JÓHANNA KATRÍN FRIÐRIKSDÓTTIR

IDEOLOGY AND IDENTITY IN LATE MEDIEVAL NORTHWEST ICELAND

A Study of AM 152 fol.[1]

THE GREAT SAGA codex AM 152 fol., one of the most impressive saga manuscripts from the medieval period, was most likely made in Northwest Iceland in the first decades of the sixteenth century by a pair of half-brothers belonging to the rich and powerful Skarðverjar dynasty. Their book must have been known and discussed in élite circles, and its contents were medieval 'best-sellers', a collection of riveting sagas that captured medieval audiences.[2] Only one, *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, is well-known today, while the others are relatively obscure and under-studied texts traditionally classified as *fornaldarsögur* or *riddarasögur*. *Grettis saga* is the first text in the manuscript, and although the saga perhaps seems to have few things in

1 A short version of this article appeared as 'AM 152 fol. Síðasta glæsta sagnahandritið,' in *Góssið hans Árna. Minningar heimsins í íslenskum handritum*, ed. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, 2014), 170–183. I am grateful to Carolyne Larrington and Marianne E. Kalinke for allowing me to read their forthcoming publications in manuscript form, and for their long-standing encouragement and support. I should also wish to thank Emily Lethbridge for many thought-provoking and inspiring discussions about medieval sagas and manuscripts, Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson and Ralph O'Connor for discussions about AM 152 fol. and Dario Bullitta for giving me access to his master's thesis. The research leading to these results has received funding from RANNÍS – the Icelandic Centre for Research, and the People Programme (Marie Curie Actions) of the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007–2013) under REA grant agreement n° 331947.

2 The sagas collected in AM 152 fol. were very popular in the medieval period, judging from the number of vellum manuscripts in which they are preserved. Comments in the margins of *Grettis saga*, probably in a sixteenth-century hand, praise Grettir and express contempt for his enemies, Þorbjǫrn ǫngull and his foster-mother, see Kirsten Hastrup, 'Tracing Tradition – An Anthropological Perspective on *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*,' in *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature. New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, eds. John Lindow et al., The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization, vol. 3 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), 286.

common with many of the other texts copied after it, its literary themes set the tone for the content and concerns of the codex as a whole.

This article follows recent developments in Old Norse-Icelandic studies (and more widely) to employ insights from material philology. Sagas have increasingly been analysed in their manuscript context, i.e. in the material artifacts in which they have come down to us, rather than in isolation, and manuscripts have come to be regarded as organic wholes, so their codicological, palaeographical and socio-historical aspects are integrated with textual analysis.[3] According to this approach, a manuscript's features such as paratext, size and degree of opulence are seen as producing meaning, just as its content does.[4] Thus my points of departure are, first, that there are impulses behind the selection of these particular sagas during the manuscript's production process, and, second, that the manuscript itself adds another layer of meaning to the sagas' content. Not only did the sagas individually appeal to medieval audiences and manuscript patrons, but they were likely seen as somehow belonging together, as some of them

3 See overview and references in Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, 'Expanding Horizons: Recent Trends in Old Norse-Icelandic Manuscript Studies,' *New Medieval Literatures* 14 (2012): 210–212. To name but a few examples of this approach in Old Norse-Icelandic studies, see Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, 'Arctic Garden of Delights: The Purpose of the Book of Reynistaður,' in *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland. Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke*, Studia Islandica, vol. 54, eds. Kirsten Wolf and Johanna Denzin (Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 2008), 279–301; Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, *The Development of Flateyjarbók. Icelandic and the Norwegian Dynastic Crisis of 1389*, The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization, vol. 15 (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2002), and 'Literary, Codicological, and Political Perspectives on Hauksbók,' *Gripla* 19 (2008): 51–76; Emily Lethbridge, 'The Place of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* in Eggertsbók, a Late Medieval Icelandic Saga-Book,' *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, eds. Annette Lassen et al. (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2013), 375–403, and 'Authors and Anonymity, Texts and Their Contexts: The Case of *Eggertsbók*,' in *Modes of Authorship in the Middle Ages*, Papers in Mediaeval Studies, vol. 22, ed. Slavica Rankovic with others (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2012), 343–364; Hans Jacob Orning, 'The Magical Reality of the Late Middle Ages: Exploring the World of the Fornaldarsögur,' *Scandinavian Journal of History* 35 (2010): 3–20, and 'Qrvar-Oddr og senmiddelalderens adelskultur,' in Lassen et al., eds., *The Legendary Sagas*, 291–321; Stefka Georgieva Eriksen, *Writing and Reading in Medieval Manuscript Culture: The Transmission of the Story of Elye in Old French and Old Norse Literary Contexts*, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe, vol. 25 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013).

4 See e.g. Stephen G. Nichols, 'Why Material Philology? Some Thoughts,' *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 116 (1997): 10–30.

are found together in other manuscripts from the same period.[5] What sets AM 152 fol. apart from these, however, is its size and lavishness, and, consequently, the importance ascribed to its contents by its patron(s).

By focussing on a manuscript that can be located in a specific time and mileu, and reading the sagas in the same physical context as their late medieval audiences, we can try to recover what the sagas in their extant manuscript manifestations may have meant for their audiences and patrons, people who considered them important or interesting enough to spend the time, effort and cost to commit them to vellum. Thus, we can ask: what, if anything, unites sagas as disparate as, first, *Grettis saga* and *Þórðar saga hreðu*, primarily set in Northwest Iceland in the eleventh century, second, the stories of Scandinavian *fornaldarsaga* heroes who go on Viking expeditions, and, finally, romances about chivalric knights set in mid- and central Europe, Northern Africa and India? I adopt the view, in line with recent Old Norse-Icelandic scholarship, that all preserved medieval texts, including legendary sagas and romances that previous scholars considered 'decadent' entertainment, foreground contemporary issues and are thus valuable evidence through which historical attitudes can be recovered.[6] Many of these sagas are deftly structured narratives with carefully focalised, intertwined episodes and richly delineated characters, themes and plots. Scholars tended to categorise and evaluate on genre-based criteria, but by analysing together sagas that have traditionally been assigned to three different genres, their common themes rise to the surface. Authors, redactors, commissioners and audiences are likely to have responded to the events around them through the composition and consumption of literary texts, and consequently, manuscript production. These texts and artifacts

5 To name a few late fifteenth-century vellum manuscripts, AM 556 a–b 4to (*Eggertsbók*) contains *Grettis saga*, *Mágus saga* and *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, among others. AM 580 4to and Sth. Perg. 7 4to (ca. 1300–25), originally one manuscript, contain *Mágus saga*, *Flóvents saga* and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* among others. AM 579 4to contains *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* and *Ectors saga*, and AM 570 4to contains *Flóvents saga* and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*.

6 The foundational works that pioneered this approach are Stephen A. Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North. The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-Century Iceland*, trans. Randi C. Eldevik, The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization, vol. 13 (Odense: Odense University Press, 2002); and Jürg Glauser, *Isländische Märchensagas: studien zur Prosaliteratur im spätmittelalterlichen Island*, Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie, vol. 12 (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1983).

both reflect but could also have had the effect of shaping individual and group identities, which were possibly multiple, shifting over time and competing.[7] They reveal particular desires, concerns, aspirations, anxieties and attitudes about the world, social behaviour, gender roles, rulership and other issues. They encapsulate and advance their authors' and sponsors' mentalities and ideologies, and would have given their audiences plenty to think about and discuss. In the following, my goal is to reach a fuller understanding of what meaning the commissioners and audiences of one manuscript, AM 152 fol., might have ascribed to the multivalent world depicted in this collection of sagas committed to vellum within the élite cultural mileu of early-sixteenth-century Northwest Iceland.

Material aspects and historical context

AM 152 fol. is dated to the first quarter of the sixteenth century by Stefán Karlsson.[8] Two scribes copied the text, the first of whom identifies himself in the upper margin of f. 46v as the brother of Björn Þorleifsson (ca. 1480–1548), who lived for the most part in Reykjahólar in Breiðafjörður.[9] The same hand has been found in a number of documents written around 1500 by Þorsteinn Þorleifsson, Björn's illegitimate half-brother.[10] Þorsteinn Þorleifsson wrote all of *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* and the first few leaves of *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, approximately one-fourth of the manuscript text (1r–51v). The second hand is almost certainly that of Jón Þorgilsson, *ráðsmaðr* (steward) in the Hólar bishopric and priest at Melstaður in the first decades of the sixteenth century.[11] For reasons both unknown and

7 For other studies with a similar approach, see e.g. Carl Phelpstead, 'The Sexual Ideology of *Hrólfs saga kraka*,' *Scandinavian Studies* 75 (2003): 1–24; Henric Bagerius, *Mandom och mödom. Sexualitet, homosocialitet och aristokratisk identitet på det senmedeltida Island* (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2009).

8 Stefán Karlsson, 'Ritun Reykjarfjarðarbókar. Excursus: Bókagerð bænda,' *Opuscula* 4, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana, vol. 30 (1970): 138.

9 The marginal note reads: 'Þessa saugu hef*r* skr*i*fath bród*ir* Bjarn*ar* Þorleifsso*nar*'.

10 Stefán Karlsson, 'Ritun Reykjarfjarðarbókar,' 138. Jonna Louis-Jensen has argued persuasively that Þorsteinn was illegitimate, see 'Den yngre del af Flateyjarbók,' *Afmælisrit Jóns Helgasonar. 30. júní 1969* (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1969), 243 fn 17.

11 Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson assisted me in comparing AM 152 fol.'s second hand with that of several documents which Stefán Karlsson believed to have been written by Jón Þorgilsson, whose name is the only one to appear in all of them. We reached the same conclusion as Stefán although there are slight differences in the script that could be

irrecoverable, the second scribe took over the work in chapter six, in the middle of a conversation between Hálfdan and Brana, and he copied the remaining three-fourths of the codex (52r–201v). The entire text is written in *árléttiskrift* (*cursiva antiquior*), a semi-cursive gothic script commonly used throughout the late medieval period in Icelandic saga manuscripts. Chapter rubrics are written in red ink throughout but most are now very faded. The leaves copied by Þorsteinn are adorned with colourful initials, but, with the exception of a dragon on f. 54v (at the beginning of *Flóvents saga*), spaces for initials have been left blank in the second part.

AM 152 fol. is rivalled in the late medieval period only by *Reykjahólabók*, Stockholm Perg. 3 fol. (ca. 1530–40), a manuscript preserving Icelandic translations from Low German of 25 legendaries in the hand of Björn Þorleifsson. These translations have been attributed to Björn or a priest in his service.[12] The two manuscripts are remarkably similar in size and appearance: both are large, thick and handsome volumes written in two columns. AM 152 fol. measures ca. 30 mm x 24 mm, and contains 200 folios and 25 gatherings, with four bifolia to a gathering.[13] *Reykjahólabók* measures ca. 30,5 x 23 cm and contains 168 folios, with some folios missing, in 22 gatherings also with four bifolia each (bar those with missing leaves).[14] The structure and layout of both manuscripts is thus highly regular. Although the second scribe's connection to Björn or his sphere of influence is unclear, and the possibility cannot be excluded that

explained by the scribe writing at different points in his life. However, it is a mystery how Jón came to work on this manuscript and why there are no decorated initials in his text. I thank Guðvarður for his generous help and advice in this matter.

12 Marianne E. Kalinke and Agnete Loth both argue that Björn was the translator and scribe of *Reykjahólabók*, but Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir has recently cast doubts on their attribution, noting that there is no direct evidence that Björn was so educated a man as to have engaged in translating foreign texts. See Marianne E. Kalinke, *The Book of Reykjahólar. The Last of the Great Medieval Legendaries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 78–124; Agnete Loth, introduction to *Reykjahólabók. Islandske helgenlegender*, vol. 1, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ, vol. A.15–16 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1969), xxi–xl; Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, *Vatnsfjörður í Ísafirði. Þættir úr sögu höfuðbóls og kirkjustaðar* (Brekka í Dýrafirði: Vestfirska forlagið, 2012), 205–207.

13 The leaves measure 29,5–30,5 cm, or 30 cm on average, and 23,5–24,5, or 24 cm on average; see AM 152 fol.'s entry on *Handrit.is*, http://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/is/AM02-0152-1-2, accessed June 2, 2013. There is no f. 112, so although the foliation (done in the nineteenth century by Jón Sigurðsson) goes up to 201, there are 200 leaves nevertheless.

14 Vilhelm Gödel, *Katalog öfver Upsala Universitets biblioteks fornisländska och fornnorska handskrifter*, vol. 1 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1892), 10; Loth, *Reykjahólabók*, ix.

both scribes were working for a patron in Skagafjörður or the North of Iceland, it seems unlikely that Þorsteinn would have copied his brother's name into the margin if Björn had had no connection to the manuscript.[15] This marginal note, the material similarity of the two codices and Björn Þorleifsson's known involvement with *Reykjahólabók* rather fuel the theory that the two manuscripts were produced in the same scriptorium, and that Björn was the patron and perhaps (co-)redactor of AM 152 fol.

Björn Þorleifsson belonged to the illustrious Skarðverjar family. He was the son of Þorleifur Björnsson (ca. 1430–1486), and grandson of Björn 'ríki' Þorleifsson (1408–1467) and his wife Ólöf Loptsdóttir (ca. 1410–1479) of Skarð on Skarðsströnd.[16] The Skarðverjar were the wealthiest and most powerful Icelanders in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, owning most of the lands and islands in Breiðafjörður, including lucrative fishing and eiderdown gathering grounds, and they possessed further extensive lands around West and North Iceland. They also held positions of formal power: both Björn *ríki* and his son Þorleifur were *hirðstjórar* (governors), the highest royal office at the time.[17] Many of the fifteenth-century's finest manuscripts, containing a diverse collection of texts both secular and devotional, were produced by the Skarðverjar, so Björn's family had a long-standing tradition of contributing to Iceland's literary culture; if he had a hand in AM 152 fol.'s making, he would presumably have been able to select sagas from a large corpus of narratives that circulated in this area in the late medieval period.[18]

15 There are otherwise no marginalia in Þorsteinn's hand.

16 Björn Þorsteinsson, Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir and Sigurður Líndal, *Enska öldin*, in *Saga Íslands*, vol. 5, ed. Sigurður Líndal (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka bókmenntafélag/Sögufélag, 1990), 106.

17 Páll Eggert Ólason, *Menn og menntir siðaskiptaaldarinnar á Íslandi*, vol. 2 (Reykjavík: Bókaverzlun Guðm. Gamalíelssonar, 1919), 56–117; Arnór Sigurjónsson, *Vestfirðingasaga 1390–1540* (Reykjavík: Leiftur, 1975), see ch. 26 onwards; Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, *Vatnsfjörður í Ísafirði*, 175–207.

18 See further Stefán Karlsson, 'Ritun Reykjafjarðarbókar,' 137–140. *Skíðaríma*, which is composed in West Iceland in the late medieval period and probably connected to Skarð, features several characters from AM 152 fol.'s sagas (e.g. Starkaðr, Víkarr, Hrólfr and Ketill Gautrekssynir and Göngu-Hrólfr). They appear among the many famous heroes from the *fornaldar-* and *riddarasögur* who feast with the Norse gods in Valhöll. See further Björn Karel Þórólfsson. *Rímur fyrir 1600*. Safn Fræðafjelagsins, vol. 9 (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska fræðafjelag, 1934), 388; Sverrir Tómasson, '"Strákligr líz mér Skíði." Skíðaríma – íslenskur föstuleikur?,' *Skírnir* 174 (2007): 305–320.

Material aspects such as the more labour-intensive double column format, decorated initials, and the codex's sheer size and weight – using the skin of 100 animals – strongly suggest that it would have been a status symbol at its time of production and beyond. The contents of AM 152 fol. are unusual for a manuscript of its size; such prestigious codices most often preserve devotional literature, laws or kings' sagas.[19] I surveyed all other medieval manuscript witnesses of these sagas, and they are typically preserved in ordinary manuscripts in quarto single-column format with little or no decoration, although Stockholm Perg. 7 fol., containing a number of *riddarasögur*, is a notable exception, and AM 556 a–b 4to, too, has a number of embellished initials.

As Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson has noted, four of the five oldest manuscripts of *Grettis saga*, including AM 152 fol., can be localised to Northwest Iceland, not surprisingly, since Grettir's family settles in Miðfjörður and the saga is mostly set in this area.[20] Similarly, the action of *Þórðar saga hreðu* principally takes place in Miðfjörður and Skagafjörður (apart from the Norwegian prelude) and would have been of local interest.[21] Other sagas in the manuscript also have connections to the area: Lee Hollander argued that *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* (and perhaps *Gautreks saga*, by extension) might have been composed in the late-thirteenth century at Þingeyrar monastery in Vatnsdalur to 'embellish and glorify' the ancestors of the Vatnsdælir.[22] Grettir's mother Ásdís is said to be descended from this family, and she gives her son an ancestral sword, which, importantly, he uses to behead Glámr. The same names recur; for instance, Ásdís's brother is named

19 Agnete Loth, who edited 15 *riddarasögur* in *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, noted that most medieval manuscripts containing *fornaldar-* and *riddarasögur* were 'workaday' manuscripts; see introduction to *Fornaldarsagas and Late Medieval Romances: AM586 and AM 589 a–f 4to*, Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile, vol. 11 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1977).

20 Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, '"Grettir vondum vættum." Grettir Ásmundarson og vinsældir Grettis sögu,' *Gripla* 11 (2000): 67.

21 Elisabeth Ida Ward, *Nested Narrative. Þórðar saga hreðu and Material Engagement* (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2012), 28.

22 Lee M. Hollander, 'The Gautland Cycle of Sagas,' *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 11 (1912): 212–217. See also Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, 'Absent Mothers and the Sons of Fornjótr: Late-Thirteenth-Century Monarchist Ideology in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*,' *Medieval Scandinavia* 14 (2004): 133–160.

Jökull, just like a prominent character in *Þorsteins saga*. All these pieces of evidence suggest that at least several of the sagas had a particular connection to the Northwest, and thus that the manuscript was compiled partly as an expression of regional identity and aimed at an audience in this area.

It will never be known if or to what degree Björn Þorleifsson and his brother Þorsteinn were involved in choosing the sagas preserved in this manuscript, but it is an appealing possibility. Given the political and economic milieu in which the codex was likely produced, as well as its literary themes (discussed later in this article), it seems productive to think about it not as a haphazard compendium of whatever texts were available to the scribes at the time of production, but rather as the deliberate product of an individual patron and perhaps his associates. As its size and paratextual features suggest, AM 152 fol. is no ordinary manuscript for everyday use, but, rather, a prestigious, élite codex that was probably intended to encode certain ethical values and serve an ideological function. As Elizabeth Ashman Rowe and Hans Jacob Orning have discussed convincingly, the patrons of medieval Icelandic manuscripts were sometimes motivated and influenced by issues such as domestic and international politics and ideological developments, but also their individual subjectivity (determined by gender, class, and other factors).[23] Rowe notes that medieval texts demanded an ethical response from their audiences, and her overall analysis shows that the purpose behind *Flateyjarbók*, the most impressive Icelandic codex from the medieval period, was originally not only to honour the young King Óláfr Hákonarson of Norway with this splendid gift but implicitly to 'encourag[e] the king to follow the example of his revered namesakes', i.e. to be sensitive and responsive to the wishes of Icelanders, and to rule justly and with respect for the law.[24] Following these insights, I suggest that a good deal of thought went into deciding which sagas to include in AM 152 fol., a manuscript that demanded a great amount of materials, expert work and production time, and that it was likely known and perhaps circulated beyond its local place of production and target audience.[25] At the very least,

23 Rowe, *The Development of Flateyjarbók*, 29 and ch. 1 more generally; Orning, 'Qrvar-Oddr og senmiddelalderens adelskultur.'

24 Rowe, *The Development of Flateyjarbók*, 29, 23–24.

25 Nichols and Wenzel, *The Whole Book*, 2.

the selection of sagas bears witness to the specific mentality and literary interests of its commissioner and redactor(s).

The manuscript's provenance after Björn's day further points to its high status: the codex had been acquired no later than 1550 (a few decades after it was copied) by Ari Jónsson, *lögmaðr* and son of bishop Jón Arason, or someone closely connected to him.[26] AM 152 fol. stayed in this influential dynasty for 200 years; among its owners were Magnús Björnsson, also the owner of *Möðruvallabók*, and his daughter Helga.[27] Ultimately the manuscript passed to Helga's grandson, Vigfús Guðbrandsson, who gave it to Árni Magnússon.[28]

The sagas: ideology and literary themes

The sagas and their literary context

AM 152 fol. contains eleven sagas: the *Íslendingasögur Þórðar saga hreðu* and *Grettis saga*; five *fornaldarsögur*: *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* (longer redaction), *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* and *Gautreks saga* (longer redaction); and four *riddarasögur*: *Flóvents saga* (redaction I), *Mágus saga* (longer redaction), *Sigurðar saga þǫgla* (longer redaction) and *Ectors saga*.[29] The sagas were probably composed over a long

26 As Jón Helgason pointed out, a list of sheep thieves jotted down also appears in a document from May 6, 1545, containing a judgment of Ari's concerning these same thieves, see *Handritaspjall* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1958), 74–75; *DI*, 11:403–405. Jón misidentifies the Björn Þorleifsson mentioned in the manuscript's margin as Björn 'ríki' (i.e. the older Björn), but his observations are otherwise reliable.

27 Jón Helgason, *Handritaspjall*, 74–75. On women's role in the distribution of AM 152 fol., see Susanne Miriam Arthur, 'The Importance of Marital and Maternal Ties in the Distribution of Icelandic Manuscripts from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century,' *Gripla* 23 (2012): 216–219.

28 Margrét Eggertsdóttir, 'Handritamiðstöðin í Skálholti,' *Menntun og menning í Skálholtsstifti 1620–1730*, Glíman, sérrit, vol. 1, ed. Kristinn Ólason (Skálholt: Grettisakademían, 2010), 86–87.

29 The *fornaldarsögur* discussed in this article are all published in C. C. Rafn's *Fornaldarsögur Nordrlanda* (1829–30) and reprinted in Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson's edition (1943–44). Some of these sagas had been previously published, and others have been edited separately. *Gautreks saga* was edited in two versions by Wilhelm Ranisch (1900), and the shorter version of *Hrólfs saga* was published by Ferdinand Detter in 1891. *Grettis saga* (1936) and *Þórðar saga hreðu* (1959) are published in the Íslenzk fornrit series by Guðni Jónsson and Jóhannes Halldórsson respectively. *Ectors saga* and *Sigurðar saga þǫgla*

period: *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar, Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, *Gautreks saga*, *Flóvents saga* and *Mágus saga* may be from before 1300, but others may be up to 200 years younger.[30] A lively debate about the sources, authorship and dating of *Grettis saga* has been ongoing since the nineteenth century and in the last two decades, several scholars have argued persuasively that the saga was composed in the fifteenth century.[31] Conversely, *Ectors saga*, *Sigurðar saga þǫgla*, *Þórðar saga hreðu* and *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra* (as

are published in Loth's *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances* (1962–63). *Mágus saga* was published in Gunnlaugur Þórðarson's edition (1858) and *Flóvents saga* (as *Flóvents saga I*) was printed by Gustav Cederschiöld in *Acta Universitatis Lundensis* (1877–78), and reprinted in *Fornsögur Suðrlanda* in 1884. All of these editions except *Grettis saga*, *Þórðar saga hreðu* and *Flóvents saga* use AM 152 fol. as their base text; in the following, quotations from those sagas are from the manuscript text of AM 152 fol. with supplementary references to the corresponding passage in the printed editions.

30 While many scholars consider *Gautreks saga* to be composed in the thirteenth century, the first extant manuscript of its shorter redaction (without *Víkarrs þáttr*) appears in ca. 1400; the longer redaction first appears in AM 152 fol. For an overview of manuscripts, redactions and editions of *Gautreks saga*, see Michael Chesnutt, 'The Content and Meaning of *Gjafa-Refs saga*,' in *Fornaldarsagaerne. Myter og virkelighed. Studier i de oldislandske fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, ed. Agneta Ney, et al. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2009), 93–106. For a recent analysis of *Gautreks saga* in a late-thirteenth-century context, see Kevin Wanner, 'Adjusting Judgements of *Gauta þáttr*'s Forest Family,' *Scandinavian Studies* 80 (2008): 375–406. *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*'s oldest manuscript, AM 567 XIV β 4to is dated to ca. 1300, see *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog. Registre* (Copenhagen: Den Arnamagnæanske kommission, 1989), 269–70. Rowe, building on arguments made by Hollander, suggests that *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* might have been composed in the 1290s, and *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* in the 1280s; see 'Absent Mothers,' 151–152; however, see discussion about the problems of the idea of medieval authorship vis-à-vis *Þorsteins saga* in Lethbridge, 'The Place of *Þorsteins saga*,' 397–398. *Mágus saga*'s and *Flóvents saga*'s older redactions are in AM 580 4to, dated to the early fourteenth century. Both are Norwegian or Icelandic translations of foreign *chansons de geste* from before or around 1300 but they differ significantly from foreign versions, see Marianne E. Kalinke, 'The Importation of *chansons de geste* in the North,' chapter in a projected monograph about translated *riddarasögur*.

31 See overview and discussion in Kate Heslop, '*Grettisfærsla*: The Handing On of Grettir,' *Saga-Book* 30 (2006): 76–78, and 'Grettir in Ísafjörður: *Grettisfærsla* and *Grettis saga*,' in *Creating the Medieval Saga. Versions, Variability and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Saga Literature*, eds. Judy Quinn and Emily Lethbridge, The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization, vol. 18 (Odense: University of Southern Denmark Press, 2010), 221–222; see also Örnólfur Thorsson, 'Grettir sterki og Sturla lögmaður,' in *Samtíðarsögur. The Contemporary Sagas. Níunda alþjóðlega fornsagnaþingið. Ninth International Saga Conference, Akureyri 31.7.–6.8.1994. Forprent. Preprints*, vol. 2 (Akureyri: [n.p.], 1994), 918–919. Although narratives about Grettir were probably told through the centuries in Iceland, it seems reasonable to conclude that there is no evidence for the existence of the preserved saga earlier than the fifteenth century.

well as the two other romances) have until very recently received scant scholarly attention, and there is little concrete evidence to date their composition more precisely than to the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries.[32] Discussion about authorship and dating is often stimulating and can illuminate the cultural and literary milieu out of which texts emerged, but the absence of medieval manuscript witnesses, and the fluidity of medieval texts, can, in many cases, present further challenges. In medieval Iceland, literary texts were frequently adapted and rewritten to fulfill the tastes and needs of different redactors and audiences.[33] Several of the sagas in AM 152 fol. are preserved in their longer redactions, and, in many cases, these versions represent the first extant text. These longer redactions have been reworked from their shorter versions, showing significant variation at a textual, episodic, and even ideological level; they are prime examples of the regenerative process that literary texts underwent in the late medieval period.[34]

Like many other late medieval manuscripts, AM 152 fol. contains sagas from several genres, which, however, derive from the same literary tradi-

32 Older scholars' dating of sagas to periods much earlier than their first extant manuscript witnesses using stylistic evidence is often based on circular arguments that do not stand up to scrutiny, and I will thus not rely on these. For general bibliography of the indigenous romances, including manuscripts, see Marianne E. Kalinke and P. M. Mitchell, *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*, Islandica, vol. 44 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); note that AM 152 fol. is misdated to the fifteenth century. *Ectors saga*'s oldest manuscripts are from 1400–1500, while *Sigurðar saga þǫgla*'s short redaction is found in AM 596 4to, dated to 1350–1400. *Þórðar saga hreðu* has a complicated preservation history and its redactions are very unlike each other, but the AM 152 fol. redaction's oldest witness is AM 551 d β 4to (ca. 1400); see introduction to *Þórðar saga hreðu*, in *Kjalnesinga saga*, ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson, Íslenzk fornrit, vol. 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka bókmenntafélag, 1959), lvi.

33 *Qrvar-Odds saga* is extant in three medieval redactions and has been a frequent subject of discussion about textual variation and literary culture in the medieval period, see e.g. Stephen A. Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991), 109–113; Orning, 'Qrvar-Oddr og senmiddelalderens,' 291–321.

34 *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*'s longer version first appears in a fragment from ca. 1400; at some point in the fourteenth century, the saga was lengthened and reworked from a slightly different ideological point of view, as I will discuss in a forthcoming article. For discussion about *Flóvents saga*'s two redactions, see introduction to *Fornsögur Sudrlanda. Magus saga jarls, Konraðs saga, Bærings saga, Flovents saga, Bevers saga*, ed. Gustaf Cederschiöld (Lund: Berlings, 1884), cxciii–ccxv, and for *Sigurðar saga þǫgla*'s redactions, see introduction to *Sigurðar saga þǫgla. The Shorter Redaction. Edited from AM 596 4to*, ed. M.J. Driscoll (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1992), lxxxi–cxxxiii.

tion.[35] As Marianne E. Kalinke and Torfi Tulinius have noted, the generic instability of late medieval sagas, i.e. *fornaldarsögur, riddarasögur* and late *Íslendingasögur* such as *Víglundar saga*, entails that motifs and narrative structures are found across traditional genre boundaries.[36] For example, female characters with maiden-king and/or shield-maiden type attributes appear in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar, Sigurðar saga þǫgla* and *Mágus saga*, while encounters with trolls in *Grettis saga* resemble those in *Þorsteins saga* and others.[37] Bridal-quests – a prominent narrative paradigm in late medieval sagas – form the underlying narrative structures in several texts (or episodes). Moreover, *Flóvents saga* is overtly religious in tone: its main characters frequently pause to pray and ask God to bless them, and the narrator regularly interjects moralising comments. This is a jarring rhetoric when regarded against the usual style of *riddarasögur*, but perhaps less so for an audience that would likely also have consumed the legendaries of *Reykjahólabók*, some of which follow a bridal-quest paradigm, and heard saints' lives and didactic *exempla* in church.[38] Thus, although sagas traditionally ascribed to differing literary genres were often separated in

35 For example, there are similarities between AM 152 fol. and AM 556 a–b 4to (*Eggertsbók*) also likely produced in Northwest Iceland: both preserve *Grettis saga*, *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* and *Mágus saga* among others. For detailed discussion about *Eggertsbók*, see Lethbridge, 'The Place of *Þorsteins saga*,' 375–403; Lethbridge, 'Authors and Anonymity,' 343–364.

36 See e.g. Marianne E. Kalinke, 'Textual Instability, Generic Hybridity, and the Development of Some *Fornaldarsögur*,' in Lassen et al., eds., *The Legendary Sagas*, 201–227; *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*, Islandica, vol. 46 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); 'Víglundar saga: An Icelandic Bridal-Quest Romance,' *Skáldskaparmál* 3 (1994): 119–43; *Reykjahólabók*, ch. 7. See also Torfi H. Tulinius, 'Kynjasögur úr fortíð og framandi löndum,' in *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, vol.2, ed. Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2006), 167–168 and 218–244.

37 For discussion about the maiden-king figure, see Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, 'From Heroic Legend to 'Medieval Screwball Comedy'? The Development and Interpretation of the *meykongr* Motif,' in Lassen et al., eds., *The Legendary Sagas*, 229–49.

38 Marianne E. Kalinke, 'Marital Consent in the Legend of Henry and Cunegund,' in *Sanctity in the North. Saints, Lives, and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Thomas A. DuBois (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 310. *Mírmanns saga*, a *riddarasaga* with hagiographical features, and *Clári saga*, essentially an *exemplum*, furnish good examples of the generic crossovers between romance and Christian material; for discussion, see Sverrir Tómasson, '*Mírmanns saga*: The First Old Norse-Icelandic Hagiographical Romance?,' in *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland. Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke*, Islandica, vol. 54, ed. Kirsten Wolf and Johanna Denzin (Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 2008), 319–335.

medieval codices, perhaps suggesting some evidence of a medieval idea of genre categories similar to those used in modern scholarship, the collection of texts preserved in AM 152 fol. and their intertextual nature opens up questions about how critical these boundaries actually were in the minds of medieval redactors, patrons and audiences.[39]

Ideology

These sagas, especially those set outside of Iceland, can broadly be seen as constructing and naturalising a monarchist ideology, a social order characterised by a strong monarch and loyal followers who harbour no ambitions to challenge or usurp his power; at the end of the saga, these companions are rewarded with royal offices or sub-kingdoms, appropriate brides, or both.[40] King Njörvi of *Þorsteins saga* even makes his *jarl*, Víkingr, swear an oath that he will never aspire to rise higher, stating that they are 'til bornir' [born for] their positions.[41] Foreign, heathen and/or simply evil kings do not enjoy the respect given to allied rulers, and the protagonists often expand their realm and influence at their expense. Upwards mobility is possible, mainly by marrying 'up', e.g. princesses from richer and more powerful kingdoms, an idea that, as Rowe discusses, is imported from feudal ideology, where younger sons who did not inherit their fathers found themselves at a loose end.[42] Wooing noble ladies is a process fraught with anxieties about rejection and humiliation, as the maiden-king narratives, prominent in this manuscript, convey.[43] Perhaps the most complicated representation of power relations between classes is in *Gautreks saga*: Refr rises from farmer's son and *kolbítr* to a *jarl*, marrying a king's daughter by his ingenious navigation – both on the sea and within the social sphere –

39 For an introduction to the broad spectrum of views about genre in relation to *fornaldar-* and *riddarasögur*, a detailed discussion of which would be beyond the scope of this article, see e.g. 'Interrogating Genre in the *fornaldarsögur*: A Roundtable Discussion,' *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 2 (2006): 275–296; Massimiliano Bampi, 'The Development of the *Fornaldarsögur* as a Genre. A Polysystemic Approach,' in Lassen et al., eds., *The Legendary Sagas*, 185–199.

40 Rowe, 'Absent Mothers,' 154; Ármann Jakobsson, '*Le roi chevalier*. The Royal Ideology and Genre of *Hrólfs saga kraka*,' *Scandinavian Studies* 71 (1999): 152–163; Bagerius, *Mandom och mödom*, 89.

41 *Þorsteins saga*, 199.

42 Rowe, 'Absent Mothers,' 133–134.

43 See Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature. Bodies, Words and Power*, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 117–119.

between the kings of Northern Europe. Many scholars have considered the saga to advance a staunch pro-monarchist ideology, but as Kevin Wanner has shown, the narrative is ambivalent towards interaction with kings, portraying King Gauti in the *Gauta þáttr* episode as too large for his surroundings and boldly, perhaps overly so, seizing hospitality not offered; in Wanner's view, the *þáttr* expresses genuine Icelandic concerns about royal over-taxation.[44] The saga's tensions are primarily focussed on the opportunities and dangers of 'maritime commerce': Refr's mobility and consequent material and social gain is juxtaposed with the isolation and self-perceived destitution of *Gauta þáttr*'s forest family, another historically-attested anxiety for Icelanders; the threat that enterprising people like Refr can pose to kings is ultimately downplayed by attributing noble ancestry to him, nor does this part of the saga seem to be unequivocally on the side of royalty.[45] Thus, seen in a late-fifteenth-/early-sixteenth-century context, the sagas more specifically seem to adopt a *stórbændur* (landowners) subject position and display an interest in commerce, a point to which I will return.

Like several other of the saga heroes, Grettir has a frustrated relationship with his father in his youth, and *Hálfdanar saga* and *Flóvents saga* also centre on foolish teenagers who make one blunder after another; John McKinnell has argued that the former is a narrative that engages with adolescent male fantasies about superior ability and sexual relationships, allowing the young protagonist to make mistakes, but, ultimately, he learns to function as a responsible adult.[46] Perhaps some of the manuscript's intended audience were young men: *Ectors saga*'s scribe gives Icelandic names for seven cart drivers and *hesta strakar* 'horse boys' among Ector's army, presumably those of people known to him, and this could be a humorous nod to boys and/or men in the audience.[47] The perspectives and pursuits of most of the sagas' protagonists – Viking or chivalric adventures, as-

44 Wanner, 'Adjusting Judgements,' 392–393.

45 Wanner, 'Adjusting Judgements,' 388.

46 John McKinnell, 'The Fantasy Giantess. Brana in *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*,' in Ney et al., eds., *Fornaldarsagaerne. Myter og virkelighed*, 201–222.

47 *Ectors saga*, in *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, vol. 1, ed. Agnete Loth, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ, series B, vol. 20 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962), 171; see also Marianne E. Kalinke, '*Ectors saga:* An Arthurian Pastiche in Classical Guise,' *Arthuriana* 22 (2012): 64–90. The names are Jón busi, Höskuldr Tálmason, Jón Andrésson, Þorjörn fetill, Eiríkr baðkall, Magnús skáldi and Sigurðr kóngr, and they do not appear in *Ectors saga*'s other medieval manuscripts.

sorted challenges to prove their mettle and bridal-quests, interspersed with feasting – are upper-class, but the realities of life in a subarctic climate demand that those who wish to emulate these characters adjust their expectations: by Grettir's time, a life of raiding and fighting is not a viable option. As Russell Poole has noted, *Grettis saga*'s presentation of Grettir's laziness alternating with impressive feats, his stealing, and his harrassment of farmers, suggest some ambivalence about the role of upper-class men and their lack of participation in the everyday drudgery of Icelandic agrarian life.[48] On this score, Grettir stands in opposition to his father Ásmundr and his brother Atli, who, like *Þórðar saga hreðu*'s protagonist, make themselves useful members of the community. Þórðr, a late settler in Iceland (like Grettir's ancestors), is an 'umsyslu m*a*ð*r* m*i*cill *ok* hin*n* mesti þiod smidr' [an industrious man and master craftsman] whose carpentry skills are in strong demand; thus there are positive, aspirational images of upper-class men to be found here.[49]

Reading the eleven sagas of AM 152 fol. in close succession has the effect that the sagas' common features – plot elements and motifs, recurrent characterisations, themes and values – rise past their external features and to the surface. These are explored, first, through images of brothers and their opponents, and, second, encounters between human and monstrous characters. The analysis presented in the following is by no means exhaustive, and indeed, the sagas – individual works that they are – can never be made entirely to overlap ideologically and ethically, or to cohere with each other in every respect; there will always be inherent contradictions in the type of analysis presented here. However, by teasing out these common themes, and reading them against the manuscript's historical context, I aim to show that there are likely impulses behind the selection of these particular sagas which shed some light on the identity and ideology of its possible patron and his community.

48 Poole, 'Myth, Psychology,' 11–12; see also Carolyne Larrington, 'Awkward Adolescents: Male Maturation in Norse Literature,' in *Youth and Age in the Medieval North*, ed. Shannon Lewis-Simpson, The Northern World (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 154.

49 F. 89v; *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 172. According to the saga, Þórðr builds a ferry in Miðfjörðr and several living quarters, and since he 'vard skiott audig*r* madr af smijdum sijnum' [soon became a rich man from his carpentry], he seems to have worked as a carpenter; f. 97v, *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 222.

Fraternal bonds and virtues

Homosocial bonds are important in medieval Icelandic texts and the sagas in AM 152 fol. feature many relationships between men where loyalties and political allegiances are forged and maintained through family, marriage or friendship ties. Henric Bagerius has shown how *fornaldarsögur* and indigenous *riddarasögur* contributed to a discourse in which a new model for aristocratic masculinity, influenced by ideas from chivalric literature and monarchical ideology, was reimagined.[50] Male characters of equal or similar social standing form strong ties of mutual loyalty and support – often after one of them defeats another in a sea battle or single combat – and help each other seek and win noble brides and complete other quests.[51] To take one example, *Ectors saga* relates a succession of *aventures* or fame-increasing exploits undertaken by Ector, prince of Troy, and six princes who offer themselves for his service after a tournament in which Ector unsaddles all of them.

Many of the sagas in this collection not only prominently feature male companions who are friends, but, more specifically, sets of brothers. One (or more) brother, usually the younger, is presented as physically outstanding, popular and psychologically well-adjusted, if uncommonly tenacious when it comes to avenging insults, while the older brother(s) is strong and able but somehow lacking in mental attributes, e.g. impetuous, rash or arrogant.[52] *Mágus saga*'s brothers furnish a representative example: Vígvarðr, the oldest, is described as 'mikill ok sterkr; skapbráðr ... svo at hann sást ekki fyrir, hvat hann hafðist at, þegar hann var reiðr; hann var svartr á hárslit, breiðleitr ok rauðleitr, ok hinn harðmannligasti' [tall and strong, hot-tempered so that he had no control over himself when he became angry; he had black hair, a broad and ruddy face, and he looked war-

50 Bagerius, *Mandom och mödom*, ch. 5.

51 Because of their subject matter and narrative structure, Bagerius includes *fornaldarsögur* such as *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, *Hrólfs saga kraka* and *Hjálmþérs saga ok Ölvis* in his analysis.

52 This pattern is the opposite of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* and *Brennu-Njáls saga*'s representation of brothers: as Carolyne Larrington notes, '[t]eenage Egill's behaviour is tiresomely attention-seeking in a mode typical of younger siblings', while his older brother Þórólfr exhibits responsibility and self-control, and the 'domineering' Skarphéðinn's arrogance, too, is characteristic of an eldest brother; see *Brothers and Sisters in Medieval European Literature*, York Medieval Texts (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, forthcoming 2015), ch. 2.

like], while Rögnvaldr is 'manna ... fríðastr sýnum, vitr ok vinsæll, góð[g] jarn ok forsjáll, hverjum manni líkaði vel við hann ... þat var mælt at hann kynni framar íþróttir, enn konungr' [the most handsome of men, wise and beloved, kind and foresightful, and everyone liked him ... it was said that he was better at manly skills than the king].[53] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* and *Þorsteins saga*'s brothers are similarly described, while variation on the theme is found in *Sigurðar saga þǫgla*, featuring three brothers: Hálfdan, an unwise hothead, Vilhjálmr, popular, generous, athletic and wise of counsel, and Sigurðr, who has *kolbítr* characteristics in his youth but ends up surpassing both his brothers.[54] The superior qualities bestowed on the younger brother seem to compensate for his inferior position according to the rule of primogeniture and the importance of the first-born, often leading to a sibling dynamic filled with tension and rivalry if not processed.[55]

The older brother becomes involved in disputes or dangerous situations that not only pose a threat to his own life but also that of others, generating (some of) the saga's plot; this tendency is not just a question of a flawed temperament but signs of a failure to learn successfully to navigate class and political tensions.[56] It is up to the younger brother to bail him out of difficulties, sometimes against his will and better judgement. In *Þorsteins saga* and *Mágus saga*, parallel situations arise where Þórir and Vígvarðr, provoked by their higher-ranking opponents, commit murder after ice hockey and chess matches, respectively.[57] This leads to feuding and disaster for the entire family; the killer's brothers (and sometimes father) must defend him and resolve the situation, sometimes with the result of further

53 *Bragða-Mágus saga með tilheyrandi þáttum. Skrifuð upp eptir gömlum handritum*, ed. Gunnlaugur Þórðarsson (Copenhagen: Páll Sveinsson, 1858), 36 (hereafter *Mágus saga*); 'godgiarn' in ms.

54 *Sigurðar saga þǫgla*, in *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, vol. 2, ed. Agnete Loth, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ, vol. B.21 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963), 99. The brothers Ásmundr and Hálfdan of *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra* have traces of this binary: the younger Hálfdan is said to be the more promising of the two brothers; see *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, in *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, vol. 3, ed. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Forni, 1944), 323. For taciturn, silent, unpromising *kolbítr* types in AM 152 fol., consider also Grettir, Göngu-Hrólfr, and Starkaðr and Refr in *Gautreks saga*.

55 Michael Jackson, 'Ambivalence and the Last-Born. Birth-Order Position in Convention and Myth,' *Man* new series 13 (1978): 341–361; for further discussion, see Larrington, *Brothers and Sisters*, ch. 2.

56 Larrington, 'Awkward Adolescents,' 159.

57 *Þorsteins saga*, 204, *Mágus saga*, 45.

loss of life. As Emily Lethbridge points out, Þórir's father Víkingr, like Ámundi, Vígvarðr's father in *Mágus saga*, has to choose between his bonds with a sworn-brother/lord or blood relatives.[58]

The superior younger brother sees the risk that his sibling poses and sometimes shows unwillingness to come to his aid; as the eponymous protagonist of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* dryly observes about Ketill, who has returned from a failed bridal-quest to Garðaríki: 'Ekki er hægt at koma ráðum við slíka menn við ákafa hans ok framgirni. Er nú vel, at hann gjaldi einræðis sjálfs sín, þar sem hann vildi ekki með várri forsjá fara' [it is an impossible task to talk sense into a man like him, because of his intensity and competitiveness. It is fitting that he suffer for his obstinancy since he did not show any regard for our guidance], suggesting that an older brother should seek and accept his younger brother's counsel before undertaking such missions.[59] Hrólfr's wife Þornbjörg dismisses his grumbling, baldly stating that there is no option but to support one's brother: '[hon] kvað þetta vera nauðsynja ferð at veita bróður sínum fullting' [she said helping one's brother was a really pressing business].[60] Fraternal bonds are, after all, mutual, and as Ketill's assistance to Hrólfr in the previous episode, the less excellent brother usually gives support as well as receiving it. Carolyne Larrington notes that in *Sturlunga saga*, 'fraternal norms of solidarity are maintained when all other social bonds come under strain' and the same seems to go in these sagas: *Grettis saga*'s famous proverb 'ber e*r* huer a̔ bakinu nema sier brodr e*igi*' [bare is every man's back unless he has a brother] crystallises the importance placed on loyalty between brothers.[61] As Russell Poole has noted, Grettir mostly avoids homosocial bonds, but his three brothers, Atli, Illugi and Þorsteinn drómundr – all versions of the

58 Lethbridge, 'The Place of *Þorsteins saga*,' 385.

59 *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, in *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, vol. 3, eds. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Forni, 1944), 93.

60 *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, 93; *Hrolf Gautreksson*, 80. Later in the saga, when Hrólfr's sworn-brother Ásmundr requires his help to win an Irish princess with a dangerous and hostile father, Þornbjörg shames Hrólfr into upholding his bonds, reminding her husband that Ásmundr had previously accompanied Hrólfr himself on his own dangerous bridal-quest and bravely fought by his side; *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, 114. For further discussion about women encouraging loyalty in *Hrólfs saga* (and elsewhere), see Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, 34–38.

61 F. 44r; *Grettis saga*, 260; Larrington, *Brothers and Sisters*, ch. 2.

'younger brother' type – are central in his life.[62] Atli is popular, friendly, industrious, foresightful and sensible; a successful farmer, he is the personification of patience and moderation, and he (unsuccessfully) tries to influence Grettir to that effect, encouraging him to be calm and prudent during a horse fight.[63] Atli becomes involved in a dispute with the unjust Þorbjǫrn ǫxnamegin and dies heroically at his hands, and he is avenged by Grettir, who in turn is avenged by Þorsteinn drómundr in Miklagarðr, as predicted by Þorsteinn.[64] Illugi, too, is unflinchingly loyal, accompanying his outlawed brother to Drangey and helping him during his last stand against Þorbjǫrn ǫngull, following Grettir in death rather than foreswearing vengeance for him; before dying, Illugi delivers a scathing speech in which he reproaches Þorbjǫrn for using magic to conquer Grettir.[65] Although Grettir proves to be unable to function in human society, his unbreakable bonds with his brothers and the loyalty they show to each other speak to the fundamental importance bestowed on brotherly bonds encoded in these sagas.

Wisdom, foresight, moderation, loyalty and prudence are juxtaposed against hotheadedness, impulsiveness, impetuousness and lack of responsibility and self-control, personified in pairs of brothers.[66] Thus physical and mental aptitude do not entail success if one's disposition and behaviour is bad, encapsulated in *Grettis saga*'s proverb 'sijtt e*r* hvort giæfa edr giorfeleikr' [luck and ability are two different things].[67] The line is spoken by Jökull Bárðarson, Grettir's maternal uncle, who is 'mikell mad*r ok* sterkur *ok* hin*n* meste ofsa m*að*r *ok* mjog odæll *ok* mikel hæf*r*' [a tall man and strong and a violent man and very wild and distinguished], a description that clearly aligns him with the 'older brother' type in the paradigm.[68] As

62 Poole, 'Myth, Psychology,' 12–13.

63 F. 17v; *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, Íslenzk fornrit, vol. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1936), 99.

64 F. 24r; *Grettis saga*, 138.

65 F. 44r, *Grettis saga*, 263.

66 For discussion about some of these virtues in kings' sagas and saga literature more generally, see e.g. Ármann Jakobsson, *Í leit að konungi. Konungsmynd íslenskra konungasagna* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 1997), 222–239.

67 F. 20v; *Grettis saga*, 117. The line is spoken at a turning point in the saga, just before Grettir goes to Forsæludalr to fight Glámr. Russell Poole notes the resemblance between the two relatives, see 'Myth, Psychology,' 7.

68 F. 20v; *Grettis saga*, 117.

an older man, he could be seen as recognising his own faults in his nephew and wanting to prevent him from repeating his uncle's mistakes. In fact, shortly before their encounter, Grettir is explicitly labelled an *ójafnaðarmaðr* by Barði, who witnesses his mistreatment of Auðunn, a benign and hard-working local farmer to whom Grettir had lost in another ice hockey match.[69] These two encounters take place in the period leading up to the fight with Glámr, when the narrator comments that Grettir's growing *ofsi* 'arrogance' was rendering him increasingly marginal.[70]

The heroes (with or without their brothers) must also deal with opponents who exhibit the same characteristics. The sagas consistently portray the heroes' foes as *ójafnaðarmenn*, i.e. men who are unjust, ruthless, arrogant, immoderate, relentless, irrational, overbearing, and in many cases deceitful. *Grettis saga*'s Þorbjǫrn ǫngull famously pursues Grettir for several years and finally resorts to enlisting his foster-mother and her malevolent magic to conquer him, an action which is universally condemned at the next *alþingi*. His namesake, Þorbjǫrn ǫxnamegin, repeatedly provokes Atli in a dispute initiated and perpetuated by the former, and he breaks the settlement that had been arranged between them, killing Atli on his doorstep; the narrator comments with typical understatement that 'w*ar* þorb*iorn* lijtt þockadr af þessu v*er*ke' [Þorbjǫrn was not much liked for this deed].[71] In one of the least epic saga of the *Íslendingasögur*, *Þórðar saga*'s eponymous hero must also deal with a villain who hounds him relentlessly with little justification or sense of proportion. After Þórðr has killed Ormr, an unsavoury character described as strong, skilled at fighting, competitive and 'fullur oiafnadar*r*' [full of vehemence], Ormr's uncle Özurr goes on a mission to avenge his nephew; the family resemblance is unmistakable for he is described as a: 'uitdeildar m*adr ok* e*ck*j u*ar* h*ann* uinsæll mi*oc* mei*re ok* sterk*a*re en*n* flest*er* men*n* ot*rur ok* un*nder*hyggiu full*r*' [a quarrelsome man and he was not very popular, taller and stronger than most men, disloyal

69 F. 17r; *Grettis saga*, 97. Torfi H. Tulinius argues that *Grettis saga*'s author uses Grettir's encounters with the supernatural, and not his personality traits, to explain his fate, but the fact that other characters comment on his flaws suggest that there are more factors at work; 'Framliðnir feður. Um forneskju og frásagnarlist í Eyrbyggju, Eglu og Grettlu,' in *Heiðin minni. Greinar um fornar bókmenntir*, ed. Haraldur Bessason and Baldur Hafstað (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, háskólaforlag Máls og menningar, 1999), 293.

70 F. 16v; *Grettis saga*, 95.

71 F. 25v; *Grettis saga*, 146.

and deceitful].[72] Unfortunately for the hapless Özurr, Þórðr's fighting prowess is better than his, and despite Özurr's many attempts on his life, Þórðr always manages to escape alive, if gravely wounded. The situation is all the stranger since Ormr was the brother of Sigríðr's betrothed, Ásbjörn, and he pursues her and threatens to rape her despite – or perhaps *because* – he is fully aware of her betrothal to his brother. In the wider context of the manuscript, it seems fundamental that he displays such an utter disregard for brotherly bonds. The saga's depiction of Ormr's coveting of his brother's woman identifies the destructive sexual jealousy and rivalry between brothers when sibling trauma, 'the fear of substitution or of failing to differentiate', has not been successfully worked through, while the success of fraternal relationships between the heroes and their brothers rests partly on the lack of competition, i.e. choosing separate paths in life (e.g. Grettir and his brothers), finding separate kingdoms to rule (e.g. Hrólfr and Ketill) and not competing for the same women.[73]

Another difficult opponent is *Mágus saga*'s King Hlöðvir, a conceited tyrant whom his people serve 'með ótta ok aga, meir enn með ástúð eðr elsku' [for fear and awe, rather than for affection or love].[74] He is also a fool, frequently mistreating his shrewd, strong-willed wife Ermenga, with whom he has a tumultuous relationship. Hlöðvir sets Ermenga several seemingly impossible challenges, the failure of which he declares will result in severe punishment, but with the help of her brother, Hrólfr, she manages to outmanoeuvre him, and they come to a *modus vivendi* in their marriage. The king does not learn from his defeats – he had already lost a chess match to Hrólfr as a result of Ermenga's challenges – and in a hungover and enraged state of mind, he challenges Rögnvaldr, the son of a *jarl* (mentioned previously), to a game of chess in order to prove his superior ability. The king loses ignominiously to Rögnvaldr, and reacts just as immoderately as expected, striking his opponent in the face with a pouch so that his nose bleeds. Rögnvaldr's brother Vígvarðr retaliates by killing the king, leading to a prolonged feud with the malevolent, deceitful *jarl* Ubbi,

72 F. 91v; *Þórðar saga*, 185. The Íslenzk fornrit text reads 'ódældarmaðr' instead of 'uitdeildar madr', a word not found in any of the dictionaries I consulted, but given the context and Özurr's character, its most likely meaning is the noun derived from 'deila við e-n', i.e. that the prefix is 'við-', not 'vit-'. I thank Merrill Kaplan for this suggestion.

73 Larrington, *Brothers and Sisters*, ch. 4.

74 *Mágus saga*, 1.

the king's chief supporter, in which their crafty, magic-wielding brother-in-law Mágus plays an important role. The narrator comments that the cunning Ubbi uses his wisdom to do evil, which garners him no popularity among the people, and he proves an indefatigable adversary in his dogged mission to destroy Rögnvaldr and his brothers.[75] They must stick together and persevere through perilous battles and obstacles, but in the end, owing to Mágus's disguises and magic, and Rögnvaldr's excellence, they finally manage to conquer Ubbi.

Göngu-Hrólfs saga presents Hrólfr and his erstwhile companion, Vilhjálmr, a man who boasts at length about his skills and accomplishments, as yet another pair of polar opposites. Hrólfr is super-humanly strong but although he notes that Vilhjálmr has deceitful eyes, Hrólfr is too trusting, a quality that Vilhjálmr manipulates to his advantage, forcing Hrólfr into a contract that involves Vilhjálmr's taking credit for all of the latter's feats.[76] After adventures in Garðaríki, Vilhjálmr puts a sleeping-thorn into Hrólfr's ear and then cuts off his legs, and the legless Hrólfr must get back to Denmark and expose his adversary, a task he completes against all odds, thanks to his perseverance, his horse Dúlcifal and the healing magic of Möndull, a dwarf. Vilhjálmr, who turns out to be a lowly goat-farmer's son with high ambitions, eventually gets his comeuppance, and the narrator condemns him several times, commenting on his execution by hanging that 'var þess ván, at illa mundi illum lúka, þar sem þvílíkr svikari ok morðingi var' [it was to be expected that a bad man would come to a bad end, such a traitor and murderer that he was].[77] *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* thus warns against trusting ruthless, scheming men who stop at nothing to advance their position and sets them up in direct opposition to the heroes. Vilhjálmr's origins, contrary to the aristocratic image he tries to inhabit, suggest a further warning to the lower classes to keep to their place.[78]

75 *Mágus saga*, 37.

76 Hrólfr declares to Vilhjálmr that 'eigi hefir þú tryggilig augu' [you do not have trustworthy eyes], *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, ch. 13.

77 *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, in *Fornaldarsögur Norðrlanda*, vol. 2, ed. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Forni, 1944), 422.

78 In addition to strength, Vilhjálmr claims to lack neither 'skotfimi ok vápnfimi, sund eða tafl ok burtreiðir, vizku ok málsnilld, ok enga missi ek þá, er karlmann má prýða' [skill in archery and dexterity in arms, swimming or chess and jousting, wisdom, and oratory, and I lack none of the qualities which a man should have]; *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, 387.

To return to the manuscript's immediate historical context, we might ask why it should contain so many sagas that focus on fraternal loyalty and unjust opponents? Perhaps it is entirely arbitrary, but perhaps the manuscript's possible patron, Björn Þorleifsson, and his brother, Þorsteinn – if, indeed, these two men had a hand in choosing its contents – were particularly interested in these subjects, and this selection of sagas appealed to them more than other texts circulating in their milieu. They might even have deliberately chosen narratives about loyal brothers and ruthless and deceitful villains in order to make a point, whether to their immediate household, their peers and supporters, the local community, or perhaps their élite social circle more widely.

Björn and his family were involved in a complicated and bitter inheritance dispute with their cousin, Björn Guðnason of Ögur, over part of the Skarðverjar wealth, a matter that dragged on for over two decades, beginning in the late 1490s.[79] Björn Guðnason *sýslumaður* (ca. 1470–1518) was the son of Guðni Jónsson (also *sýslumaður*, ca. 1430–1507) and Þóra Björnsdóttir, the illegitimate daughter of Björn 'ríki' (and Þorleifr's half-sister); judging from letters he wrote and records about his actions, he appears to have been a skilled rhetorician and tenacious, or, arguably, ruthless, in his pursuit of property and power.[80] One of the tactics he employed to try to disinherit Björn Þorleifsson and his sisters was to have them declared illegitimate: Þorleifr and his wife Ingveldr were third cousins and had been unable to receive a papal dispensation to get married until after they had their children, so there might have been technical legal grounds for this claim.[81] On the other hand, their dispensation had been confirmed by the archbishop in Niðarós, King Kristján I and the bishop of Skálholt; after decrees made by the king and *lögmaðr*, in 1500, *alþingi* declared Björn and his sisters their parents' legal heirs.[82] Some people might have accepted these rulings – made by both secular and church authorities – but Björn Guðnason continued by various legal appeals to try to get his hands on the

79 I will only touch on the bare essentials of this inheritance dispute. This and other matters of the Skarðverjar and Björn Guðnason have most recently been discussed by Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, *Vatnsfjörður*, 175–220; see also Páll Eggert Ólason, *Menn og menntir*, 2:56–117.

80 See e.g. his letter to Bishop Stefán Jónsson of Skálholt; *DI*, 7:532–536.

81 Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, *Vatnsfjörður*, 176.

82 Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, *Vatnsfjörður*, 177–178, 190, 193.

siblings' (mainly Björn's) property, never ceasing despite repeated rulings in his cousins' favour. Ironically, Björn Guðnason himself was the son of an illegitimate daughter, but this does not seem to have been used against him. He managed to rally considerable support in the West Fjords for his cause; to complicate matters, power struggles between landowners, spearheaded by Björn Guðnason, on one hand, and, on the other, the Church, became mixed up in the matter, as Stefán Jónsson, bishop of Skálholt, supported Þorleifr's heirs. In 1514, after years of legal wrangling, Jón Sigmundsson *lögmaður* ruled that Björn Guðnason was the heir of Þorleifr, and this was confirmed by the king in 1518. However, by then, the bishop had finally managed to subjugate Björn, and he died soon thereafter.

In a long and impassioned letter that Björn Guðnason wrote to Bishop Stefán in 1500, he complains bitterly about Björn and Þorsteinn Þorleifssynir's alleged slander of him to the Bishop, and accuses them of various other offences towards him.[83] Although Þorsteinn was illegitimate and thus not eligible to inherit from his father in the same way as his brother Björn, they appear to have joined forces throughout this dispute, and it can be conjectured from this letter that the brothers enjoyed a good relationship, with Þorsteinn supporting his brother despite his inferior legal standing. The only direct hint at the scribe's attitude to the texts is in his previously mentioned marginal identification as 'the brother of Björn Þorleifsson', which is written at the very place where Þorsteinn drómundr – incarcerated in Miklagarðr for having slain his brother's killer – sings so wonderfully that Spes, who is passing by, has him released from prison.[84] At this point, the text reads: 'Þorsteinn nefndi sik' [Þorsteinn stated his name], and, as Dario Bullitta has suggested, the marginal note appearing at this point is unlikely to be coincidental. Perhaps the scribe not only wished to draw a link between himself and the name, but also the character himself: Þorsteinn drómundr is Grettir's half-brother – like Þorsteinn and Björn, he and Grettir have the same father – and he is arguably one of the saga's most positive figures. Emphatically, harmony between brothers is most likely in both the literary and the historical realms when they are not in direct competition with each other for inheritance. The illegitimate

83 *DI*, 7:532–536.

84 Dario Bullitta, 'La "saga di Þorsteinn Víkingsson": Introduzione e traduzione' (Master's dissertation, University of Sassari, 2010).

Þorsteinn, presumably not set to inherit his father, was nevertheless not ignored by his family: he received an education as a scribe and farmed at the manor (*höfuðból*) Svignaskarð in Borgarfjörður, in whose purchase his father Þorleifr seems to have been involved.[85] Besides feelings of fraternal love and solidarity, Þorseinn may have felt secure enough that more was at stake for him to support his half-brother than compete with him.

During the inheritance dispute, Björn Guðnason also continued his legal feud with the Bishop (the so-called Vatnsfjarðarmál), and in 1515, he was excommunicated.[86] Björn appears to have become belligerent at this development, and he physically attacked and mistreated Jörundr, a priest sent by the Bishop to deliver a message to Björn. Using violence against a priest was clearly scandalous behaviour, perhaps especially for someone of his social standing, and for this offence, Björn was condemned as an *óbótamaðr*, a punishment that amounted to outlawry.[87] It is tempting to imagine that Björn and Þorsteinn's dealings with their cousin might have had an effect, whether a conscious or an indirect one, on the selection of sagas for their manuscript. Considering the repeated legal claims that Björn Guðnason continued to make on Þorleifr's inheritance over the years, and the vehemence with which he pursued these claims, could it not be possible that Björn and Þorsteinn might have seen certain parallels between their cousin and some of the villains in the sagas? These villains have terrible tempers (e.g. King Hlöðvir), relentlessly harrass and attack the protagonists (e.g. Özurr and Þorbjǫrn ǫngull), act unreasonably and without moderation (e.g. Ubbi), go to great lengths to deceive their victims (e.g. Vilhjálmr) and commit excessive violence (e.g. Þorbjǫrn ǫxnamegin). Could it be that the patron of AM 152 fol. wished to draw comparisons between its moderate and wise heroes and himself? Did the emphasis on brotherhood, despite differences of temperament and ability, send a message to supporters and opponents alike that Björn and Þorsteinn's resolve would not break? Perhaps AM 152 fol. can be regarded as part of an early-sixteenth-century project of image-building: a contribution towards a public relations campaign surrounding the dispute between the two

85 *DI*, 8:363 (no. 299), 8:400 (no. 327).

86 Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, *Vatnsfjörður*, 212.

87 Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, *Vatnsfjörður*, 213; for a more detailed description of the incident, see Páll Eggert Ólason, *Menn og menntir*, 2:105.

factions, one that took place not just within the legal system, but perhaps also in the court of public opinion.

Humanness and monstrosity

The distinction between human and monstrous behaviour is arguably one of the main preoccupations of the sagas in AM 152 fol. Kirsten Hastrup argues that for late medieval audiences, Grettir is a tragic hero and 'one of us', who keeps evil forces such as trolls at bay for the benefit of the community, at a time when Icelanders were perhaps feeling powerless in the face of calamities such as the major and minor plagues that wreaked devastation for the Icelandic people in the fifteenth century, as well as foreign, i.e. Danish and English, political and economic influence.[88] However, the idea that trolls are wicked creatures that need to be kept out of human society by a strong hero – who becomes dehumanised in the process – is only part of the depiction of monstrosity in these sagas. Many scholars have dwelt on *Grettis saga* in this context but the *fornaldarsögur* in particular have recently become a focus of discussion about the multivalent meaning of monstrous beings, which have come to be seen both as 'Othered' foils for humans, yet also as useful figures for saga authors and audiences to engage with tabooed human behaviour and vulnerabilities.[89] By taking trolls and non-human figures in the manuscript's other sagas into account, we can arrive at a more nuanced image of the monstrous, the human vulnerabilities that monstrous creatures reveal, and the troll-like aspects of humans.

Monstrous figures, in this collection of sagas, foreground male behaviour, especially sexual violence and its dangers, on one hand, and class relations on the other, themes that often intersect. The monstrous creatures of the *riddarasögur* – including giants, berserks, *blámenn* and animal-human hybrids – are terrifying opponents, and their descriptions focus on their large size, dark skin, abnormal, hideous bodies that often carry animal

88 Hastrup, 'Tracing Tradition,' 281–313.

89 See e.g. Katja Schulz, *Riesen. Von Wissenshütern und Wildnisbewohnern in Edda und Saga*, Skandinavistische Arbeiten, vol. 20 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2004); Ármann Jakobsson, 'Identifying the Ogre: The Legendary Saga Giants,' in Ney, et al., eds., *Fornaldarsagaerne. Myter og virkelighed*, 181–200; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, ch. 3; Arngrímur Vídalín, '"Er þat illt, at þú vilt elska tröll þat." Hið sögulega samhengi jöðrunar í Hrafnistumannasögum,' *Gripla* 24 (2013): 173–210.

features, foul language and other markers of low social class.[90] In *Ectors saga*, which contains at least one such monster in all bar one of the seven subplots, they are sometimes invulnerable to weapons but all terrifying in various ways, especially the Swedish giant Gandilabrus, whose entire body is hairy like a sheep, whereas some of *Sigurðar saga þǫgla*'s many giants wear garments made of goat skin.[91] In the *fornaldarsögur*, we find characters that are just as loathsome: *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, for instance, features the evil berserk Sóti, who is half-red, half-blue, bald, with one single hair on his head, and like the ogre from *Ectors saga*, he does not wear clothes, a clear marker of non-humanness.[92] These creatures are seemingly easy to dismiss as wholly Other, sometimes attacking the hero out of nowhere, and fulfilling the same functions as dragons or other dangerous creatures, but in other instances, they lead a military invasion of a particular kingdom, or abduct a princess. The hero proves his mettle by killing this external threat, marries the princess and all ends well.

One of the primary characters in *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, the giant's daughter Brana, is the daughter of a Wallonian princess who seems never to have been rescued by a hero, or at least not until after she had been made pregnant by her abductor, the giant Járnhauss. In *Sigurðar saga þǫgla*, too, rape is abjected onto monstrous outsiders when Sigurðr, a prince, rapes the maiden-king Sedentiana three times, disguised as a horrible ogre, a dwarf and a swineherd.[93] The rape is not only justified both by reference to Sedentiana's treatment of her previous suitors and age-old rape myths, but the description of Sigurðr's third disguise is so hyperbolic and gleeful that the question arises whether it was intended to be amusing for the audience:

> þæ sier hun ... einn jǫtunn storan. suartan og suipillann. nasæstoran og nefbiugan. og suo krokott ath hlyckur sæ sem æ nefinu uar tok odrum megin langt ut æ hans hruckottu kinn ath þij illa eyra er hann bar æ sijnum suijuirdliga uanga. enn nasirnar ut æ adra kinn ofan langt fra eyrunum. og uoru þær suo flæstar ath smair men mattu

90 See e.g. *Ectors saga*, 94–96, 99, 105, 111; *Sigurðar saga*, 177, 207–208.

91 *Ectors saga*, 165–166; *Sigurðar saga*, 149, 208.

92 *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, 3:325.

93 *Sigurðar saga*, 201–209. For more detailed discussion of this episode, see Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, 122.

> smiuga j huora. og þar nidr ur sæ hun liggia eina stora listu miog osyniliga allt nidur æ bringu. þuij eigi olict sem þat uære frodan vr honum. munnur hans er suo sem iokla sprunga. edur giær þær er uotn fallæ ur. og uar hann bade skackur og skialgur. augun uoru sem skallhettir suartir og lodnir. og uotnn .ij. flyte j midiu. enn hans haus uar harlaus og glittade sem suell. enn hy suart og sijtt med uǫngum. Hann war clæddr geitskinnzolpu. hun uar suo stor at akrkarl einn munde eigi lypt fæ af iǫrdu.[94]
>
> [Then she sees a big giant, dark and scary-looking, big-nosed and hooked-nosed, and so crooked that the curve on the nose went on one side far out on his wrinkly cheek that it reached the ugly ear that he had on his disgraceful cheek. But the nostrils went down to the other cheek far away from the ears and were so widely flared that small men would be able to slip into either one. And from it she saw hanging a great and revolting chunk of snot all the way down to the breast, not unlike if foam fell from him. His mouth is as large as a glacial crevasse or ravines from which rivers flow, and he was both lopsided and squinting. His eyes were like black and hairy skull-hoods with water floating in the middle, but his head was bald and shone like a sheet of ice, and black and long fuzz on his cheeks. He wore a goat-skin parka so big that a field-worker would not be able to lift it from the ground.]

This troll's enormous size, grotesque facial features, and goat-skin garment all link him unmistakably to giants and giantesses in the *fornaldarsögur*, and the snot evokes *Clári saga*'s Perus, disguised as an ogre, who violently mistreats the maiden-king protagonist on behalf of his protegé, Clárus; in these instances, male fantasies of sexual violence are not far under the surface.[95] Sigurðr is able to assume such disguises because he has been given a magic mirror by the giantess sisters Fála and Flegða, and he entices Sedentiana out of her castle into the wilderness, where she is unprotected and vulnerable, by means of a magic ring. These figures, functioning as the hero's helpers here and later in the saga, can perhaps be regarded as

94 *Sigurðar saga*, 207–208.

95 Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, chs. 3 and 5.

complicit in Sigurðr's crime, his violation of the maiden-king's sexual autonomy, showing that there is no female sisterhood, at least not between classes.[96]

We find less monstrous rapists in *Grettis saga*: the notorious Norwegian berserks, outlaws and thieves Þórir þǫmb and Ǫgmundr illi are said to abduct married women and keep them as concubines for a week or two before bringing them back to their husbands, exactly like the evil, racially Other and heathen king Príams in *Mágus saga*.[97] Grettir deceives the berserks and their hangers-on and is able to kill them all before they do any harm to his benefactor Þorfinnr's wife. Late in his life, Grettir joins these ranks when he rapes a servant woman who makes fun of the size of his penis; again the rape seems to be distanced by framing it in a comic light.[98]

The behaviour of these othered men, whether they are giants, trolls, berserks or Saracens, is thus sometimes remarkably similar to that of human men, and clearly their violence is not just something that happens in faraway places: when Grettir is in Norway, he defends a farmer and his daughter against the berserker Snækollr, and the narrator remarks that

> þath w*ar* þæ wijda J nor*egi* ath m*a*rka m*enn ok* illu*i*rkiar hlupu ofan*n* ur mörku*m ok* skorudu æ m*enn* til kuen*n*a eda toku m*ed* of r*iki* af mo*nnu*m þ*ar* e*r* e*igi* w*ar* lidsfiolde f*yrer*.[99]
>
> [it happened in many places in Norway that forest-dwellers [i.e. outlaws] and criminals ran down from the forest and challenged men for their women or plundered from men with tyrrany where there was no military troop in place.]

Incidentally, the berserk rapists from *Grettis saga* originate from Hálogaland, the same area of Norway as the protagonists of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, and the question arises whether they, like Þorsteinn and

96 For discussion about giantesses who function as the hero's helpers and align themselves with him against their own kin, see Schulz, *Riesen*, 211–13, 295–302; John McKinnell, *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 184–185, Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, 73–76; cf. 'Girl as Helper in the Hero's Flight' folktale type (AT 313c).

97 F. 10v; *Grettis saga*, 61; *Mágus saga*, 161–162.

98 F. 41r; *Grettis saga*, 240–241.

99 F. 23v; *Grettis saga*, 135.

his ancestors, are partly of giant kin. In fact, Hálogaland has a special connection with giants, since in *Gautreks saga*, Starkaðr's ancestors also derive from this area. In *Þorsteins saga* and *Gautreks saga*, violence towards women is glossed over, but it is nevertheless clear that many men acquire wives through less than peaceful means.[100] Both Starkaðr's grandfather and namesake (who is explicitly said to be a giant) and his father Stórvirkr abduct their wives, as does Þorsteinn's grandfather.[101] So too, Þorsteinn's brother Þórir acquires his wife through violence, conquering her father in a duel. Moreover, the two brothers – on the run from their enemies – behave more like Glámr than traditional legendary heroes when they ascend the roof of a house belonging to their father's friend, and ride it 'svá at braka tók í hverju tré' [so that every timber began to creak], terrifying the inhabitants, but, since the narrator, and thus the hegemonic reader position, is aligned with Þorsteinn and his kin, none of this is problematised.[102] In fact, the heroes of this manuscript are often so formidable that the question whether they are trolls or men is frequently brought up, and there is clearly a great deal of overlap between monstrous and human behaviour, a fact that the authors and redactors are clearly uncomfortable with and try to suppress.

By examining episodes of men, whether monstrous or human, attacking women and their guardians or kingdoms with the goal of sex and marriage, we can attempt to unpack further attitudes towards sexual behaviour. As Bagerius has shown, aristocratic men in the romances, versed in the rules of chivalry, restrain their sexuality towards women of their own social class and keep their desires in check.[103] The rape and abduction of women is generally regarded as behaviour in which evil, Other men, whose

100 Rowe, 'Absent Mothers,' 144.

101 So too are the ancestors of Egill Skalla-Grímsson; Massimiliano Bampi points out the genealogical patterns that tend to manifest themselves in the stories of both Starkaðr and Egill. He further suggests that Stórvirkr's name signifies he is a giant; given Stórvirkr's ancestry as at least half giant, this seems reasonable. See '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 13th International Saga Conference. Durham and York, 6th–12th August, 2006*, eds. John McKinnell et al. (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 92–93.

102 *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, 220; Glámr ascends the roof and rides it 'suo ath brak*ar* J hu*er*iu t*re*,' f. 21r, *Grettis saga*, 119.

103 Bagerius, *Mandom och mödom*, ch. 7.

position remains outside of the closed aristocratic social group, engage, and the hero is justified in killing them. There is a double standard, however, since this does not apply when it comes to the heroes and their ancestors. The redactor of *Sigurðar saga þǫgla* seems to realise that this cannot be reconciled, and while the text does not reject violence towards women as morally wrong, at least not if they arrogantly dare to reject their suitors, it is only when Sigurðr has temporarily taken on a monstrous exterior that he is permitted to behave in such a way.[104]

Themes of monstrosity, gender and class intersect, too, in the representation of giantesses. Fála and Flegða, those dispensers of magical objects (mentioned previously), are no ordinary trolls, although their names, bodies – dark and broad faces – and clothes – leather tunics short at the back – are straight out of the *fornaldarsögur*.[105] These Alpine cave-dwellers are set apart from their *fornaldarsögur* cousins is their high level of civilisation and life of luxury: their cave has two rooms for guests, one for *samdrykkjur* 'drinking parties' with other trolls, and the other, far more luxuriously decorated, is intended for human visitors.[106] These giantesses boast tableware, exotic food, gold-woven tapestries, King Arthur's chess set and other precious and magical objects, all worthy of emperors. The giantess sisters, perhaps surprisingly, display aristocratic female behaviour – an acquired set of skills more frequently, although not exclusively, associated with human women – when they serve the prince at the table.[107] The sisters

104 There are some divergences between the shorter and longer redactions of this saga but, as far as I can tell, the account of Sedentiana's rapes are very similar.

105 *Sigurðar saga*, 149; see Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, 62–65.

106 *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* also features a civilised giant, Grímnir, who invites the hero and his companions to dine at a beautifully laid table with clean napkins and bowls for washing their hands, and he is contrasted with his savage brother, who eats raw meat, a type of character that also appears in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (as Grímr *ægir*); for discussion about the negative cultural connotations of a diet of raw flesh, see Carolyne Larrington, 'A Viking in Shining Armour? Vikings and Chivalry in the *fornaldarsögur*,' *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 4 (2008): 276–277.

107 *Sigurðar saga*, 154. Carolyne Larrington analyses another courtly giantess, *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*'s, Arinnefja, who educates younger women in etiquette and decorous behaviour. Thus, the monstrous Arinnefja exhibits the queenly attributes that, along with hag-like aspects, characterise the Sovereignty figure; see '*Kerling/drottning*: Thinking about Medieval Queenship with *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*,' *Saga-Book* 39 (forthcoming 2015).

tuck Sigurðr into bed when he wishes to sleep but the question of sexual relations between them is left open. Such a relationship would fall in line with the usual behaviour of *fornaldarsögur* heroes when they encounter giantesses in the wilderness: for example, *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*'s protagonist has an affair with the giantess Brana, which produces a daughter. In *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, we are not explicitly told whether Þorsteinn and the giantess Skellinefja, a bewitched princess and his future wife, have sex in her cave, where she lets the wounded Þorsteinn recover after a gruelling battle, but at the end of the saga, the narrator mentions that their daughter was conceived there. These episodes seem to be about tabooed relationships across class or ethnic divisions, and while sex is permissible, marriage is not.[108] While the *fornaldarsögur* occasionally problematise this custom by having the giantesses reproach their human lovers, or grieve for their loss, the faithful giantesses in *Sigurðar saga þǫgla* voice no such criticisms.[109] They are happy to provide services and magic objects to the hero when he is in need, but otherwise they are portrayed as being content with their lot. Men can marry up, since Sigurðr manages to subjugate, impregnate and marry Sedentiana, but unless the giantess turns out to be a princess, it is impossible for these relationships to last.

The sisters' role as the hero's helpers draws attention to the fact that one of the primary roles of women, whether human or monstrous, in the manuscript, is to help men out of trouble. I have already mentioned Skellinefja, who nurses Þorsteinn back to health after being wounded in battle, and Brana, who helps Hálfdan vanquish another, more hostile, giantess, and later woo the princess Marsibil. Also notable are the Saracen women who rescue the imprisoned heroes in *Flóvents saga* and *Ectors saga*, and the warrior women Ermenga (as Hirtingr) in *Mágus saga* and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*'s Þornbjörg (as Þorbergr). *Grettis saga*'s female characters have not received much attention, but on the whole, they are positive figures. While, as Rowe has noted, mothers in some of these sagas are conspicuously absent, Grettir's mother Ásdís loves him dearly and he seems to reciprocate this love.[110] The *skörungr* Þorbjörg *digra* – who, like the maiden-kings, rules her realm temporarily – appears at a critical moment,

108 Schulz, *Riesen*, 196–197.

109 Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, ch. 3.

110 Rowe, 'Absent Mothers,' 145–147; Poole, 'Myth, Psychology,' 8–9.

when Grettir is about to be hanged by the local farmers for stealing their cattle and generally misbehaving. She not only rescues him, but hosts him at her farm for a while; she becomes much renowned for this, and Grettir praises her in a verse.[111] Thus women are allowed to transcend their normally restricted gender role, provided that they are not working towards their own goals, but rather on behalf of the protagonist.

In the sagas of AM 152 fol., fantasies of unrestrained sexual behaviour are projected onto the Other: monstrous men are the aggressors and pose danger to aristocratic women, but monstrous women are willing sexual partners and helpers, just like female characters more generally. Seen from another point of view, the prince who rapes in disguise is perhaps a warning to young women not to trust men, because, despite their charming exterior, a monster may lurk within. Thinking about the historical context, perhaps redactors and audiences would have made connections between the monstrous Other and foreigners, such as the English fishermen and merchants who sailed up to the shores of Iceland in the fifteenth century and interacted with Icelanders. Dozens (or more) of ships arrived every year, so a foreign presence, perhaps hundreds of sailors during the warmer months, must have been tangible for the small population – twice in the 1400s depleted by plague – at least anywhere close to the sea.[112] Certain Icelanders, including the Skarðverjar, benefitted enormously from trade with these foreigners, but as the slaying of Björn ríki shows, this international contact sometimes turned violent.[113] Presumably, Icelandic fathers and brothers were not keen on the foreigners coming too close to their daughters and sisters, and thus these outsiders can be seen as demonised as monstrous rapists standing outside of human society. However, domestic power struggles were no less a reality and since the manuscript expresses such a strong regional identity, it is perhaps conceivable that people from outside the area were seen by some as outsiders not to be trusted. Finally, if read carefully, many of the protagonists' behaviour is no different from

111 F. 30r; *Grettis saga*, 151–152.

112 Englishmen began to sail to Iceland around 1400, while German sailors started arriving there in ca. 1468; see *Saga Íslands*, 5:13, and Björn Þorsteinsson, *Enska öldin í sögu Íslendinga* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1970), 222.

113 Björn Þorsteinsson, *Enska öldin*, 207–212; Björn Þorsteinsson, 'Fall Björns Þorleifssonar á Rifi og afleiðingar þess,' in *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenskra bókmennta að fornu og nýju*, series 2, vol. 1.4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka bókmenntafélag, 1953–1993), 1–22.

those that are ostensibly not 'one of us', and there is thin line between their behaviour and that of *Þórðar saga hreðu*'s Ormr, suggesting that there is just as much reason to fear the monster(s) lurking within every kinship group, household or community, however difficult it may be to admit.

Conclusion

AM 152 fol. was very likely produced sometime during the height of the inheritance dispute between Björn Guðnason and Björn Þorleifsson and his circle, perhaps in the first decade of the sixteenth century. Unfortunately, most medieval Icelandic manuscripts have not been localised or dated with as much relative precision as this codex, but it is perhaps possible to draw wider conclusions from this study. Given the cost of the manuscript's production, *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur* here appear as prestigious types of literature on an equal footing with religious and legal material. This tells us that these types of sagas were promoted and sponsored by members of the upper echelons of society and were not only designated for ordinary people's everyday consumption. They were clearly regarded as useful vehicles to construct, communicate and promote certain ethical and moral values, and ways to organise society, especially the dominance of certain groups over others, based on factors such as social class, nationality or ethnicity, region and gender. These sagas are copied alongside *Íslendingasögur*, shedding light on the similarities and commonalities that they might have had in their redactors' and audiences' minds despite their different settings in time and space.

Much more could be said about every one of the sagas in AM 152 fol., but I have attempted to tease out some of its main themes, and what they indicate about the manuscript's milieu, its contemporary literary culture, mentalities and social dynamics. The analysis shows that moral values were encoded in the manuscript, and the narratives are full of characters whose unjust, foolish, violent and immoderate actions prove enormously difficult for its heroes, whose images are constructed as wise and moderate. The privileging of these values and the condemnation of others may reflect its possible patron's self-perception and the image he (and his brother and associates) wished to project to the world. This collection, when regarded as a whole, expresses a great deal of fear about male behaviour, sexual and

otherwise, sometimes projecting violence onto outsiders but not altogether managing to efface its heroes' misconduct. The sagas' ideological messages promote the social *status quo*, i.e. from the point of view of a wealthy landowner with a royal title and office who might have made money from business with foreign merchants; they convey to the audience that those who keep their place will be rewarded with favour from the ruler. Ultimately, the recurrent images of loyal brothers who support each other through thick and thin add a personal dimension to the manuscript and suggest its patron's regard for family bonds, and given these themes and Þorsteinn's marginal note, I put forward the proposal to name this manuscript Bræðrabók. We will never be able to know the inner thoughts of medieval people but manuscripts like this give us some small access to the mental landscapes, fears, desires and fantasies of at least one patron and community in Breiðafjörður in the early 1500s.

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EFNISÁGRIP

Hugmyndafræði og sjálfsmynd á Norðvesturlandi á síðmiðöldum. Rannsókn á AM 152 fol.

Lykilorð: Björn Þorleifsson á Reykhólum, Þorsteinn Þorleifsson skrifari, Norðvesturland, AM 152 fol., efnisleg textafræði, bræðrabönd, siðferðisleg gildi í bókmenntum, fornaldarsögur, Íslendingasögur, riddarasögur, *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, tröllslegt eðli, kynferðislegt ofbeldi gegn konum.

Greinin fjallar um hið glæsta sagnahandrit AM 152 fol. frá öndverðri 16. öld á heildstæðan hátt. Annar skrifara þess var Þorsteinn Þorleifsson, hálfbróðir Björns Þorleifssonar á Reykhólum. Færð eru rök fyrir því að Björn hafi haft hönd í gerð handritsins og e.t.v. stýrt efnisvali. Sögurnar ellefu í handritinu eru af ýmsum toga og tilheyra Íslendinga-, fornaldar- og riddarasögum en þrátt fyrir ólík sögusvið og umgjörð eiga þær mörg þemu sameiginleg. Þær tjá m.a. ákveðna afstöðu til siðferðislegra gilda og samfélagslegrar hegðunar og fela þannig í sér sjálfsmyndarsköpun og hugmyndafræði þess eða þeirra sem að handritinu stóðu.

Sögurnar í handritinu AM 152 fol. eru margar hverjar þroskasögur um unga pilta af háum stigum. Þeir takast m.a. á við fúlmenni sem sýna af sér ofstopa, óbilgirni, illsku, frekju, valdagræðgi, dramb og undirferli. Þessar persónur eru einatt sýndar í neikvæðu ljósi andstætt hetjunum og eru menn sem taka óskynsamlegar ákvarðanir, stofna til deilna, beita óheiðarlegum aðferðum og hegða sér illa í siðaðra manna samfélagi. Þung áhersla er lögð á að bræður standi saman og styðji hver við annan gegn andstæðingum sínum. Leidd eru rök að því að sögur um menn sem sýna bræðrum sínum hollustu og uppfylla dygðir á borð við stillingu, sanngirni og réttlæti gætu hafa höfðað sérstaklega til Björns og Þorsteins þar sem þeir stóðu í áralöngum erfðadeilum við frænda sinn, Björn Guðnason, sem beitti sér gegn Birni og systkinum hans af fullum krafti.

Hins vegar fjalla margar sagnanna í handritinu um tröllslega hegðun og einkum kynferðislegt ofbeldi trölla gegn konum. Þrátt fyrir að þessi hegðun sé oftast jaðarsett og 'öðruð' (e. *othered*) kemur fyrir að söguhetjurnar hagi sér á sama hátt. Í þeim tilfellum er ofbeldið sýnt í gamansömu ljósi eða undir rós og þar með réttlætt eða þaggað. Þetta bendir til tvíbentrar afstöðu til kynferðislegs ofbeldis og skarast eðli manna og trölla í mörgum tilfellum þegar nánar er að gáð. Hægt væri að túlka tröll í tengslum við ótta við veru erlendra sjó- og verslunarmanna á Íslandi á síðmiðöldum en þau eru e.t.v. ekki síður tæki til að ræða kynferðisbrot og ofbeldi í eigin ranni.

Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir
Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum og
Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures
Harvard University
365 Barker Center
12 Quincy Street
US-Cambridge, MA 02138