indicates that royal biographical historical-writing was a point of inspiration. The integration of biographical and genealogical structures in *Vǫlsunga saga*, mirroring the “tryptics” of historiographical works such as *Heimskringla* and *Knýtlinga saga*, further evinces this influence.

¹⁴⁵ Quinn, “Trust in Words,” 90.

But while the structure of *Vǫlsunga saga* seems to have been fashioned after certain *konungasögur*, the prosimetrum is suggestive of influence from, but not adherence to, this model. Approximately two-thirds of the verses quoted are presented as situational, the greater part of which comes in Brynhildr's long poetic monologue of runic wisdom, quoted from *Sigrdrífumál*. The authenticating verses of *Vǫlsunga saga* do not precisely resemble those of the *konungasögur*, but they do appear to corroborate the prose narrative, often with close verbal correspondence. However, the saga author seems to have been aware of the weighty cultural importance of his eddic source material, and the verses recall not only the subject matter of the legendary cycle, but also the medium of the poetic tradition, evoking the anonymity and orality of the eddic tradition in their introductory formulae. The authenticating/situational paradigm clearly falls short of fully elucidating the function of verse quotation in *Vǫlsunga saga*, though its historicising effect is evident, and necessitates that we consider the prosimetrical *fornaldarsögur*, however their verse quotations are framed, alongside historiographical prosimetra.

4: *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttr*

The final chapter of this thesis will analyse *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, and the related text *Ragnarssona þáttr*. *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* was probably composed sometime in the thirteenth century but is preserved in the manuscript NKS 1824, in which it directly follows *Völsunga saga*; the short narrative known either as *Þáttr af Ragnars sona* or *Ragnarssona þáttr* (neither title is medieval) is preserved in *Hauksbók* (AM 544).¹ Though the precise nature of their relationship is debated, it is evident that both the saga and *þáttr* belong to a single, written tradition concerning the Danish king Ragnarr loðbrók, his wives, and their sons. These two texts vary considerably from one another in length, and in some details, but for the most part follow the same narrative, which I will now briefly summarise:²

Ragnars saga loðbrókar begins with the fosterage of Áslaug, the daughter of Sigurðr and Brynhildr of *Völsunga saga*, by an elderly couple, who conceal her nobility and give her the name 'Kráka' (*Ragnarssona þáttr* lacks this prologue). The saga continues where the *þáttr* begins, with Ragnarr slaying a great serpent in Gautland, and marrying the jarl's daughter, Þóra, who bears him the sons Eiríkr and Agnarr, before dying. Ragnarr then marries Áslaug, with whom he has the sons Ívarr "beinlausí" ('the Boneless'), Björn "járnsíða" ('Ironside'), Hvítserkr, and Sigurðr ormr-í-auga ('Snake-in-the-Eye'). Eiríkr and Agnarr die attacking King Eysteinn of Sweden and are avenged by Áslaug's sons; these brothers go on to raid in 'Suðrríki' ('the Southern Kingdom,' referring to Central and Southern Europe), while Ragnarr himself attacks England, is captured by King Ella, and put to death in a pit of snakes. Ragnarr's sons avenge his death, and here the saga and *þáttr* differ in their ending; both summarise the end of Ragnarr's sons' lives, and their ensuing genealogy, but *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* adds two separate epilogues, one a verse-exchange between two of Ragnarr's followers, the other the discovering of an ancient *trémaðr* ('wooden man') erected by Ragnarr's sons.

¹ In *Hauksbók*, *Ragnarssona þáttr* is rubricated "Her seger af Ragnars svnm ok hversv margir konvngar erv kommer af þeim" ('Here is said of Ragnarr's sons and how many kings have come from them'). *Ragnarssona þáttr*, in *Hauksbók udgiven efter de Arnamagnæanske håndskrifter no. 371, 544 og 675, 4, samt forskellige papirshåndskrifter af det Kongelige nordiske oldskrift-selskab*, eds. Finnur Jónsson and Eiríkur Jónsson (Copenhagen: Thieles bogtrykkeri, 1892-96), 458.

² *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 111-175; *Ragnarssona þáttr*, 458-67.

Among the *fornaldarsögur*, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* may have the strongest claim to some basis in historical events; figures corresponding to Ragnarr and his sons are found in a variety of Frankish, Anglo-Saxon, and Irish sources from the ninth century onwards, and in subsequent Latin historiographical and hagiographical traditions. The antecedents to the characters in the saga-tradition of Ragnarr loðbrók have been painstakingly documented by Rory McTurk and Rowe, who have each also theorised on how the legend evolved from these figures into its extant form in the saga and *þáttr*.³ I will not address the subject of the historical background to the legendary tradition, save where it may have significant bearing on the composition and reception of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttr* as texts in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; however, it is important to note the firm belief of medieval Icelanders in the historical existence of Ragnarr and his family. Their importance to medieval Icelandic literary culture, and the Icelanders' sense of their own history, is illustrated in the second half of Rowe's study of the Ragnarr legend, in which she documents more than twenty prose works in Old Norse, from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, that mention Ragnarr or his kin.⁴ Ragnarr's name is found most often in a genealogical context, as the ancestor either of historical Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish royal lines, or of prominent Icelandic families: those who claimed descent from Ragnarr's sons include Ari Þorgilsson and the *loqmaðr* Haukr Erlendsson, in whose encyclopaedic compendium *Ragnarssona þáttr* is found.⁵

Though not quite to the extent of *Völsunga saga*, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* has enjoyed a relatively privileged position in scholarship, though it too has benefitted from the recent growth of *fornaldarsaga* studies. In addition to the extensive research on the historical antecedents of the figures in the Ragnarr legend already indicated, the post-medieval reception of the Ragnarr legend, and especially *Krákumál* (a twelfth-century skaldic poem attributed to Ragnarr, see below), has received

³ Rory McTurk, "Ragnarr loðbrók in the Irish Annals?" in *Proceedings of the Seventh Viking Congress, Dublin, 15-21 August, 1973*, ed. Bo Almqvist and David Greene (Dublin: Viking Congress, 1976), 93-123; Rory McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga loðbrókar and its Major Scandinavian Analogues* (Oxford: The Society for the Study of Mediæval Languages and Literature, 1991); Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, *Vikings in the West: The Legend of Ragnarr loðbrók and His Sons* (Wien: Fassbender, 2012).

⁴ Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 181-268.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 184-87, 236-38.

significant attention; following recent trends in the study of the *fornaldarsögur*, there have also been a number of recent studies on the themes explored in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*.⁶ While editing the verses of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, McTurk has published two enlightening analyses of individual verses quoted in the saga, though broader questions relating to the prosimetrical form of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* remain to be answered.⁷

Ragnars saga loðbrókar is a reasonable length in comparison to other *fornaldarsögur*, and though it is shorter than *Völsunga saga*, it is denser with verse quotation. In the sixty-five pages of Magnus Olsen's edition (approximately thirty leaves in NKS 1824), *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* contains forty-one verses, the majority of which are in a skaldic metre, but one that, as McTurk notes, frequently and unsystematically departs from the strict pattern of *dróttkvætt*.⁸ Several of these verses are also quoted in *Ragnarssona þáttur* (see Table 7, below). Given the extensive verse quotation in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, examining the function of its prosimetrical form is essential to understanding its composition and reception; the first theme of this chapter's analysis will therefore be the function of verse quotation in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, according to the authenticating/situational paradigm employed elsewhere in this thesis. All of the verses in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* are presented, at face value, at least, as situational, and most are placed in the mouths of the principal characters – Ragnarr, Áslaug, and Ragnarr's sons. As such, the potential authenticating or historicising function of the verses may not seem obvious, but, as will be seen, a more nuanced understanding of the prosimetrum of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* requires us to look beyond this simplistic categorisation.

⁶ Tom Shippey, "The Death-Song of Ragnar Lodbrok: A Study in Sensibilities," in *Medievalism in the Modern World: Essays in Honour of Leslie J. Workman*, eds. Richard Utz and Tom Shippey (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 155-172; Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Norse Muse in Britain 1750-1820* (Trieste: Parnaso, 1998).

⁷ Rory McTurk, "Rattus rattus as a Beast of Battle? Stanza 12 of *Ragnars saga*," in *Eddic, Skaldic, and Beyond: Poetic Variety in Medieval Iceland and Norway*, ed. Martin Chase (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 102-113; Rory McTurk, "An Eye for an Eye and a Snake for a Snake: Stanza 8 of *Ragnars saga*," in Jackson and Melnikova, *Skemmtiligastar Lygisögur*, 111-121.

⁸ McTurk, introduction to "*Ragnars saga loðbrókar*," in *SkP* 8, 623.

The skaldic metre of the verses quoted in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* makes it unique among the prosimetrical *fornaldarsögur*, the rest of which, of course, quote poetry in eddic metres. The implications of this are not to be underestimated, nor has this distinctive feature of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* gone unnoticed, and Rowe has observed:⁹

Ragnars saga loðbrókar does not appear to be intended as “history” in the same way that *Fagrskinna* or *Heimskringla* are, but yet it stands closer to the kings’ sagas than to the *fornaldarsögur*, for it quotes skaldic stanzas in the manner of the former, rather than the eddic verses that are characteristic of the latter.

Rowe goes on to emphasise the moralising and fantastic elements of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and it is probably these features she has in mind when contrasting *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* with *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*. However, it is Rowe’s comment on the verses quoted in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* that is of most interest here, as she seems to imply that the form of the verse – either eddic or skaldic – is more significant in indicating the text’s genre than the relationship between the verse and prose, and the function of the poetic quotations. There is certainly some validity to this, and one oft-cited distinction between the prosimetrum of the *fornaldarsögur* and that of the *konungasögur* (and, for that matter, the *Íslendingasögur*) is the former’s use of eddic verse forms, which, as Clunies Ross suggests, seem to have been viewed as chronologically appropriate to *fornaldarsögur*’s setting in the legendary past.¹⁰

The significance of the skaldic metre of the verses in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* will be addressed in the second half of this chapter, which will analyse more broadly the place of Ragnarr loðbrók in skaldic poetics in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Though Rowe has more than adequately demonstrated the belief in medieval Iceland of Ragnarr’s historical existence, her study does not illustrate the extent to which the historical Ragnarr was associated with poetic composition, as a patron and practitioner of this art. A number of scholars, including Clunies Ross, Guðrún Nordal, and Mikael Males, have commented in passing upon the appearance of Ragnarr’s name in both skaldic verse and poetic treatises from the twelfth and thirteenth

⁹ Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 208.

¹⁰ Clunies Ross, *Poetry and Poetics*, 10-11.

centuries, but the need remains for a sustained analysis of all the relevant evidence for this association, including the long poem, *Krákumál*, attributed to Ragnarr, and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* itself.¹¹

Further to the scholarship on *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* indicated above, the textual development of this saga and *Ragnarssona þáttr*, and their relationship to one another, has also been the subject of considerable debate. The textual history of this saga tradition is complex issue, and the theories regarding it are, at times, extremely intricate; before commencing my analysis, therefore, an account of the textual history of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttr* must be given.

4.1: Textual history

The earliest extant manuscript of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* – NKS 1824 – is also the only medieval manuscript to preserve the saga in its entirety, and it is this redaction that I will analyse. A second, fragmentary redaction of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* is also preserved in Reykjavík, AM 147 4to. This redaction seems to have been written in the middle of the fifteenth century, but was scraped from the leaves of the manuscript around 1600, when a number of legal texts were written on the recycled vellum. The largest part of AM 147, 1r-89r, contains a copy of the law code *Jónsbók*, in a sixteenth-century hand; an assortment of other legal texts is now found on 89r-111v, beneath which the traces of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* can still be read on 93r-111v. This redaction of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* was included in Olsen's edition, but because of the difficulty in reading the remnants of the saga in AM 147, Olsen's text is extremely fragmentary.¹² As such, the AM 147 redaction is of very little use in a literary analysis of the saga, and has been excluded, implicitly or explicitly, from a

¹¹ Clunies Ross, "Poet into Myth," 33-34; 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), 122, 128-29; Mikael Males, "'Archaic' Assonance in the in the Strophes of Ragnarr Loðbróks [sic] Family and Other Early Skalds," in *Á Austrvega. Saga and East Scandinavia: Preprint Papers of The 14th International Saga Conference Uppsala, 9th-15th August 2009*, eds. Agneta Ney, Henrik Williams and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist (Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009), 643-44.

¹² *Brudstykker af Ragnars saga loðbrókar* in Olsen, ed. *Völsunga saga ok Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 176-94.

number of studies.¹³ Nevertheless, the AM 147 redaction has been used, principally by McTurk, in attempting to reconstruct the textual history of *Ragnars saga*.¹⁴

There is broad acceptance for McTurk's dating of the extant complete redaction of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* to the second half of the thirteenth century, and there is no apparent reason to challenge the prevailing opinion.¹⁵ Indeed, this seems a logical dating for the composition of a *fornaldarsaga* about one of Denmark's most famous legendary kings, as it accords with an identifiable pre-occupation with Danish affairs in thirteenth-century Icelandic literature: many of the genealogical references to Ragnarr and his sons are found in texts that also date to this period, and Guðrún Nordal has noted the importance of Danish myth and legend – including the figure of Ragnarr – to twelfth- and thirteenth-century poetics.¹⁶ Despite the Norwegian subject matter of most *konungasögur*, Danish history clearly also interested Icelandic writers well into the thirteenth century, as is evidenced by the composition of *Knýtlinga saga*, possibly by Snorri Sturluson's nephew, Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld, in the 1250s.¹⁷

Despite the late witnesses of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, we can therefore be quite confident that our analysis of the text pertains to the literary culture of thirteenth-century Iceland in which the *fornaldarsögur* emerged as a genre. The intricacies of the saga's textual history merit a preliminary discussion, however, as they are relevant to any literary criticism of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttr*. In his short analysis, Torfi Tulinius also finds the saga “of interest as, above all else, a literary work of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries,” but nevertheless concedes that, because of the relationship between the saga and *Ragnarssona þáttr*, closer

¹³ See, for example, Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 207; and Rory McTurk, “Male or Female Initiation: The Strange Case of *Ragnars saga*,” in *Reflections on Old Norse Myths*, eds. Pernille Hermann, Jens Peter Schjødt and Rasmus Trandum Kristensen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 53.

¹⁴ Rory McTurk, “The Extant Icelandic Manifestations of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*,” *Gripla* 1 (1975), 43-75.

¹⁵ Rory McTurk, “The Relationship of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* to *Þiðreks saga af Bern*,” in *Sjötíu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni*, 2:568-85. For those who have followed McTurk's dating, see Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 24-26, and Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 207.

¹⁶ Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 191-225; Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 310-18.

¹⁷ Bjarni Guðnason, introduction to *Danakonungasögur*, CLXXIX-CLXXXIV.

attention must be paid to “the evolution of the story material” of these texts than to the other *fornaldarsögur*.¹⁸

As Rowe notes, the first prose narrative account of Ragnarr’s life in Old Norse was probably **Skjöldunga saga*, fragments of which pertaining Ragnarr are preserved in *Sögubrot*, and summarised in Arngrímur Jónsson’s, *Ad Catalogum regum Sveciæ*, appended to his *Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta*.¹⁹ Arngrímur’s summary is, however, too brief to provide insight into the nature of **Skjöldunga saga*, and it is further problematised by the possibility that Arngrímur also used the extant *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, a later text, as a source.²⁰ Use of Arngrímur’s version of **Skjöldunga saga* as a source for the Ragnarr legend in the thirteenth century is therefore limited, but it must be mentioned as *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* was most likely derived, at least in part, from **Skjöldunga saga*, though the narrative has, to quote Rowe, “evolved considerably beyond it.”²¹

Returning to *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* itself, we can be certain that some version of it existed in the thirteenth century. Since *Ragnarssona þáttr* refers to a *saga Ragnars konungs* in its account of the serpent fight, a *terminus ante quem* for the saga is provided by the only manuscript witness of the *þáttr*, *Hauksbók*, and it is possible that Haukr himself composed *Ragnarssona þáttr* shortly before the manuscript was assembled, c.1302 x 1310.²² Beyond this, the written development of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* is conjectural, dependent on establishing the relationships between the three extant witnesses of the saga tradition: *Ragnarssona þáttr*, the NKS 1824 redaction (‘Y’), and the AM 147 redaction (‘X’).

There are a number of key differences between *Ragnarssona þáttr* and the two redactions of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (Table 5). Observing some of these, Bjarni Guðnason proposed that the *þáttr* was based on an older form of the saga than either

¹⁸ Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 128.

¹⁹ Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 191; *Sögubrot*, 70-71; *Sviakonungatal Arngríms læðra* in *Danakonungasögur*, 72-77.

²⁰ McTurk, *Studies*, 57, 135, 163-65.

²¹ Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 207.

²² *Ragnarssona þáttr*, 458; Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, “Literary, Codicological, and Political Perspectives on *Hauksbók*,” *Gripla* 19 (2008), 64-66; Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 228-29.

the ‘X’ or ‘Y’ redactions.²³ Building on Bjarni’s earlier work, McTurk has observed further discrepancies between the *þáttr* and the saga (in the depiction of Ragnarr’s serpent fight), and follows Bjarni in concluding that the extant *Ragnarssona þáttr* was derived from a saga antecedent to ‘X’ and ‘Y,’ while also allowing for the possibility of **Skjöldunga saga*’s direct influence on the *þáttr*.²⁴

| <i>Ragnarssona þáttr</i> | <i>Ragnars saga loðbrókar</i> |
|---|---|
| Eysteinn rules Sweden as a <i>skattkonungr</i> ('tributary king') of Ragnarr | Eysteinn rules Sweden independently, and is a friend of Ragnarr |
| Eysteinn’s daughter is named Borghildr | Eysteinn’s daughter is named Ingibjörg |
| Eiríkr demands Borghildr’s hand in marriage | Ragnarr is betrothed to Ingibjörg, but terminates the engagement when he learns of Áslaug’s parentage |
| Eiríkr and Agnarr demand Eysteinn recognise them as overlords | Eiríkr and Agnarr attack Eysteinn when his friendship with Ragnarr ends |
| Ragnarr fights Þóra’s <i>ormr</i> wearing ragged <i>brækr</i> and a cape with sleeves and a hood; the serpent spews poison at Ragnarr | Ragnarr fights Þóra’s <i>ormr</i> wearing <i>loðbrækr</i> and <i>loðkapa</i> ; Ragnarr is sprayed by a gush of blood from the serpent |

Table 5: Main differences between *Ragnarssona þáttr* and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*.

Bjarni and McTurk’s theories posit that the original *Ragnars saga* more closely resembled *Ragnarssona þáttr* than do the extant ‘X’ and ‘Y’ redactions. Rowe has proposed an alternative theory: that the source of *Ragnarssona þáttr* was the extant ‘Y’ redaction of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, and that the differences between the two texts are the result of the *þáttr* author’s attempt to improve the saga, sometimes shortening it and sometimes making the text closer to **Skjöldunga saga*.²⁵ Thus, Rowe argues, the *þáttr* restores the political themes of **Skjöldunga saga*, hinted at in *Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta*, by making Eysteinn of Sweden Ragnarr’s *skattkonungr*; the change in Eysteinn’s daughter’s name from Ingibjörg in the saga to

²³ Bjarni Guðnason, “Gerðir og ritþróun *Ragnars sögu loðbrókar*” in *Einarsbók: Afmæliskevðja til Einar Ól. Sveinssonar*, 12. Desember 1969 (Reykjavík: Nokkrir Vinir, 1969), 30-31.

²⁴ McTurk, “Extant Icelandic Manifestations,” 46-8, 63.

²⁵ Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 229.

Borghildr in the *þáttir* may have been out of political sensitivity, since King Hákon hálegggr of Norway (r.1299-1319) fathered a daughter named Ingibjörg in 1299; ch.1 and chs.18-20 of the saga have no equivalent in the *þáttir*, being among the extraneous material that the *þáttir* cut from the saga; and the *þáttir*'s ending introduced additional material from **Skjöldunga saga*, and perhaps also other sources, to closer resemble chronicle writing.²⁶ Rowe's analysis convincingly accounts for all the major differences between the *þáttir* and saga (except in the details of Ragnarr's serpent fight – a point that McTurk does not miss in his review of Rowe's monograph) raising the possibility that, in its original form, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* may have quite closely resembled the extant 'Y' redaction.²⁷

Both Bjarni and McTurk also observed differences between NKS 1824 and, as far as can be read, AM 147 (Table 6), though McTurk's study is by far the more thorough, and clearer in its conclusions.²⁸ From these discrepancies, Bjarni assumed the existence of a common ancestor to these manuscripts – his 'X' redaction – though he is unclear on its nature; McTurk, however, argues that AM 147 faithfully preserves 'X,' and that 'Y' in NKS 1824 b represents a further development from 'X.'²⁹

| AM 147 fol. ('X') | NKS 1824 b 4to ('Y') |
|---|---|
| Begins with Ragnar's serpent fight | Begins with 'Kráka' prologue (ch.1) |
| Ends shortly after Ella's death | Three additional chapters (chs.18-20) after Ella's death: Hvítserkr's death; verse-exchange between Ragnarr's warriors; discovery of the <i>trémaðr</i> |
| Several verses of <i>Krákumál</i> and two <i>lausavísur</i> spoken by Ragnarr in the snake-pit* | Two <i>lausavísur</i> spoken by Ragnarr in the snake-pit; <i>Krákumál</i> included as an appendix |
| Shorter, pithier text | More expansive text |

Table 6: Main differences between the 'X' and 'Y' redactions of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*.

²⁶ Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 229-34.

²⁷ Rory McTurk, review of *Vikings in the West: The Legend of Ragnarr Loðbrók and his Sons*, by Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, *Saga-Book* 37 (2013), 94-99.

²⁸ Bjarni Guðnason, "Gerðir og ritþróun," 31-32; McTurk, "Extant Icelandic Manifestations," 48-52.

²⁹ Bjarni Guðnason, "Gerðir og ritþróun," 31-32; McTurk, "Extant Icelandic Manifestations," 55-64.

* Cf. Table 7 (below).

The reasons for assuming the priority of the ‘X’ redaction are, however, far from conclusive, and by no means as secure as McTurk has suggested. The preserved text of this redaction, as far as Olsen was able to read, begins midway through the first verse of the saga, which is spoken by Ragnarr after he has slain the serpent in Gautland; it is safe to assume that the serpent fight itself did indeed precede this verse, but there is no indication of whether this redaction did or did not include the Kráka prologue.³⁰ ‘X’ does indeed seem to end after Ella’s death, for, as McTurk notes, the text finishes slightly further up the page on 111v than on the other leaves. However, it seems no less likely that the final chapters of ‘Y’ were cut from ‘X’ (as Rowe suggests was the case in *Ragnarssona þáttr*) than their having been a later addition.³¹ Indeed, as it stands, ‘X’ ends quite abruptly, stating “Suo er sagt at hann leti drepa iatmund hinn helga ok lagdi vndir sig Riki hans lodbrokar synir foru vida med hernadi vm england vestur ok suo vida anars stadar” (‘It is thus said that he [Ívarr] had Edmund the Holy killed, and conquered his kingdom. Loðbrók’s sons went raiding widely around England in the west, and as widely in other places’).³² This is considerably shorter than the ending in both ‘Y’ and in *Ragnarssona þáttr*, and seems to have been truncated somewhat; it is at least possible, therefore, that chs.18-20 of ‘Y’ were included in the exemplar of AM 147, but were edited out of this redaction.

On the other hand, McTurk identifies similar influences from *Þiðreks saga af Bern* (which seems also to have influenced *Völsunga saga*) in ch.1 and chs.18-20 of the ‘Y’ redaction, but not elsewhere in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, and suggests that the final chapters were added to ‘X’ at the same time as the Kráka prologue, to produce the extant ‘Y.’³³ McTurk’s reasoning that ch.1 and chs.18-20 were added to the saga at the same time is quite plausible, though it does not negate the possibility that ‘X’ represents a contraction of ‘Y,’ according to the objections raised above. It is unclear where ‘X’ fits in Rowe’s theory of the saga’s development, since she does not examine its evidence. However, if the priority of ‘X’ over ‘Y’ cannot be absolutely ascertained, then one may plausibly suggest that both ‘X’ and *Ragnarssona þáttr*

³⁰ *Brudstykker*, 176.

³¹ *Brudstykker*, 194; McTurk, “Extant Icelandic Manifestations,” 48-49.

³² *Brudstykker*, 193-94.

³³ McTurk, “The Relationship of Ragnars saga loðbrókar to Þiðreks saga af Bern,” 569-81.

represent a condensed redaction of a *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* that resembled, as Rowe suggests, the extant ‘Y’ redaction.

However one wishes to view the relationships between the extant witnesses of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, it remains essential that we firmly date the ‘Y’ redaction to the period of Icelandic literature that this thesis seeks to address, namely, the thirteenth century, and here we can be quite confident in McTurk’s analysis. McTurk suggests that a *terminus ante quem* for ‘Y’ is provided by *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinsonar*, composed c.1300. This saga introduces a certain Skúli, jarl of Álaborg, and states: “Hann var sagðr bróðir Heimis, fóstura Brynhildar Buðladóttur, er getr í sögu Ragnars konungs loðbrókar” (‘He was said to be the brother of Heimir, foster father of Brynhildr Buðladóttir, which is referred to in the saga of King Ragnarr loðbrókar’).³⁴ This suggests an awareness on the part of *Hálfðanar saga*’s author of a *Ragnars saga* complete with ‘Y’ ch.1, which refers to Heimir’s “harmr eptir Brynhildi, fósturu sína” (‘grief over Brynhildr, his fosterling’), which must therefore have been added to the saga before *Hálfðanar saga*’s composition.³⁵

Though some uncertainty remains regarding the interrelation of *Ragnarssona þáttur* and the ‘X’ and ‘Y’ redactions of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, we can, nevertheless, be quite confident that the subject of analysis in this chapter – the ‘Y’ redaction – was composed sometime in the thirteenth century. However, verses quoted in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* pose yet further questions regarding its textual development, though the provenance of the poetry has not been contemplated in scholarship at any great length.

The ‘Y’ redaction of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* contains forty-one verses, three in *fornyrðislag* metre and the remainder in what McTurk calls “irregular *dróttkvætt*.”³⁶ *Ragnarssona þáttur* contains nine verses, the first seven of which are also found in the saga; *Ragnarssona þáttur* v.8 is a *helmingr* from Sigvatr Þórðarson’s *Knútsdrápa*, and v.9 is extant only in the *þáttur*. Table 7 illustrates the correspondence between the

³⁴ McTurk, “The Relationship of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* to *Þiðreks saga af Bern*,” 582-84; *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinsonar*, ed. Franz Rolf Schröder (Halle: Niemeyer, 1917), 94.

³⁵ *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 95.

³⁶ McTurk, *Studies*, 54-55.

verses of ‘Y’ and *Ragnarssona þátr*. For reference, I have also included the verses that appear to have been included in the ‘X’ redaction, though it must be stressed that, due to the fragmentary nature of this text, we cannot rule out the possibility that more of the verses in ‘Y’ were also included in ‘X’.

| Prose order in ‘Y’ | Prose order in ‘X’ | Prose order in <i>Rsp</i> | Attribution |
|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | 1 | | Ragnarr |
| 2 | | | Áslaug |
| 3a | | | Ragnarr |
| 3b ³⁷ | | | Áslaug |
| 4 | | | Ragnarr |
| 5 | | | Áslaug |
| 6 | 2 | | Áslaug |
| 7 | 3 | | Björn |
| 8 | 4 | | Ragnarr |
| 9 | 5 | | Ragnarr |
| 10 | 6 | | Ragnarr |
| 11 | | 1 | Eiríkr |
| 12 | | | Eiríkr |
| 13 | | 2 | Eiríkr |
| 14 | | | Eiríkr |
| 15 | 7 | | Áslaug |
| 16 | 8 | | <i>liðsmaðr</i> |
| 17 | | | Áslaug |
| 18 | 9 | 3 | Áslaug |
| 19 | 10 | 4 | Sigurðr ormr-í-auga |
| 20 | 11 | 5 | Björn |
| 21 | | 6 | Hvítserkr |
| 22 | 12 | 7 | Ívarr |
| 23 | 13 | | Ragnarr |
| 24 | 14 | | Ragnarr |
| 25 | 15 | | Áslaug |

³⁷ Olsen treated the v.3a and v.3b as a single verse; from a prosimetrical perspective, these should be seen as separate quotations, but I have followed Olsen’s numeration of the verses for ease of reference.

| | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| | <i>Unnumbered block quotation</i> | | Ragnarr (<i>Krákumál</i>) |
| 26 | 16 | | Ragnarr |
| 27 | 17 | | Ragnarr |
| | 18 | 8 | Sigvatr Þórðarson (<i>Knútsdrápa</i>) |
| 28 | | | Björn |
| 29 | | | Björn |
| 30 | | | Áslaug |
| 31 | | | Áslaug |
| | | 9 | Áslaug |
| 32 | | | <i>Liðsmaðr 1</i> |
| 33 | | | <i>Liðsmáðr 2</i> |
| 34 | | | <i>Liðsmaðr 1</i> |
| 35 | | | <i>Liðsmaðr 2</i> |
| 36 | | | <i>Liðsmaðr 1</i> |
| 37 | | | <i>Liðsmaðr 2</i> |
| 38 | | | <i>Trémáðr</i> |
| 39 | | | <i>Trémáðr</i> |
| 40 | | | <i>Trémáðr</i> |
| <i>Appendix</i> | | | Ragnarr (<i>Krákumál</i>) |

Table 7: Verses quoted in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttr*.

The verses in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* are not, however, the only poetry ascribed to Ragnarr, and are predated by the poem *Krákumál*. In its extant form, this poetic monologue is comprised of twenty-nine verses, in which the speaker (who names himself “Loðbrók” in v.1) recalls the battles he has fought (*Krákumál* 1-21) and voices his heroic defiance as King Ella puts him to death in a pit of snakes (*Krákumál* 22-29).³⁸ The majority of these verses are, like those in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, in a fairly loose variant of *dróttkvætt*, made up of ten lines (instead of the usual eight, as in *dróttkvætt*), each verse beginning with the refrain “Hjuggu vér með hjörvi” (“We hewed

³⁸ Rory McTurk, ed. “Anonymous Poems, *Krákumál*,” in *SkP* 8, 707-77.

with the sword').³⁹ Considerably more attention has been paid to the origins of *Krákumál* than to the verses of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, and the theories of Finnur Jónsson, Jan de Vries, and Olsen have been assessed more recently by McTurk. Space does not permit the rehearsal of the arguments here, but McTurk follows Olsen in suggesting that *Krákumál* was composed in the Hebrides, probably before c.1200; the preserved orthography of *Krákumál* – lacking initial <h> before <l> and <r> (enabling in v.29/7-8 alliteration of (*h*)*læjandi* ('laughing') with *lífs* ('of life')) – reflects a phonological change occurring in Danish, Southern Norwegian, and Insular dialects, while v.15 refers to “Suðreyjum sjálfum” ('[in] the Hebrides themselves').⁴⁰

While *Krákumál* evidences a poetic tradition associated with Ragnarr loðbrók that seems to predate the saga, this poem appears to have had a genesis and development quite separate to *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and its verses, as there are very few correspondences between the two texts. Only v.26 of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* bears resemblance to the verses of *Krákumál*; v.26/5-6 (“eigi hugðumz orma | at aldragi mínu”) echoes *Krákumál* 24/5-6 (“eigi hugðak Ellu | at aldragi mínu”), and v.26/1-4 (“Orrostur hefi ek áttar... fimmtigu ok eina”) echoes *Krákumál* 28/2-4 (“Hefr fimm tögum sinna | folkorrostur framðar | fleinþings boði ok eina”).⁴¹ McTurk has discussed the narrative contents of *Krákumál* in the context of the development of the legendary tradition surrounding Ragnarr, which I will touch on where relevant to my analysis, but for now it is sufficient to note that the narrative contents of *Krákumál*, for the most part, have little to do with the narrative of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*.⁴² However, verses of *Krákumál* were incorporated into the narrative of 'X,' and the poem was included as an appendix to 'Y' in NKS 1824 (Table 7); I will return to this topic later in this chapter, but for now we may note that these additions were probably made sometime after the saga's original composition. While an

³⁹ Exceptions to this generalised description are v.23 and v.29, which each have eight lines, the latter also lacking the refrain. See McTurk, *Studies*, 126-27.

⁴⁰ McTurk, *Studies*, 125-32; McTurk, introduction to “*Krákumál*,” 710-11.

⁴¹ Rory McTurk, ed. “*Ragnars saga loðbrókar* 26 (Ragnarr loðbrók, *Lausavísur* 9),” 676; McTurk, ed. “*Krákumál* 24, 28,” 765, 774.

⁴² McTurk, *Studies*, 125-35.

important parallel to *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, *Krákumál* does not, therefore, aid us in dating either the saga or the verses quoted therein.

In his edition of skaldic poetry, Finnur Jónsson consigned the verses of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* to the thirteenth century, and this dating has gone unchallenged in recent scholarship – Bjarni Guðnason and McTurk do not address this issue, and Guðrún Nordal follows Finnur Jónsson’s thirteenth-century dating.⁴³ Males has offered a stimulating analysis of the archaicising features of the verses in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, to which I will return in my own analysis.⁴⁴ Males highlights the difference between the archaicising features of the “Ragnarr-group” and genuinely old poetry, such as that of Bragi Boddason, pointing to the relatively young age of the verses in *Ragnars saga loðbrók*; beyond this, however, he is satisfied with Finnur Jónsson’s dating, adding only that “it is reasonable to believe that the poetry has the same provenance” – that is, the thirteenth century – as the oldest saga about Ragnarr.⁴⁵ Males does, however, reason quite soundly that all the verses attributed to Ragnarr and his family in *Ragnars saga loðbrók* were present in the exemplar to *Ragnarssona þáttr*, which in its brevity contains fewer verses, and none attributed to Ragnarr himself. Since Ragnarr, his sons, and Áslaug are named as poets in *Skáldatal* (see below), it would be most unusual if an “original” *Ragnars saga* contained verses attributed to Ragnarr’s family but not to the eponymous hero.⁴⁶

This may also support Rowe’s case for *Ragnarssona þáttr*’s use of a source that resembled ‘Y,’ which we may therefore be all the more confident in analysing as a late or even mid thirteenth-century text. Given the general trend in the textual development of the *fornaldarsögur*, in which prose narratives evolved from poetry, it would be natural to assume that the verses of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* likewise

⁴³ *Skj A*, 2:232-42; *Skj B*, 2:251-61. In editing the verses of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, Olsen found the text of NKS 1824 to be quite corrupt in places, and produced a normalised version based on readings from NKS 1824, 147, and *Hauksbók* where possible; see Olsen’s notes to the verses in *Völsunga saga ok Ragnars saga loðbrók*, 195-222. Guðni Jónsson’s edition follows Olsen’s normalised text.

⁴⁴ Males, “Archaic’ Assonance,” 643-648.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 643-44.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*; *Uppsala Edda*, 100. The last king named in the redaction of *Skáldatal* found in the *Kringla* manuscript of *Heimskringla* (c.1258–64) is Knútr Hákonarson (d.1261), suggesting the composition of *Skáldatal* c.1260. See Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 122; Margaret Clunies Ross, “Poet into Myth,” 31 n.1.

predate the prose; indeed, my analysis of their function in the prose will indicate the priority of the verses in the composition of the saga. However, despite the numerous analogous sources for the Ragnarr legend, little light can be shed on the composition and dating of the verses themselves.

Though its fragmentary preservation prevents definitive conclusions from being reached, there is little indication that **Skjöldunga saga* contained any verses related to Ragnarr loðbrók and his family; Arngrímur Jónsson records no poetry related to Ragnarr loðbrók in his account in *Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta* and *Ad Catalogum Regum Sveciæ*. This may either be evidence of Arngrímur's heavy hand in redacting his source, as Jakob Benediktsson has suggested, or of the brevity of his source – an older, short redaction of **Skjöldunga saga* – as Bjarni Guðnason has suggested.⁴⁷

It is perhaps more significant that Saxo ascribes no poetry to Regnerus in Book IX of *Gesta Danorum*. Vernacular poetry was not only a valuable source for the narrative material of *Gesta Danorum* – as Saxo himself professes in his preface – but the figure of the poet, as Friis-Jensen has demonstrated, is afforded a revered status in *Gesta Danorum*, and it is worth mentioning that Saxo celebrates the poetic achievements of a certain Danish king, Haldanus. Given this, it would seem unlikely that Saxo, if he knew of a tradition of Ragnarr loðbrók composing poetry, would omit this information.⁴⁸ The closest Saxo comes to reproducing Ragnarr's poetic voice is in his account of Ragnarr's death in the snake-pit (which Saxo locates in Ireland, rather than England); this, of course, is the circumstance of the speaker of *Krákumál*, and 'Y' also has Ragnarr speak two verses as he is killed. In *Gesta Danorum*, Saxo offers this account:⁴⁹

Cuius adeso ioncinore, cum cor ipsum funesti carnificis loco coluber obsideret, omnem operum suorum cursum animosa uoce recensuit, superiori rerum contextui hanc adiiciens clausulam: "Si sucule uerris supplicium scissent, haud dubio irruptis haris afflictum absoluerent properarent."

⁴⁷ Jakob Benediktsson, "The Icelandic Traditions of the Scyldings," *Saga-Book* 15 (1957-61), 49-52; Bjarni Guðnason, introduction to *Danakonungasögur*, XXII-III.

⁴⁸ Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as a Latin Poet*, 25-28; *Gesta Danorum* vii.2.7.

⁴⁹ *Gesta Danorum*, ix.4.38.

After they [vipers] had gnawed his liver and a serpent lay siege to his heart like some deadly executioner, he reviewed the achievements of his whole career in undaunted tones, adding this coda to the end of his narrative: “If the young pigs had only known the distress of their boar, they’d certainly break into the sty and release him from his suffering without delay.”

The *animosa vox* may suggest that some poetry was included in Saxo’s source for this scene, and the phrase that Saxo quotes is echoed very closely in v.29 of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, the second spoken by Ragnarr in the snake-pit, the first two lines of which read “Gnyðja mundu grísir | ef galtar hag vissi” (‘The piglets would grunt if they knew the boar’s condition’).⁵⁰ However, it must be reiterated that, given Saxo’s enormous effort in rendering his vernacular poetic sources in Latin verse elsewhere in *Gesta Danorum*, it would be most unusual if he omitted the verses in this scene, had they been available to him; in any case, it remains that no further trace of the *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* verses may be seen in *Gesta Danorum*. It is true of most of the prosimetrical *fornaldarsögur* that we lack external witnesses to the verses they preserve – *Völsunga saga* is the lone exception to this – but given that our analogous sources for the Ragnarr legend do not hint at the presence of verse (where we might reasonably expect it, in Saxo’s case), it may be suggested that the verses of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* do not much predate the prose. We may tentatively conclude, therefore, that the extant version of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, after a presumably long period of oral transmission, underwent a quite rapid textual development in the thirteenth century, reaching its current form before 1300, and perhaps as early as c.1260.

4.2: Verse quotation in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttr*

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the verses quoted in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* differ from the rest of the corpus of *fornaldarsögur* in their form, utilising a skaldic metre, and the extent to which *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* may be likened to the *konungasögur* on this basis, as Rowe has suggested, is an important question.

⁵⁰ *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 135.

However, all of the verses in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (and all but one of the verses in *Ragnarssona þáttr*) are presented as situational; in this regard, these two texts conform to the style of verse quotation that has long been regarded as typical of the *Íslendingasögur* and other *fornaldarsögur*, sagas Whaley categorises as lying “at the fictional end of the spectrum of saga-literature.”⁵¹ As such, there is a less direct relationship between the prosimetrical form of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and that of the *konungasögur* than can be observed in, for instance, *Gautreks saga*. However, as I have argued already, the situational presentation of verse quotations, designated by their introductory formulae, does not necessarily negate their function in corroborating, authenticating, and otherwise historicising the prose narrative. But despite the limitations of the situational/authenticating paradigm, it remains a convenient place to begin analysing the verse quotations of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, before turning to a more nuanced approach to the relationship between verse and prose.

The most obvious imitation of authenticating verse, in the style of those found in the *konungasögur*, is found only in *Ragnarssona þáttr* and the ‘X’ redaction of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*. In both of these texts, a verse from Sigvatr Þórðarson’s *Knútsdrápa* is quoted in evidence of how Ragnarr’s sons killed Ella in revenge for their father’s death:⁵²

...letv þeir ný rista orn á baki Ellv ok skera sípan rifin oll frá ryginvm með sverði sva at þar vorv lvgvnt dregin. Sva segir Sigvatr skald i Knvtz drapv Ok Ellv bak at let hin er sat Ivar ara lórvík skorið.

...they had had an eagle cut on Ella’s back and then cut out all the ribs from the spine with a sword so that the lungs were pulled out. As Sigvatr the skald says in *Knútsdrápa*...

⁵¹ Bjarni Einarsson, “The Rôle of Verse.” Whaley, “Situational Verses,” 254.

⁵² *Ragnarssona þáttr*, 464.

Normalised, the *helmingr* from *Knútsdrápa* reads:⁵³

Ok Ellu bak
at, lét, hinns sat,
Ívarr ara,
Jórvík, skorit.

And Ívarr, who resided at York, had Ælla's back cut with an eagle.

This passage in *Ragnarssona þáttr* has aroused considerable interest for its lurid description of Ella's death, and the so-called "blood-eagle" ritual, though, as Roberta Frank has argued, the reference to the carrion bird is little more than a skaldic trope, and *ara...skorit* should be read as "cut *by* an eagle," casting Ella as the prey of the beast of battle.⁵⁴ Still, the author of *Ragnarssona þáttr* has clearly (mis)understood this verse as referring to a ritualised, torturous method of execution, and provided a very literal interpretation in his prose account. Likewise, the 'X' redaction of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* also provides a literal explanation of the verse, depicting Ívarr as ordering the execution:⁵⁵

Nu skal sa maðr er hagur er marka aurn aa baki hanum ok riodaa j blodi hans Sa maðr er til þerssa var kuaddur Reist aurnn aa baki hanum ok skar rifin fraa hryggnum ok dro vr hanum lungun ok adr enn þessu verki var lokit let ella kongr lif sitt. Suo segir siguatr skalld j knutz drapu...

"Now shall that man who is skilful mark an eagle on his [Ella's] back and redden it in his blood." That man who was summoned to this carved an eagle on his back and cut the ribs from the spine and pulled out his lungs, but before this work was finished Ella died. As Sigvatr skald says in *Knútsdrápa*...

Aside from the particulars of the content of this verse and its interpretation in the prose, the manner in which this verse is quoted in *Ragnarssona þáttr* and 'X' is unequivocally authenticating, replicating exactly the way in which Snorri and other thirteenth-century Icelandic historians quote skaldic verse in *konungasögur*, the "svá segir" formula is used to introduce the verse, and both the poet and poem from which

⁵³ Matthew Townend, ed. "Sigvatr Þórðarson, Knútsdrápa 1," in *SkP* 1, 651.

⁵⁴ Roberta Frank, "Viking Atrocity and Skaldic Verse: The Rite of the Blood-Eagle," *EHR* 99 (1984), 332-343.

⁵⁵ *Brudstykker*, 193.

the verse is quoted are named. Rowe's assessment of *Ragnarssona þáttr* as a "secular chronicle" is evidenced in part by the quotation of Sigvatr's *Knútsdrápa*, and its quotation in 'X' has a similar historicising effect in this redaction.⁵⁶

The inclusion of this verse in *Ragnarssona þáttr* and the 'X' redaction of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, but not 'Y,' also has clear implications for the textual history of the saga, and is, perhaps, the most compelling evidence for McTurk's theory of the saga's development. Without wishing to further dwell on textual history, we must still examine the implications of the omission of Sigvatr's verse in 'Y'. The 'Y' redaction of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, like 'X,' describes Ívarr ordering Ella's death:⁵⁷

"Nu skal sa madr, er oddhagaztr er, marka aurnn a bake honum sem inneligazt, ok þann aurnn skal rioda med blode hans." Enn sa madr, er kvaddr var til þessarar syslu, giorir, sem Ivar baud honum. Enn Ella konungr var miok sár, apr þesse sysly lykr.

"Now shall that man, who is the most skilled in wood carving, mark an eagle on his back as exactly as possible, and that eagle shall redden with his blood." And that man, who was summoned to this task, did as Ívarr bid him. But King Ella was greatly wounded before this task was finished.

Some of the wording in 'Y' is similar to that in 'X' – summoning the man who is most skilled, the eagle-mark reddened with Ella's own blood – but the verse from Sigvatr's *Knútsdrápa* is not referenced. Whatever the reason, the absence of this verse in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* is also the absence of an historicising style that is achieved in *Ragnarssona þáttr* and 'X'.

Aside from the quotation of *Knútsdrápa* in *Ragnarssona þáttr* and 'X,' all of the verses quoted in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* are presented as situational, introduced with the formula "X kvað vísu" or some variation thereon. Furthermore, many of the poetic utterances in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* meet the criteria that Whaley proposes as requisite for situational verse in the strictest sense, that is, fully integrated into the prose: a) that the physical setting of the utterance is provided, b) that the poet is given prominence in the scene, and c) that the verse is framed as part of a dialogue.⁵⁸ That

⁵⁶ Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 231-33.

⁵⁷ *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 167-68.

⁵⁸ Whaley, "Situational Verses," 260-62.

most of the verses in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* are spoken by the principal characters – either Ragnarr himself, or his family – ensures that the poet is almost always given prominence in the scene, and the majority of these verses are directed towards another of the protagonists, often in the context of a dialogue. Indeed, there are several extended poetic dialogues in the saga, with the six verses exchanged between Áslaug and her sons (Sigurðr, Björn, Hvítserkr, and Ívarr) standing out in particular for their dramatic, rather than corroborative function. In these verses, Áslaug incites her sons to avenge the deaths of their half-brothers, Eiríkr and Agnarr, while the brothers themselves each pledge to this course of action.⁵⁹ As forms of speech act, Áslaug’s whetting could be categorised as a “directive,” prompting her sons to action, while their verses function as “commissives,” committing them to this course, and as such do not reiterate the narrative but, in fact, serve to propel it.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, many of the situational verses of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* do serve primarily to corroborate and commemorate events in the narrative, as is the case in the first verse quoted in the saga, which is spoken by Ragnarr after he has slain the serpent in Gautland. The prose relates that Jarl Herraudr of Gautland had given to his daughter, Þóra, “lítinn lyngorm[r]” (‘a little snake’) as a gift; this *lyngormr* grows to such a size that it encompasses her bower and feeds on oxen, and Herraudr decrees that only the man who kills it may marry Þóra. Ragnarr, protected by “loðbrækr ok loðkápa...vella í biki” (‘shaggy-breeches and a shaggy-cap...boiled in pitch’) – hence the epithet *loðbrók* – kills the serpent and attracts the attention of those in Þóra’s bower.⁶¹ The scene is thus set for the introduction of the verse, as follows:⁶²

⁵⁹ *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 142-46.

⁶⁰ On the applicability of “illocutionary speech acts,” including commissives, as categorisations for verse quotation in Old Norse prosimetra, see Whaley, “Situational Verses,” 256-60.

⁶¹ *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 116-18.

⁶² *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 118-19; McTurk, ed. “*Ragnars saga loðbrókar* 1 (Ragnarr loðbrók, *Lausavísur* 1),” 626.

Nu ser Þóra ganga einn mann mikinn frá skemmunne ok spyr hann at nafne, eda hvern hann vili nú finna. Hann nemr stadar ok kvad visu þessa:

Hætt hefik leyfðu lífi,
litfögr kona – vëtra
vá ek at foldar fiski
fimmtán gamall – mínu.
Hafa skal ek böi, nema bíði,
bráðráðinn mér dauði,
heiðar lax til hjarta
hringlegnum, smjúga.

Now Þóra sees a large man go from the bower, and asks him his name and what he now wishes to find. He stops in his place and spoke this verse:

I have the life allotted to me, fair-complexioned woman, at the age of fifteen I attacked the fish of the earth [SNAKE]. I shall encounter disaster, unless the death imminently destined for me succeeds in creeping to the heart of the ring-coiled salmon of the heath.

The situational presentation of this verse is apparent not only from its introductory formula – “hann... kvað visu þessa” – but also from its integration into the prose, through the establishment of the physical setting (outside Þóra’s *skemma*), the prominence of Ragnarr in the scene, and the framing of the verse as a response to a verbal cue. However, the situational presentation of this verse does not negate its potential function for authenticating the prose narrative, for although the verse is prompted by Þóra’s inquiry as to Ragnarr’s identity, the referential content of the verse clearly indicates that it is occasioned by an “event” – Ragnarr’s killing of the serpent – which the speaker himself commemorates, not entirely dissimilar to the commemorative situational verses that Whaley identifies in *Heimskringla*.

It is also worth noting that Ragnarr’s verse corroborates a further detail provided in the prose account, regarding his age; the saga relates that Ragnarr undertook his expedition to Gautland “þegar hann hafði aldr til” (‘once he was old enough’), which is substantiated by Ragnarr’s boast in v.1 of accomplishing such a feat at a young age, “fimmtán vëtra gamall.”⁶³ Of course, the relative youth of a hero’s

⁶³ *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 100-101.

first exploits is something of a topos in Old Norse literature, and Boberg's *Motif Index* is replete with examples – from the *konungasögur* and *Íslendingasögur*, as well as other *fornaldarsögur* – of the motif F611.3.2 ('Hero's precocious strength').⁶⁴ Furthermore, Ármann Jakobsson has emphasised the importance of the youthful age at which Sigurðr Fáfnisbani and Ragnarr loðbrók overcome fear and defeat their monsters, and regards this as an essential aspect of the dragon-slaying myth that *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* is witness to.⁶⁵ Whether Ragnarr's youth reflects some essential mythological feature or a literary commonplace, it is unlikely that the claim made in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* v.1 is attributable to the direct influence of any single text, or even a specific saga genre; indeed, the notion of "saga genre" seems entirely unhelpful when dealing with such commonplaces as the "hero's precocious strength," which characterises equally Icelandic outlaws, Norwegian kings, and chivalric knights of romance. However, Ragnarr's exact age – fifteen years – is significant, since, as McTurk has noted, this was the age of majority in medieval Norway.⁶⁶ Given this, it seems likely that the saga's prose statement of Ragnarr's youth was intended to directly reflect the verse. It would be a stretch, perhaps, to suggest that the phrase "þegar hann haðfi aldr til" was synonymous with the contemporary age of majority, but the two statements of Ragnarr's age – in the prose and in v.1 – may nevertheless have held a closer meaning for an audience for whom the age of fifteen was an important landmark in a young person's life.

One might reasonably object that the slaying of such a monstrous beast as Þóra's *ormr* is hardly the kind of material which one finds commemorated in the skaldic verse of the *konungasögur*, but this episode is of great importance in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* itself, and in the legendary tradition more broadly. The killing of the serpent in Gautland is, as Ármann Jakobsson has noted, the greatest achievement of Ragnarr's career: its symbolic function, like Sigurðr's dragon-fight in *Völsunga saga*,

⁶⁴ Boberg, *Motif-Index*, 125-26.

⁶⁵ Ármann Jakobsson, "Enter the Dragon: Legendary Saga Courage and the Birth of the Hero," in *Making History: Essays on the Fornaldarsögur*, eds. Matrin Arnold and Alison Finlay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2010), 41-50.

⁶⁶ McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 70.

is crucial to the “birth of the hero” in these texts.⁶⁷ Larrington, however, suggests that the serpent of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* is symbolic of Þóra’s chastity, and that its defeat represents Þóra’s maturation as much as Ragnarr’s.⁶⁸ Such approaches certainly further our understanding of the resonances of this episode in the saga, but overlook the importance of the dragon-fight in the saga’s major analogues, and thus its place in the written culture in which it was produced and disseminated. McTurk has examined the multiple versions of the serpent fight, in the medieval sources for the Ragnarr legend and in post-medieval ballads, and suggests that a pervasive oral legend about this accomplishment lies behind each written account; however, it is the attestation of Ragnarr’s serpent fight in written sources from medieval Scandinavia that demonstrates its establishment in historiographical tradition and historical memory.⁶⁹

Despite the differences McTurk notes in the accounts of Ragnarr’s serpent fight, this is, along with his death in Ella’s snake pit, the only “event” in the legendary tradition that appears in the four major sources from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, *Ragnarssona þáttr*, *Krákumál*, and Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum*. It is not certain that *Gesta Danorum* was known in medieval Iceland, but it must be noted that Saxo records a version of the serpent-fight that varies only slightly from the saga tradition: Regnerus wins the hand of Thora after slaying two enormous snakes (“magnitudinis...serpens”), given to her by her father Herodus, “rex Sueonum.”⁷⁰ And although most of the verses of *Krákumál* bear little relation to the narrative of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, the serpent fight is plainly recalled in *Krákumál* 1:⁷¹

⁶⁷ Ármann Jakobsson, “Enter the Dragon.”

⁶⁸ Carolyne Larrington, “Þóra and Áslaug in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*: Women, Dragons, and Destiny,” in Arnold and Finlay, *Making History*, 58-60.

⁶⁹ McTurk, *Studies*, 166-73.

⁷⁰ *Gesta Danorum*, ix.4.5.

⁷¹ McTurk, ed. “*Krákumál* 1,” 717.

Hjuggu vér með hjörvi.
Hitt var ei fyr löngu,
er á Gautlandi gengum
at grafvitnis morði.
Þá fengu vér Þóru;
Þaðan hétu mik fyrðar,
þá er ek lyngölun lagðak,
Loðbrók, at því vígi.
Stakk ek á storðar lykkju
stáli bjarta mála.

We hewed with the sword. It was not long ago when we set about the slaying of the digging-wolf [SNAKE] in Götaland. That was when we married Þóra; people have called me Loðbrók ('Hairy-breeches') from the time when I stabbed the heather-fish [SNAKE] to death in that fight. I thrust the blade with bright ornaments at the loop of the earth [SNAKE].

Because neither *Krákumál* nor *Gesta Danorum* appear to have directly influenced the composition of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, they constitute independent witnesses to the establishment of Ragnarr's serpent fight in historical memory, in both vernacular and Latin traditions. Given this, we can hardly contest the commemorative function of Ragnarr's verse in the saga on the grounds that the "event" it refers to was not the stuff of history, or that it was simply implausible.

Ragnarssona þáttr's account of the serpent fight, although manifestly informed by an antecedent written source, and not an independent witness to the legend, also attests the canonicity of this episode in the narrative tradition of Ragnarr loðbrók. Though *Ragnarssona þáttr* omits many of the supernatural elements of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, the serpent fight is not only left in, but is afforded a rather long treatment (including Herrauðr's bestowal of the serpent, its growth in size and terror, and Ragnarr's attire) in the otherwise concise *þáttr*, which can only emphasise its relative importance in the legendary tradition of Ragnarr loðbrók.⁷²

The relationship between the *þáttr* and saga's accounts of the serpent fight – further to their significance in the textual history of the saga tradition – is also

⁷² *Ragnarssona þáttr*, 458.

revealing of attitudes towards authentication in these texts. In describing the precise manner of the serpent's death, the *þátttr* states that Ragnarr “geck at *hanum* diarflega ok lagði hann með spíoti í hiartað” (‘went at it boldly and stabbed it with a spear in the heart’).⁷³ *Ragnarssona þátttr* does not quote the verse attributed to Ragnarr, as does the saga, but that Ragnarr is said to stab the serpent in the heart echoes *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* v.1/7, suggesting that the verse was found in the *þátttr* redactor's source material. Though *Ragnarssona þátttr* does not cite any verse at this point in the narrative, the redactor offers unequivocal authentication in referring to his written source for the narrative. After Ragnarr has cut the head from the serpent, the *þátttr* states: “ok for þat sva sem segir í sogv Ragnars konungs at hann feck síþan Þorv borgahiort” (‘and it went as is said in the saga of King Ragnarr, that he afterwards married Þóra borgarhjörtr’).⁷⁴ There is little reason to read this reference other than at face value, as a scholarly reference to the redactor's source material, and it is indicative of the *þátttr*'s historiographical purpose.

Furthermore, this reference in *Ragnarssona þátttr* also attests the authority of the source material itself, that is, the saga that was the *þátttr*'s source. Of course, given the contested textual history of the saga tradition, the reference to a *saga Ragnars konungs* does not necessarily entail that the extant *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* was regarded as historical; that said, Rowe's suggestion that the *þátttr*'s source was the extant ‘Y’ redaction of the saga is entirely plausible, and, in any case, McTurk does not suggest that this particular episode – the account of the serpent fight – differed significantly between the various redactions of the saga. In light of this, we may quite reasonably take the reference in *Ragnarssona þátttr* as testament to the historical authority of the extant saga, at least as far as Ragnarr's serpent fight is concerned. As for *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* itself, presentation of Ragnarr's verse does not represent a direct imitation of the *konungasögur*'s authenticating verses, but we should not overlook the potential for authentication beyond this style of verse quotation. The referential contents of the verse, in relation to the immediate prose context, signal its commemorative function; furthermore, the “event” that occasions

⁷³ *Ragnarssona þátttr*, 458.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

the verse was not only canonical in the narrative tradition of Ragnarr loðbrók, but central to it. It therefore seems reasonable to suggest that the verses of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* did indeed serve to authenticate the prose narrative, despite their situational presentation.

The relative wealth of comparative material for this episode in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* permits us to analyse various strategies of authentication available to authors writing *fornaldarsögur*. In the saga, at least, it seems that Ragnarr's own poetic testimony, despite its situational presentation, served to authenticate the prose narrative, and we may now examine the potential authenticating function of a number of verses throughout the saga that appear to corroborate their immediate prose contexts. Although these verses do not commemorate such noteworthy events in the legendary tradition as Ragnarr's serpent fight, and thus do not permit the same comparative approach, several form an important subset sharing in common an elegiac theme.

Much of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* is concerned with documenting the heroic accomplishments of Ragnarr's sons, and several of its climactic moments – especially the brothers' deaths – are also points at which the narrative is conveyed in prosimetrical form, where the poetry quoted serves as a commemoration of the event. The first example of such a verse occurs in ch.8, when Ívarr, Björn, Hvítserkr, and Rognvaldr attack Hvítabær in England; the brothers defeat two trollish bulls worshipped by the inhabitants of the town and win the ensuing battle, but the youngest brother, Rognvaldr, is slain.⁷⁵ At this point, the saga introduces v.8, attributed to Björn:⁷⁶

⁷⁵ *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* claims that men fled from the *traullskapr* of these bulls; I have preferred to describe these creatures as 'trollish,' since neither the Modern English "supernatural" nor its synonyms adequately convey the negative semantics of the Old Norse *troll* and its derivatives. For the various meaning of *troll*, see Ármann Jakobsson, "The Trollish Acts of Þorgrímr the Witch: The Meanings of *Troll* and *Ergi* in Medieval Iceland," *Saga-Book* 32 (2008), 39-68.

⁷⁶ *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 132; McTurk, ed. "*Ragnars saga loðbrókar* 7 (Björn Ragnarsson, *Lausavísur* 1)," 637.

Ok er þeir hverfa apr til borgarinnar, kvedr Biorn visu:

Upp hrundu vér ópi,
(ór bitu meira en þeira),
satt mun ek til þess segja –
(sverð) í Gnípafirði.
Knátti hverr, er vildi,
fyr Hvítabæ útan,
né sitt spari sveinar
sverð – manns bani verða!

And when they turned back to the town, Björn spoke a verse:

We raised a war-cry in Gnípafirðr; our swords had more bite than theirs; I will tell the truth of the matter. Everyone who was willing could slay a man outside Hvítabær; may the lads not spare their sword!

Like v.1, v.7 is clearly occasioned by the “event” just narrated in the saga prose – the brothers’ battle at Hvítabær – and refers directly to this battle, specifying the place-name (v.7/6). In its referential content, this verse is quite demonstrably commemorative, but that it served to authenticate the prose is further suggested by the manner in which it is presented. Considerably less circumstantial detail is given for the recital of v.8 than v.1, and, crucially, the verse is not framed as a part of a dialogue, or prompted by any other verbal cue; as such, it serves minimal narrative function, and aside from its introductory formula – “kvedr Biorn visu” – it seems to differ little from the typical authenticating verses of the *konungasögur*. The same might also be said of vv.30-31, in which Áslaug mourns the loss of her son Hvítserkr; the prose narrative briefly relates that Hvítserkr is captured in battle and put to death (he elects to be burnt on a pyre of severed heads) whilst raiding “i Austrveg” (‘in the east’). The two verses are then introduced in the prose and quoted as follows:⁷⁷

⁷⁷ *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 168-69; McTurk, ed. “*Ragnars saga loðbrókar* 30-31 (Kráka/Áslaug Sigurðardóttir, *Lausavísur* 9-10),” 684-85. Áslaug is said to earn the name *Randalín* after commanding part of the army sent against King Eysteinn, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 146-47. McTurk notes that *Randalín* may derive from *Randa-Hlín* (‘shield-goddess,’ shield-woman’), and suggests that this may reflect the character’s origins as a valkyrie; on the development of the figure of Áslaug, see McTurk, *Studies*, 173-79.

Ok er Randalin syrr þetta, þa kvad hun visu:

Sonr beið einn, sá er ek átta,
í austrvegi dauða;
Hvítserkr var sá heitinn,
hvergi gjarn at flýja,
Hitnaði hann af höfðum
Höggvins vals at rómu;
kaus þann bana þengill
þróttarsnjallr, áðr fell.

Ok enn kvad hun:

Höfðum lét of hrundit
Hundmörgum gramr undir,
at feigum bör fóka
fingi eldr yfir syngja.
Hvat skyli beð enn betra
böðheggr und sik leggja
Olli d*ýrr víð orðstír
allvaldr jö*furs falli.

And when Randalín heard this, she then spoke a verse:

One son of mine met his death in the east; that one was called Hvítserkr, in no way inclined to take flight. He was burnt by the heads of the slain cut down in battle; the prince, courageous in his strength, chose that manner of death before he fell.

And still she spoke:

The leader allowed a great many heads to be thrust under him, so that fire would have a chance to sing over the doomed tree of battles [WARRIOR]. How could a battle-tree [WARRIOR] place beneath himself an even better bed? The mighty ruler caused a prince's death with renown.

Again, these verses are clearly occasioned by an “event” that is referred to in v.30/1-2: “Sonr beið einn, sá er ek átta | í austrvegi dauða.” Furthermore, these two verses corroborate a number of specific details that are given in the prose; v.30/2 corroborates the location of Hvítserkr’s death in the east, but the real focus of the verses is the nature of Hvítserkr’s death. Verse 31/5-6 allude to Hvítserkr’s being

burnt – “Hitnaði hann af höfðum | höggvins vals at rómu” – and v.30/7-8 confirm that Hvítserkr himself elected to be killed in this way; v.31, in its entirety, also corroborates the manner of Hvítserkr’s death. In corroborating the prose account, in quite some detail, the referential contents of these verses alone would suggest an authenticating function, and, like v.7, only the introductory formula – “þa kvad hun visu” – indicates that this verse be read otherwise; indeed, even less situational context is given for the quotation of vv.30-31 than for v.7. As presented in the prose, these verses represent Áslaug’s immediate reaction to the news of Hvítserkr’s death, but the focus here is quite clearly on Hvítserkr himself, rather than Áslaug. Admittedly, we are told just a few lines prior to these verses that “Randalin, modir þeirra, vard gaumul kona” (‘Randalín, their mother, became an old woman [by the time of Hvítserkr’s death]’), but we are told nothing of her situation when she receives the news. These verses are not prompted by any verbal cue, nor are they directed at anyone (for no other characters are depicted) save for the saga’s audience. As such, they are about as far removed from the narrative as we would expect any authenticating verse.

It should be noted that the meaning of Áslaug’s verses is not as explicit as McTurk’s interpretation (quoted here) suggests. The verb *hitna* in v.31 literally translates as “to become hot,” and in other contexts in skaldic poetry has a metaphorical meaning; McTurk’s translation, “was burnt,” is dependent on the saga prose, though the demonstrative pronoun in *þann bana* does imply that Hvítserkr died “becoming hot,” suggesting his immolation.⁷⁸ In v.31/3-4, the explicit reference to Hvítserkr’s burning is dependent on the addition of the noun *eldr*, which is absent in the sole manuscript witness of this verse, though the meaning of these lines is quite obscure without the additional noun. Without explicit reference to any fire, the heads thrust underneath Hvítserkr referred to in this verse may simply illustrate his prowess in battle. It is possible that the prose account of Hvítserkr’s death in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* is the result of a literal (mis)interpretation of these two verses, supporting the conclusion that the verses predate the prose. However, the parallel account of Hvítserkr’s death in *Gesta Danorum* supports the one given in the prose of *Ragnars*

⁷⁸ See, for example, “falr hitnar” (‘the spear-head sockets grow hot’) in “Snorri Sturluson, *Háttatal* 9,” ed. Kari Ellen Gade, in *SKP* 3, 1114.

saga loðbrókar, and McTurk's reading of the verses: Saxo relates that Withsercus, who ruled Scythia at the time, was captured in battle and elected to be burnt alive. It is also worth pointing out that the pyre of severed heads in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* is echoed in *Gesta Danorum*'s description of this battle, in which Withsercus becomes enclosed by a heap of his enemies' bodies.⁷⁹

Whether or not the verses themselves actually refer to Hvítserkr electing to be burnt alive (which is probably the case), in their context in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, vv.31-32 corroborate the details of the prose account of Hvítserkr's death. The framing of these verses problematises their authenticating function somewhat, since, according to the saga itself, Áslaug was not herself an eyewitness to the events she describes; however, their description as "situational" is also problematic, given the near-total lack of any contextual detail provided by the narrative. The framing of vv.31-32 in the prose in fact seems of little importance to the function of the quotation, though the verses' referential contents, in reiterating the prose narrative, do seem to indicate their corroborative role. Of course, the potential function of these verses as entertainment cannot be overlooked, providing as they do a lively description of Hvítserkr's particularly macabre death, and between this and the two kennings (which are relatively few in the verses of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*) in v.31– *bör fólka* and *böðheggr* – add heroic colour to the tone of the saga. The same might be said of many of the verses in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* that commemorate events in the prose, but it must be stressed that this does not preclude their potential to corroborate the narrative; indeed, Whaley, among others, has noted that the authenticating verses of the *konungasögur* also contribute to the artistry of the saga in this manner.⁸⁰

The importance of poetry in commemorating the deaths of Ragnarr's sons is yet further demonstrated by a sequence of verses relating to the death of Eiríkr, who is killed in Sweden with his brother, Agnarr, by Eysteinn. This episode is dense with verse quotation (six in total), and exhibits the multiple potential functions of situational verse in saga narratives: in v.11, Eiríkr declines Eysteinn's offer of clemency and

⁷⁹ *Gesta Danorum* IX.4.30.

⁸⁰ Whaley, "Situational Verses," 263; O'Donoghue, *Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 77.

marriage to his daughter, and requests to be put to death; in vv.12-14, Eiríkr celebrates his heroic death in verse, and commands his men to report his death to Áslaug; vv.15-16 form a pair in which Áslaug asks for news of her stepsons' expedition, and a messenger reports their deaths.⁸¹ Of the verses in this episode in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, only v.11 and v.13 are quoted in *Ragnarssona þáttr*, and the differences in the presentation of v.11 between the two texts makes this an interesting case study. In *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, v.11 is framed as Eiríkr's direct response to Eysteinn's offer of marriage to his daughter:⁸²

“Ok þat mun ek til legia,” segir hann, “vid þik, at ek man gipta þe dottur mina.” Eirekr segir ok kvad vísu:

Vil ek eigi boð fyrir bróður
né baugum mey kaupa
– Eystein kveða orðinn
Agnars bana – heyra.
Grætr eigi mik móðir;
mun ek eptir öl drekka
ok geirtré í gegnum
gör látið mik standa!

“And I will put this to you,” he [Eysteinn] says, “that I will give you my daughter in marriage.” Eiríkr replies and spoke a verse:

“I do not wish to hear of an offer for my brother, nor to purchase a maiden with rings; they say that Eysteinn has become Agnarr's slayer. My mother does not weep for me; I'll be drinking ale afterwards; and let spear-shafts, [duly] prepared, run me through.”

The first two lines of this verse constitute Eiríkr's refusal of Eysteinn's offer, directly replying to the preceding prose, but v.11/3-4 also commemorate Agnarr's death,

⁸¹ *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 139-42.

⁸² *Ibid*, 139. McTurk, ed. “*Ragnars saga loðbrókar* 11 (Eiríkr Ragnarsson, *Lausavísur* 1),” 648. There are certain differences between this verse as preserved in NKS 1824 and in *Hauksbók*, most significantly in 11/6, which McTurk attempts to reconcile in his edition. The reading of 11/6 in NKS 1824, “menn ok eptir öl drekka,” is, as McTurk notes, apparently meaningless; from the reading in *Hauksbók* “mun ek efstr of val deyja” (‘I will die uppermost on the heap of the slain’) McTurk borrows “mun ek,” to produce in his edition “mun ek eptir öl drekka” (‘I'll be drinking ale afterwards,’ presumably in Valhöll).

which is related in the prose account of the battle. While the second *helmingr* of this stanza may be seen as an embodiment of the heroic ethos of the *fornaldarsögur* – as Rowe has put it, “pagan heroism at its most senseless” – it also reveals a complex relationship between the verse and the prose at this point in the saga. Following the verse, Eiríkr requests, in prose, “at spíot se tekinn sem flest, ok se stungit spíotunum í voll nidr, ok þar vil ek mik lata hefia a upp, ok þar vil ek lata lifit” (‘that spears be taken, as many as possible, and stuck in the ground below, and there I will have myself lifted up on them, and there I will lose my life’).⁸³ This seems to be an elaboration of Eiríkr’s request to be run through by spears in v.11/7-8, as it appears in the saga, but it also suggests an awareness of the reading of this verse in *Ragnarssona þáttr*, in which line 6 reads “mon ek œfstr a val deya” (‘I will die uppermost among the slain’); Eiríkr’s request in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* to be lifted atop of the spears, so that he will die physically above the slain on the battlefield, seems to be a literal interpretation of the *Ragnarssona þáttr* reading of the verse.⁸⁴

The verse corresponding to *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* v.11 is the first to be quoted in *Ragnarssona þáttr*, and the context is the same, Agnarr having been killed in battle and Eiríkr captured by Eysteinn.⁸⁵ In *Ragnarssona þáttr*, however, the verse is preceded by a prose summary of Eiríkr and Eysteinn’s verbal exchange, which narrates that Eiríkr refuses Eysteinn’s offer of marriage to his daughter, and that Eiríkr requests the manner of his own death, after which the verse is quoted:

“Eiríkr bað at þeir tœki vndir hann spíotz oddvm ok hefi hann sva vpp yfir allan valin.
þa q(vað) Eiríkr:...” (‘Eiríkr bade that they place spear points under him and thus lift him up over all the slain. Then Eiríkr spoke...’).⁸⁶

As it is presented, the verse immediately reiterates the two important gestures related in the prose: Eiríkr’s refusal to marry Eysteinn’s daughter, and his request to be impaled upon spears. If we take at face value the introductory formula used – *þá kvað* – the function of this verse in the narrative is unclear, since Eiríkr’s requests have

⁸³ *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 139.

⁸⁴ *Ragnarssona þáttr*, 460.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

already been communicated in prose. However, if we look past the introductory formula the function of the verse becomes more apparent: a claim (regarding Eiríkr's response to Eysteinn) is made in the prose and subsequently repeated in a verse, and, given the value that Icelandic textual culture placed on poetry as an historical source, it seems likely that this verse was intended to corroborate the prose account of this dialogue.

Each of the above verses, to some extent, corroborates its immediate prose context, but in their situational presentation they do not seem to be directly imitating the style of verse quotation encountered in the *konungasögur*. Furthermore, the commemorative verses of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* differ in their relation to the surrounding prose narrative even from those situational verses in the *konungasögur* that can be seen to have authenticated the account. As Whaley has also noted, the situational verses of the *konungasögur* tend to function as third-person eye-witness accounts to events as they unfold, and only infrequently do the royal protagonists commemorate their own deeds in verse, as is seen throughout *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*.⁸⁷

However, this first-person perspective brings many of the verses of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* closer to a particular mode of skaldic poetry, also utilised in prosimetrical saga writing, that Russell Poole has identified as expressing an “autobiographical memory.”⁸⁸ Poole argues that autobiographical memory is characterised by a focus on events of individual personal significance, but also constructed around the individual's relationships with others, and that these memories find expression in skaldic poetry in two forms: more detailed “autobiographical episodes,” like those found in Egill Skallagrímsson's *Arinbjarnarkviða*, and the more wide-ranging “catalogue of deeds,” such as Haraldr Sigurðarson's *Gamanvísur* or the *lausavísur* of Earl Rognvaldr Kali, which Poole suggests may once have formed a longer, single poem.⁸⁹ It is true that nowhere in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* is a particular

⁸⁷ Whaley, “Situational Verses,” 255.

⁸⁸ Russell Poole, “Autobiographical Memory in Medieval Scandinavia and Amongst the Kievan Rus” in *Minni and Muninn: Memory in Medieval Nordic Culture*, ed. Pernille Hermann, Stephen A. Mitchell, and Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 109-29.

⁸⁹ Poole, “Autobiographical Memory,” 109-113, 117.

moment or event commemorated or recalled in as much depth as *Arinbjarnarkviða* recalls Arinbjörn Þórisson's advocacy for Egill before Eiríkr blóðøx in York; however, the type of poem designated a "catalogue of deeds" is relevant to *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, and the *fornaldarsögur* more generally.

The term "catalogue of deeds" is in many ways an apt description of the *ævikviða* genre, and thus of much of the poetry in the *fornaldarsögur* – including the verses of **Víkarsbálkr* in *Gautreks saga* – but Poole has called such poetry (including **Víkarsbálkr*, as well as the poetry in *Qrvar-Odds saga* and *Gesta Danorum*) only "superficially comparable" to the skaldic encomnia he discusses, pointing to its pseudonymous composition and "more generalised or mythic or legendary style."⁹⁰ However, leaving aside the obvious difference in authenticity, the verse quotations in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* are perhaps more similar to those from "genuine" autobiographical poems in more conventionally historiographical works than Poole allows for.

Turning first to Haraldr Sigurðarson's *Gamanvísur*, both *Heimskringla* and *Morkinskinna* quote the poem after recording that Haraldr composed it on his journey from Constantinople through the Rus'; as such, the verses of *Gamanvísur* stand apart from the events they narrate, and do not seem to be intended strictly as authentication. *Gamanvísur* 2 is the only verse to be quoted in both texts, and refers specifically to Haraldr's raiding in Sicily, though both accounts of Haraldr's Mediterranean campaigns are punctuated with authenticating verses of the skalds Þjóðólfr Arnason, Illugi bryndælaskáld, Stúfr inn blindi Þórðarson, and Bolverkr Arnórsson.⁹¹ That said, it is likely that Haraldr's *Gamanvísur* was nevertheless regarded, to some degree, as an important source for the king's life, especially to the author of *Morkinskinna*, which, elsewhere in the text, places equal weight on Haraldr's own testimony and that of the skalds who accompanied him: "er sú frásögn um farar Haralds er hann, Haraldr, sagði sjálfr, ok þeir menn er honum fylgðu" ("the story of

⁹⁰ Poole, "Autobiographical Memory," 113.

⁹¹ *Heimskringla*, 3:74-84, 89; *Morkinskinna*, 1:91-108.

Haraldr's journeys is as he, Haraldr, said himself, as well as the men who followed him').⁹²

Though the "catalogue of deeds" attributed to Haraldr is not itself quoted as authentication in *Heimskringla* and *Morkinskinna*, the association of Haraldr with poetic compositions commemorating his deeds seems to have held currency in the Icelandic historiographical tradition, for a number of *lausavísur* are also attributed to Haraldr. Several of these, though presented situationally, as the king's impromptu compositions, serve to corroborate certain events in the prose narrative; in both *Heimskringla* and *Morkinskinna*, a pair of verses record the growing tensions between Haraldr and Einarr þambarskelfir, a local chieftain.⁹³ Haraldr's situation before the Battle of Stamford Bridge is also commemorated in two verses, one of which includes the important detail that the Norwegians were without their byrnies.⁹⁴ There is, then, perhaps some parallel between the representation of Haraldr Sigurðarson and Ragnarr loðbrók in their respective sagas. Like Haraldr, Ragnarr is associated with the composition of a long "catalogue of deeds" (*Krákumál*), and like Haraldr's *Gamanvísur*, Ragnarr's *Krákumál* is quoted to varying degrees in the prosimetrical narratives about him (*in situ* in the 'X' redaction, as an appendix in 'Y' [Table 7]), but not to the effect of corroborating his deeds; rather, *lausavísur* are attributed to both Haraldr and Ragnarr their respective sagas, which, despite their situational presentation, serve to corroborate the prose accounts. In Ragnarr's case, however, the association with autobiographical poetry is also extended to his family, Áslaug and his sons.

Closer comparison may perhaps be made with the poetry attributed to Rognvaldr in *Orkneyinga saga*, which, as noted, Poole has suggested may once have formed a single "catalogue of deeds"; as they appear in *Orkneyinga saga*, however, these verses are distributed throughout the prose as *lausavísur*, and are generally

⁹² *Morkinskinna*, 1:84.

⁹³ *Heimskringla*, 3:123-24; *Morkinskinna* 1:207-208; Kari Ellen Gade, ed. "Haraldr harðráði Sigurðarsonar, *Lausavísur* 6-7" *SkP* 2, 47-8.

⁹⁴ *Heimskringla*, 3:187-88; *Morkinskinna*, 1:316-17; Kari Ellen Gade, ed. "Haraldr harðráði Sigurðarsonar, *Lausavísur*, 13-14" *SkP* 2, 54-56.

categorised as such.⁹⁵ Each of the verses attributed to Rǫgnvaldr is presented in *Orkneyinga saga* as situational, but, like the situational verses of Ragnarr and his family, and those of Haraldr Sigurðarson in *Heimskringla* and *Morkinskinna*, many of Rǫgnvaldr's verses serve to corroborate the prose narrative immediately preceding them. For example, Rǫgnvaldr's second verse in *Orkneyinga saga* records a journey from Grímsbær (Grimsby) to Bjǫgyn (Bergen) that has just been narrated in the prose, naming both locations in the verse.⁹⁶ Later in the saga, the account of Rǫgnvaldr's Mediterranean expedition is punctuated with a number of situational verses, attributed to Rǫgnvaldr and others in his company, commemorating the battles and other events that occur along the way; again, many of these verses reiterate specific details of the prose account.⁹⁷

The status of *Orkneyinga saga's* genre has been difficult to determine, and terms such as "political saga" and "colonial saga" have been coined specifically to accommodate it, as well as other anomalous sagas such as *Færeyinga saga* and *Jómsvíkingasaga*; however, it is generally acknowledged as belonging to historical saga writing, in a broad sense.⁹⁸ In a number of studies, Jesch has argued that *Orkenyinga saga* was originally written as an historiographical text, but one that became "dehistoricised" as it was edited by the scribes its manuscripts, especially in the *Flateyjarbók* redaction.⁹⁹ But despite the historiographical style of *Orkneyinga saga* (the audience of which is, according to Jesch, encouraged to adopt a source-critical stance to the narrative), Jesch maintains that its situational verses "show a tendency towards the fictionalizing process by which skaldic verses became an

⁹⁵ Poole, "Autobiographical Memory," 117; see Judith Jesch, introduction to "Rǫgnvaldr jarl Kali Kolsson, *Lausavísur*," in *SkP 2*, 575-76.

⁹⁶ *Orkneyinga saga*, 130-31, Jesch, "Rǫgnvaldr jarl Kali Kolsson, *Lausavísur 2*," in *SkP 2*, 577-78.

⁹⁷ *Orkenyinga saga*, 208-35.

⁹⁸ Melissa A. Berman, "The Political Sagas," *SS* 57, no.2 (Spring 1985), 113-29; Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, *The Development of Flateyjarbók: Iceland and the Norwegian Dynastic Crisis of 1389* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2005), 17; Judith Jesch, "Orkneyinga saga: A Work in Progress?," in *Creating the Medieval Saga: Versions, Variability and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Saga Literature*, eds. Judy Quinn and Emily Lethbridge (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2010), 168-69.

⁹⁹ Judith Jesch, "Orkneyinga saga: A Work in Progress?," 168-73; Judith Jesch, "Narrating *Orkneyinga saga*," *SS* 64, no.3 (Summer 1992), 336-55; Judith Jesch, "History in the 'Political Sagas,'" *MÆ* 62 (1993), 210-20.

integral part of saga entertainment.”¹⁰⁰ Given the suspension of disbelief required to entertain the motif of impromptu verse composition, it is probably fair to describe the incorporation of situational verses in *Orkneyinga saga* as “fictionalising,” but we cannot disregard the important historicising effect of Rǫgnvaldr’s verses; as Poole has demonstrated, the content of these verses clearly marks them as autobiographical, and they are presented in the text as eyewitness testimonies to the events described.

Both *Orkneyinga saga* and the accounts of Haraldr Sigurðarson in *Heimskringla* and *Morkinskinna* illustrate the authenticating function of first-person, situationally framed verse quotations in medieval Icelandic historiographical works, which supports the possibility that the first-person, situational verses in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* may have functioned similarly. In Haraldr Sigurðarson’s case, the value of his *lausavísur* as historical sources seems to be an extension of his poem *Gamanvísur*, and it is possible that Rǫgnvaldr’s *lausavísur* in *Orkneyinga saga* gained credence thanks to his reputation as a poet, for he is credited in *Orkneyinga saga* with the composition of *Háttalykill* (see below). Haraldr and Rǫgnvaldr’s *lausavísur*, even if pseudonymous compositions, could therefore have plausibly been regarded as authentic, lending weight to the eyewitness accounts that their quotation furnishes *Heimskringla*, *Morkinskinna*, and *Orkneyinga saga* with. This is significant to note, since it is possible that the commemorative verses in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* may have been regarded as similarly authoritative. That Ragnarr was regarded in medieval Iceland as an historical figure is more than adequately demonstrated by Rowe’s study, but in examining Ragnarr’s place in poetical discourse in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it is apparent that the historical Ragnarr was also known as a poet himself.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Jesch, “Narrating *Orkneyinga saga*,” 345-51; Jesch, “History in the ‘Political Sagas,’” 211-13 (213).

¹⁰¹ Rowe, *Vikings in the West*.

4.3: Ragnarr loðbrók in Skaldic Poetics

As Rowe has illustrated, there are few extant prose works from twelfth-century Iceland that mention Ragnarr loðbrók, and certainly none that amount to a written narrative of his legend; nevertheless, she notes that “despite the paucity of written sources, by the 12th century Ragnarr’s legend had an important place in the Icelandic cultural universe.”¹⁰² Rowe’s otherwise excellent study fails, however, to fully demonstrate this cultural significance, by omitting two important twelfth-century poetic sources associated with the Ragnarr legend: *Krákumál* (probably completed by c.1200, see introduction) and *Háttalykill* (c.1150, see below). These poems, together with the ninth-century *Ragnarsdrápa*, are excluded from Rowe’s analysis on the grounds that they “lack a clear historiographical or political aspect”; however, as I will argue, Ragnarr’s place in Old Norse poetics is critical to understanding the cultural and, specifically, historiographical significance of Ragnarr loðbrók and his family.¹⁰³

The significance of *Krákumál* to the Ragnarr legend can hardly be overstated, not least because it is the earliest of the three extant narrative sources in Old Norse for the Ragnarr legend.¹⁰⁴ This poetic monologue, in its extant form comprised of twenty-nine verses, recalls the battles fought by the speaker (who names himself “Loðbrók” in v.1, *Krákumál* 1-21), and voices his heroic defiance in the face of death, anticipating the vengeance of his kin (*Krákumál* 22-29). Though the name “Ragnarr” appears nowhere in the poem, we can confidently identify “Loðbrók” as identical with the hero of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, since the speaker claims in v.1 that his nickname was earned when he killed a serpent in Gautland and married Þóra. Furthermore, v.26 refers to Áslaug as the mother of the speaker’s sons and to the *ormar* that tear at him as he dies, and v.24 and v.27 both refer to Ella as the speaker’s killer.¹⁰⁵ Further

¹⁰² Ragnarr is mentioned in a genealogical context in *Íslendingabók*, **Skjöldungatal*, and *Fóstbræðra saga* (though the twelfth-century dating of this text is contentious), and also in the *Itinerarium* of Abbot Nikulás Bergsson; see Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 181-190 (181).

¹⁰³ Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 9-10.

¹⁰⁴ The others being, of course, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þátr*. Though *Krákumál* is hardly a complete biographical account of Ragnarr’s life, it is “narrative” in the sense that it relates an account of his life’s achievements.

¹⁰⁵ McTurk, ed. “*Krákumál* 1,” 717; McTurk, ed. “*Ragnars saga loðbrókar* 24, 26-27 (Ragnarr loðbrók, *Lausavísur* 8-10),” 672, 676-78.

references to King Eysteinn, Rognvaldr, and Agnarr are found in *Krákumál* 7, 15, and 17, though in these cases *Krákumál* is at some variance with the account given in the saga tradition.¹⁰⁶ There is little enough overlap between the contents of *Krákumál* and both *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttr* to suggest that the poem had little or no influence on the composition of the saga; however, the very existence of a poetic monologue attributed to Ragnarr indicates that, by the turn of the thirteenth century, he was remembered as a composer of skaldic verse. Although we cannot know the extent of *Krákumál*'s circulation in thirteenth-century Iceland, it is at least possible that an awareness of the poem, or some poetic tradition associated with Ragnarr, prompted the author of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and composer of its verses (perhaps one and the same person) to represent Ragnarr as a skald, and extend this attribute to his family.

The influence of *Krákumál* on the saga's depiction of Ragnarr as a poet, if not on the saga's narrative, is firmly demonstrated by its inclusion in the 'X' redaction of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*: in this redaction the dying Ragnarr recites *Krákumál* 6-9, 12-15, and 17-29, followed shortly thereafter by verses corresponding to vv.26-27 in 'Y.'¹⁰⁷ McTurk proposes that *Krákumál* was not connected to the saga tradition in its earliest stages, since no knowledge of its contents is evidenced in *Ragnarssona þáttr*, but that verses of the poem were added by the 'X' redactor. The 'Y' redactor, McTurk reasons, removed *Krákumál* from the saga and included it as an appendix, presumably because of the narrative inconsistencies its inclusion created (*Krákumál* 15 locates Rognvaldr's death in the Hebrides, whereas the saga locates this in Hvítabær).¹⁰⁸ However, if we cannot be as confident in assuming the priority of 'X' over 'Y,' as I have argued in the introduction to this chapter, then we must consider it just as likely that *Krákumál* was first included as an appendix to the 'Y' redaction, and later placed in the narrative by the 'X' redactor, who identified the purported context of

¹⁰⁶ McTurk, ed. "*Krákumál* 7, 15, 17," 730, 747, 751. For the divergence between *Krákumál* and the saga tradition, see McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga*, 98-99, 118-41.

¹⁰⁷ *Brudstykker*, 187-89. Soffía Guðný Guðmundsdóttir has been able to read more of the AM 147 text than Olsen had, and has also suggested that *Krákumál* 16 was also included in 'X'; her readings from AM 147 are recorded in McTurk's edition. McTurk, introduction to "*Krákumál*," 708.

¹⁰⁸ McTurk, ed. "*Krákumál* 15," 747; *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 131-32; McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga*, 132-33; McTurk, "Extant Icelandic Manifestations," 52, 62-3.

the appended *Krákumál* (recited by the dying Ragnarr, *Krákumál* 24-29) with the corresponding scene in the saga.¹⁰⁹

However, and whenever, *Krákumál* entered the saga tradition, its inclusion in some fashion in both the ‘X’ and ‘Y’ redactions is indicative of the gravitational force exerted by the two, originally separate, traditions – *Krákumál* and the saga tradition – in which Ragnarr was accredited with verse composition. As Rowe has noted, it is somewhat surprising that “the widespread historiographical interest in his [Ragnarr’s] legend never resulted in a saga that combined all the information in the other texts,” in the manner of the synoptic histories of Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson; on the other hand, this appears to have been exactly the case with *Krákumál* and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, the combination of which amounts to a full account of his poetic achievements.¹¹⁰ Whatever the relative chronology, the ‘X’ and ‘Y’ redactors both felt compelled to include in their texts as much of the poetry attributed to Ragnarr as was available to them, each in their own way. For the ‘X’ redactor, this entailed incorporating the long poem into the prosimetrical narrative, and though the narrative inconsistencies posed by this seem to have deterred the ‘Y’ redactor from doing so, he was nevertheless moved to include *Krákumál* as an appendix relevant to the material in the saga.

The second poem that we must consider in connection with *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* is *Háttalykill in forni* (‘The Old Key to Verse-Forms’), a *clavis metrica* comprising, in its extant form, forty-one verse pairs (eighty-two verses total), each pair demonstrating a particular metre. According to *Orkneyinga saga*, *Háttalykill* was composed by Rognvaldr kali, Earl of Orkney 1115-58, and a visiting Icelander, Hallr Þórarinnsson breiðmaga, and it is tentatively accepted that this is indeed the provenance.¹¹¹ It is possible that *Háttalykill*’s composition was some kind of metrical game or contest between the two poets, but it is clear, regardless, that it is indebted

¹⁰⁹ McTurk, ed. “*Krákumál* 24-29,” 765-75.

¹¹⁰ Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 275-76.

¹¹¹ *Orkneyinga saga*, 185; Kari Ellen Gade, introduction to “Rognvaldr jarl and Hallr Þórarinnsson, *Háttalykill*,” in *SkP* 3, 1001-1002; Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 31; Stephen N. Tranter, *Clavis Metrica: Háttatal, Háttalykill, and the Irish Metrical Tracts* (Basel: Helbing and Lichtenhahn, 1997), 7.

to the influence of the learned study of Latin *grammatica*.¹¹² As Guðrún Nordal has noted, the poem's function is to demonstrate the variety of available metres in skaldic poetry, but equally as important to note is its subject matter, which "arouses particular interest and indicates the learned background of the poets."¹¹³ Each verse pair commemorates an individual legendary or historical king or hero, including Sigurðr Fáfnisbani and other figures from the Vǫlsung legend, Danish and Swedish kings of legendary history, and historical Norwegian kings, from Eiríkr blóðøx to Magnús berfœtr (d.1103), though the end of the poem is missing. Significant not only in the context of this study, but also to the poem itself, are the twelve verses that refer to Ragnarr loðbrók, his sons, and King Ella. Ragnarr himself is the referent of v.11; v.13 names Ella as "Ragnars bani" ('Ragnarr's killer'); v.15 refers to "inn beinlausi" ('the boneless [one]') and v.16 to "...Agnars bróður | án gǫrvalla beina" ('Agnarr's brother without complete bones'), whom we must take to be Ívarr; v.17, v.19, and v.21 refer to Björn, Sigurðr, and Hvítserkr, respectively, and while no patronymics or other specific details are recorded, we must, given the context, take these to be Ragnarr's sons, as recorded in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttr*.¹¹⁴

The organisational principle of the poem is one of royal chronology and genealogy, and Nordal has observed that it is marked by a "preference for a Danish prehistory of the kings of Norway."¹¹⁵ It is an interesting aside to note, however, that the verses of *Háttalykill*, as they are ordered in their extant manuscripts, are not arranged in strict chronological order of their referential content, but, rather, thematically; thus, the verses alluding to Ragnarr and his sons directly follow those which refer to figures associated with the Vǫlsung legend (Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, Högni and Gunnarr Gjúkason, and Helgi Hundingsbani), whereas Ragnarr's father, Sigurðr hringr, is named in a much later verse.¹¹⁶ This, of course, supports McTurk's claim that the Ragnarr legend may have been connected to the Vǫlsung legend as early as the twelfth century, which he suggests is also evidenced by Áslaug's mention in

¹¹² Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 29-36. Gade, introduction to "*Háttalykill*," 1008.

¹¹³ Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 32.

¹¹⁴ Gade, ed. "*Háttalykill* 11-22," 1014-30.

¹¹⁵ Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 34.

¹¹⁶ Gade, ed. "*Háttalykill* 3-10," 1011-18; "*Háttalykill* 41-42," 1049-51.

Krákumál 26.¹¹⁷ It may seem that the subject matter of *Háttalykill* has little relevance to its purpose as a *clavis metrica*, since the figures named in *Háttalykill* are, themselves, not necessarily associated with poetic composition; however, as Nordal has argued, Danish history – and especially its legendary past – enjoyed considerable cultural currency in Iceland (and Orkney), and the study of skaldic poetry in particular “was infiltrated with a Danish historical perspective.”¹¹⁸ Though the inclusion of Ragnarr and his sons in *Háttalykill* is not itself evidence of their association with the composition of skaldic verse, the prominent place in the poem occupied by these figures illustrates the importance of the Ragnarr legend in the field of Old Norse poetics.

The significance of the Ragnarr legend in *Háttalykill* has also been suggested as indicative of Rognvaldr’s particular familiarity with the material, and perhaps of the legend’s popularity in medieval Orkney (the inscription referring to “loðbrók” at Maeshowe on Orkney’s Mainland also supports this).¹¹⁹ Ragnarr’s inclusion in the Orcadian *Háttalykill* may itself support the Insular, specifically Hebridean, provenance of *Krákumál*, but there are also significant verbal parallels between these two poems; in the notes to his edition of *Krákumál*, McTurk lists fifteen correspondences to parts of *Háttalykill*, suggesting the influence of the latter on the former poem (Table 8).¹²⁰ It is perhaps no coincidence that seven of the possible borrowings in *Krákumál* are from verses in *Háttalykill* that refer to the Ragnarr legend, and while some of these examples are less certainly direct borrowings, several are words or phrases unique or unusual enough in skaldic poetry to suggest a close connection between the two poems.

¹¹⁷ McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 90-91.

¹¹⁸ Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 32-34, 309-338 (310).

¹¹⁹ Gade, introduction to “*Háttalykill*,” 1004-1005. On the significance of the Maeshowe inscription to the development of the legendary tradition of Ragnarr loðbrók, see McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 9-50; for a rebuttal of McTurk’s interpretation, and an alternative view of the development of the figure “Ragnarr loðbrók,” see Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 155-58.

¹²⁰ McTurk, introduction to “*Krákumál*,” 713; see also McTurk’s and Gade’s notes to “*Krákumál*” and “*Háttalykill*.”

| <i>Krákumál</i> | <i>Háttalykill</i> |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1/10 | 66/4 |
| 4/10 | 11/4 |
| 5/10 | 18/8 |
| 7/7 | 68/1 |
| 8/10 | 64/7 |
| 9/3, 24/7 | 17/1 |
| 9/6 | 28/6 |
| 11/7 | 25/6 |
| 12/7 | 18/5, 71/2 |
| 16/7 | 76/3 |
| 16/9-10 | 17/7-8 |
| 17/6 | 18/5 |
| 18/2-3 | 46/6 |
| 24/6 | 15/7 |
| 26/10 | 34/1 |

Table 8: Correspondence of passages in *Krákumál* and *Háttalykill*.

The kenning *bensildr* ('wound-herrings' [SWORDS]) is found only in *Háttalykill* 11/4 and *Krákumál* 4/10, and while Snorri notes in *Skáldskaparmál* that *benjar* ('wounds') and *fiskar* (pl. 'fish') are appropriate elements in kennings for "sword," the use of *sildr* is rare in skaldic poetry, this particular compound being unique to these two poems.¹²¹ *Háttalykill* 17/1 reads "Björn ǫrn bræddi" ('Björn fed the eagle'), and *bræða* ('to feed' and 'to tar') is also found in *Krákumál* 9/3 – "þá er benstara bræddum" ('when we fed the wound-starling [RAVEN/EAGLE]') – and 24/7 – "þás blóðvali bræddak" ('when I fed the blood-falcon [RAVEN/EAGLE]'); with the meaning "to feed," it is elsewhere found only in Þorbjörn hornklofi's *Haraldskvæði* and a *lausavísa* by Þórarinn stutfeldr.¹²² de Vries suggested that *Krákumál* 16/9-10 – "Varð... | valtafn gefit hrafni" ('corpse-prey was given to the raven') is reminiscent of *Háttalykill* 17/7-8 – "hrátt brátt hafði at slíta | hrafn tafn af því jafnan" ('the raven

¹²¹ Gade, ed. "*Háttalykill* 11," 1019-20; McTurk, ed. "*Krákumál* 4," 724; *Skáldskaparmál*, 67. McTurk suggests that, in the context of *Krákumál* 4, *bensildr* should be understood as [ARROWS/SPEARS] rather than [SWORDS], to avoid repetition of *blandr* ('sword') in the previous line.

¹²² Gade, ed. "*Háttalykill* 17," 1024-25; McTurk, ed. "*Krákumál* 9, 24," 734-35, 765; R. D. Fulk, ed. "Þorbjörn hornklofi, *Haraldskvæði* (*Hrafnsmál*) 13" in *SkP* 1, 107; Kari Ellen Gade, ed. "Þórarinn stutfeldr, *Lausavísur* 3" in *SkP* 2, 481.

always had raw food to tear quickly because of that’); it must be noted, however, that the rhyming pair of *tafn* and *hrafn* is quite common, and found, for instance, in the poetry of Þormóður Kolbrúnarskáld, Einarr skálaglamm Helgason, and Sturla Þórðarson.¹²³ A more certain correspondence between the two poems is seen in *Háttalykill* 18/7-8 – “bar... | bjart snart í styr hjarta” (‘carried... | a cheerful, brave heart to battle’) – and *Krákumál* 5/9-10 – “...bar... | snart fram í styr hjarta” (‘...carried... | a stout heart forward into battle’).¹²⁴

One final correspondence may be examined here, and merits a longer discussion. *Háttalykill* 15/7 reads “réð aldragi *Ellu*” (‘caused the death of Ella’), where *Ella* has been supplied as the missing object of “réð aldragi,” since it is known from *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, *Ragnarssona þáttur*, and Sigvatr’s *Knútsdrápa* that Ívarr is Ella’s killer.¹²⁵ The noun *aldrag* (‘[one’s] allotted fate, destiny; death’ [lit. ‘life-laying’]) also occurs in *Krákumál* 24/56 – “eigi hugðak *Ellu* | at aldragi mínu” (‘I did not think that Ella would cause my death’), which, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, is also paralleled in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* v.26/5-6 – “Eigi hugðmz orma | at aldragi mínu” (‘I did not think that snakes would cause my death’).¹²⁶ While *Krákumál* 24/5-6 and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* v.26/5-6 are more similar, the construction *at aldragi* shares with *ráða aldragi* (in *Háttalykill* 15/7) the sense of “causing [one’s] death.”¹²⁷ *Aldrag* is a relatively rare word in skaldic poetry, and, outside of these instances, appears only in two verses in *Hugsvinnsmál* (‘Sayings of the Wise-Minded One,’ a translation of the *Distichs of Cato*).¹²⁸ The *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* records ten citations of *aldrag*, in *Trójumanna saga*, *Rómverja saga*, *Alexanders saga*, *Völsunga saga*, and *Sverris saga*, and between the prose and skaldic corpora it is possible to

¹²³ McTurk, ed. “*Krákumál* 16,” 749; Jan de Vries, *Een skald onder de troubadours* (Ledeberg, Gent: Drukkerij Erasmus, 1938), cited in McTurk, “*Krákumál* n.16/10,” 750; Gade, ed. “*Háttalykill* 17,” 24-26. R. D. Fulk, ed. “Þormóður Kolbrúnarskáld, *Lausavísur* 20” in *SkP* 1, 833; Edith Marold, ed. “Einarr skálaglamm Helgason, *Vellekla* 35,” in *SkP* 1, 327; Kari Ellen Gade, ed. “Sturla Þórðarson, *Hákonarflokkur* 2,” in *SkP* 2, 747.

¹²⁴ Gade, ed. “*Háttalykill* 18,” 1026-27; McTurk, ed. “*Krákumál* 5,” 726.

¹²⁵ Gade, ed. “*Háttalykill* 15,” 1022-23.

¹²⁶ McTurk, ed. “*Krákumál* 24,” 765; McTurk, ed. “*Ragnars saga loðbrókar* 26 (Ragnarr loðbrók, *Lausavísur* 9),” 676.

¹²⁷ Cleasby/Vígfusson, s.v. “aldr-lag,” 12.

¹²⁸ Tarrin Wills and Stephanie Gropper ed. “Anonymous Poems, *Hugsvinnsmál*,” in *SkP* 7, 382-84.

discern trends in the occurrence of *aldrlag* in Old Norse literature.¹²⁹ *Trójumanna saga*, *Rómverja saga*, and *Alexanders saga* are all, like *Hugsvinnsmál*, translations of Latin works, and given *Háttalykill*'s "foreign, learned influence[s]," it is possible to see the instance of *aldrlag* in the context of these works.¹³⁰ However, it may also be appropriate to view *aldrlag* as part of an historiographical lexis: each of the prose works in which *aldrlag* appears may be loosely categorised as historiographical, and, of these, all except *Sverris saga*, deal with ancient or legendary history, as does the first half of *Háttalykill*, in which the subject matter of the Ragnarr legend occupies a significant space.

These examples illustrate the purported close connection between *Háttalykill* and *Krákumál*, lend weight to the proposition that *Krákumál* was composed in close geographical and temporal proximity to *Háttalykill*, and underscore the conclusion that we must draw from the contents of *Háttalykill* 11-22: that the legend of Ragnarr loðbrók was particularly important in Norse-Orcadian literary culture in the twelfth century. In light of this, the comparisons drawn earlier between the prosimetrum of *Orkneyinga saga* and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* seem all the more pertinent. More importantly, however, this discussion has also highlighted the importance of the Ragnarr legend in Old Norse poetics, in light of which we may better appreciate the remembrance of Ragnarr himself as a skald.

So far, we have seen that *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Krákumál* attest Ragnarr's reputation as a skald, and that *Háttalykill* is illustrative of the further connection between the Ragnarr legend and skaldic poetics. Aside from these sources, *Snorra Edda* also provides evidence that Ragnarr was remembered in medieval Iceland as a poet. In *Háttatal*, Snorri exemplifies a number of verse-forms with *háttaföll* (sg. *háttafall*, 'metrical flaw') that he considers as characteristic of early skalds, and he instructs would-be skalds not to compose in these metres, "þó at þat þykki eigi spilla í fornkvæðum" ('though it is not considered a flaw in old poems').¹³¹

¹²⁹ *ONP*, s.v. "aldrlag."

¹³⁰ Gade, introduction to "*Háttalykill*," 1007.

¹³¹ *Háttatal*, 24-26.

First among the early poets whose style he claims to imitate, Snorri includes Ragnarr loðbrók:¹³²

Nú skal rita þá háttu er fornskáld hafa kveðit ok eru nú settir saman, þótt þeir hafi ort sumt með háttaföllum, ok eru þessir hættir dróttkvæðir kallaðir í fornum kvæðum, en sumir finnask í lausum vísum, svá sem orti Ragnarr konungr loðbrók með þessum hætti...

Now shall be written those verse forms in which ancient poets have composed and which are now set together [i.e. made into regular metres], though they [the poets] have sometimes composed with metrical forms, and these forms are called *dróttkvætt* in old poems, and some are found in *lausavísur*, such as those which King Ragnarr loðbrók composed in this form...

Following his own verse in the style of Ragnarr, Snorri goes on to describe its metrical qualities and their deviation from *dróttkvætt*, and does the same for the following early skalds: Torf-Einarr (Rognvaldsson, tenth century), Egill (Skallagrímsson, tenth century), Fleinn (Hjörsson, c.800?) and Bragi (gamli Boddason, ninth century). For Snorri, Ragnarr was evidently to be reckoned among the earliest, historical composers of skaldic poetry, which suggests that the verses attributed to him in *Ragnars saga loðbrók* were to be regarded as authentic.

It may also be significant to note that Snorri differentiates between *forn kvæði* and *lausavísur*, and specifically associates Ragnarr's style of poetry with the latter group. We cannot be certain of the sources for the Ragnarr legend with which Snorri was familiar, or even whether Snorri had seen any poetry attributed to Ragnarr on which to base his composition; nevertheless, the suggestion that Ragnarr composed *lausavísur*, as opposed or in addition to longer poems (*kvæði*), indicates that Snorri was familiar with some source other than the long poem attributed to Ragnarr, *Krákumál*. As I have previously noted, we cannot date *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, in something like its extant form, to any earlier than the middle of the thirteenth century, and I have suggested that the verses quoted in the saga may not predate the prose by a significant margin. Still, that Snorri associates Ragnarr with the composition of *lausavísur* may indicate the circulation, whether written or oral, of a source in which

¹³² *Háttatal*, 24.

Ragnarr was accredited with single stanzas of poetry, as he is in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*. It is certainly tempting suggest that Snorri was aware of some antecedent of the extant saga, but at the least, *Háttatal*'s brief testament indicates that Ragnarr was not only a figure relevant to skaldic poetics, but that Ragnarr himself was associated with poetry, and more specifically the kind of poetry – *lausavísur* – that is attributed to him in the saga.

In close relation to *Snorra Edda*, Ragnarr's reputation as a skald is also witnessed by *Skáldatal*, the list of Old Norse poets and their royal and aristocratic patrons that was included in the *Kringla* manuscript of *Heimskringla* (destroyed in the fire in Copenhagen, 1728), and in the *Codex Upsaliensis (U)* manuscript of Snorri's *Edda*. There are some differences between the *U* and *Kringla* redactions of *Skáldatal*, but the passage of interest here is identical in both *U* and the copies made of *Kringla* before it was lost.¹³³ Following Heimir Pálsson's edition of the *Uppsala Edda*, *Skáldatal* begins:¹³⁴

Starkaðr inn gamli var skáld. Hans kvæði eru fornust þeira sem menn kunnu. Hann orti um Danakonunga. Ragnarr konungr loðbrók var skáld, Áslaug kona hans ok synir þeira.

Starkaðr the old was a poet. His poems are the oldest of those which men know. He composed about the kings of the Danes. King Ragnarr Loðbrók was a poet, his wife Áslaug and their sons.

Skáldatal continues in a simple list format, in which the names of poets are written next to the names of their patrons; Bragi gamli Boddason is the first name to appear in this list, as skald to one "Ragnarr konungr." Rowe, Clunies Ross, Nordal, and Males have each made passing reference to Ragnarr's status as a poet with regard to this passage, but its significance bears reiterating; *Skáldatal* not only demonstrates the remembrance of Ragnarr as a skald, but is also the first indication we have seen that Áslaug and Ragnarr's sons were likewise credited with the composition of

¹³³ For textual criticism of *Skáldatal*, see Heimir Pálsson, introduction to *The Uppsala Edda*, trans. Faulkes, LXXV-VII. Cf. Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 121.

¹³⁴ *The Uppsala Edda*, 100.

verse.¹³⁵ Clunies Ross offers some insightful conclusions about the status of Starkaðr and Bragi as semi-mythical progenitors of poetic traditions (see also my analysis in Chapter 2), though precious little is said of Ragnarr loðbrók – surprisingly so, given that his significance in twelfth- and thirteenth-century poetics is at least equal to that of Starkaðr. Clunies Ross’ view of Starkaðr and Bragi could, however, easily be extended to Ragnarr; in fact, he is perhaps doubly important in *Skáldatal*, appearing not only as a poet himself, along with Áslaug and his sons, but also as the first royal patron of poetry.

Nordal’s conclusions on the rationale and use of *Skáldatal* are important to note here; both in its context in *Kringla* and the *U* redaction of *Snorra Edda*, *Skáldatal* appears to have been a kind of reference work, allowing readers and saga authors to place the work of each skald listed “in the context of the chronology of the kings of Scandinavia.”¹³⁶ *Skáldatal* thus not only enshrines Ragnar and his family in the skaldic canon, but also, as Nordal observes, places these poetical figures in a firmly historiographical context. Heimir Pálsson has gone as far to suggest that *Skáldatal* was, primarily, a list of kings, rather than poets, but, as Nordal has argued so forcefully, skaldic poetry and historiography were inextricably linked in medieval Iceland.

Despite its significance, *Skáldatal*’s value as an independent witness to the remembrance of Ragnarr as a skald is compromised slightly by its relation to *Snorra Edda* and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*. Most scholars are reluctant to ascribe an author to *Skáldatal*, but Rowe has suggested that Snorri himself may have been responsible for including Ragnarr in the list; if this is the case, *Skáldatal*’s claim that Ragnarr was a poet cannot be distinguished from the same claim in *Háttatal*.¹³⁷ Snorri’s authorship of *Skáldatal* has not been widely accepted, yet it remains that it is “indissolubly linked

¹³⁵ Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 197-98; Clunies Ross, “Poet into myth,” 33-34, 37; Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 122, 128-29; Mikael Males, “‘Archaic’ Assonance,” 644.

¹³⁶ Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 120-130 (126).

¹³⁷ *Háttatal*, 24; Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 198. Clunies Ross, Heimir Pálsson, and Nordal, for example, have preferred not to speculate at all on the authorship of *Skáldatal*. Clunies Ross, “Poet into Myth,” 31-33; Heimir Pálsson, introduction to *The Uppsala Edda*, LXXV-VII; Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 50-51, 120-130.

with Snorri's works," and the notion that Ragnarr was Bragi's patron is most likely derived from Snorri's identification, in *Skáldskaparmál*, of Ragnarr loðbrók as the recipient of Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa*.¹³⁸ On the other hand, the status of Áslaug and Ragnarr's sons as poets in *Skáldatal*, in addition to Ragnarr himself, is likely due, as Clunies Ross has also hinted, to the saga tradition in which *lausavísur* were attributed to members of Ragnarr's family. *Skáldatal* probably does not, therefore, attest a tradition beyond *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* of Áslaug and Ragnarr's sons composing verse, but regardless, it is testament to the likelihood that the verses in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* were regarded as the authentic compositions of historical figures.

Having examined the sources for the poetic remembrance of Ragnarr outside of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, we must return to the saga itself – or, rather, the verses therein – and analyse them in the context of skaldic poetics. It is something of a truism to note that the poetry cited in the *konungasögur* and *Íslendingasögur* makes use of skaldic metres, whereas the *fornaldarsögur* quote verses in eddic metres, but this generalised distinction is, perhaps, of some use; as Clunies Ross has noted, the use of the same eddic metres in both the *fornaldarsögur* and in the mythological *Gylfaginning* of *Snorra Edda* suggests that “saga writers, antiquarian compilers, and mythographers... considered this kind of poetry suitable to the representation of legendary heroes and pre-Christian Norse gods as their kind of speech act.”¹³⁹ As I have noted, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttr* are somewhat unusual among the *fornaldarsögur* for the skaldic metre (dubbed “irregular *dróttkvætt*” by McTurk) of the verses quoted therein, which has led Rowe to suggest that the saga may be closer to the *konungasögur* than to the *fornaldarsögur*.¹⁴⁰ That a particular metre may have been associated with a chronological epoch – legendary, or more recent history – is an interesting notion, and provides a useful lens through which to analyse the verses of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* in particular.

Nordal and Males have each argued that the metre of the verses attributed to Ragnarr and his family was considered appropriate to the historical period

¹³⁸ *Skáldskaparmál*, 50; Heimir Pálsson, introduction to *The Uppsala Edda*, LXXV.

¹³⁹ Clunies Ross, “Poetry in Fornaldarsögur,” 125.

¹⁴⁰ McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga Loðbrókar*, 54-55.

represented by the saga, according to thirteenth-century Icelandic poetics. Nordal identifies the metre of Ragnarr's verses as *háttlaus* ('formless'), a verse form characterised by Snorri in *Háttatal* as having the regular pattern of alliteration found in *dróttkvætt*, but devoid of rhyme.¹⁴¹ Nordal suggests that the use of a skaldic metre, albeit a simple one, rather than the eddic metres found in other *fornaldarsögur*, constitutes a tacit acknowledgment of "Ragnarr's place in the skaldic canon." Moreover, she suggests that the specific choice of *háttlaus* for the metre for Ragnarr's verses reflects a thirteenth-century notion that *dróttkvætt* had developed from a simpler form of skaldic poetry; thus, as figures associated in *Skáldatal* with the earliest period of skaldic poetry, "when the rules of skaldic metre had not been properly fixed," it is chronologically appropriate that the verses attributed to Ragnarr and his family should be in the less stringent metre of *háttlaus*.

There is considerable merit to Nordal's suggestion, and the idea that Ragnarr loðbrók was a liminal figure of sorts, between the remote and more recent past, is also borne out by the genealogies in which he figures. Ragnarr occupies a terminal position in many of the Icelandic genealogies in which he is listed. In *Landnámabók*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, and three times in *Njáls saga*, Ragnarr loðbrók is listed in genealogies as the final ancestor in a family line, though the identity of Ragnarr's father in Sigurðr hringr was hardly uncommon knowledge in thirteenth-century Iceland; this may suggest that Ragnarr was regarded as a figure on the border of traceable, genealogical history and the legendary past.¹⁴² If Clunies Ross is right to suggest that Starkaðr and Bragi were thought of, respectively, as progenitors of ancient and modern poetic traditions, then the place of Ragnarr and his family between these two figures in *Skáldatal* would also indicate the liminality of the poetry ascribed to them.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 314; Snorri Sturluson, *Háttatal*, 29.

¹⁴² *Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson (Reykjavík: Íslenska fornritafélag 1968), 214; *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthias Þórðarson (Reykjavík: Íslenska fornritafélag 1935), 4; *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (Reykjavík: Íslenska fornritafélag 1954), 6, 285, 287, cited in Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 206-207, 217-22.

¹⁴³ Clunies Ross, "Poet into Myth," 40-41.

Males has provided an important emendation to Nordal’s argument, however, noting that many of the Ragnarr verses feature “archaic” forms of assonance, and thus cannot be considered to be *háttlaus*, in which we would expect a complete lack of assonance. Males further suggests that these forms of assonance are similar to those found in what is (probably) genuinely old poetry, and he offers examples from Bragi’s *Ragnarsdrápa* of such archaic features as “fronted assonance,” in which the rhyming or half-rhyming positions are clustered at the beginning of the line, and “assonance across lines, as in the metres Snorri calls *dunhent*, *iðrmælt*, and *liðhent*.”¹⁴⁴ The preprint publication of Males’ conference paper gives no examples from *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* of these “archaic” features, but a few may be noted here. Verse 1/1 (“fimtán gamall – mínu”) and v.25/4 (“ór hársíma gránu”), attributed to Ragnarr and Áslaug, respectively, display fronted assonance, and v.4/7-8 (“sú var buðlungi bragna | blíðum þekk til dauða”) and v.12/5-6 (“Mun blóði þá bróður | ok bráð yfir gjalla”), attributed to Ragnarr and Eiríkr, respectively, display assonance across lines.¹⁴⁵ The “archaic” forms of assonance in the Ragnarr verses suggest, according to Males, that they were not “composed in likeness of the contrived *háttlaus* of Snorri,” which lacks all assonance, but rather in imitation of early skalds such as Bragi and Torf-Einar.¹⁴⁶

Males goes on to demonstrate that the archaising Ragnarr verses are, however, distinguished from those attributed to “genuinely” old poets, with regard to the pattern of “rising assonance,” whereby the odd line of a verse pair is never more conspicuously marked by assonance than the even line. Despite the irregular distribution of assonance, early skaldic verse conforms to this principle; the archaising Ragnarr verses, however, replicate the irregularities and occasional lack of assonance in early skaldic verse, but fail to conform to the pattern of rising assonance. Thus, in the example given by Males – *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* v.11/1-2 “vilkat boð fyrir bróðir | né baugum mey kaupa” – the odd line is marked by

¹⁴⁴ Mikael Males, “‘Archaic’ Assonance.” For assonance across lines, see also Kari Ellen Gade, *The Structure of Old Norse Dróttkvætt Poetry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 6.

¹⁴⁵ McTurk, ed. “*Ragnars saga loðbrókar* 1, 4, 12, 25, (Ragnarr loðbrók, *Lausavísur* 1, 3; Eiríkr Ragnarsson, *Lausavísur* 2; Kráka/Áslaug Sigurðardóttir, *Lausavísur* 8),” 626, 632, 649, 675.

¹⁴⁶ Males, “‘Archaic’ Assonance,” 643.

skothending ('half-rhyme,' in *boð... bróð-*), but the even line is completely unmarked.¹⁴⁷ From this failure to observe the principle of "rising assonance," Males concludes that the Ragnarr verses were composed considerably later than the poetry of Bragi and Torf-Einar, by a poet that sought to imitate their antiquity, but lacked an awareness of the subtleties of their work.¹⁴⁸

Males' thorough analysis of the metre of the Ragnarr verses is to be favoured over Nordal's more cursory assessment, but the implications of their conclusions are very similar: the verses in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* were composed, in all likelihood deliberately, in such a way as to impart a considerable sense of antiquity. In their imitation of the metres of early skalds, such as Torf-Einar and Bragi, the Ragnarr verses are made to reflect the epoch of skaldic poetics in which *Skáldskaparmál* and *Skáldatal* place Ragnarr (and his family, in the latter text). With the historical veracity of Ragnarr and his family firmly established in medieval Iceland, and the verses attributed to these figures appropriately archaic, it is quite possible that thirteenth- and fourteenth-century audiences would have regarded the verses of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* as the genuine testimonies of these figures, which has significant implications for the reception of the saga itself. The perceived authenticity of the verses would allow for their commemorative function in relation to the prose narrative, as I have explored previously, in the manner in which Whaley suggests is true of many of the situational verses in *Heimskringla*. The verses, conveyed and contextualised by the vehicle of a prose narrative, could thus offer medieval Icelanders direct access to the past, fulfilling what Clunies Ross has viewed as the primary function of Old Norse prosimetrum.¹⁴⁹

There are objections that may be made to this analysis, but none that critically undermine its conclusion. The metrical features we may use to distinguish "pseudonymous" from "genuine" poetry are by no means certain criteria for dating; the authenticity of the poetry in the *skáldasögur*, for example, remains controversial, and

¹⁴⁷ Males, 646; *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 139. Males quotes Finnur Jónsson's edition of this verse: *Skj B*, 2:254.

¹⁴⁸ Males, "Archaic' Assonance," 646.

¹⁴⁹ Whaley, "Situational Verses," 257-58; Clunies Ross, *History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics*, 80-82.

where Gade argued for the tenth-century provenance of Kormákr Ógmundarson's poetry, against older scholarship that regarded it as spurious, Males has since made the case again for its later, pseudonymous composition.¹⁵⁰ The uncertainty in dating Old Norse poetry does, however, allow for the possibility that the verses in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* were composed rather earlier than the saga itself, perhaps making their perceived authenticity more likely. Regarding the ability of later poets to reproduce older poetic forms, Gade's suggestion that medieval poets could have imitated "archaic" metrical features, but probably could not have consistently replicated forms that had long since ceased to be productive, accords with Males' argument that the pseudo-Ragnarr poet sought to imitate early skalds such as Bragi with only limited success.¹⁵¹

It may also be objected that, if thirteenth-century writers were in the business of composing pseudonymous poetry, it is perhaps unlikely that the verses in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* were believed to have been authentic. However, as I argued with regard to Starkaðr's verses in *Gautreks saga*, poetry in the *fornaldarsögur* need not necessarily have been regarded as the genuine composition of these historical figures to have imparted a degree of authority to the saga's representation of history. It is again worth citing Meulengracht Sørensen's suggestion that quoting poetry – regardless of its provenance – made for a more authoritative historical narrative, in replicating a "mode of expression belonging to the past."¹⁵² Meulengracht Sørensen's arguments are especially relevant to my analysis of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, since he stresses both that the very quotation of verses is, in itself, more significant than their situational or authenticating framing, and that the appropriately archaic form of the poetry – its metre and diction – served as a link to the past.

Finally, the case for the historiographical value of verse quotation in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* may be made by comparing its function to the poetry in *Gesta Danorum*: if the Virgillian style of Saxo's poetry imbued it with authority, implicitly

¹⁵⁰ Mikael Males, *The Poetic Genesis of Old Icelandic Literature*, forthcoming. I am extremely grateful for Males' permission to read his manuscript pre-publication.

¹⁵¹ Kari Ellen Gade, "The Dating and Attributions of Verses in the Skald Sagas," in Poole, *Skaldsagas*, 71.

¹⁵² Meulengracht Sørensen, "Verses as the Voice of the Past," 188.

drawing a parallel with Classical history, the adoption of an “archaic” style in the Ragnarr verses may likewise have contributed to its perceived authority, if not authenticity. If, as Mortensen has argued, Saxo’s professional skill as a Latinist and poet empowered his “mythopoiesis” – his fabrication of history – then perhaps the composers of Old Norse pseudonymous poetry were likewise empowered by their poetic skills to fabricate authoritative poetic testimonies, befitting inclusion in legendary-historical works, in the vernacular historiographical tradition of medieval Iceland.¹⁵³

4.4: Summary

Building on the conclusions of the first two chapters, my analysis of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttr* makes the case for the historicising function of verse quotation in the saga tradition. The complex textual relationship between the extant witnesses of this tradition make a relative chronology difficult to establish, but as it stands, *Ragnarssona þáttr*’s more chronicle-like narrative style is reflected in its quotation of Sigvatr’s *Knútsdrápa*, also found in the ‘X’ redaction of the saga, in the unambiguously authenticating style of the *konungasögur*. The remaining verses in the saga tradition are presented situationally, but nevertheless serve to historicise the prose. Like the authenticating verses of *Gautreks saga* and *Völsunga saga*, the close verbal correspondences between these situational verses in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and their immediate prose contexts suggest both the dependence of the prose narrative upon a corpus of antecedent poetry (albeit possibly quite young itself) and the authenticating function of these verses, similar to that of the verses in the two aforementioned sagas, and the *konungasögur*. Framed as direct speech, the verses in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* are presented as first-person testimonies to the events of the narrative, and are thus reminiscent of the *lausavísur* attributed to Haraldr Sigurðarson and Earl Rognvaldr of Orkney. These figures were known poets and associated with composition of longer poems, which may have substantiated the

¹⁵³ Mortensen, “The Status of the Mythical Past,” 131-34.

authority of the situational verses attributed to them in *Heimskringla* and *Orkneyinga saga*.

It is quite possible that the verses attributed to Ragnarr and his family were likewise believed to be the authentic compositions of historical figures. The significance of the Ragnarr legend in skaldic poetics is demonstrably attested in *Háttalykill*, but, moreover, *Skáldskaparmál* and *Skáldatal* attest Ragnarr's remembrance in medieval Iceland as a poet himself. That the verses in the saga seem to have been composed in a deliberately archaicising metre, reminiscent of early skalds, leaves open the possibility that they passed for the genuine testimonies of the heroes they are attributed to. But even if the first-person testimonies of Ragnarr and his family were seen for the source fiction that they are, the quotation of corroborative verses is a source fiction that is thoroughly developed and sustained throughout the saga, and one that conformed to the dominant mode of historical representation in medieval Iceland: prosimetrum. That the metre of the verses would probably have been seen as appropriate to the historical epoch that Ragnarr and his family occupied in Icelandic historiographical tradition likely lent weight to the saga's posturing as an authoritative account of the *forn öld*.

5: Conclusion

The three main chapters of this thesis have each compared a single *fornaldarsaga* (and related texts), through several critical lenses, to contemporaneous texts that are regarded, for the most part unproblematically, as historiographical, principally the *konungasögur*. In doing so, I have argued that the composition of these sagas was influenced by historiographical writing, and therefore that they were conceived of by their authors, and regarded by audiences, as narrating history, however remote or fabulous. By approaching *Gautreks saga*, *Völsunga saga*, and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* individually, I have analysed these works not as “legendary sagas,” with the baggage that this generic categorisation brings to the debate, but as texts which, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, functioned as narratives about the past. The extent to which these narratives were regarded as historical is, of course, debatable, but comparing them to the *konungasögur* may be one approach to this question. The conclusion of this thesis is, therefore, not only that *Gautreks saga*, *Völsunga saga*, and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* were written as a kind of historiography – engaging with, but not identical to, the *konungasögur* – but also that comparing texts regarded as *fornaldarsögur* to contemporaneous narrative historiography may be a productive methodology for understanding these sagas, as well as broadening our conception of what it meant to write history in medieval Iceland.

It is for the remainder of this study, then, to explore the applicability and merit of this comparative methodology. In part, this will test whether the dialogue with historiographical writing witnessed in the three case studies is to be found in other *fornaldarsögur*, if so, we may ask if it is possible to speak of the *fornaldarsögur*, as a genre, as belonging to medieval historiographical discourse, broadly conceived. However, the point of this analysis is not to “prove” or “disprove” the conclusions established in the previous chapters: historiographical influences present in, say, *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* do not in themselves verify the historiographical intent of the author of *Völsunga saga*, nor does their absence invalidate my interpretation of the latter text. Rather, the similarities and differences between texts in the corpus of *fornaldarsögur* may prompt tentative conclusions about saga genre in medieval

Iceland, or present new questions and avenues of research. At the least, the present analysis will demonstrate the potential for further study of the *fornaldarsögur* in relation to history-writing in medieval Iceland.

Summaries of my case studies are provided at the end of each respective chapter, though I will here articulate the perspectives from which I will go to compare further examples of *fornaldarsögur* to historiographical writing in this conclusion. Analysing the representations of space and geography in *Gautreks saga*, in Chapter 2, is critical to my reading of this text, since it allows us to situate its outwardly fictional aspects within a broadly historiographical framework. The opening ethno-geographical excursus places the work in a dialogue with learned historiographical traditions, and anchors the narrative to a real-world geography, which in *Víkars þáttur* resembles that of the *konungasögur*. Using the Bakhtinian theory of the “chronotope,” it is possible to see the saga author compartmentalise the folktale-type narrative of *Dalafífla þáttur* in a discrete fictional space, within this historiographical geography. In Chapter 3 I demonstrated the importance of genealogy as a literary structure in the organisation of *Völsunga saga*’s narrative materials. At some point in the saga tradition, generations of Völsungs not attested in the *Poetic Edda* were introduced into the cycle, reframing the central Sigurðr story (itself expanded along similar lines as certain biographies of Norway’s missionary kings) as part of a dynastic chronicle; the specific claim of the Völsungs’ descent from Óðinn, meanwhile, placed the work in the context of both Scandinavian and English learned and historiographical traditions.

The quotation of poetry in the *fornaldarsögur* is crucial to understanding their historiographical function, and is central to each of the chapters in this thesis. Analysing the verse quotations of *Víkars þáttur* according to the paradigm of authenticating and situational verse, it is apparent that they are introduced to corroborate and authenticate the prose narrative in a manner clearly modelled on that of the *konungasögur*. Nevertheless, the situationally presented recital of *Víkarsbálkr* establishes Starkaðr’s authorship of the *ævikviða* quoted throughout the *þáttur*, suggesting a continued narrative tradition between the historical figure and his textual

representation. This dynamic is replicated in other *fornaldarsögur*, as I will demonstrate in this concluding chapter.

Establishing thus the historicising potential of situational verses invites an analysis of the authenticating function of such quotations elsewhere in the corpus of the *fornaldarsögur*. In *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, a number of situational verses can be shown to commemorate significant events in the narrative, corroborating the prose with close verbal correspondence and mirroring the function of verse quotations – both authenticating and situational – in the *konungasögur*. The authenticating impact of these verses was no doubt enhanced by Ragnarr’s place in twelfth- and thirteenth-century skaldic poetics: he was remembered as an historical figure and composer of poetry – of both an *ævikviða* (*Krákumál*) and *lausavísur* – while the poetry in the saga was composed in an irregular skaldic metre that reflected his status as one of the earliest skalds. The choice of metre may have suggested that the verses were indeed the genuine poetic testimonies of Ragnarr himself, but at the least probably imparted a chronological verisimilitude to the saga’s poetics.

But while the importance of the Ragnarr legend in skaldic poetics makes this text unique among the *fornaldarsögur*, it nevertheless prompts us to consider the status of poetry in medieval Iceland when analysing its historiographical function in the prosimetrical *fornaldarsögur*. Such intellectual context is, indeed, necessary for understanding the function of poetry in *Vǫlsunga saga*, much of which defies easy categorisation as either “authenticating” or “situational.” A number of the verse quotations do serve to corroborate the prose narrative, often with close verbal correspondence, though the authority they appeal to is not that of the named skaldic poets quoted in the *konungasögur*, nor even that of the verse-declaming heroes of other *fornaldarsögur*. Rather, the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* seems to have been aware of the weighty cultural importance of his eddic source material, and the verses recall not only the subject matter of the legendary cycle, but also the medium of the poetic tradition, evoking the anonymity and orality of the eddic tradition in their introductory formulae.

The authenticating/situational paradigm, then, serves as a helpful tool for analysing the historiographical function of verse quotations, but one that cannot fully account for the historicising effect of *fornaldarsaga* prosimetrum. In the closing analysis of this thesis, I will examine the verse quotations, however they are framed, in a further selection of *fornaldarsögur*, while also considering the status of poetry in Old Norse literary culture, and its significance for how we view the prosimetrical *fornaldarsögur* in relation to historiographical discourse in medieval Iceland. First, however, I will discuss how the two other key themes of this thesis – the representation of space and geography, and the use of genealogical structures – might be analysed in relation to the *fornaldarsögur* and medieval Icelandic historiography.

5.1: Geography and Spatial Representation

The geographical, topographical, and ethnological description of Gautland that opens *Gautreks saga* owes much to the conventions of learned writing – not only historiography, but also encyclopaedic knowledge – and such passages are, in fact, quite common in the corpus of *fornaldarsögur*. In their classic study of the genre, Hermann Pálsson and Edwards provide numerous examples, from *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, *Egils saga ok Ásmundar*, and *Qrvar-Odds saga*, in addition to *Gautreks saga*.¹ Of these, the examples from *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* may be examined here as a comparison to the geographical passage in *Gautreks saga*. Following the conclusion to the main part of the narrative, with the double wedding of the saga's two main heroes, a reasonably long (relative to the length of the saga) geographical excursus is given. The saga relates that King Haraldr of Vincestuborg (Winchester), a friend of the protagonists Hrólf and Stefnir, returned home after their wedding in Denmark, and describes, in a rather curious passage, the economy of England:²

¹ Hermann Pálsson and Edwards, *Legendary Fiction*, 28-30.

² *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, in *FN*, 2:458.

England er kallað gagnauðigast land af Vestrlöndum, því at þar er blásinn allr málmr, ok þar fellr hveiti ok vín, ok alls konar sæði má þar hafa. Eru þar ok klæði gerð ok margháttaðir vefir meir en í öðrum stöðum. Lundúnaborg er þar höfuðstaðr ok Kantaraborg. Þar er Skarðaborg ok Helsingjaborg, Víncestr ok margir aðrir staðir ok borgir, er hér eru eigi nefndir.

England is called the most productive country of the Westernlands, because all kinds of metal are cast there, and wheat and vines are produced there, and all kinds of crops are to be had there. There are also cloths made, and many kinds of textiles, more than in other places. London is the chief place there, and Canterbury. There is Scarborough and Hastings, Winchester, and many other places and towns, which are not named here.

Following this, it is said that Hrólfr appointed Stefnir Jarl of Jótland (Jylland), and a longer, “textual map” of Denmark is given, describing the situation of Jylland, Fjón (Fyn), Sjáland (Sjælland), and Skáney (Skåne), as well as Borgundarhólmr (Bornholm) and several other islands, and naming the major towns in Denmark.³ Two historical anecdotes are also noted in this passage: the first is of how Haraldr Sigurðarson, fleeing King Sveinn of Denmark (Sweyn II, r.1047-76), dragged his ships across the isthmus that separates Limfjorden from the North Sea; in the second, the saga notes that, at the time that Gøngu-Hrólfr lived, the Skjöldungs ruled over Denmark and were the most powerful kings, though other kings and jarls also held lands there.⁴ This serves as a reminder of how closely intertwined the study of geography and history were in the Middle Ages, recalling the “storied landscape” of *Historia Regum Britannicae* that Otter has analysed.⁵ For a closer comparison, Dale Kedwards has also commented on the interconnectedness of past and place in geographical excursions, noting that the *Icelandic Geographical Treatise* in Reykjavík, AM 736 I 4to “frequently subordinates geography to history,” and that its topographical descriptions “permitted the author to relate events from the lives of the

³ Tatjana N. Jackson: “On the Possible Sources of the Textual Map of Denmark in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*,” in Jackson and Melnikova, *Skemmtiligastar Lygisögur*, 62-70; *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, 458-59.

⁴ The author seems to refer to an incident in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* in *Heimskringla*. *Heimskringla*, 3:140.

⁵ Otter, *Inventiones*, 70.

apostles,” in much the same way as the excursus in *Knýtlinga saga* and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* prompted secular historical anecdotes.⁶

There are marked parallels between this passage and a somewhat longer description of Denmark in *Knýtlinga saga*, and it has long been assumed that *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* directly borrowed from this source.⁷ More recently, Tatjana N. Jackson has cast some doubt on this assumption, suggesting rather that both *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* and *Knýtlinga saga* drew on a common written source – a geographical description of Denmark – and that information in the passage in *Knýtlinga saga* but missing from *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (such as episcopal sees) was taken from a second source.⁸ In either case, it is clear that *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* has borrowed from a learned source. It should also be noted in this context that the encyclopaedic entry on the kingdoms of Russia in *Qrvar-Odds saga* is remarkably similar to one found in *Hauksbók*; Hermann Pálsson and Edwards observe this, and state that its source is “obviously some medieval treatise on geography,” and though they do not expound on the relationship between these two texts, it would again seem either that *Qrvar-Odds saga* drew on the encyclopaedic texts in *Hauksbók*, or that both works drew on a common source. From this, we may extrapolate that the authors of *fornaldarsögur* were not only influenced by the *konungasögur*, but closely imitated the incorporation of geographical knowledge into their representations of the past, possibly even drawing directly from them.

However, despite the obvious interest in geography witnessed in the *fornaldarsögur*, it is well observed – though often without much substantiation – that the settings of *fornaldarsögur* are distinctly more vague than in the *konungasögur*, and especially in the *Íslendingasögur*.⁹ For a more concrete indication of the

⁶ Dale Kedwards, “Cartography and Culture in Medieval Iceland” (PhD diss., University of York, 2014), 71, 84.

⁷ Jacob Wittmer Hartman, *The Göngu-Hrólfs saga: A Study in Old Norse Philology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 72; Hans-Peter Naumann, “Göngu-Hrólfs saga,” in Pulsiano and Wolf, *Medieval Scandinavia*, 254.

⁸ Jackson, “The Textual Map of Denmark in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*.”

⁹ For example, Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas*, 28-29. Cf., however, Hermann Pálsson and Edwards, who noted somewhat more specifically that stereotyped settings such as the king’s hall, the clearing in the woods, are frequently described using similar or identical phrases across the genre: *Legendary Fiction*, 26.

comparative vagueness of the *fornaldarsögur*'s spatial representation, we may compare the frequency with which relative direction is indicated in the *fornaldarsögur* and *konungasögur*. In the first four texts of Guðni Jónsson's edition of the *fornaldarsögur* – *Völsunga saga*, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, *Ragnarssona þáttr*, and *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, roughly 56,000 words in total – I have counted, with a fairly rudimentary word search, a total of just nineteen instances in which the cardinal directions are given to indicate the relative situations of locales, or the direction of travel; in a similar sized sample from *Heimskringla* – *Hálfdana saga svarta*, *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, *Hákonar saga góða*, *Haralds saga gráfeldar*, and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, also around 56,000 words – there are 301 similar usages of the cardinal directions.¹⁰ These figures are approximate, but demonstrate the marked difference between the representation of space in the *fornaldarsögur* and *konungasögur*.

Still, it is somewhat misleading to suggest that the authors of the *fornaldarsögur* were not invested in spatial representation, and we ought to be cautious not to conflate the “air of unreality” of their settings with their literary status, as Stephen Mitchell has.¹¹ It is worth noting that the *konungasögur* are a good deal less specific in their geographies than the *Íslendingasögur*: while the former tend to move between districts in Norway – similar in this regard, as noted, to *Víkars þáttr* in *Gautreks saga* – the latter are, famously, precise in their descriptions of the landscape, and, as Chris Callow has analysed in the case of *Laxdæla saga*, their narratives operate at the level of the individual farmstead.¹² However, it would be absurd to argue on these grounds that the *konungasögur* were regarded as less historical than the *Íslendingasögur* in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century literary culture. What we may suggest, rather, is that Icelandic authors' sense of geography and spatial relations became increasingly vague as they strayed further from the

¹⁰ Calculated using HTML versions of *FN*, vol.1 and *Heimskringla: eða Sögur Noregs konunga Snorra Sturlusonar*, eds. N. Linder and H. A. Haggson (Uppsala: Schultz, 1869-72).
<http://heimskringla.no/wiki/Fornaldarsögur_Norðurlanda>; <<http://heimskringla.no/wiki/Heimskringla>>.

¹¹ Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas*, 29-30.

¹² Ian Wyatt, “Landscape and Authorial Control in the Battle of Vigrfjörðr in *Eyrbyggja saga*,” *LSE* 35 (2006), 43-45; Chris Callow, “Reconstructing the Past in Medieval Iceland,” *EME* 14, no.3 (August 2006), 311-18.

familiar, and this seems to be apparent within individual texts. Hartmann noted of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* that “the clearness and exactness” of the text’s geography decreases as the action moves eastwards from Denmark and Sweden, and we may also observe, though by no means scientifically, that Snorri is rather less specific in representing the geography of Haraldr Sigurðarson’s expeditions in the Mediterranean than the Norwegian geography in the greater part of *Heimskringla*.¹³

It may be possible, then, to forgive the *fornaldarsögur* authors their vagueness, and not read into this the fictionality of their works. But in any case, closer study of particular geographies in the *fornaldarsögur* may indicate that these narratives were in fact mapped onto a conceptual geography in the minds of their authors and audiences. Rudolf Simek has argued that this was the case for the descriptions of the far north that appear in “late legendary fiction” – a term encompassing late *Íslendingasögur* (such as *Bárðar saga Snæfellsness*), *riddarasögur* (such as *Samsons saga*), and *fornaldarsögur* – and has even attempted to produce a coherent picture of the northern “*Weltbild* of the younger sagas.”¹⁴ That one may reconstruct a “geographical system” that reflects “the notions of 14th-century Icelandic saga authors as well as most educated Icelanders” implies that these two groups shared a common frame of spatial reference, and, given the scholastic nature of the geographic descriptions noted above, we might legitimately question whether these “educated Icelanders” were the authors of such texts.¹⁵ We have seen that the authors of a number of *fornaldarsögur* were keen to demonstrate what geographical learning they did possess, even where it is of little consequence to the narrative, and Simek’s analysis suggests that even the *fornaldarsögur*’s representations of more elusive geographies – including the mythical realms of Jötunheim and Glæsisvellir – were part of an imagined spatial reality for medieval Icelanders. That these representations drew influence, in places, from historiographical and encyclopaedic traditions further

¹³ Hartmann, *The Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, 64; *Heimskringla*, 3:69-90.

¹⁴ Rudolf Simek, “Elusive Elysia or Which Way to Glæsisvellir: On the Geography of the North in Icelandic Legendary Fiction,” in Simek, Jónas Kristjánsson, and Bekker-Nielsen *Sagnaskemmtun*, 247-75 (275).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 271.

supports the view that the *fornaldarsögur* were seen to represent a real, historical landscape of the *norðrlönd*.

The nature of the settings of the *fornaldarsögur* – both macro geographies and micro *mises-en-scène* – is certainly ripe for study, but perhaps more significant is their function in the texts. Though a more detailed analysis is, sadly, lacking, what Simek says on the function of the distant realms of the north in the *fornaldarsögur* is noteworthy: such locales were written about in these sagas, he claims, “from an apparently genuine desire to convey knowledge of geographical areas far off... but [which] were nevertheless part of the reality of at least some saga authors as much as they were for some medieval scholars.”¹⁶ This echoes the earlier conclusions of Hermann Pálsson and Edwards, and though their analysis is also brief, they are unequivocal regarding the informative and serious intent of the geographic digressions in the *fornaldarsögur*, noting that “geographic learning in legendary fiction serves both to display the authors’ erudition and to give... the impression that the actual events are not invented,” and, as an aside, that the verisimilitude of the topography of the *Íslendingasögur* has “frequently fooled people into accepting the veracity of the events”.¹⁷ It is frustrating that this line of thought is not further pursued, for it comes close to expressing the importance of the spatial frame of reference in historiographical writing, but the following may be concluded with confidence: that in anchoring their narratives to a real-world geography, the authors of the *fornaldarsögur* cast them as “real” histories.

As Sverrir Jakobsson has very recently illustrated, the study of spatial representation in the sagas has become increasingly popular in the last decade, and the varying importance of this frame of reference across saga genres is evident; Sverrir notes studies that have identified a “Norway-centred” system of orientation in the *konungasögur* that is not shared with the *Íslendingasögur*, as well as numerous studies of the symbolic function of landscape in the latter genre.¹⁸ The function of

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹⁷ Hermann Pálsson and Edwards, *Legendary Fiction*, 31.

¹⁸ Sverrir Jakobsson, “Space,” in Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson, *Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 178, 180-81.

space and geography seems to vary to some extent within the corpus of the *fornaldarsögur*, reminding us of their generic hybridity. Localisation, in the north of Norway, seems to have been a great deal more important in the *Hrafnistumannasögur* – *Ketils saga hængs*, *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, *Qrvar-Odds saga*, and *Áns saga bogsveigis* – for example: though the heroes frequently adventure in far-off locales (frequently Finnmörk), they are tied to their ancestral home of Hrafnista, which lies in the modern Norwegian county of Trøndelag. To return to our provisional measure of geographic specificity, we may note that in these sagas (comprising an approximate total of 50,000 words), cardinal directions relating to relative location and travel are given eighty-four times, significantly more than in the previous sample of *fornaldarsögur*.¹⁹ It is also interesting to note that the vast majority of these instances – seventy-one – are on the North-South axis, compared to just thirteen on the East-West axis. The reason for this, perhaps, may be found in the use in these sagas of the “journey to the North” motif – a “narrative unit” analysed by Vésteinn Ólason – in which the supernatural Other is encountered on a hero’s journey to Finnmörk or Bjarmaland, which brings me to my final point on the representation of geography and space in the *fornaldarsögur*.²⁰

Though Simek notes that depictions of the far north serve in the *fornaldarsögur* as more than just a “suitably fantastic setting for their sometimes bizarre plots,” the localisation of many of the more fantastic elements of the *fornaldarsögur* is important to our understanding how they navigated historicity and fictionality.²¹ Though I have used Bakhtin’s theory of the chronotope as a framework to analyse movements between historiographical and folk-tale worlds in *Gautreks saga*, Fulvio Ferrari has provided similar insights using the theory of “possible worlds,” as developed by Umberto Eco, among others.²² Ferrari suggests, for example, that Oddr’s two encounters with giants in *Qrvar-Odds saga* pertain to different fictional worlds,

¹⁹ <http://heimskringla.no/wiki/Fornaldarsögur_Norðurlanda>.

²⁰ Vésteinn Ólason, “The Marvellous North.”

²¹ Simek, “Elusive Elysia,” 254.

²² Fulvio Ferrari, “Possible Worlds of Sagas: The Intermingling of Different Fictional Universes in the Development of the *Fornaldarsögur* as a Genre,” in Lassen, Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, 271-89.

signalled by the different means by which Oddr reaches their realm; in the first instance, Oddr is blown by a storm to an unknown island while sailing north-east along the coast of Finnmörk; in the second instance, he is carried to Risaland ('Giantland') by a vulture.²³ Furthermore, though he does not express it in such terms, it is clear that the "journeys to the north" analysed by Vésteinn Ólason also fit this pattern, of a movement between chronotopes or "possible worlds," in which the marvellous or incredible are contained within discrete spaces in the text. In his study, Vésteinn distinguishes between the use of this motif in "*fornaldarsagas* with oral roots" – *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna* – and "adventure sagas" such as *Bósa saga*, suggesting that the latter merely parodies the motif, and that its heroes' journeys to Bjarmaland and Glæsisvellir lack the sense of "direction, distance, and danger" found in the former examples.²⁴ Employing more analytic language, we might suggest that a text such as *Bósa saga* is less invested in compartmentalising its more adventurous, fantastic elements into a chronotope, or "possible world," distinct from more historiographical realms. However, it is possible at least that Bósi and Herraudr's journey into the woods in Bjarmaland – as Hermann Pálsson and Edwards note, a common means of reaching "strange haunts" in the *fornaldarsögur* – was enough of an indication to the audience that the text had entered a more fictional chronotope.

As a final argument for the use of these motifs to demarcate a discrete space for the fantastic in the *fornaldarsögur*, I point to the example of *Helga þáttur Þórissonar*, often counted among the *fornaldarsögur* but in fact an integral part of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in *Flateyjarbók*. In this tale, Helgi, a retainer of King Óláfr, encounters noblewomen from Glæsisvellir after becoming lost in a forest in a heavy mist while returning from a trading expedition to Finnmörk, and is later abducted to Glæsisvellir in a storm at sea. Rosemary Power has illustrated the clear connection between this *þáttur* and several narratives like it in the corpus of *fornaldarsögur*, but, as Rowe has demonstrated, it is clearly best understood in its context within *Óláfs saga*

²³ *Örvar-Odds saga* in *FN*, 1, 298-99, 337-38.

²⁴ Vésteinn Ólason, "The Marvellous North," 117.

Tryggvasonar, in which it functions as a “conversion *páttir*.”²⁵ In this historiographical context, *Helga páttir Þórissonar* clearly works to carve out a space for the fantastic, distinct from the rest of the text, in much the same manner as many *foraldarsögur*; it seems legitimate, therefore, to view the *foraldarsögur* in the same way. Extending the discussion of geography and space in *Gautreks saga* to other *foraldarsögur*, it is hopefully evident that this is a productive framework by which they may be compared to contemporary historiographical writing, and that through this comparison, we may better understand the historiographical influence on the *foraldarsögur*.

5.2: Genealogy

The use of genealogy in the *foraldarsögur* can broadly be characterised as operating either intra- or intertextually, though in some sagas both usages may be found. Put simply, intratextual genealogy may be used to describe the structural design of those sagas which narrate a dynastic history, and though there may be a central hero of the saga, whose story occupies most of the text, significant space is devoted to their ancestors or descendants. Intertextual genealogies are those which operate across multiple texts, constructed by claims in individual texts that a particular character is the ancestor or descendant of some other saga hero; we may also include in this category genealogical links forged between historical royal lines, and Icelandic kin groups, and the world of the *foraldarsögur*, both in these latter texts and in the *konungasögur*, *Íslendingasögur*, and other texts.

The genealogical structure of *Völsunga saga* is just one example of the intratextual genealogies in the *foraldarsögur*, though a handful of other texts in the corpus also make significant use of genealogy as a structural framework. One such example is *Hrólfs saga kraka*, which shares with *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* its derivation from **Skjöldunga saga*. *Hrólfs saga kraka* is extant only in seventeenth-century manuscripts, though the redaction of the text they preserve is

²⁵ Rosemary Power, “Journeys to the Otherworld in the Icelandic *Fornaldarsögur*,” *Folklore* 96, no.2 (January 1985), 156-75; Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, “*Þorsteins páttir úxafóts*, *Helga páttir Þórissonar*, and the Conversion *Þættir*,” *SS* 76, no.4 (December 2004), 459-74.

thought to date to c.1400; an earlier redaction of the saga may have been composed in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, but it is impossible to speculate on the nature of such a text, if it existed.²⁶ As it stands, the greater part of this saga revolves around King Hrólfur kraki, of the Skjöldung dynasty, but although he is the central figure of the narrative, the heroes at his court are afforded their own backstories, which occupy significant portions of the text.²⁷ As such, Lönnroth has suggested that the author modelled the structure of *Hrólfur saga kraka* on that of *Karlamagnús saga*, dividing it into “semi-independent episodes dealing with the various heroes of Hrólfur,” who are, according to Valgerður Brynjólfsson, “the real heroes” of the saga.²⁸ Nevertheless, the saga has something of an underlying genealogical structure, beginning with the killing of Hrólfur’s grandfather, Hálfdan, by his brother, Fróði, and the life of Hrólfur’s father, Helgi. This *Fróða þáttur* and *Helga þáttur* together occupy more than a quarter of the extant text, and demonstrably owe their place in *Hrólfur saga kraka* to its derivation from **Skjöldunga saga*, for versions of these narratives are found in *Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta*.²⁹ However, the genealogical prologue to the saga was not merely a relic of its origins in the dynastic chronicle, but continued to serve a narrative and thematic purpose in the text, being expanded and adapted throughout the saga’s transmission; though Helgi is portrayed as sexually aggressive in the many textual attestations of the legend, *Hrólfur saga kraka* exaggerates this trait significantly, using *topoi* of later medieval saga-writing, such as the “maiden-king” motif, in service of its violently misogynistic ideology.³⁰ Though the genealogical structure of **Skjöldunga*

²⁶ Cf. Tulinius’ words to this effect: *The Matter of the North*, 19.

²⁷ *Hrólfur saga kraka*, ed. D. Slay (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1960), 37-86.

²⁸ Lars Lönnroth, “Charlamagne, Hrólfur Kraki, Olaf Tryggvason: Parallels in the Heroic Tradition,” in *Les relations littéraires Franco-Scandinaves au moyen Age: Actes du Colloque de Liège, avril 1972* (Paris: Société d’édition Les belles lettres, 1975), 34; Valgerður Brynjólfsson, “A Valiant King or a Coward? The Changing Image of King Hrólfur Kraki from the Oldest Sources to *Hrólfur Saga Kraka*,” in Lassen, Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi*, 141-56. I have elsewhere critiqued Valgerður’s interpretation, arguing that although Hrólfur’s champions surpass him in martial prowess, he is by no means ridiculed in *Hrólfur saga kraka*, as she suggests: Timothy Rowbotham, “Warriors, Women, and Wealth: Thematic Stability in the Legend of King Hrólfur kraki” (MA diss., University of York, 2014).

²⁹ *Hrólfur saga kraka*, 1-36.

³⁰ Rowbotham, “Thematic Stability,” 38-48. Many have written on the misogyny of *Hrólfur saga kraka*; see, for example, Ármann Jakobsson, “Queens of Terror: Perilous Women in *Hálf saga* and *Hrólfur saga kraka*,” in Lassen, Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi*, 173-89, and Carl Phepstead, “The Sexual Ideology of *Hrólfur saga kraka*,” *SS* 75, no.1 (Spring 2003), 1-24.

saga is somewhat diminished in importance in *Hrólfs saga kraka* – competing against the structural model provided by *Karlamagnús saga* – it seems to have nevertheless continued to shape and give new meaning to the text, proving a productive narrative framework.

Hrólfs saga kraka is an important work to note in analysing the historiographical function of the *fornaldarsögur*, since the presumed late composition of the extant text has often excluded it from the study of the genre's origins (historiographical or otherwise), as well as prompting studies on its "late" features.³¹ In spite of this, it nevertheless appears to have retained more of the intratextual genealogical structure of **Skjöldunga saga* than the other prominent *fornaldarsaga* derived from this tradition – *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* – despite the consensus of the latter text's thirteenth-century composition.

Though Ragnarr loðbrók's father, Sigurðr Hringr, is a prominent figure in Icelandic legendary historiography, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* only briefly relates that he ruled Denmark before Ragnarr, and that he had become famous for defeating Haraldr Hilditǫnn at the Battle of Brávellir; *Ragnarssona þáttr* is even more brief, stating only that Ragnarr inherited the kingdom after his father's death.³² And though Ragnarr's sons appear to be as important as Ragnarr himself in both the saga and the *þáttr*, neither text can really be considered a dynastic history; furthermore, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttr* are unusual in that, unlike *Vǫlsunga saga*, *Hrólfs saga kraka*, or the great thirteenth-century compendia of *konungasögur*, the exploits of the two generations are narrated more or less concurrently, up to the point of Ragnarr's death. As an intratextual framework, the genealogical structure of **Skjöldunga saga* seems to have diminished in importance in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*

³¹ Lassen, for example, makes no mention of *Hrólfs saga kraka* in her article on the "learned origins" of the *fornaldarsögur*, despite a lengthy discussion of **Skjöldunga saga*, as well as the later development of the genre: Lassen, "Learned Origin of *Fornaldarsögur*." Tulinius explicitly excludes *Hrólfs saga kraka*, on grounds of its lateness, from his group of *fornaldarsögur* derived "most overtly" from "ancient tradition": Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 19. Kalinke has analysed the *Helga þáttr* of *Hrólfs saga kraka* as evidence of how far from its historiographical origins the saga has moved in the direction of romance: Kalinke, "Textual Instability, Generic Hybridity, and the Development of some *Fornaldarsögur*," 214-18.

³² *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 117; *Ragnarssona þáttr*, 458.

to a much greater extent than in *Hrólfs saga kraka*. However, the relationship between both of these sagas and **Skjöldunga saga* draws attention again to the case for viewing *fornaldarsögur* as a response to legendary, dynastic historiography – the *origines gentium* – as noted in my Introduction, and the possibility of Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum* having directly inspired the writing of **Skjöldunga saga*.³³ In light of this, it is hard not to conclude that *Hrólfs saga kraka* and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, specifically, were a continuation of an historiographical tradition, but there are yet further connections that we might draw between the *fornaldarsögur* and genealogical models of history-writing.

It is significant to note that a number of texts adjacent to the *fornaldarsögur* – some considered part of the corpus, others studied in comparison – also attest the importance of genealogy as a means of organising the legendary past. In addition to **Skjöldunga saga*, *Ynglinga saga* also comprises a dynastic chronicle, projecting a royal line – in this case, the Fairhair dynasty – into the mythological past, lending it the same kind of legitimacy as is conferred in other examples of *origines gentium*. But while Lassen has admitted the former to the corpus of *fornaldarsögur*, the generic status of the latter has proven more problematic. Jon Gunnar Jørgensen notes that the features *Ynglinga saga* shares in common with the *fornaldarsögur* – its chronological and geographical setting, and fantastic elements – are superficial, and also highlights the difference in structure between *Ynglinga saga* and the biographies that make up the rest of *Heimskringla*. The principal difference lies in the rapidity with which the succession of kings is narrated in *Ynglinga saga*, prompting Jørgensen to draw comparison with the annalistic style of classical historiography epitomised by Livy, and to note that its structure is more similar to its poetic source, *Ynglingatal*, than to other prose sagas.³⁴ In response to Jørgensen, Mundal further suggests that *Ynglinga saga* should indeed be considered simply a *tal* (‘enumeration’), rather than a *konungasaga* or *fornaldarsaga*, noting the poetic genre of its source and the use of *tal* in reference to other prose works, such as *Skáldatal*, and *Fagrskinna* – which is rubricated in its medieval manuscripts as *Nóregs konunga tal* and *ættartal Nóregs*

³³ Lassen, “Learned Origin of *Fornaldarsögur*.”

³⁴ Jørgensen, “Ynglinga saga.”

konunga – the latter examples demonstrating the extent to which the semantic meaning of *tal* “strekkiast i retning av *saga*” (‘stretches in the direction of *saga*’).³⁵ There seems little justification, therefore, to include *Ynglinga saga* among the *fornaldarsögur*, though it does attest the use of genealogy in representing the *fornöld*, and even locates certain kings of *fornaldarsaga* fame – Gautrekr and Hrólfr kraki, among them – in this genealogical, historiographical context.³⁶

Though *Ynglinga saga* and, to a lesser extent, **Skjöldunga saga* may be considered on the margins of the *fornaldarsögur*, two further texts related to these works are included in the corpus: *Sögubrot af nokkrum fornkonungum í Dana ok Svíaveldi* (‘Fragment of a saga about certain ancient kings in Denmark and Sweden’) and *Af Upplendinga konungum*. As Rowe has cautioned, the fragmentary nature of *Sögubrot* precludes us from drawing firm conclusions on the nature and function of this text, though it is generally accepted that it is a reworking of some of the material in **Skjöldunga saga*: it covers five generations of the Skjöldung dynasty, up to Ragnarr loðbrók, and describes in some detail the Battle of Brávellir.³⁷ It has been noted that *Sögubrot*’s style represents a move further in the direction of the *fornaldarsögur* from the likely form of its source (which some, including Lassen, regard as a *fornaldarsaga* anyway), and Rowe has sought to explain the social and political relevance of these reworkings, which include the influence of eddic poetry and incorporation of “Odinic” motifs.³⁸

Af Upplendinga konungum is found solely in *Hauksbók*, and is extremely short, covering seven generations of the Yngling dynasty over forty-five lines of prose in the manuscript. Its textual relationship with *Ynglinga saga* (as well as *Historia Norwegie*, and *Íslendingabók*, which also record the Yngling genealogy) is uncertain, though its brevity suggests at the least that it precedes Snorri’s *Ynglinga saga*; its place in

³⁵ Else Mundal, “*Ynglinga saga* og genreproblematikken,” in Ney, Ármann Jakobsson, and Lassen, *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myer og Verkelighed*, 60-65.

³⁶ *Heimskingla*, 1.56-59, 64.

³⁷ Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, “*Sögubrot af fornkonungum*: Mythologised History for Late Thirteenth-Century Iceland,” in Arnold and Finlay, *Making History*, 13; Bjarni Guðnason, introduction to *Danakonungasögur*, XXXVI-VIII; *Sögubrot*, 46-71.

³⁸ Friis-Jensen, “Saxo Grammaticus og fornaldarsagaerne,” 72-73; Rowe, “Mythologised History,” 1-16.

Hauksbók has scarcely been analysed, but it evidently speaks to Haukr's general interest in genealogical and legendary historiography. More specifically, we may suggest that the portion of Yngling history related in *Hauksbók*, covering the establishment of the Norwegian branch of the Ynglingar (a Swedish dynasty), accords with the theme of *translatio* – “the movements of genealogies through time and space,” specifically from East to West – that Sverrir Jakobsson has identified as part of the “world view” presented in the manuscript.³⁹

Taken together, these two texts make for an insightful parallel to the other thirteenth-century *fornaldarsögur*. Though *Sögubrot* is considerably more discursive than *Af Upplendinga konungum*, both represent a different kind of history-writing than, say *Völsunga saga* or *Hrólfs saga kraka*, though all four texts might be considered dynastic histories; rather, the former two texts, along with their more expansive counterpart in *Ynglinga saga* might perhaps be seen as more akin to the historiographical style of the synoptics – *Historia Norwegie*, *Ágrip*, and Theodoricus' *Historia*. The continued, active transmission of synoptic histories of the *forn öld* in the late-thirteenth century, alongside the composition of more expansive, narrative *fornaldarsögur*, makes for compelling evidence that the genealogical structure of these latter texts signalled their function as historiography.

But not only did authors adapt dynastic histories, like **Skjöldunga saga*, into *fornaldarsögur* that are extant today, and which have retained their genealogical structures to varying degrees; newly composed *fornaldarsögur* also employed this organisational principle as a framework for their narratives. As I have argued, the genealogical structure of *Völsunga saga* must be viewed as a conscious authorial decision, since this structure is lacking from the poetic manifestation of the tradition, and similarly, *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* also attests the influence of dynastic historiography on *fornaldarsaga* authors in the thirteenth century. The three major redactions of *Hervarar saga* each contain roughly the same material, which can be divided into sections as follows: the forging of the sword Tyrfingr; the *hólmganga* on Sámsey between Angantýr and his brothers, and Hjálmar and Qrvarr-Oddr (including

³⁹ Sverrir Jakobsson, “Construction of an Icelandic World View,” *Saga-Book* 31 (2007), 26.

the “Sámsey Poetry,” or *Hjálmar’s Death-Song*); Hervor’s recovery of Tyrfingr from her father’s gravemound (including the verses dubbed *Hervararkviða*, or *The Waking of Angantýr*); the career of Heiðrekr, Hervor’s son; Heiðrekr’s riddle contest with Óðinn; the war between Heiðrekr’s children, Angantýr, Hlǫðr, and Hervor (including the poem *Hlǫðskviða*, or *The Battle Between the Goths and Huns*); and, in the U redaction alone, a genealogical epilogue.⁴⁰ Tulinius observes that this complex of narrative materials “gives the impression of having been pulled together from sundry sources,” and, in analysing the verse quotations in the saga, Love posits that the four clusters of poetry may reflect the saga’s oral sources.⁴¹ Christopher Tolkien has suggested that the separate legendary traditions that seem to underpin *Hervarar saga* may have been drawn together because of the same or similar names of the figures they concern – and that the elder Hervor was created to link together the two Angantýrs – but it is important to note that the genealogical expression of this composite narrative was not an inevitable outcome of the process of accretion; as Andersson, and more recently Catalin Taranu, have suggested, originally separate legends gradually became attached to the figure of Sigurðr in the early development of the *Vǫlsung/Niblung cycle*.⁴² In the case of *Hervarar saga*, however, no attempt was made to attribute the *hólmganga* on Sámsey and the sibling drama of *Hlǫðskviða* to a single Angantýr, but rather these legends, when pulled together, were imagined as unfolding over successive generations, reflecting the propensity in thirteenth-century Iceland for writing genealogical narratives, a principally historiographical endeavour.

Regarding its function, Tulinius has illustrated how the “genealogical schema” of *Hervarar saga* gives cohesion to the multifarious narrative, noting that “the

⁴⁰ Summary following Alaric Hall, “Changing Style and Changing Meaning: Icelandic Historiography and the Medieval Redactions of *Heiðreks saga*,” *SS 77* (2005), 2-3; and Jeffrey Scott Love, *The Reception of Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Munich: Herbert Utz Verlag, 2013), 22. On *Hervarar saga*’s textual history, see Love, 81-189.

⁴¹ Love, “Organisation of Poetic Quotations,” 155-56.

⁴² Christopher Tolkien, introduction to *Saga Heiðreks konungs ins vitra: The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise* (London: Nelson, 1960), XXVIII-XXIX; Andersson, *The Legend of Brynhild*, 78-107; Catalin Taranu, “The Original Dragon-Slayer.” Likewise, Hall suggests that *Hervararkviða* was probably composed to link together the saga’s various other episodes: Hall, “Medieval Redactions of *Heiðreks saga*,” 7.

transitions between the different sections coincide with the appearance of each new generation”; furthermore, he suggests that the theme of intergenerational conflict is vital to understanding the saga’s social meaning.⁴³ Alaric Hall has further analysed the function of genealogy specifically in the *U redaction (which probably dates to c.1270-1300); he argues that the added introductory material – including an allusion to the account in Genesis of mankind’s intermarrying with giants, and an account of Óðinn’s exodus from Asia to the North, recalling Snorri’s *Edda* and *Ynglinga saga* – established the saga’s temporal frame of reference and its veracity, while the list of kings in its epilogue provided a further chronological point of reference, and provided contemporary Icelanders with a vested genealogical interest in the saga through its inclusion of Ragnarr loðbrók and his sons.⁴⁴ This redaction of *Hervarar saga* therefore comprised, Hall continues, a chronicle from biblical times, through the heathen period in the *norðrlond*, to the present Christian era – not unlike a universal chronicle, though Hall does not himself draw this comparison – as well as a dynastic history, adding Heiðrekr’s paternal line (from his grandfather, the giant Guðmundr of Glæsisvellir) in the introduction, and the Swedish kings descended from him.⁴⁵

The intratextual genealogy of *Hervarar saga* seems to have fulfilled multiple functions, as a structure that provided narrative and thematic cohesion to the text, as well as signalling its historiographical intent. The potential of intratextual genealogy as a means of structuring narrative materials is also suggested by *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, and though space prevents a detailed analysis, it is nevertheless worth briefly mentioning.⁴⁶ This saga probably dates to the early-fourteenth century, though an older version probably existed in **Hróks saga svarta*, referred to in *Sturlunga saga*; like *Hervarar saga*, *Hálfs saga* was ultimately derived from a number of poetic sources, and on the surface its narrative seems, in the words of Tulinius, “quite a

⁴³ Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 75, 106-109.

⁴⁴ *U is identified as the medieval antecedent of the H redaction (*Hauksbók*), U redaction (Uppsala R 715, mid-seventeenth century), and AM 203 fol. (seventeenth century). Hall, “Medieval Redactions of *Heiðreks saga*,” 4-6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 12-16.

⁴⁶ *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, ed. Hubert Seelow (Reykjavík: Stofunn Arna Magnússonar, 1981).

farrago.”⁴⁷ However, Tulinius and Mitchell have each argued for a thematic unity to the text, identifying, respectively, marital and homosocial norms, and masculinity and familial ties, as the saga’s principal concerns, but both agree that these themes were, to quote Mitchell, “strengthened by the generational linkage between the various forebears and descendants of Hálfir.”⁴⁸ These readings suggest the intratextual genealogy of *Hálfs saga* imparted meaning in the text, but the historiographical function of this genealogy is also suggested, in the saga’s intertextual genealogical references, which I will explore below.

In light of the above, we can confidently conclude that intratextual genealogy, as a structural framework, was not merely a vestige of the historiographical origins of individual *fornaldarsögur*, gradually displaced or declining in importance, but rather remained, for some authors at least, a productive means of organising narratives, and marking them as works of historiography. But not all texts regarded as *fornaldarsögur* are characterised by an intratextual genealogical framework. Rowe has suggested that the “adventure tales” among the *fornaldarsögur* (as well as those she terms “legendary fiction,” and “‘second generation’ adventure tales”) are distinguished from “heroic legends” by a number of generic markers, including the scale of the narrative: only the latter group are characterised by their span of several generations, while the remainder – the majority of the corpus, in fact – span just a single generation.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, an active engagement with genealogical modes of thought may be considered as characteristic of the genre, since even those *fornaldarsögur* that span just a single generation, and thus cannot be viewed as dynastic histories in the way that otherwise disparate texts such as *Hrólfs saga kraka* and *Heimskringla* can, still inform us of the ancestry of their central protagonists, and occasionally their descendants. In doing so, many of these sagas create genealogical links with figures

⁴⁷ *Sturlunga saga*, 7; Seelow, introduction to *Hálfs saga*, 156-66; Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 23-24.

⁴⁸ Stephen Mitchell, “Heroic Legend and Onomastics: *Hálfs saga*, *Das Hildebrandslied* and the *Listerby Stones*,” in *Donum natalicium digitaliter confectum Gregorio Nagy septuagenario a discipulis collegis familiaribus oblatum: A Virtual Birthday Gift Presented to Gregory Nagy on Turning Seventy by his Students, Colleagues, and Friends*, eds. Leonard Mueller and David Elmer (Washington DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2012). <<https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/4360>>.

⁴⁹ Rowe, in Quinn, et al., “Interrogating Genre,” 285-86.

that appear in other texts, often other *fornaldarsögur*, in some cases forming distinct networks of texts related by the genealogies of their protagonists. Clunies Ross has argued for the importance of intertextual genealogical connections in shaping the medieval Icelandic literary landscape, and that we ought to reconsider the literary relationships between texts of different genres – including the *fornaldarsögur* – in light of the genealogical links forged between them.⁵⁰ This is a subject that deserves further investigation, at greater length than can be afforded here, but I wish to briefly outline the significance of the intertextual genealogies to the *fornaldarsögur*, and its implications for their literary status.

The most well-known group of genealogically linked *fornaldarsögur* are the *Hrafnistumannasögur* – *Ketils saga hængs*, *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, *Qrvar-Odds saga*, and *Áns saga bogsveigis* – the protagonists of which are all said to descend from Hallbjörn hálftröll, son of Úlfr inn óargi, from the island of Hrafnista in Hálogaland. This genealogy is firmly established through its repetition in the four sagas; *Ketils saga hængs* and *Qrvar-Odds saga* S and M provide the full patrilineal descent from Hallbjörn to Oddr, while *Qrvar-Odds saga* ABE and *Gríms saga* provide just the descent from Ketill to Grímr to Oddr.⁵¹ *Áns saga bogsveigis* is something of an outlier, since only in this saga is Án's place in the genealogy attested: he is said to be the matrilineal great-grandson of Ketill hængur.⁵² Nonetheless, Leslie-Jacobsen has considered *Áns saga bogsveigis* to be derived from the same store of oral narratives about the Hrafnistumenn as the three other texts, which formed an “immanent saga” around this genealogy.⁵³ In its literary context, however, the robustness of this intertextual genealogy is manifest in the sagas' frequent appearance together in manuscripts, and although this in itself is not indicative of their perceived historicity, it does at least suggest a coherence within the narrative world that approaches that of the *Íslendingasögur*. Though I would issue the utmost caution in using post-medieval

⁵⁰ Margaret Clunies Ross, “The Development of Old Norse Textual Worlds: Genealogical Structure as a Principle of Literary Organisation in Early Iceland,” *JEGP* 92, no.3 (July 1993), 372-85.

⁵¹ *Ketils saga hængs*, in *FN*, 1:245, 266; *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, in *FN*, 1:269, 280; *Qrvar-Odds saga*, 2-5; *Örvar-Odds saga*, in *FN*, 1:283.

⁵² *Áns saga bogsveigis*, in *FN*, 1:404.

⁵³ Helen Leslie, “The Matter of Hrafnista,” *Quaestio Insularis* 11 (2010), 180-85.

manuscript transmission of sagas as an indication of their medieval reception, we may note that thirteen extant manuscripts contain all four *Hrafnistumannasögur*, a further thirty-eight contain three of the four, and twenty-two contain two of the four.⁵⁴

Further to its impact on the sagas' transmission, the intertextual genealogy of the *Hrafnistumannasögur* seems to have been an important factor in shaping their narratives, or as Clunies Ross has put it: "as interesting as the surface genealogical links between these sagas is the fact that they regularly show thematic and structural similarities."⁵⁵ Ciklamini, Joaquín Martínez Pizarro, Vésteinn Ólason, and Leslie-Jacobsen have each noted parallels between the characters, motifs, and narratives of the *Hrafnistumannasögur*, and certain *Íslendingasögur* (the protagonists of which are genealogically related to the *Hrafnistumenn*, see below), including the folktale pattern of the "bear's son's tale," motifs such as the "journey to the North," and themes such as food procurement.⁵⁶ Given that the intertextual genealogy of the *Hrafnistumannasögur* seems to have impacted on both the composition of these sagas and their transmission, it is safe to conclude that this ancestry was widely accepted and integral to the sagas' reception.

Less often considered with regard to Icelandic genealogical pursuits is the suite of sagas sometimes labelled "The Matter of Gautland," comprised of *Gautreks saga*, *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, and *Bósa saga*.⁵⁷ *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* continues *Gautreks saga* by recounting King Gautrekr's bridal quest in his old age (which is also recorded in *Gautreks saga* in one manuscript of the short redaction), and that of his son Hrólfr, who takes the throne of Gautland at the end of the saga.⁵⁸ In *Bósa saga*, King Hringr, the father of Herraudr, is said to be the son of Gauti, and half-brother of King Gautrekr.⁵⁹ The epilogue to *Bósa saga* also links the Gautland

⁵⁴ Numbers from the *Stories for all time* database. The vast majority of these manuscripts are seventeenth- and eighteenth-century.

⁵⁵ Clunies Ross, "The Development of Old Norse Textual Worlds," 384.

⁵⁶ Marlene Ciklamini, "Grettir and Ketill hængr, the Giant Killers," *Arv* 22 (1966), 136-55; Joaquín Martínez Pizarro, "Transformations of the Bear's Son Tale in the Sagas of the Hrafnistumenn," *Arv* 32-33 (1976-77), 263-81; Vésteinn Ólason, "The Marvellous North"; Leslie, "The Matter of Hrafnista," 169-208.

⁵⁷ For this designation, see Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads*, 107.

⁵⁸ *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, 3-78.

⁵⁹ *Bósa saga*, 2:465.

sagas with *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, making Herraúðr the same ruler of Gautland whose daughter, Þóra, Ragnarr marries, and summarising how Ragnarr won her by slaying the serpent that encircled her bower.⁶⁰ As a cycle, these three sagas cover the kingship of Gautland from the arrival of Óðinn in the North (from whom Gauti is said to descend, in both *Bósa saga* and *Ynglinga saga*), to the beginning of the end of the heroic period, with Ragnarr. Vésteinn Ólasson has claimed that the genealogies presented in *Bósa saga* were intended as a parody, but there is little to suggest this, beyond the fantastical and burlesque mode of some of the saga's episodes; Vésteinn's claim suffers, therefore, from the same logical fallacy that O'Connor has identified in the parodic readings of truth-claims in romance sagas, where satire is presumed purely on the basis of the presence of the fantastic.⁶¹ As I touched upon in Chapter 2, there is a strong textual link between *Gautreks saga* and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*: they appear continuously, under a single title, in several manuscripts, and the latter may have been intended from its inception as a sequel. Further analysis of the manuscript transmission supports the conclusion that all three Gautland sagas – *Bósa saga* included – were felt to belong together, and is the subject of current doctoral research by Jonathan Hui at the University of Cambridge.⁶²

For Mitchell, “the tendency towards cycles of romances,” exemplified by “The Matter of Gautland,” is indicative of the influence of romance literature on the *fornaldarsögur*, but the cyclical transmission of certain *fornaldarsögur* may in fact suggest that Icelandic scribes were at pains to historicise the adventures narrated, as were their counterparts on the Continent. Within “The Matter of Britain,” for example, it is possible to distinguish between the *Brut* tradition – which, in its various languages and media, remained a chronicle tradition, accounting for a swathe of the early history of the British Isles – and the Arthurian cycles concerning the quests and adventures of individual heroes. The synthesis of these traditions in the thirteenth-century – the most famous of these being the *Vulgate Cycle* of the *Estoire del Saint Grail*, *Estoire de Merlin*, *Lancelot en prose*, *Queste del Saint Graal*, and *Mort Artu* – attests,

⁶⁰ *Bósa saga*, 2:497.

⁶¹ Vésteinn Ólason, “The Marvellous North,” 117; O'Connor, “Defensive Narrators,” 111-12

⁶² Jonathan Hui, “Manuscript Transmission in ‘The Matter of Gautland,’” (paper presented at Norse in the North, “Translation and Transmission,” University of York, 4 June 2016).

according to Jane H. M. Taylor, the impulse to situate Arthurian romances within the Galfridian historiographical tradition.⁶³ And although, according to Taylor, “pseudo-history” provided “no more than the barest framework” for the central narrative, *Lancelot*, it is nonetheless most significant that these romances were given historical context by the *Vulgate*’s historiographical framework.⁶⁴ It is perhaps this that provides the best analogy for cycles of *fornaldarsögur* like “The Matter of Gautland”: while individual texts may exhibit certain hallmarks of fictionality – *Bósa saga*, in particular, has often been characterised thus – the intertextual genealogy that links these sagas attests the impulse to historicise their narratives.

Not only did intertextual genealogies link groups of *fornaldarsögur* together, they also connected the heroes of the *fornaldarsögur* to the figures that populate the world of the *Íslendingasögur*, as Clunies Ross has sketched out. Among the genealogical links she notes are those between the Hrafnistumenn and Egill Skallagrímsson, Grettir Ásmundarson, and Björn Hítðœlakappi, each eponymous protagonists of their own sagas.⁶⁵ And before her, Hollander noted the genealogical connection between the families of *Vatnsdœla saga* and the Gautland dynasty, arguing that this prompted the scriptorium responsible for *Vatnsdœla saga* to compile and compose the “Gautland cycle” of sagas.⁶⁶ Not only are *fornaldarsaga* heroes named as ancestors in the *Íslendingasögur* and in genealogical works, but occasionally one finds such claims in the *fornaldarsögur* themselves; *Áns saga bogsveigis* ends by relating Án to Ingimundr inn gamli, who settled Vatnsdalr in Iceland, while *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* concludes with the story of Hámundr and

⁶³ Jane H. M. Taylor, “The Thirteenth-Century Arthur,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Arthurian Legend*, eds. Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2009), 53-68 (esp. 58-64); *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances Edited from Manuscripts in the British Museum*, ed. Oskar H. Sommer, (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1908–1916).

⁶⁴ Taylor, “The Thirteenth-Century Arthur,” 60.

⁶⁵ Clunies Ross, “Old Norse Textual Worlds,” 282-85.

⁶⁶ Lee M. Hollander, “The Gautland Cycle of Sagas: I. The Source of the Polyphemos Episode of the *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*,” *JEGP* 11, no.1 (January 1912), 61-81; Lee M. Hollander, “The Gautland Cycle of Sagas: II. Evidences of the Cycle,” *JEGP* 11, no.2 (April 1912), 209-217.

Geirmundr heljarskinn, also found in *Landnámabók*, that connects these two settlers to the kings of Hǫrðaland (Hjǫrleifr, Hálf, and Hjǫrr).⁶⁷

This brings us to the widespread phenomenon in medieval Iceland of notable kin groups tracing their descent, via the prominent settlers of Iceland named in *Landnámabók*, to the legendary figures about whom the *fornaldarsögur* were composed. Certainly, the most prominent figure in this regard was Ragnarr loðbrók, the genealogical references to whom are documented by Rowe (see Chapter 4). The most common means of incorporating Ragnarr into Icelandic genealogies seems to have been through the settler Hǫfða-Þórðr, said to be descended from Ragnarr's son Björn járnsíða in *Landnámabók*, several *Íslendingasögur* (including *Njáls saga*), and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* itself.⁶⁸ Through Hǫfða-Þórðr's eleven sons and eight daughters, named in *Landnámabók*, a great many Icelandic families could thus trace their ancestry to Ragnarr; however, the Breiðfirðingar's descent from Sigurðr ormr-í-auga (first witnessed in *Íslendingabók*), and the descent of the settler Auðunn skǫkull from a daughter of Ragnarr, Álǫf (not mentioned in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*), also provided opportunities for Icelanders to claim Ragnarr as their ancestor.⁶⁹ Furthermore, through Áslaug – the mother of Björn, Sigurðr, and Álǫf – these families could also trace their lineage to Sigurðr Fáfnisbani. *Fóstbræðra saga*, in fact, omits naming Ragnarr as Sigurðr ormr-í-auga's father, instead naming his mother and her father, Sigurðr Fáfnisbani.⁷⁰

But Ragnarr was far from the only legendary figure to whom Icelanders traced their origins; through the genealogies found in the *Íslendingasögur*, a host of legendary figures could be claimed as ancestors. Mitchell has documented the array of *fornaldarsaga* heroes that Haukr Erlendsson and his wife, Steinunn Óladóttir, could claim descent from, including King Hjǫrleifr of *Hálfs saga*, Ketill hœngr and the Hrafnistumenn, as well as Haraldr hilditǫnn and the Skjǫldung dynasty, including Ragnarr loðbrók. Mitchell goes on to argue that such genealogical claims contributed

⁶⁷ *Áns saga bogsveigis*, 1:431; *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, 197-98.

⁶⁸ *Landnámabók*, 239; *Njáls saga*, 285; *Ragnars saga*, 169.

⁶⁹ *Landnámabók*, 239-42; *Íslendingabók*, 27; for Álǫf Ragnarsdóttir, see *Landnámabók*, 214.

⁷⁰ *Fóstbræðra saga*, in *Vestfirðinga sögur*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1943), 124; cited in Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 189.

to the impetus behind Haukr's commission of *Hauksbók*, and very probably the composition and transmission of other *fornaldarsögur*.⁷¹ It is precisely this argument that Clunies Ross further develops in suggesting that *fornaldarsögur*, *Íslendingasögur*, and *samtíðarsögur*, were composed and read alongside one another, to represent "the history and prehistory of Icelandic family groups from the legendary past... down to the period of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries."⁷²

My analysis of the genealogical structure of *Vǫlsunga saga* suggested that the saga witnessed a meeting of multiple traditions in which genealogy played an important role – including Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman historiography, as well as twelfth- and thirteenth-century Icelandic texts – all of which influenced the reshaping of the eddic source material, and the forgoing analysis supports the extension of this conclusion to the *fornaldarsögur* as a genre. Genealogies were likely an important aspect of the narrative material of the *fornaldarsögur* in their preliterate forms: an oral genealogy probably preceded **Skjöldunga saga*, as did *Ynglingatal* for *Ynglinga saga*, and an "immanent" saga of the Hrafnistumenn would also support this claim. However, learned writings, specifically *origines gentium*, seem also to have exerted influence on the genealogies of *fornaldarsögur*. This is witnessed in the composition on texts such as *Ynglinga saga*, **Skjöldunga saga*, and their adaptations, directly modelled on this example, and in the reorganisation of narrative material in texts such as *Hálfs saga* and *Hervarar saga*. The reconfiguration of separate texts – as is seen in the linking of *Vǫlsunga saga* and *Ragnars saga* in NKS 1824 b, and the assemblage of a "Gautland cycle" – may also be seen as attempts to write dynastic histories, though in the case of the latter the historicising impulses in Continental romance literature may have also influenced Icelandic scribes. In many cases, this was all in the service of writing the prehistory of Icelandic and royal Scandinavian families, which further supports the conclusion that the genealogical dimension of the *fornaldarsögur*, intratextual and intertextual, attests their historiographical function in medieval Iceland.

⁷¹ Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas*, 122-26.

⁷² Clunies Ross, "Textual Worlds," 382.

5.3: Prosimetrum

It must be stated at the outset that, among the *fornaldarsögur*, the nature of verse quotation in both *Gautreks saga* and *Völsunga saga* is atypical. No other *fornaldarsaga* makes such extensive use of authenticating verse, in a manner so palpably imitative of the *konungasögur*, as does *Gautreks saga*. And though we can assume that the poetry of most prosimetrical *fornaldarsögur* pre-dates the prose, none were based on such a rich, and important, poetic tradition as *Völsunga saga*; as demonstrated in Chapter 3, this seems not to have been lost on the saga author, and, as a result, *Völsunga saga* is unique in its evocation of orality. The prosimetrical form of these sagas has been critical to the argument for their historiographical function in medieval Iceland, therefore in the following I will attempt to argue for the historiographical nature of verse quotation in a further select sample of *fornaldarsögur*, providing a briefer analysis of these texts along similar lines as those in my three case studies.

Outside of *Gautreks saga* and *Völsunga saga*, the quotation of verse in an explicitly authenticating manner – either with a “svá segir”-type formula, or something like the “sem er kveðit” formulae used in *Völsunga saga* – is infrequent indeed. Beyond these texts (and *Ragnarssona þáttir*), authenticating formulae are used to introduce verses only in *Hervarar saga* and *Qrvar-Odds saga*, and only in certain redactions of these works. In *Hervarar saga* R, five verses belonging to **Hljóðskviða*, clustered at the end of the saga, are introduced by the formula “sem hér segir,” signalling their authenticating function. Of these, R v.73 is the most straightforward in its function; the preceding passage (doubtless, inspired by the verse) contains an ethnographic anecdote of sorts, describing the custom, “þann tíma” (‘at that time’) of giving swords, horses, and livestock to new-born male nobility, and the verse is quoted as evidence of this, in relation to Hljóðr Heiðreksson (“sem her segir um Hlauð Heidreks son,” ‘as it says here about Hljóðr Heiðreksson’).⁷³ The remaining four instances of the “sem hér segir” formula indicate the authenticating function of the verses that follow, but their relationship with the prose is unusual, in that they provide

⁷³ *Heiðreks saga*, 85-86.

narrative that is not conveyed in the prose. R v.72 supplies the names of six kings and the *herr* ('people,' in the sense of a *gens*) that they ruled over, and is framed by the prose as historical context to the narrative:⁷⁴

Þa redu þessir konungar laundum, sem her segir.

Ar quōþo Humla
firi her rada,
Gizur Gautum,
Gotum Anganty,
Ualldar Danum,
en Ualum Kiar;
Alrekr en frækni
enskrí þiodu.

Then ruled these kings over lands, as it says here:

Long ago they said Humli ruled over the people, Gizurr the Gautar, Angantýr the Goths, Valdarr the Danes, and Kíarr the Valir; Alrekr the Brave [ruled] the English people.

This verse does corroborate the prose account of Angantýr becoming king after his father, Heiðrekr, but it is also itself the vehicle for antiquarian matters in the prosimetrical saga. Moreover, R vv.74-75 actually further the narrative with the contents that they supply that are not included in prose. The prose preceding R v.74 describes Humli, king of the Huns, advising his foster-son, Hlōðr, to ask for his share of Heiðrekr's inheritance from Angantýr, his brother, but it is the verse itself that describes Hlōðr travelling to Árheimar, his brother's court.⁷⁵ This verse could be read as authenticating the next line of prose, however, which reads "Nu kom Hlaudr i Arheimar," though the following verse, R v.75, is introduced ("*sem her segir*") as evidence for this.⁷⁶ The first *helmingr* of R v.75, however, describes Hlōðr greeting a man outside Árheimar, while the second *helmingr* is in fact direct speech, in which Hlōðr bids the man to summon Angantýr.⁷⁷ Finally, R v.77 is quoted as evidence of the commotion in Angantýr's hall following Hlōðr's aggressive posturing, though it does so with more detail than the prose account.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *Heiðreks saga*, 85.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

Leslie-Jacobsen has postulated that these verse quotations indicate that the relationship between verse and prose was more flexible in the oral eddic tradition, in which verses might equally be quoted as speech or as “evidence stanzas.”⁷⁹ A cursory reading of the *Poetic Edda* attests the function of verse as both a vehicle for narrative and direct speech, but there is little evidence that verses functioned as authentication; the use of authenticating formulae is limited to three instances in *HH II*, two of which explicitly refer to written text of *HH I* in the same manuscript, demonstrating the influence of textual culture at this point in the poem’s construction.⁸⁰ Indeed, as I argued in Chapter 3, the *segja hér* construction in introductory formulae stresses the following verses’ textuality, the adverb drawing attention to the verse as written words on a page. I would argue, therefore, that use of the “sem segir hér” formula in *Hervarar saga* likewise betrays the influence of a distinctly written historiographical style, namely that of the *konungasögur*. The use of poetry as third-person narration, however, is peculiar in the context of saga prosimetrum, and cannot have been derived from the *konungasögur*; rather, it is likely due to the narrative function of poetry in the eddic tradition, as attested in the *Poetic Edda*. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of source citation adopted in the quotation of these verses indicates the authority that these verses carried as historical sources, at least in the mind of the saga author.

Leslie-Jacobsen has sought to explain the irregularity of *Völsunga saga*’s verse quotations by suggesting that the author of this early *fornaldarsaga* had few models to draw on, and struggled to integrate eddic verse into saga prosimetrum; hence the doubling of some direct speech in prose and verse.⁸¹ Though I have proposed a deliberate authorial strategy that rationalises this idiosyncrasy, I do think that the narrative function of some of the verses in *Hervarar saga R* – also among the earliest *fornaldarsögur* – may indicate that the prosimetrical form of the *fornaldarsögur* had not yet been regularised. As Hall and Leslie-Jacobsen have each also noted, *Hervarar saga U* also omits all of the narrative verses of *Hljóðskviða*,

⁷⁹ Leslie, “Prose Contexts of Eddic Poetry,” 322.

⁸⁰ *Eddukvæði*, 2:273-75.

⁸¹ Leslie, “Prose Contexts of Eddic Poetry,” 278-79.

quoting only those presented as direct speech, which seems to indicate a “perceived distinction of using prose for narrative and verse for dialogue in the saga prose” (Leslie-Jacobsen), and a movement “toward conventional saga-style” (Hall).⁸² The R redactor, however, seems to have tried to incorporate narrative poetry into the saga prosimetrum, drawing on the closest available model: the authenticating verses of the *konungasögur*.

Though less overtly, the influence of the *konungasögur*'s use of poetry as authentication is also witnessed in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*. *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* is considered to exist in an older, shorter redaction (S), a younger, longer redaction (ABE), and an intermediate redaction (M); the older and intermediate redactions are each preserved in a single manuscript, and were edited in parallel by R. C. Boer.⁸³ The younger redaction is preserved in several manuscripts, each with independent textual value, often offering unique readings, of which a “best version” is published by Bjarni Vilhjálmsson and Guðni Jónsson, after Rafn's edition.⁸⁴ The preservation of the poetry in each manuscript, and its integration into the prose, is a vast topic indeed, and merits fuller treatment than can be provided here; the details of this are explicated by Clunies Ross in *SkP* 8, and Leslie-Jacobsen has analysed the prosimetrum of *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, accounting for these variations, in some depth.⁸⁵ The saga contains a group of verses known as *Hjálmar's Death-Song*, concerning the duel on Sámsey that is also found in *Hervarar saga* (S omits this scene; though Boer argues that it was in its exemplar), and each of the manuscripts further quotes a number of *lausavísur* throughout the prose; ABE also contains a long *ævikviða*, of seventy-one verses, spoken by Oddr at the end of the saga, in which some of the *lausavísur* interspersed in the prose are repeated. This *ævikviða* is absent from S, though five of its verses are quoted as *lausavísur* in prose narrative, following events to which the verses themselves refer. In this regard, they may be read as

⁸² *Heiðreks saga*, 142-55; Hall, “Medieval Redactions of *Heiðreks saga*,” 19; Leslie, “Prose Contexts of Eddic Poetry,” 323.

⁸³ *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*. Sigla following Boer's designations for the primary manuscripts.

⁸⁴ *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, in *FN*, 1:281-399.

⁸⁵ Margaret Clunies Ross, ed. “*Ǫrvar-Odds saga*,” in *SkP* 8, 805-947; Leslie, “Prose Contexts of Eddic Poetry,” 367-400.

authenticating. The verses, their preceding prose contexts, and introductory formulae are laid out in Table 9:

| Verse number in S | Prose context | Introductory formula (p. in <i>Qrvar-Odds saga</i> , 1888) |
|-------------------|---|--|
| 8 | Oddr arrives in Aquitaine and kills four chieftains who rule there | “Þar um kvað hann þessa vísu” (117) |
| 9 | Oddr’s ship runs aground in a storm, and all its crew killed; Oddr comes ashore alone | “Hér um kvað Oddr þessa vísu” (117) |
| 10 | Oddr aids King Knútr of Ungaraland in claiming the kingdom from his brother, Vilhjálmr, whom Oddr kills in battle | “Hér um kvað Oddr þessa vísu” (137) |
| 36 | Daughter of King Herraúðr of Hunland, Silkisif, is betrothed to Oddr by her foster-father, Hárekr | “Þessa vísu kvað Oddr hér um” (173) |
| 41 | Oddr kills a pagan king with a wooden club | “Hér um kvað Oddr þetta” (185) |

Table 9: Authenticating Verses in *Qrvar-Odds saga* S.

The content of each of these verses consists of first-person attestations of the events that precede them in the prose, reminiscent of Starkaðr’s verses in *Gautreks saga*, and thus may be seen as authenticating in function. Indeed, Leslie-Jacobsen describes S vv.8-10, quite unproblematically, as “authenticating” or “evidence stanzas,” apparently on the basis of their introductory formulae.⁸⁶ But while all five of these verses are certainly authenticating in their function, their presentation in the prose requires some explanation. I have noted that the verb *kveða* is more commonly associated with situational than authenticating verses in Old Norse prosimetrum, and that its use in the authenticating formulae of *Völsunga saga* blurs the distinction between the two modes; the same may be said of the above verses in *Qrvar-Odds saga*. Since *kveða* takes *vísa* as its direct object in all but one of the above instances, we may understand it as “compose” or “recite,” rather than simply “speak.” The semantic implication of recital would suggest the situationality of the quotation, but the lack of any temporal adverb – *þá*, or *nú* – marks these quotations apart from the clearly situational verses elsewhere in the text. The phrase “hér/þar um,” however, makes it explicit that the verse refers to the events just narrated in prose, and suggests that the saga author understands the verse as source material, or evidence,

⁸⁶ Leslie, “Prose Contexts of Eddic Poetry,” 396.

for these events. In the younger redactions of the saga, these verses appear in Oddr's *ævikviða*, of which only the final two verses are quoted in S; if audiences were aware of this poem as a work independent from the saga, it is possible that this tradition lent weight to the authentication provided by the verses. However, there is nothing in the text of S that explicitly signals these verses as belonging to the *ævikviða*, and the scene in which Oddr composes the poem lies quite apart from these verses in the manuscript of S. There is, therefore, some ambiguity in the presentation of these verses, and the circumstances in which Oddr composed these verses is left unclear; nevertheless, their authenticating function is evident, both in the relationship between the prose and the referential contents of the verses, and in the introductory formulae.

Finally, the transmission of the prosimetrical episode common to *Hervarar saga* and *Qrvar-Odds saga* – built around the “Sámsey Poetry,” including *Hjálmar's Death-Song* – exemplifies various strategies of writing saga prosimetrum and establishing textual authority. In each of the redactions of *Qrvar-Odds saga*, and in *Hervarar saga* U, the entirety of the poetry in the episode is presented as situational (which does not, however, preclude an authenticating function). *Hervarar saga* H contains a concise summary of the episode, omitting the poetry entirely, and the reader is referred to *Qrvar-Odds saga*: “skipti svá sem greinir í Qrvar-Odds sögu...” (‘it went as is recorded in *Qrvar-Odds saga*’).⁸⁷ Reference to another written work establishes the authority of both the referent – which is cited as a reliable source – and the referee, which achieves a more scholarly style. *Hervarar saga* R, however, explicitly derives its authority from its poetic source material. *Hjálmar's ævikviða* proper – the retrospective verses spoken as he lays dying – is presented as direct speech, introduced simply “Hjálmar kvað,” but two verses associated with this poetry are introduced with a formula in which the R redactor – or perhaps the original saga author – asserts their evidentiary value. Prior to their fight with Angantýr and his brothers, the saga relates a conversation between Oddr and Hjálmar in which they

⁸⁷ *Hauksbók*, 353. Cf. *Heiðreks saga*, 9-10.

express their fear and contemplate fleeing, but eventually resolve to fight. Following this, a pair of verses (R vv.2-3), one apiece, is quoted as follows:⁸⁸

“Þetta úiðr mæli þeira sanna þessar uisur, er Híalmar quæð”

Fara halir hraustir
af herskípum
xíí men saman
tirar lausir,
uid munum i aptan
Odin gista
íí fostbrædr,
en þeir xíí lifa

Oddr segir:

Þui mun ordi
ansuar uefta:
þeir munu i aptan
Opinn Gista
xíí berserkir
en uid íí lifa

These verses, which Híalmarr spoke, prove this conversation of theirs:

Brave warriors go from the warships, twelve men together, lacking glory; we
will lodge with Óðinn tonight, two foster-brothers, but they twelve will live.

Oddr says:

I will answer that speech: they will lodge with Óðinn tonight, the twelve
berserkir, but we two will live.

The contents of these verses reflect the conversation as it has been relayed in prose, occasionally doing so with precise verbal correspondence: R v.2 reflects Híalmarr’s words to Oddr, “**uer munum** allir **Odín gista** i *quell*d i Ualhøllu” (‘we will all lodge with Óðinn tonight in Valhøll’); R v.3 reflects Oddr’s reply, that “*skulu þessir* allir *dadir berserkir*, *adr quell*d se, **en uid íí lifa**” (‘they shall all be dead before the evening, but we two shall live’).⁸⁹ These verses plainly corroborate the preceding prose, but their introduction into the narrative is complicated by their introductory formulae. The formula that introduces Oddr as the new speaker is neither typically situational nor authenticating, lacking a “svá/sem” or “pá/nú” that would aid our reading of it, but since the introduction to Híalmarr’s verse in fact refers to verses, plural, we may read this as referring to Oddr’s verse as well. This introduction implies that the verses are

⁸⁸ *Heiðreks saga*, 10-11.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 10. Italics according to Jón Helgason; boldface emphasis my own.

separate from the preceding prose, but one cannot fail to notice that the verses are themselves the dialogue (*viðrmæli*) that the narratorial voice claims they prove (*sanna*). The audience is therefore left to assume that the “original” performance context of these verses was the scene in which they are now quoted in the saga, and so they may be regarded as “situational” – spoken *in situ*. Nevertheless, a more unequivocal assertion of poetry’s value as historical source material is not found in the corpus of *fornaldarsögur*; the nominal and adjectival forms of *sannr* carry connotations of legal proofs and evidences, justice and fairness, and transparency, but above all else it conveys the notion of truth.⁹⁰ The quotation of this verse-pair establishes the veracity of verses spoken by the actors of the narrative, and appearing so early in the prosimetrum – immediately before Hjálmar’s *ævikviða* – it is possible that this legitimacy is imparted to the subsequent situational verses in the saga.

It must be noted, however, that Hall suggests that R vv.2-3, and the quotation of *Hervararkviða* in *Hervarar saga* H, indicate that the characters “were not actually considered to have conversed in poetry.”⁹¹ Such a view seems far more justified in the case of H, wherein an exchange of verses between Hervor and a shepherd on Sámsey (prior to *Hervararkviða*, proper, Hervor’s conversation with her dead father, Angantýr), is introduced “Þetta er kveðit eptir viðræðu þeira” (‘This is composed according to their conversation’).⁹² A number of these verses in H run continuously, without indicating a change of speaker; this is not particularly unusual in the poems of the *Edda* (see, for example, the verse-exchange between Sigurðr and Fáfnir in *Fáfnismál*), but is highly unusual in the context of the *fornaldarsögur* (and, indeed, written saga literature more broadly).⁹³ Indeed, in the verse-exchange between two of Ragnarr’s former *liðsmenn* in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, the saga author (or a later scribe), is at pains to distinguish between the two speakers, attributing each verse in prose either to “sa, er fyr kom” (‘that one, who arrived first’) or “sa, er sidar kom” (‘that

⁹⁰ Cleasby/Vigfusson, s.v.v. “SANNR,” “sannr,” 514-15.

⁹¹ Hall, “Medieval Redactions of *Heiðreks saga*,” 20.

⁹² *Heiðreks saga*, 18.

⁹³ *Eddukvæði*, 2:303-307. On the various methods of indicating the speaker in the poems in *Codex Regius*, see Gunnell, *Drama in Scandinavia*, 206-212.

one, who arrived afterwards').⁹⁴ The absence of new introductory formulae in *Hervararkviða* in *Hervarar saga* H, along with a *helmingr* of third-person narration (H v.1; absent in U and rendered as direct speech in R [v.19]), gives the impression that an eddic poem (with prose interspersed, similar to those of the *Poetic Edda*) is being quoted, rather than the direct speech of the saga characters.⁹⁵ Rather than using these verses as evidence for his retelling of events, the H redactor, in a more documentary style, simply presents the audience with the poem itself, as an historical monument. The use of verse as evidence for direct speech in R may indicate that while prose may be the more naturalistic medium for direct speech – offering greater verisimilitude – the poetry was regarded as more reliable as an historical source; nevertheless, the “Híalmar *quad*” and “Oddr *segir*” of R vv.2-3 do strongly suggest that the verses were presented as the direct testimonials of these figures.

It is easy to see why the U redactor rendered R vv.2-3 simply as direct speech, since their quotation in R disrupts the narrative somewhat; this further evinces that the U redactor saw a sharp distinction between the functions of prose and verse, the latter being used exclusively for direct speech through the text. Nevertheless, Hall does suggest that in the strictly situational quotation of verse, U retained “a crucial statement of veracity,” though he does not elaborate.⁹⁶ The authenticating function of situational verse quotation is, however, an important point to stress, and is one of the major arguments of this thesis. Indeed, given the widespread practice of *fornaldarsögur* authors copying details from the verses they quote, as direct speech, into their prose narratives, it is possible to suggest that what *Hervarar saga* R explicitly states is implicit throughout the rest of the corpus: that the verses attributed to the characters in these texts verify and historicise the narrative.

To the best of my knowledge, this accounts for all of the explicitly authenticating verses in the corpus of *fornaldarsögur*, and so it remains to examine how, elsewhere, situational verses functioned as authentication, and contributed to

⁹⁴ *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 171-73. The regularity with which the *fornaldarsögur* formally mark the changes in speaker of verses also emerges in Leslie-Jacobsen’s study: “Prose Contexts of Eddic Poetry,” 215 ff.

⁹⁵ *Heiðreks saga*, 18-33, 105.

⁹⁶ Hall, “Medieval Redactions of *Heiðreks saga*,” 20.

the sagas' narration of the past. As noted in my Introduction, Clunies Ross has characterised the poetry in *fornaldarsögur* principally as either monologue or dialogue, noting the retrospective tone of the former, and in the preprint of her paper at *The 13th International Saga Conference*, she emphasises the “autobiographical mode” that poetry contributed “to the sagas’ reprise of prehistory.”⁹⁷ There, Clunies Ross lists *Ásmundar saga kappabana*, *Gautreks saga*, *Hálfs saga*, *Hervarar saga*, and *Qrvar-Odds saga* as containing autobiographical poetry, *ævikviður*, and also suggests that poetic dialogues between protagonists – some of which may also offer retrospection, as in *Hálfs saga* – may have grown out of the *ævikviða* form.⁹⁸ The prosimetrum of each of these sagas requires a more extensive treatment than can be afforded here, since the relationship between poetry and prose in these sagas poses challenging questions about the origins and oral-prehistory of the genre, though I wish to turn to these questions, briefly, before concluding this thesis. It is also worth noting, however, that many of the verses in *fornaldarsögur* seemingly unrelated to the *ævikviða* genre – including single-stanza quotations as well as those in longer poetic episodes – likewise provide a similar retrospective corroboration of the prose narrative.

Many examples of such verse quotations could be given, though here just one text must suffice. *Friðþjófs saga ins frækna* is replete with verse quotations, all situational, almost half of which relate to Friðþjófr’s passage from Norway to Orkney, during which the ship and crew weather a tumultuous storm and kill two *tröllkonur*.⁹⁹ These verses offer an ongoing commentary on the voyage, and, as Leslie-Jacobsen has also noted, many of the verses may be described as authenticating, since they corroborate the prose narrative as it unfolds.¹⁰⁰ In the first of these, v.2, Friðþjófr attests the name of his ship (“Elliði”), his departure from Sogn, Norway, and the storm they run into, all this having been established in the prose; v.13 corroborates the deaths of four of the crew as the ship’s bow is broken; and in v.14 Friðþjófr announces that he must break apart a ring and share the gold among his crew, so

⁹⁷ Clunies Ross, “Poetry in *Fornaldarsögur*,” 121-138; Clunies Ross, “Poetry and *Fornaldarsögur*,” 182.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Friðþjófs saga ins frækna*, ed. Ludvig Larsson (Halle: Niermeyer, 1901), 12-29.

¹⁰⁰ Leslie, “Prose Contexts of Eddic Poetry,” 421.

that they may greet Rán, a goddess and personification of the sea, suitably bedecked, having already expressed this sentiment and acted upon it in the preceding prose.¹⁰¹ Several of the verses, however, function as illocutionary acts, prompting an immediate effect or outcome; vv.8-10 are spoken, respectively, by Friðþjófr and his companions Björn and Ásmundr, each verse prompting a spoken response in prose; in v.15/1-4, Friðþjófr announces that he has seen two *tröllkonur*, whose appearance has been described in the prose, but v.15/5-8 and v.16 are commissives, in which Friðþjófr directs the ship (to which the saga ascribes autonomous agency, on the basis of v.16) to strike the *tröllkonur*, with their deaths subsequently described in prose.¹⁰² Nevertheless, the repetitive descriptions of the storm in almost all of the verses in this sequence reinforces the prose account of Friðþjófr's arduous journey, with the poetry presented as a contemporary, eyewitness account.

Most of these verses also contrast the hardships of sailing with the entertainments the men had with women at home in Norway, with particular reference to Friðþjófr's beloved, Ingibjörg, employing, as Clunies Ross has noted, "some common conventions of skaldic poetry."¹⁰³ In particular, v.6 and v.9 show signs of possible influence from the verses of *Kormaks saga*.¹⁰⁴ Comparison might also be drawn, however, with the prosimetrum of *Orkneyinga saga*, in which the account of Earl Rognvaldr's sea-voyage in the Mediterranean is likewise punctuated with situational verses that serve as authentication – certainly, the frequent invocation of Ingibjörg's name in Friðþjófr's poetry is reminiscent of the verses in which Rognvaldr pines for Ermingerðr of Narbonne.¹⁰⁵ Unlike the Ragnarr legend, there is little evidence of an Orcadian connection to *Friðþjófs saga* – that Friðþjófr takes refuge there in exile is probably coincidence – but literary influence from *Orkneyinga saga* is

¹⁰¹ *Friðþjófs saga*, 15, 24-25.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 20-22, 26-27. Cf. Whaley, "Situational Verses," 256-60.

¹⁰³ Margaret Clunies Ross, introduction to "*Friðþjófs saga ins frækna*," in *SkP* 8, 195

¹⁰⁴ See Clunies Ross, ed. "*Friðþjófs saga ins frækna* 6" (Friðþ Lv 6); "*Friðþjófs saga ins frækna* 9" (Björn Lv 1), in *SkP* 8, 201, 204.

¹⁰⁵ For example, *Friðþjófs saga*, 18, 23; *Orkneyinga saga*, 211, 215-16.

by no means out of the question; at the least, the use of situational verse is similar in both.

Though, as noted, there exists a considerable body of scholarship on the *ævikviða* genre, the historicising function of this kind of poetry merits a brief commentary here. *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* contains a high proportion of poetry (seventy-eight verses), the majority of which forms whole poems, quoted with minimal or no intervening prose. The final poem of the saga, known as *Hrókskviða*, combines elements of the *ævikviða* form with other poetic modes. Hrókr inn svarti – formerly one of the “Hálfsrekkar,” King Hálfr’s band of warriors – looks back on the events of his life, though not on the point of his death, in a familiar retrospective tone, but the poem is also: part-encomium for Hálfr, whose death is memorialised; part-*mannjafnaðr* (‘comparison of men’), Hrókr comparing himself favourably with a rival suitor for a woman’s hand; and part-confession of love addressed to said woman. The more retrospective verses, however, play an important role in memorialising the events of the main part of the narrative; five verses (vv.53-56, v.61) speak in general terms of the heroic life pursued by Hálfr and his men; four verses (vv.57-60) attest the customs observed by the Hálfsrekkar – such as leaving wounds undressed – and five (vv.62-65, v.67) list the names of the champions, all of which echo the prose narrative earlier in the saga; a further verse (v.68) records the ages at which Hálfr began his viking career and died, as was also established earlier in the prose. Yet even those verses that serve an emotive or narrative function – expressing Hrókr’s grief for his comrades, desire for revenge, and love for the daughter of King Haki, with whom he resides at the time of the poem’s recital – corroborate key plot points, such as, for example, that it was King Ásmundr that killed Hálfr and many of his companions.¹⁰⁶ Quoted near the end of the saga, this poem seems to function partly as a review of the main part of the narrative, and as a memorial to Hálfr and his heroic band.

A similar memorial and summative function can be seen in Oddr’s *ævikviða*, as it is quoted at the end of *Orvar-Odds saga* ABE, in which the majority of the verses recall the major events of the saga’s narrative, including the prophecy of Oddr’s

¹⁰⁶ For *Hrókskviða*, see *Hálfs saga*, 190-97; for the equivalent prose, see *Hálfs saga*, 177-86.

unnaturally long life, the death of his companion Hjálmar, and the several encounters with his arch-nemesis, Qgmundr Eyþjófsbani.¹⁰⁷ As noted, Oddr's *ævikviða* is quoted in full only in ABE, while in S only the final two verses are quoted (introduced "Þessa vísu kvað Oddr síðast," 'Oddr spoke these verses last'); M omits the poetry in this scene entirely. However, S still informs us that Oddr's poem recollected the major events of his life, stating that "svá leið at Oddi, sem upp leið á kveðit" ('as it went for Oddr, so it went in the poem').¹⁰⁸ It has long been considered (and articulated most recently by Clunies Ross) that the majority of the verses of Oddr's *ævikviða* in *Qrvar-Odds saga* ABE are interpolations into an originally much shorter poem; the authenticating *lausavísur* in S may have been "original" to the poem, the rest composed on the basis of the prose narrative.¹⁰⁹ It should be noted, however, that Leslie-Jacobsen has remained open to the possibility that the complete poem, as it stands in ABE, was the original source of the saga, offering possible explanations for its exclusion in S.¹¹⁰ Of course, other Icelandic sagas, including *Egils saga Skallagrímsson*, offer parallels to this phenomenon, in which only a short extract of a longer, known poem is quoted in the oldest redaction of the prosimetrical work, though subsequent redactions quote the poem in its entirety.¹¹¹

Regardless of the age of the verses of Oddr's *ævikviða*, in their quotation at the end of the saga in ABE, presented as Oddr's dying words, the redactor seems more concerned with recapturing the "original" performance context of the poem than with the evidentiary value of individual verses, in opposition to the S redactor. This offers a valuable comparison with the verses of **Víkarsbálkr* quoted in *Gautreks saga*, illustrating the divergent forms that *fornaldarsaga* prosimetrum might take. As noted in Chapter 2, the authenticating *lausavísur* attributed to Starkaðr probably once formed a longer poem, which seems to belong to the *ævikviða* genre, that the saga author has broken up and quoted as evidence in the prose, mimicking the practice of

¹⁰⁷ *Qrvar-Odds saga*, 195, 198-208.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁰⁹ Clunies Ross, introduction to "*Qrvar-Odds saga*," in *SkP* 8, 807-808.

¹¹⁰ Leslie, "Prose Contexts of Eddic Poetry," 400.

¹¹¹ Judy Quinn, "'Ok þetta er upphaf" – First-Stanza Quotation in Old Norse Prosimetrum," *Alvíssmál* 7 (1997), 61-80.

konungasögur authors; the redactor of *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* ABE, however, seems to have preferred the poetry's dramatic function to their authenticating value. It is possible, furthermore, that in quoting the full *ævikviða*, possibly adding to it, the ABE redactor sought to recapture – where S quotes only two verses, and M omits the poetry completely – the practice of ending an oral saga performance with a full poem, as is attested in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*.¹¹² It may be possible, then, to link the (re-)introduction of a long poem to the end of *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* to the same impulse that I have argued characterises the authenticating verse quotations of *Vǫlsunga saga*: namely, the allusion to an older mode of narrative – be it eddic poetry, or oral prosimetrical story-telling – that the written saga was successor to.

Although *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* ABE and *Gautreks saga* take, for the most part, quite different approaches to verse quotation, common ground between them can be found, and also relates to a kind of “transmission history” presented in the sagas. I argued in Chapter 2 that the scene in *Gautreks saga* in which Starkaðr delivers *Víkarsbálkr* functions in part as metatextual corroboration, conferring authority onto the saga by depicting the narrative tradition the saga inherits as originating with Starkaðr himself. Likewise, the accounts of Oddr, Hrókr in *Hálfs saga*, and other *foraldarsaga* heroes delivering poetry that memorialises the events of the saga seems to depict the origins of these narrative traditions, which the written sagas claim to preserve. *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* seems especially preoccupied with the idea of a “transmission history,” for in all of its redactions the preservation and circulation of Oddr's *ævikviða* is accounted for; in ABE, Oddr instructs his companions to memorise (*nema*) his poem, while in S he instructs them to carve it in runes (*rísta*). The latter version of events recalls, of course, a similar scene in *Egils saga*, in which Egill's daughter inscribes his poem *Sonatorrek* on a rune-stick, and in both sagas it is possible that the author, concerned with the transmission of the poetry – from poet to saga, over however many hundreds of years – introduced the motif of the poem's inscription as a guarantee of its authenticity.¹¹³ In *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* S and ABE, Oddr's companions, following his dying wishes, bring news of his death and his

¹¹² *Sturlunga saga*, 1:27; cf. my Introduction.

¹¹³ *Egils saga*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2003), 146.

regards (*kveðja*) to his wife and sons; it would be easy for audiences to imagine that Oddr's *ævikviða* went with them.

Scenes such as those in *Hálfs saga* and *Qrvar-Odds saga* are, of course, heavily “fictionalised,” in that, as O’Donoghue notes, the impromptu composition of poetry – especially as lengthy as these quotations – is quite implausible.¹¹⁴ But these may well have been convincing fictions in their suggestion of a continuity of narrative material, from historical figure to medieval saga. Audiences must have been attuned to the basis of the *fornaldarsögur* on older poems, not only through the explicit usages of verse quotation as authentication, but also through the (presumed) continued oral circulation of the poetry, perhaps with some contextual plain-speech narration; this is necessary for explaining the variance in the amount of poetry recorded in the extant manuscripts of individual *fornaldarsögur*, as well as the variants of the verses themselves. Scenes in which *ævikviður*, and other corroborative verses, are recited in the *fornaldarsögur* serve to anchor the origin of this poetic material – as an historical artefact – in the context of the saga narrative, the life and times of the figure to which it is attributed.

From the above analysis, it is clear that the importance of poetry in historicising the *fornaldarsögur* goes beyond the simple quotation of verses explicitly as authentication, for even the most well-integrated of situational verses nevertheless appears to have had a similar corroborative effect. Indeed, beyond the authenticating verses of *Gautreks saga*, my research has shown that the authenticating/situational paradigm clearly falls short of fully accounting for the function of verse quotation in the *fornaldarsögur*. While this is most evident in *Völsunga saga*, my readings of *Hervarar saga R* and *Qrvar-Odds saga S* also reveal that verse quotations cannot always be neatly categorised, since the poetry therein was apparently understood to represent the direct speech of the heroes of the *forn qld*, and could thus function as direct speech in the prose and as authentication for the narrative. Understanding this, it becomes apparent that the situational verses that corroborate their prose context, common throughout the *fornaldarsögur*, could be an important rhetorical tool in

¹¹⁴ O’Donoghue, *Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 12.

vouching for the reliability of the saga's narration of history. That said, we must recall Hall's observation that *Hervarar saga U* utilises a more "conventional saga style" of verse quotation than its older redactions; the same might also be said of *Qrvar-Odds saga ABE*, which suggests that *fornaldarsaga* prosimetrum became more homogenous over the course of the Middle Ages. Hall's suggestion that the prosimetrum of *Hervarar saga U* resembles more closely that of the *Íslendingasögur* also merits some consideration, and, given that the thirteenth century in Iceland saw the concurrent development of both the *fornaldarsögur* and the *Íslendingasögur*, a comparison between the function of verse quotation in these two genres may prove a productive avenue for future research.

Still, I would maintain that a comparison between the function of verse quotation in the *konungasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* remains an instructive starting point for research into the historiographical nature of the latter genre, not least for the simple reason that, in the *konungasögur*, we have a firm consensus that poetry was integral to their historiographical rhetoric.

5.4: Final Comments

At the outset, I proposed to address in this thesis the extent to which the *fornaldarsögur* functioned as historiography, and how this was signalled to audiences in these texts. From my analysis of *Gautreks saga*, *Völsunga saga*, and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttur*, it emerged that the authors of *fornaldarsögur* engaged with rhetorical practices of contemporaneous history-writing in a variety of ways, foremost among which was their employment of the prosimetrical form. Having argued for the historiographical function of these texts, in my conclusion I have suggested that studying further texts in the corpus along similar lines may contribute significantly to our understanding of them; my preliminary attempt at this indicates that the *fornaldarsögur*, as a genre, were situated in a literary discourse acutely aware of what it meant to write history, and continually tested the limits of representing the past in textual narratives.

Taking the historiographical – and historical – status of poetry in thirteenth-century Iceland as our starting point, the historiographical function of the *fornaldarsögur* comes more easily into focus. It has not been the intention of this thesis to chart a chronological development of the *fornaldarsögur* through the medieval period (much less their post-medieval transmission), nor to make any attempt to account for the heterogeneity of the genre, though it is evident from the present chapter that the earlier composed *fornaldarsögur* seem to exhibit signs of greater influence from the prosimetrum of the *konungasögur* than later examples of the genre. The different redactions of *Hervarar saga* and *Qrvar-Odds saga*, of which only the earlier quote verse explicitly as authentication, make this especially apparent. Furthermore, it may be possible to employ the relative importance of verse quotation in each *fornaldarsaga* as a criterion for subdividing the corpus, as has Guðrún Nordal.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, prosimetrum was clearly regarded – certainly in the thirteenth century, though beyond this as well – as the most authentic mode of narrating the past; even accounting for the “fictive” nature of pseudonymous poetry quoted as a direct speech, corroboration of the prose narrative in the medium of poetry was evidently an important rhetorical strategy in authoritatively representing the *forn qld*.

And while the prosimetrical influence of the *konungasögur* seems to have diminished in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, my analysis of the genealogical structures of the *fornaldarsögur*, and their representations of geography and space, indicates that historiographical writing, and learned literature more broadly, nonetheless influenced those *fornaldarsögur* which quote few verses, or none at all. It is my contention that we should therefore consider the *fornaldarsögur* as a branch of medieval Icelandic historiography, especially in their infancy in the thirteenth century. At the very least, we must consider historiographical writing – along with poetic traditions, oral saga telling, folklore, and Continental romance – as a major stream that fed into the composition of the *fornaldarsögur*, which must be accounted for if we are to properly understand their place in medieval Icelandic literary culture.

¹¹⁵ Nordal, “Poetic Voices,” 145-49.

Abbreviations

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| <i>ANF</i> | <i>Arkiv för nordisk filologi</i> |
| Cleasby/Vigfusson | Cleasby, Richard, and Guðbrandur Vigfússon. <i>An Icelandic English Dictionary</i> . Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957. |
| <i>EHR</i> | <i>English Historical Review</i> |
| <i>EME</i> | <i>Early Medieval Europe</i> |
| <i>FN</i> | <i>Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda</i> . Edited by Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson. 3 vols. Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Forni, 1944. |
| ÍF | Íslensk Fornrit |
| <i>JEGP</i> | <i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i> |
| <i>JMH</i> | <i>Journal of Medieval History</i> |
| <i>LSE</i> | <i>Leeds Studies in English</i> |
| <i>MS</i> | <i>Mediaeval Scandinavia</i> |
| <i>MW</i> | <i>Medieval Worlds</i> |
| <i>MÆ</i> | <i>Medium Ævum</i> |
| <i>NS</i> | <i>Northern Studies</i> |
| <i>QI</i> | <i>Quaestio Insularis</i> |
| <i>Skj</i> | <i>Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning. A: Tekst efter håndskrifterne. B: Rettet tekst</i> . Edited by Finnur Jónsson. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske, 1912-1915. |
| <i>SKP</i> | <i>Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages</i> |
| <i>SS</i> | <i>Scandinavian Studies</i> |

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