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HALLDÓR JAKOBSSON ON TRUTH AND FICTION IN THE SAGAS (1789)¹

1. Introduction

MS ICEL. 32 in the Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, is a paper manuscript completed in 1789 in the hand of Halldór Jakobsson (1734²–1810), at that time *sýslumaður* in Strandasýsla.³

- 1 I would like to thank Dr Werner Schäfke and his students from the Skandinavischen Seminar at the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, Freiburg im Breisgau, for bringing to my attention the many mistakes in an earlier transcription of Halldór's "Formáli." Thanks also to Dr William Stoneman, Curator of Early Books and Manuscripts at the Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge MA, for authorizing the production of new colour photographs of the "Formáli" to MS Icel. 32 upon which the transcription in this article is based. Thanks are also due to the two anonymous readers for *Gripla* who went through text, transcription and translation with a fine tooth comb. I benefited greatly from their attentive readings and I trust that they will be pleased with the resulting version. All remaining errors are of course my own responsibility.
- 2 Halldór lists the date of his birth as 1734 in the fragment of his autobiography in Lbs 519 4to. Only three chapters of this work covering his childhood, his education until 1757 and his appointment as *sýslumaður* in Strandasýsla were completed. See Sjöfn Kristjánsdóttir, "Af Halldóri Jakobsyni", in *Grímsævintýri sögð Grími M. Helgasyni sextugum 2. September 1987*, ed. Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, 2 vols. (Reykjavík: [Menningar- og Minningarsjóður Mette Magnussen], 1987), 2: 32–38 at pp. 33–37. However, his birthdate is given as 1735 in Páll Eggert Ólason and Jón Guðnason, eds., *Íslenzkar æviskrár frá landnáms tímum til arsloka 1940* [1965], 6 vols. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1948–1976), 2: 257.
- 3 The MS is 321 leaves, 19.9 x 15.6 cm ("quarto"). Blank: 1^v, 4^v, 5^v, 253^v. Several worn-out pages have been replaced by text in another hand. The sagas contained in the manuscript are the *riðdarasaga Sigurðar saga þögla*, the *fornaldarsögur Völsunga saga* (along with *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and the *Páttur af Ragnars sonum*), *Ans saga bogsvegis*, *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, *Egils saga einhenda og Ásmundar berserkjabana*, *Þjalar-Jóns saga Svipdagssonar* and the modern fairy-story, *Söguþáttur af Rósaníá*. For a detailed description of the contents and how the manuscript came to be in the possession of Konrad Maurer (1823–1902), Professor of Law at the University of Munich, see Shaun F. D. Hughes, "The Fortunes of a Fornaldarsaga Manuscript," in *The Legendary Legacy: Transmission and Reception of the Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, ed. Matthew Driscoll (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, forthcoming 2017).

The manuscript contains seven sagas, for the most part *fornaldarsögur*, but what is particularly interesting is that Halldór has prefaced the work with a five page preface (2^r–4^r) or *Formáli* which addresses the problem of to what extent can the texts he has collected be considered as reliable historical documents since all except one of them identify themselves as a *saga*, that is, a history.⁴ In this *Formáli* Halldór states that he has written the manuscript in his spare time for people's amusement and pleasure. He is not himself opposed to *riddarasögur* or *fornaldarsögur* and was in fact responsible for writing and publishing one such saga and bringing another one into print for the first time.⁵ What concerns him then are not the stories, but rather that their contents might be misinterpreted as being true, that is, being history. To this end he attempts a taxonomy of saga-texts based on what he perceives as the degree to which the content presented is historically accurate or not. The stories he has included in his manuscript are old, although he avoids tackling the issue of dating (a contentious one over which there is scarcely more agreement now than there was in the eighteenth century) and he classifies them into three groups. First there are those composed by the learned for pleasure or stories translated from foreign languages. These are fiction. Then there those that are partly true but which have become hopelessly mixed up with fables and fairy-tales so that it is impossible to know what is true and what is not. Nor are the events mentioned corroborated by Latin chronicles and other reliable sources. Thirdly, there are those which are for the most part true. The events are corroborated in the chronicles although here and there fantastic elements have been admitted in to the narratives. The sagas included in these three groups

- 4 The one exception is the story of Rósanía, a translation via Danish of "Ricdin-Ricdon, Conte" and "Suite du Conte de Ricdin-Ricdon," from Marie-Jeanne Lhéritier de Villandon (1664–1734), *La Tour Ténébreuse: Et Les Jours Lumineux, Contes Anglois, Accompagnez d'Histoires et tires d'une ancienne Chronique composée par Richard surnommé Coeur de Lion, Roy d'Angleterre. Avec le Récit de diverses Aventures de ce Roy* (Paris: Veuve de Claude Barbin, 1705), 44–143 and 144–230. This is identified as a *sögubáttur* (historical narrative or episode) but this may be more a comment on its length than its historicity.
- 5 *Ármanns saga* (Hrappsey, n.p., 1782), 2nd ed. (Akureyri: Hallgrímur Þorsteinsson, 1858), 3rd ed: Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Íslendinga sögur*, 13 vols. (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1953), 12: 415–68. In his introduction to the saga Guðni says: "Almennt er talið að Halldór sýslumaður Jakobsson ... sé höfundur sögunnar" (It is the common opinion that Halldór sýslumaður Jakobsson is the author of the saga), Guðni Jónsson, *Íslendinga sögur*, 12: xiii–xiv. The other saga is *Sagan af Gaungu-Hrólf sem inntrók Nordmandið* (Leirárgarðir við Leirá: Magnús Móberg, 1804), 2nd ed. (Reykjavík: Einar Þórðarson, 1884).

are what we would call *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*, with the more fantastic of the latter such as *Örvar-Odds saga* or *Egils saga einhenda* belonging to group two, and the more sober such as *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* or *Áns saga bogsveigis* belonging to group three. He then turns to a general consideration of the *Íslendingasögur*, *samtíðarsögur*, and *konungasögur* and finds them all to be clearly members of group three. Next he briefly classifies the sagas according to where they take place without going into any detail, following this with a list of all those sagas referred to in reliable texts that have not survived down to the present. He then returns to his previous subject and says that it is a desideratum that the sagas be classified according to their date of composition and their truthfulness, challenging scholars, especially those in Copenhagen, with their unrivaled access to manuscripts and other resources, to make an such an inventory of all the sagas in Icelandic. This is probably a dig at his friend Jón Ólafsson frá Grunnavík (1705–1769) with whom Halldór had been in frequent contact during his stay in Copenhagen in the winter of 1764–1765.⁶ He then he returns to evaluating the truthfulness of *Áns saga bogsveigis* and it cannot be said that the discussion comes to any conclusion, because at this point it just breaks off.

2. History and Fiction in Written Texts

The tension between fiction and history is hardly a recent phenomenon.⁷ It was a matter which exercised the ancients as they tried to separate out *historia* from *fabula* and to determine whether or not the Homeric epics

6 See Jón Helgason, *Jón Ólafsson frá Grunnavík*, Safn fræðafjelagsins um Ísland og Íslendinga 5 (Copenhagen: S. L. Möller, 1926), 49. Halldór implies that Copenhagen is the obvious place where this kind of research into the sagas should be taking place, except that it is not. Jón Ólafsson had the potential to accomplish a great deal and indeed he began many projects. However, he found it impossible in almost every case to bring any of his work to a close.

7 For the purposes of this paper the following working definition of “history” and of “fiction” is relevant: “History is a narrative discourse with different rules than those that govern fiction. The producer of a historical text affirms that the events entextualized did indeed occur prior to the entextualization. Thus it is quite proper to bring extratextual information to bear on those events when interpreting and evaluating an historical narrative. ... It is certainly otherwise with fiction, for in fiction the events may be said to be created by and with the text. They have no prior temporal existence, even if they are presented as if they did.” Robert Scholes, “Language, Narrative, and Anti-Narrative,” in *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 200–08 at 207.

were true.⁸ But the problem was given a new urgency after the supremacy of Christianity. This new religion placed great emphasis on the historicity and the truthfulness of the foundational texts on which it was based, in particular the narratives recounted in the New Testament. While the ancients had equivocated over whether a text could accurately represent history and recognized the fact that texts could contain various mixtures of historicity and fictionality, the Christian tradition was adamant that a completely reliable truthful history was possible and that the Scriptures were the living embodiment of this principle. What then about secular histories? Were they also capable of achieving this absolute standard of historicity? As a result the term “history” became a contested category and debates over the extent to which it is or is not capable of expressing truth have continued down to the present.⁹

Nevertheless, I have not found any evidence that “History” in Iceland in the eighteenth century was as contested in this way as it was in Great Britain. Furthermore there can hardly be said to have been a great deal of reflection in Icelandic intellectual circles at the time over what “history” actually was.

In his *Íslendingabók*, written some time around 1130, Ari fróði Þorgilsson notes: “En hvatki es missagt es i fræðum þessum, þá es skylt að hafa þat heldr er sannara reynisk.”¹⁰ This suggests a certain scrupulousness

8 See Ruth Scodel, *Credible Impossibilities: Conventions and Strategies of Verisimilitude in Homer and Greek Tragedy*, Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 122 (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1999), 1–31, and the essays in Panagiotis A. Agapitos and Lars Boje Mortensen, eds. *Medieval Narratives between History and Fiction: From the Centre to the Periphery of Europe, c. 1100–1400* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2012).

9 See further Peter G. Bietenholz, *Historia and Fabula: Myths and Legends in Historical Thought from Antiquity to the Modern Age*, Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History 59 (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

10 Ari Þorgilsson, “Íslendingabók,” *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, 2 vols., Íslenzk fornrit 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1968), 1–28 at 4 [‘And what-ever is incorrectly stated in this work, one should rather take that which is proven to be the more true’]. There has been considerable discussion over the boundaries of “truth” and “fiction” in medieval literature among which see: Laura Ashe, *Fiction and History in England, 1066–1200*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 68 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Jeanette M. A. Beer, *Narrative Conventions of Truth in the Middle Ages*, Études de philologie et d’histoire 38 (Geneva: Droz, 1981); D. H. Green, *The Beginnings of European Romance: Fact and Fiction 1150–1220*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 47 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Päivi Mehtonen, *Old Concepts and New Poetics: Historia, Argumentum and Fabula in the Twelfth- and Early*

with sources – and in fact Ari goes out of his way to identify the oral sources of his information when needed. In this he differs significantly from predecessors such as the Venerable Bede, who in the introduction to his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* blamed any errors not on himself but on the sources he was using.¹¹ Ari leaves it up to the reader to decide what is true and what is not, and this approach was to characterize Icelandic approaches to “saga” for many centuries afterwards.¹²

3. History out of Fiction

During the seventeenth century the kingdoms of Denmark and Sweden¹³ began to expand in terms of territory, wealth, power and prestige. Whenever such a phenomenon occurs, new histories need to be written,

Thirteenth-Century Latin Poetics of Fiction, Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum 108 (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1996); Ruth Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages: Rhetoric, Representation, and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Monika Otter, *Inventiones: Fiction and Referentiality in Twelfth-Century English Historical Writing* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Nancy F. Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977). While “truth” and “fiction” are constant themes in the essays collected in Walter Haug, *Die Wahrheit der Fiktion: Studien zur weltlichen und geistlichen Literatur des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003), no single essay directly addresses these topics.

- 11 Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 6–7. Jakob Benediktsson, in the Introduction to his edition of *Íslendingabók*, discusses the possibility that Ari was influenced by Bede, and certainly both emphasize their reliance on named oral sources (xxii–xxiv). But Ari's attitude to truth claims is not the same as Bede's.
- 12 Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) argue that “history” and “fiction” are distinct categories. For fiction they present “a ‘no truth’ theory of literature,” arguing that “*inter alia* the concept of truth has no central or ineliminable role in critical practice” (1) and they argue against post-modern readings of history as a variety of fiction: “The historian does not create the past but only a verbal expression, an account of the past. Both activities [history and fiction] make demands on the human imagination and intelligence. But while fiction is construction, history is reconstruction ... The problem of the post-modern view of history is that it is without a concept of the past” (310). If post-modernists in line with their world-view read history and fiction as fiction, Icelandic audiences because of their world view read *saga* (almost always anonymous) whether history or fiction as history. Neither position is ultimately satisfactory.
- 13 In 1523 Gustav Vasa (1496–1560) entered Stockholm, declaring himself King of Sweden and effectively ending the Kalmar Union.

especially foundational histories.¹⁴ Both countries turned to Iceland and its historical treasures, in which they saw preserved the records of their ancient glory.¹⁵ Manuscripts began to leave Iceland for Danish and Swedish libraries, and scholars followed them. *Fornaldarsögur*, particularly those dealing with Swedish history, began to appear in print.

Historians trying to write the early history of Scandinavia faced the same dilemma as their British counterparts did when having to deal with the problem of the “History of Britain” as found in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s twelfth-century *Historia Regum Britanniae*. As Robert Mayer demonstrates, the fact that doubts had been cast on the reliability of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s history from its initial appearance did not prevent narratives from the tradition being included as part of English history, disclaimers and all, until well into the eighteenth century, because not to use it would be to leave the early history of the country a blank.¹⁶ If historians of early Scandinavia did not use sources such as the *fornaldarsögur*, then they too would be faced with having no material with which to address the period before the year 1000. This dilemma is clearly demonstrated in the *magnum opus* of the Danish Historiographer Royal, the Icelander Þormóður Torfason, his *Historia rerum Norvegicarum*. In this work, which appeared in 1711 in four volumes and which covered the history of Norway from its mythical beginnings until 1387,¹⁷ Þormóður used every *fornaldar-*

14 On the political use of the Icelandic sagas in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Sweden, see Kay Busch, *Grossmachtstatus und Sagainterpretation - die schwedischen Vorzeitsagaeditionen des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, Vol. 1: Beschreibung, Unpublished Dissertation, Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Philosophische Fakultät II – Sprach-, und Literaturwissenschaften, 2002. For a revised electronic version which appeared in 2004, see <http://www.opus.ub.uni-erlangen.de/opus/volltexte/2004/51/index.html>

15 When the medieval historian known as Saxo Grammaticus (c. 1140–c. 1220) composed his history of Denmark, the *Gesta Danorum*, he too relied upon Icelandic sources (“Praefatio,” I.6, *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, ed. J. Olrik and H. Ræder, 2 vols. [Copenhagen: Levin and Munksgaard, 1931–1957], 1: 5; “Praefatio,” 1.4, Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum. The History of the Danes*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen, trans. Peter Fisher, 2 vols., Oxford Medieval Texts [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2015], 1: 6–7).

16 Robert Mayer, *History and the Early English Novel: Matters of Fact from Bacon to Defoe*, Cambridge Studies in Eighteenth-Century English Literature and Thought 33 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 34–53.

17 Þormóður Torfason. (Tormod Torfæus), *Historia rerum Norvegicarum in quatuor tomos divisa. In qua, præter Norvegiæ descriptionem, Primordia gentis, instituta, mores, incrementa; & inprimis Heroum ac Regum ...*, (Copenhagen: Joachim Schmitgen, 1711). See the complete translation into Norwegian: Tormod Torfæus, *Norges historie*, ed. Torgrim Titlestad, trans.

saga he could lay his hands on to flesh out the earlier section of his history before he could turn to more trusted sources like Snorri Sturluson.¹⁸ His method was not so much to translate the sagas but recast them in a coherent narrative based on his own retelling of the sweep of Norwegian history. Therefore, *Örvar-Odds saga* appears in volume 1, Book 6,¹⁹ while the account of Ketill *hængur*, Oddur's grandfather, is postponed to Book 7.²⁰

Þormóður sees his responsibility to report what he finds in the manuscripts ("monumenta"), no matter how unlikely some events may appear to be, because even these events may hide a kernel of truth.

Qvæcunqve ergò ex fide dignis, aut saltim veri speciem habentibus, Antiquitatum monumentis in nostras manus pervenerunt, fideliter huc transtulimus: ne iis quidem exclusis, qvæ de primorum seculorum obscuria rebus vel confusè narrata sunt, vel fabulis propiora videri forsitan poterant, modò ne apertè falsa aut fidem exsuperantia

Aslaug Ommundsen et al., 7 vols. (Bergen: Eide Forlag et al., 2008–2014). There has been considerable interest in Þormóður and his history in the last decade, and two volumes of conference papers devoted to the topic have been published: Aud Irene Jacobsen, et al., eds., *Den nordiske histories fader, Tormod Torfæus*, Karmøyseminaret 2002 (Karmøy/Avaldsnes: Karmøyseminaret, Karmøy kommune, 2004); Anine Kongshavn, ed., *Tormod Torfæus: Mellom Vinland og Ringenes Herre*, Karmøyseminaret 2004 (Karmøy/Avaldsnes: Karmøyseminaret, Karmøy kommune, 2006). See also, Karen Skovgaard-Petersen, "The First Post-Medieval History of Norway in Latin: The *Historia rerum Norvegicarum* (Copenhagen 1711) by Tormod Torfæus," in *Germania Latina, Latinitas Teutonica: Politik, Wissenschaft, humanistische Kultur vom späten Mittelalters bis in unsere Zeit*, ed. E. Kessler and H. C. Kuhn, 2 vols. (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2003) 2: 707–20. The standard biography of Þormóður, which first appeared in Copenhagen in 1788 and was written by Jón Eiríksson (1728–1787), has been re-issued: John Erichsen, *Tormod Torfæus: levnetsbeskrivelse*, ed. Oddvar Nes (Kvernnavik: Saga Bok, 2009).

- 18 This applies particularly to volume one which contains the deeds of people before the institution of the monarchy (Pars prima, *continens* res gentis ante monarchiam institutam gestas) and volume two which contains those things which are reported in Norway after the institution of the Monarchy up to the introduction of the Christian Religion (Pars secunda, *ea continens*, qvæ post Institutam in Norvegia Monarchiam ad Introductam eodem Christianam Religionam gesta sunt).
- 19 Liber sextus continens vitas Örvar-Oddi, Bodvaris Biarkii, et Sörlíi Robusti; Sectio prima: De Örvar-Oddo (1: 263–74). Vibeke Roggen, "Old Norse Saga versus Neo-Latin History Writing: Some Aspects of the Style in Torfæus' *Historia Rerum Norvegicarum* (1711)," *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 55 (2006): 183–94, looks at how Þormóður used this late thirteenth-century *fornaldarsaga* and its fantastic narrative.
- 20 Liber septimus continens vitas ... Ketillis Hængi et Anis Bogveigeris; Section tertia. Historia Ketillis Hængi (1: 315–23).

deprehenderentur: indicatâ tamen, sicubi de fide narrationum dubitatio oborta est, nostra opinione; ut Lectori ulterius in rei suspectæ veritatem inqvirendi occasio porrigeretur.²¹

Only on rare occasions does he intervene with comments on the unlikely nature or the incorrect reporting of a particular event. It is left up to the reader to be the final arbiter as to whether an event is credible or not, just as it was in the time of Ari Þorgilsson.²²

4. Icelandic Responses

In 1685 the bishop of Skálholt, Þórður Þorláksson (1637–1697), managed to get permission from the Danish king after the death of his brother Gísli (1631–1684), bishop of Hólar, to have the sole printing press in the country moved south from the northern see where it had been almost from the beginning of printing in Iceland. Þórður was a man very interested in science, agriculture and medicine, and he put these interests to good use while he was in charge of the press. In the twelve years of his custodianship, he published an average of five books a year compared to the average of two titles annually during the previous 85 years the press was at Hólar. In particular, Þórður seems to have been interested in producing small books which could be easily carried in a pocket or knapsack.²³ In a volume

21 *Prolegomenon, Historia rerum Norvegicarum*, 1: G1^r. “Whatsoever things therefore are appropriate through their verisimilitude or at least having the appearance of truth, to that extent we have faithfully transcribed the ancient monuments which have come into our hands: nor omitted anything from them, which with respect to obscure matters of the first centuries, either are confusedly narrated, or might seem to be perhaps closer to fables, unless manifestly a falsehood or a superior account has been encountered: however, if anywhere uncertainty with regard to verisimilitude has sprung up in the narrative, in our opinion, it is pointed out, so that the opportunity might be held out for the reader to inquire further into the truth with regards to the matter of suspicious nature.” See also *Norges Historie*, ed. Titlestad, 1: 69.

22 See the passage from Þormóður’s “Prolegomenon” quoted in Lars Boje Mortensen, “Before Historical ‘Sources’ and Literary ‘Texts’: The Presentation of Saga Literature in Tormod Torfæus’ *Historia rerum Norvegicarum*,” *Renaissanceforum: Tidsskrift for Renaissanceforskning* 5 (2008), separate pagination, 1–14 at 7 http://www.renaissanceforum.dk/5_2008/lbm.pdf (accessed July 31, 2009). Mortensen also discusses Þormóður’s use of the family saga *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar* (Volume 2, Book 3: 151–214), “Before Historical ‘Sources,’” 5–7.

23 Guðrún Ingólfssdóttir, “En að sá helgi stíl saugist af sögum”: útgáfastarf Þórðar biskups

of essays dedicated to the intellectual life and pursuits of bishop Þórður, Guðrún Ingólfsdóttir examines in detail his work with the press. He went out of his way to obtain the king's permission to print the five historical titles that appeared between 1688–1690 and which were edited by him and Einar Eyjólfsson (c. 1641–1695), because he did not want to be accused of betraying the sacred purpose of the press by the printing of history on his own initiative.²⁴

As early as 1589, Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson (1541/2–1627) excommunicated his flock for their love of narratives of “Trólla og Fornmanna” [‘of trolls and of ancient heroes’].²⁵ Despite the hostility of Guðbrandur and the clerical elite whose position in this regard does not seem to have been in any way mollified during the seventeenth century, narratives about trolls and ancient heroes flourished in both prose and verse. But at least these stories were not committed to the permanency and prestige of print. When this did happen with the appearance of *Gautreks saga* and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* in 1664, edited by Olof Verelius (1618–1682), followed by *Bósa saga og Herrauds* in 1666 and *Hervarar saga og Heiðreks* in 1672,²⁶ it is

Þorlákssonar,” in *Frumkvöðull vísinda og mennta: Þórður biskup Þorláksson biskup i Skálholti*, ed. Jón Pálsson (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 1998), 161–77 at 165.

- 24 *Sagan Landnama vm fyrstu bygging Islands af Nordmönnum* [ed. Einar Eyjólfsson] (Skálholt: [Hendrick] Kruse, 1688); *Schede Ara prestz froda Vm Island*, [ed. Þórður Þorláksson] (Skálholt: Hendrick Kruse, 1688); *Christendoms saga Hliodande um þad hvornem Christen Tru kom fyrst a Island* [ed. Þórður Þorláksson] (Skálholt: Hendrick Kruse, 1688); *Gronlandia Edur Grænlandz saga Vr Islenskum Sagna Bookum og Annalum samanntekin og a Latinskt maal Skrifud af ... Arngrime Jonssine*, trans. Einar Eyjólfsson (Skálholt: Hendrick Kruse, 1688); *Sagan Þess Haloflega Herra Olafs Tryggvasonar Noregs kongs* [ed. Þórður Þorláksson] 2 vols. (Skálholt: Hendrick Kruse, 1689–1690).
- 25 [Guðbrandur Þorláksson,] *Ein ny Psalma Bok, Med morgum andlegum Psalmum Kristilegum Lofsaunguum og Vijsum, skickanlega til samans sett og Auken og endurbætt* (Hólar: n.p., 1589; Rpt. Reykjavík: Ólafur J. Hvannndal, 1948), [aa vi’]. To be sure, Guðbrandur is here specifically referring to rímur, but there is no indication that he or the clerical elite were more favourably disposed to such narratives in prose.
- 26 *Gothrici et Rolfii Westrogothie regum historia lingua antiqua Gothica conscripta* [*Gautreks saga and Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*], ed. Olof Verelius (Uppsala: Henricus Curio, 1664); *Herrauds och Bosa saga med en ny vtolkning iämppte Gambla Götskan. Hoc est Herravdi et Bosæ historia cum nova interpretatione iuxta antiquum Textum Gothicum*, ed. Olof Verelius (Uppsala: Henricus Curio, 1666); *Hervarar saga på Gammal Götska*, ed. Olof Verelius (Uppsala: Henricus Curio, 1672). In these editions the Icelandic of the sagas is characterized as “ancient Gothic,” i.e. “old Swedish.” For a detailed analysis of these editions see Busch, *Grossmachtstatus und Sagainterpretation*, 35–49. She also has detailed discussions of the numerous other editions of Old Norse material published in Sweden in the seventeenth

possible to interpret Bishop Þórður's decision to print Old Norse historical texts as an attempt to counter the appearance of such titles overseas. If so, his venture was a failure, as his experiment in Icelandic printing history was not to be repeated so long as the printing press remained in ecclesiastical hands. The next historical text to be printed in Iceland would be an edition of the seventeenth-century annals (*Annálar*) of Björn Jónsson á Skarðsá (1574–1655), which appeared in 1774 from the privately-owned press that had been set up on Hrappsey in Breiðafjörður the year before (a work that proved so popular that it was reprinted the same year in a two-volume enlarged edition with a Latin translation).²⁷ Ironically, the next non-religious work to appear from the church-run press was to be a volume of fiction in 1756.²⁸

The same impetus that motivated Þormóður to include *fornaldarsögur* in his *Historia rerum Norvegicarum* is also seen in *Nordiska kända dater*, the massive folio volume that Erik Julius Björner published in Stockholm in 1737, containing the stories of ancient Scandinavian heroes, particularly those with some connection with Sweden, and providing the Icelandic texts of fourteen *fornaldarsögur* with Swedish and Danish translations.²⁹ But just as Geoffrey of Monmouth was dismissed once and for all as a fabulist by

and eighteenth centuries not mentioned here. See also: Vilhelm Gödel, "Fornnorsk-isländsk litteratur i Sverige," *Antiqvarisk Tidskrift för Sverige* 16.4 (1898): 1–312.

27 Björn Jónsson á Skarðsá, *Annálar*, ed. Ólafur Olavíus (Hrappsey: Guðmundur Ólafsson, 1774); *Annálar Björns á Skarðsá. Sive Annales Björnionis de Skarðsá*, 2 vols. (Hrappsey: Guðmundur Ólafsson, 1774–1775).

28 *Pess Svenska Gustav Landkrons Og Pess Engelska Bertholds Faubreitileger Robinsons, Edur Lijfs Og Æfe Sögur*, trans. Þorsteinn Ketilsson (Hólar: Halldór Eiríksson, 1756). This narrative was first published in German in 1724 under the title: *Gustaf Landcron, eines schwedisches Edelmannes, merckwürdiges Leben und gefährliche Reisen. Auf welchen er als ein wahrhafter ROBINSON sich mit einer getauften Türckin bey 12. Jahren, in einer unbewohnten Insel wunderbahr erhalten* (Frankfurt: C. F. v. M., 1724). Subsequently it was translated into Danish by Caspar Peter Rothe (1724–1784) as: *Den saa kaldede Svenske Robinson eller Gustav Landkrons, en svensk Herremands, forunderlige Livs- og selsomme Levnets-beskrivelse* (Copenhagen: J. C. Groth, 1743).

29 Erik Julius Björner, ed., *Nordiska kända dater, i en sagaflock samlade om forna kongar och hjälter ...* (Stockholm: Joh[an]. L[aurantius]. Hornn, 1737). The scholarly introduction to the work proved too long for an already outsize volume and was published separately: Erik Julius Björner, *Inledning til de yfverborna göters gamla häfder, särdeles götiska språkets förmån och sagornas kjänedom. Introductio in antiquitates hyperboreo gothicas, præfertim prærogativam linguae et cognitionem historiarum gothicarum* (Stockholm: Joh[an]. Laur[entius]. Hornn, 1738). Busch, *Grossmachtstatus und Sagainterpretation*, 136–96, 221–25 analyses the text of each of the sagas printed by Björner in *Nordiska kända dater*.

the end of the eighteenth century, so the use of the *fornaldarsögur* as history was not to last much longer.³⁰ When Carl Christian Rafn publishes a complete translation of them into Danish in 1822–1826 (second edition 1829–1830 to accompany what still remains the standard edition of the Old Icelandic texts), these narratives are identified not as history but as fiction and classified as mythological and romantic sagas.³¹

5. The True History of *Robinson Crusoe*

The appearance in 1719 of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* marks a turning point in the quarrel between history and fiction. Defoe presented his work as a true history, and equivocated when pressed about the fictionality of the work.³² *Robinson Crusoe* was extraordinarily popular, especially in Germany where there were numerous attempts to write Robinson Crusoe-like narratives, in effect challenging "[h]istory's claim to the verifiable" by writing narratives with "their own claim of historicity," to use Everett Zimmerman's words.³³ This activity culminated in the *Wunderliche Fata*

30 In Sweden by the middle of the eighteenth century, the enthusiasm for "Gothic" antiquities had waned, so that when *Yngvars saga víðförla* was published in 1762 it was identified as being edited from an Icelandic manuscript: *Sagan om Ingvar Widtfarne och hans son Swen: fran gamla Isländskan öfversatt, och undersökning om ware runstenars alder, i anledning af samma saga, samt företal om sagans trovärdighet; hwaruti de förr hos oss urgifna sagors värde tillika stadfästes; altsammans, till nordiska historiens och sprakets förbättring*, ed. Nils Reinhold Brocman (Stockholm: Lars Salvius, 1762). Brocman (1731–1770) was Assessor in the Antikvitetsarkivet in Stockholm.

31 Carl Christian Rafn, trans., *Nordiske Kæmpe-Historier eller mythiske og romantiske Sagaer*, 3 vols. (Copenhagen: H. F. Popp, 1821–1826); 2nd ed. under the title: *Nordiske Fortids Sagaer, efter den udgivne islandske eller gamle nordiske Grundskrift*, 3 vols. (Copenhagen: H. F. Popp, 1829–1830); Carl Christian Rafn, ed., *Fornaldar sögur Norðrlanda eptir gömlum handritum*, 3 vols. (Copenhagen: E. Popp, 1829–1830).

32 On these issues in Defoe's work, see Maximillian E. Novak, *Realism, Myth, and History in Defoe's Fiction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983); David Blewett, *Defoe's Art of Fiction--Robinson Crusoe*, Moll Flanders, Colonel Jack and Roxana (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979); and Mayer, *History and the Early English Novel*.

33 Everett Zimmerman, *The Boundaries of Fiction: History and the Eighteenth-Century British Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 236. See also Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996; first published 1983); William Nelson, *Fact or Fiction: The Dilemma of the Renaissance Storyteller* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).

einiger See-Fahrer (1731) by Johann Gottfried Schnabel (1692–1752), who uses the term “Robinsonade” in the preface to this work.³⁴

In 1750 séra Þorsteinn Pétursson á Staðabakka (1710–1785) began writing his autobiography. In his “Prolegomena” he refers approvingly to a certain Gustav Landkrón as a role model, someone who was shipwrecked in Ottoman lands, who never abandoned his faith despite the tortures he endured, who returned to his native Germany where he immediately prospered, and who in his fortieth year took up writing his life story.³⁵ Þorsteinn appears not to have understood that Gustav’s story was fictitious, and he reads the account as if it were straightforward history, a narrative that so inspired him that he began to write a history of himself upon attaining his fortieth year.³⁶

6. Further Icelandic Responses

By the middle of the eighteenth century the ecclesiastical printing press had been returned north to Hólar. When a new bishop, Gísli Magnússon (1712–1779) came to power in 1755, he found the press in a miserable state. It had printed numerous works since the beginning of the century, but most of them remained unsold, filling an entire pack-house. Vice-

34 Johann Gottfried Schnabel, *Wunderliche Fata einiger See-Fahrer, absonderlich Alberti Julii, eines geborhnen Sachsens ...*, ed. Marcus Czerwionka and Robert Wohlleben, 3 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1997), 1: 10 (first published 4 vols., Nordhausen: Johann Heinrich Gross, 1731–1743). Schnabel’s narrative was given a new title, *Die Insel Felsenburg*, when re-edited by Ludwig Tieck in 1828: Johann Gottfried Schnabel, *Die Insel Felsenburg, oder, Wunderliche Fata einiger Seefahrer, eine Geschichte aus dem Anfange des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols. (Munich: Lothar Borowsky, [1979]) (first published 6 vols., Breslau: Joseph Max, 1828). It was twice translated into Danish: Johann Gottfried Schnabel, *Adskillige Søfarendes underlige Skiebner, især Alberti Julii, en fød Sachsers*, trans. Peder Winter, 3 vols. (Copenhagen: Frid. Christian Pelt, 1761–1765) and *Øen Klippeborg eller flere Søfarendes forunderlige Hændelser, En Historie fra Begyndelsen af det attende Aarhundrede*, trans. Andreas Rasmussen, 6 vols. (Copenhagen: n.p., 1828–1829). On Schnabel and his work, see Fritz Brüggemann, *Utopie und Robinsonade: Untersuchungen zu Schnabels Insel Felsenburg (1731–1743)*, *Forschungen zur neueren Literaturgeschichte* 46 (Weimar: Alexander Duncker, 1914; Rpt. Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1978).

35 Þorsteinn Pétursson, *Sjálfsævisaga síra Þorsteins Péturssonar á Staðabakka*, ed. Haraldur Sigurðsson (Reykjavík: Hlaðbúð, 1947), 5. The reference is to the Danish chapbook *Den saa kaldede Svenske Robinson eller Gustav Landkrons ... forunderlige Livs- og selsomme Levnetsbeskrivelse* (1743).

36 Þorsteinn Pétursson, *Sjálfsævisaga* 1 and 7.

lawman Björn Markússon (1716–1791) had an idea to get the press back on a sound financial footing. If people liked secular stories so much, why not print some of them and pocket the profits? He began with two Robinsonades translated from Danish.³⁷ The first of these was a translation by Þorsteinn Ketilsson from Hrafnagil (1688–1754) of *Den saa kaldede Svenske Robinson eller Gustav Landkrons*³⁸ while the second was about Berthold, an Englishman related to Robinson Crusoe, and this story is probably also ultimately German, unless it is a Danish original.³⁹ In his Preface to the volume, Björn equivocates over whether the stories he is presenting are fiction or not — on the one hand, fictional stories can be morally uplifting and on the other hand, it is not his business to separate the false from the true in history:

Lærder Menn, sierdeilis i Franka-Rijke, og sijdann Þijsker og Dansker hafa vitiad afijsa Foolk til Dygda og Mannkosta, med ymsum Dæme-Søgum og *Romaner*: Hafa adrer vered ødrum Lagkiænare þat med, og synt sig þeim Gømlu miklu fremre, sem bygt hafa Kastala i Loftenu, og Otrwlegar Søgur i Rit fært, af hverium ver hœfum margar æ Norrænu, ad Forlage Hækonar Kongs Gamla snaradar, og annara vorra froodra Lands-Manna, so sem Jons Biskups i Skálholte Halldorssonar, sem siælfur hefur ymisleg Æfenntijr

37 *Pess Svenska Gustav Landkrons Og Pess Engelska Bertholds Fæbreitileger Robinson* (1756). Neither of these texts are identified as being a *saga* on the title page. Instead a new term is introduced, *ævisaga* ('life-history', biography) calquing *Levnets-beskrivelse* used in the title of the 1743 Danish version. Nevertheless, it seems clear that they were indeed read as "history", and my copy of the work in an early twentieth-century binding identifies the volume on the spine as "Gustavs saga, 1756."

38 It is not known if Þorsteinn Pétursson played any role in encouraging Þorsteinn Ketilsson to translate the story into Icelandic, or if he was involved in persuading Björn Markússon that this would be an appropriate text to print, perhaps even being the conduit through which the translation reached the press, since Þorsteinn Ketilsson by then was deceased.

39 While the history of Berhold claims to be translated from English and to be printed in London, no such English text has been recorded. There are two versions, both of which appeared in 1740. The first, of 80 pages, on which the Icelandic translation is based, is: *Engelender Berthold, den vidt berømte Robinson crusoes nær Beslægtede, hans Liv og Levnet Forfattet med moralske Anmærkninger. Overs. af det Engelske Sprog* (London [i.e. Copenhagen]: paa det Søe-farende Compagnies bekostning, 1740). The second version, of 238 pages, is: *Engländer Berthold, den vidt berømte Robinson Crusoes mer Beslægtede, hans Liv og Levnet, som han i 10 Aar til Lands og Vands har ført, ved at opfinde en ubeboet Insul, men efter udstanden Møye, Lykkelig er kommen til sit Fæderneland, Forfattet med moralske Anmærkninger* (Copenhagen: n.p., 1740).

samannteked, Brands Biskups æ Hoolum Jonssonar etc. Enn þar ed Þormooder Torfason *Historiogr[aphus]*. *Reg[ius]*.⁴⁰ og epter hönum *Sibbern Hist[oricus]*. *Biblioth. Hist. Cap I*⁴¹ og Jon Magnusson æ Asgeyrs-Aa,⁴² hafa giört sier Omak fyrer, ad adgreina diktadar Jslendinga-Sögur frá sönnum; þa er það ei minn Asetningur ad tala hier framar umm.⁴³

Björn followed this up with two volumes of *Íslendingasögur*, mostly outlaw sagas and late sagas already heavily influenced by the romance tradition.⁴⁴ There was, of course, a storm of outrage from conservative pastors that the press should be as derelict as to allow such wretched stuff to be printed in Iceland. Of the Robinsonades the story of Berthold proved moderately popular and there are three surviving sets of *rímur* based on Berthold's story along with references to three further sets otherwise unknown.⁴⁵ In addition the story survives in at least one manuscript, and has

40 Þormóður was awarded this post along with a handsome emolument in 1682.

41 Nicolaus Petrus Sibbern, *Bibliotheca historica Dano-Norvegica* (Hamburg: Liebezeit, 1716).

42 I have not been able to identify which (if any) of the writings of Jón Magnússon (1662–1738), the brother of the manuscript collector, Árni Magnússon, Björn is referring to. See the survey of Jón's surviving work in Jón Magnússon, *Grammatica Islandica. Íslensk málfræði*, ed. Jón Axel Harðarson (Reykjavík: Málvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands, 1997), xxviii–xxx.

43 'Learned men, particularly in France and then Germans and Danes have set out to encourage people to probity and human virtue with various exempla (*dæmisögur*) and romances. Some have been more skilful than others in this regard, and shown themselves to be better than the ancients, who have built castles in the air and written unbelievable histories (*sögur*), of which we have many in Icelandic thanks to old king Hákon, and to others of our wise countrymen such as Jón Halldórsson, Bishop of Skálholt [1322–1339], who himself put together various exempla (*ævintýri*), bishop Brandur Jónsson of Hólar [1263–1264] etc. But since the Historiographer Royal, Þormóður Torfason, and after him the historian Sibbern in chapter 1 of his *Bibliotheca historica Dano-Norvegica* [1716], and Jón Magnússon á Ásgeirsá, have made it their business to separate made-up *Íslendingasögur* from true ones, it is not my intention here to say any more about this.' (*Þess Svenska Gustav Landkrons*, [ii–iii]). There are a number of verbal echoes between this preface and Halldór's "Formáli."

44 *Agíatar Fornmanna Sögur*, ed. Björn Markússon (Hólar: Halldór Eiríksson, 1756); *Nockrer Marg-Frooder Sögu-Patter Íslendinga*. ed. Björn Markússon (Hólar: Halldór Eiríksson, 1756).

45 "Rímur af Berthold," 15 fitts, by the reverend Eiríkur Bjarnason (1704–1791); "Rímur af Berthold engelska," 8 fitts by Hólmfríður Markúsdóttir (c. 1741–1799) composed 1772; "Rímur af Berthold enska," Jón Jónsson frá Minni-Ökrum (1813–1892) which were published (Akureyri: n.p., 1874). The following are also reported to have composed *rímur* about Berthold: Jón Þorsteinsson (c. 1680–after 1739), 8 fitts; Guðrún Jónsdóttir frá Stapadal (1767–1850); Þorsteinn Þorsteinsson á Saurum (1760–1809), 12 fitts.

been printed twice as a children's book.⁴⁶ The sagas, however, did not sell as well as expected, and ten years after they were printed half the print-run of 1000 copies remained unsold.⁴⁷

7. History and Halldór's "Formáli"

The majority of the population in Iceland, subsistence farmers as they were, eked out an existence on marginal farmlands. For their entertainment in the evening work periods they wanted action, and they found that the *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur* or the narrative *rímur* based on these and similar stories fulfilled that need. Also, these materials were not a waste of time, because so far as they were concerned they were "saga," that is "history."⁴⁸ When Eggert Ólafsson visited the fishing camps on Snæfellsnes he noted:

Oft hittast hér skáld, sem hafa það at atvinnu að yrkja rímur út af sögum. Það, sem verst er í því efni, er það, að rímnaskáld þessi taka sé jafnt hinar lélegustu lygisögur að yrkisefni og hinar, sem sannar eru, enda eru þeir fáir, sem kunna að greina þar á milli.⁴⁹

In Iceland itself a new approach towards history begins to make an appearance. First of all there is a shift of emphasis from the past to the present. As the result of a petition to the King a commission had been set

46 The MS copy is found in Lbs 1793 8vo (ca. 1800). The childrens books are: *Berthold hinn víðförli* (Reykjavík: Sögusafn heimilanna, 1935); 2nd ed., *Berthold á eyðiey* (Reykjavík: Smári, 1959).

47 Ólafur Pálmason, "Inngangur," *Nockrer Marg-Frooder Sögu-Þættir Íslendinga 1756*, Íslenzk rit í frumgerð 1 (Reykjavík: Endurprent, 1967), vii–xv at xiv.

48 This suggests that Ralph O'Connor, "History or Fiction? Truth-Claims and Defensive Narrators in Icelandic Romance-Sagas," *Medieval Scandinavia* 15 (2005): 101–69, at 133–41, is on the right track when he argues that the *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur* were regarded as "history" in the late Middle ages since there is sufficient evidence that they were regarded as such in the early modern period.

49 Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson, *Ferðabók Eggerts Ólafssonar og Bjarni Pálssonar um ferðir þeirra á Íslandi árin 1752–1757*, trans. Steindór Steindórsson frá Hlöðum, 2nd ed., 2 vols. in 1 (Reykjavík: Örn og Örlygur, 1975), §519, vol. 1, p. 204. 'Often one meets here [in the winter fishing camps] poets who have that for an occupation to compose *rímur* out of sagas. That which is worst in this regard is that that these *rímur*-poets take on equally the worst *lygisögur* for their inspiration as others which are true, and they are few who know how to distinguish between the two.'

up to investigate the situation in the country. Headed by Árni Magnússon, Professor of Philosophy and Danish Antiquities at the University of Copenhagen, and Páll Vídalín *lögmaður*, the chief legal official in Iceland, the commission first set about to conduct a *manntal* or census, which was begun in 1703, followed by a survey, district by district, of every inhabited structure, its income and value, a project which took until 1714 to complete. In typical Icelandic fashion, the *Manntal* and the Land Register or *Jarðabók* remained in manuscript until the twentieth century (although the section of the Land Register for Múlasýsla perished in the great fire of Copenhagen in 1728).⁵⁰ A new trend had begun and regular censuses continued to be held. In a similar fashion, vice-lawman Eggert Ólafsson and the surgeon general Bjarni Pálsson, while still students, spent the summers from 1753–1757 travelling the country taking notes on flora and fauna and the status of the inhabitants and making a large number of drawings to accompany their research. The text was completed in 1766, but Eggert drowned in a boating accident in 1768. The result was that the publication was delayed until 1772 when it appeared in Danish in two large volumes, thanks in large part to the efforts of Jón Eiríksson (1728–1787), who had been professor of law at the academy on Sorøe since 1763.⁵¹ Jón was also

50 Árni Magnússon and Páll Vídalín, *Manntal á Íslandi 1703* (Reykjavík: Hagstofa Íslands, 1924–1947); Árni Magnússon and Páll Vídalín, *Jarðabók*, 2nd ed. 13 vols. (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska fræðifélag í Kaupmannahöfn, 1980–1990). Vols. 1–11 first published, Copenhagen, 1913–1943. On the background to these enterprises see Lýður Björnsson, “Bænaskrá til kongs 1700,” in *Saga Íslands*, ed. Sigurður Línal et al., 11 vols. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1974–2016), Vol. 8, ed. Lýður Björnsson, Guðbjörn Sigurmundsson and Þóra Kristjánsdóttir (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag 2006), 67–78.

51 Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson, *Vice-Lavmand Eggert Olaffsens og Land-Physici Bjarne Povelsens Reise igennem Island*, 2 vols. Sorøe: Jonas Lindgren, 1772. An abbreviated English translation (with its own title page) appeared in 1805 as part of volume 2 of the *Collection of Modern and Contemporary Voyages and Travels*, first series, 10 vols. (London: Richard Phillips, 1805–1810): Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson, *Travels in Iceland Performed by Order of his Danish Majesty: Containing Observations on the Manners and Customs of the Inhabitants, a Description of the Lakes, Rivers, Glaciers, Hot-Springs, and Volcanoes: of the Various Kinds of Earths, Stones, Fossils, and Petrifications, as well as of the Animals, Insects, Fishes, &c.* (London: Richard Phillips, 1805), rev. ed., ed. Steindór Steindórsson (Reykjavík: Örn og Örlygur, 1975). The standard annotated edition is *Ferðabók*, trans. Steindór Steindórsson, 2nd ed. (1975). See further Haraldur Sigurðsson, “Náttúruvísindi og Landfræði,” in *Upplýsingin á Íslandi: Tíu ritgerðir*, ed. Ingi Sigurðsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1990), 268–92, at 273–77, and Aðalgeir Kristjánsson, *Bókabylting 18. aldar: Fræðastörf og bókaútgáfa upplýsingarmanna*, Ritsafn Sagnfræðistofunar 44 (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2008), 46–51.

instrumental in getting into print the manuscript of an economic survey of the northern regions of Iceland made in 1775 by Ólafur Olavius on behalf of the Danish government, published in two volumes in Copenhagen in 1780.⁵² But Jón's most significant contribution was the role he played in getting underway the printing of the first volume of the ecclesiastical history of Iceland by the bishop of Skálholt, Finnur Jónsson.⁵³ This was a complete breakthrough in the writing of Icelandic historiography. First of all there was its length. Four thick volumes appeared between 1772–1778. Then there was the fact that it was not just medieval history, but also modern history right down to 1740. Furthermore, although it was written in Latin, it was full of hitherto unpublished documents and other materials in Icelandic from the church's archives.⁵⁴ Aðalgeir Kristjánsson has shown that the Enlightenment had already set down deep roots in Iceland long before the last decades of the eighteenth century and the campaign of Magnús Stephensen (1762–1833) to educate and modernize his countrymen.⁵⁵

Halldór's *Formáli* has to be situated in the context of these developments. He is not someone steeped in the values of the Enlightenment as was Jón Eiríksson, but nor is he a credulous believer in the written word as the *rímur*-poets encountered by Eggert Ólafsson in the fishing camps on Snæfellsnes. He is prepared to dismiss some sagas as fiction. On the

52 Ólafur Olavius, *Oeconomisk Reyse igiennem de nordvestlige, nordlige og nordostlige Kanter af Island*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1780). A German edition appeared shortly afterwards: *Oekonomische Reise durch Island in den nordwestlichen, und Nord-Nordostlichen Gegenden* (Dresden: Breitkopf, 1787). The standard annotated edition is *Ferðabók: Landsþagir í norðvestur-, norður- og norðaustursýslum Íslands 1775–1777*, trans. Steindór Steindórsson frá Hlöðum, 2 vols. (Reykjavík: Bókafellsútgáfan, 1964). See further Haralður Sigurðsson, "Náttúruvísindi og Landfræði," 278–79 and Aðalgeir Kristjánsson, *Bókabylting 18. aldar*, 53–55.

53 Finnur Jónsson, *Historia Ecclesiastica Islandiæ*, 4 vols. (Copenhagen: Typis Orphanotropii, 1772–1778; Rpt. Farnborough: Gregg International, 1970). Pétur Pétursson (1808–1891), subsequently Bishop of Iceland (1866–1889), published a continuation bringing the history down to 1840, *Historia Ecclesiastica Islandiæ. Ab anno 1740, ad annum 1840* (Copenhagen: Bianco Luno, 1841).

54 As Mortensen points out, Þormóður Torfason saw Latin as the primary vehicle for the presentation of Old Norse material and "could hardly himself envisage scholarly collections of Old Norse texts" ("Before Historical 'Sources,'" 9). Finnur Jónsson wrote in Latin and also translated the Old Norse into that language, but he also presented the Old Norse and Modern Icelandic texts in the original language.

55 Aðalgeir Kristjánsson, *Bókabylting 18. aldar*, 145–46.

other hand, he is not yet ready to dismiss out of hand those sagas that are full of fantastic elements. This cautious approach was the one to be adopted by most influential writers and publishers for a long time thereafter.

8. Subsequent Developments

In 1886, nearly a century after Halldór penned his *Formáli*, the Reykjavik bookseller, Sigurður Kristjánsson (1854–1952),⁵⁶ published the first part of what was intended to be one or more volumes in a series he titled “Ævintýra-sögur”. Each part was to cost 30 *aura*, but if one subscribed to the series, the price was reduced to 20 *aura*. The project was not a success and only two parts appeared,⁵⁷ but of particular interest is Sigurður’s introduction to the collection, which appeared on the inside of the front and back covers of the first part. He planned to assemble a collection of sagas, most of which had yet to appear in print:

Það eru sögur sem margir kann að segja um, að þær hafa lítinn sögulegan sannleika við að styðjast; en þótt það verði eigi sannað að viðburðir þeir, er þessar sögur segja frá, hafi átt sjer stað á þann hátt, sem í sögunum segir, þá verður því aldrei neitað, að slíkar sögur hafa í sjer fólgin mikinn sannleika, en hann liggur opt dýpra en svo, að hver maður geti þreifað á honum.⁵⁸

56 He subsequently gained fame by publishing an inexpensive edition of the Family Sagas: *Íslendingasögur*, 38 vols. (Reykjavík: Sigurður Kristjánsson, 1891–1902).

57 *Ingvars saga víðförla*, *Ævintýra-sögur* 1 (Reykjavík: Sigurður Kristjánsson, 1886); *Erex saga*, *Ævintýra-sögur* 2 (Reykjavík: Sigurður Kristjánsson, 1886). The projected third volume, *Hektors saga ok kappá hans*, announced at the bottom of the back cover to the second volume, never appeared, and it was not until 1962 that this saga was published as *Ectors saga*, *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, ed. Agnete Loth, 5 vols., Editiones Arnarnagæanæ, Series B 20–24 (Copenhagen Munksgaard, 1962–1965), 1: 79–186.

58 *Ingvars saga víðförla*, inside cover. ‘There are sagas which many have a definite opinion on, that they have little historical truth to support them; but although it may not be verifiable that those events which these sagas narrate took place in that particular way as told in the sagas, it may on the other hand never be denied, that such sagas have hidden in them a great deal of truth, and it lies often deeper than every individual may be able to grasp it.’ Sigurður goes on to praise these sagas for their language and for their insights into the popular customs, culture, and ways of thinking of the nation at the time when these sagas were written down in the fourteenth century and later.

It should not be overlooked that this is from a sales-pitch designed to promote a new venture, but Sigurður seems to be calculating that this approach, which is very much still in the spirit of Halldór's *Formáli*, would strike a responsive chord: *saga* is still *history* and who could not be flattered by the suggestion that those who loved such sagas were capable of appreciating deeper truths than those who scorned these works. Half a century later, Sigurður Nordal was being deliberately provocative when he wrote: "Aðalviðburðirnir, sem Hrafnkatla segir frá, hafa aldrei gerzt".⁵⁹ Not all of Sigurður Nordal's fellow citizens greeted this insight with great enthusiasm, and this response reveals that the tensions that Halldór had addressed between "truth" and "fiction" in the sagas were still in large measure unresolved. Helgi Haraldsson (1891–1984) from Hrafnkelsstaðir in Hrónamannahreppur gained notoriety for a blistering review he published in 1953 in the newspaper *Tíminn* of *Gerpla*, the most recent novel by Halldór Kiljan Laxness which had appeared late the previous year.⁶⁰ Helgi lambasts Laxness for having brought the *Íslendingasögur* and their protagonists into disrepute: "Ég hef þá trú á íslenzku þjóðinni, að það verði aldrei vinsælt verk, hver sem það reynir, að breyta gullaldarbókmenntum okkar í stóran sorphaug".⁶¹ While Helgi does not discuss Sigurður Nordal's work on *Hrafnkels saga*, his position towards such scholarship is clear:

"Nýjustu vísindin eru þau, að Ingólfur Árnarson hafi aldrei verið til ... Hvað ætli að Norðmenn segðu við því, ef þeim væri sagt, að Heimskringla væri lygasaga frá rótum og Haraldur hárfagri hefði

59 Sigurður Nordal, *Hrafnkatla*, Íslenzk fræði 7 (Reykjavík: Ísafold, 1940), 66. '[T]he principal events in [*Hrafnkels saga*] never took place.' *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða: A Study by Sigurður Nordal*, trans. R. George Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1958), 56.

60 Halldór Kiljan Laxness, *Gerpla* (Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1952). *Tíminn* (1917–1996) was the party newspaper of the Progressive Party (*Framsókn*), which in particular drew its support from the rural areas. At this time, it was in the opposition in the *Alþing*, and 1953 was an election year. Helgi's writings, which are often more polemical than carefully argued and which are not free from political, religious, and regional biases, struck a particular resonance among people of his own age and background.

61 'I have then faith in the Icelandic people, that it [*Gerpla*] will never be a popular work, however much it may try, to turn our Golden Age literature into a huge pile of rubbish.' "Gerpla Halldórs Kiljans," *Tíminn* 37.46–47 (February 26–27, 1953), 4; 4 [quotation, 37.47, pg. 4, col. 3]. Reprinted as "Gerpla Halldórs Laxness" in Helgi Haraldsson, *Engum er Helgi líkur: Bóndin á Hrafnkelsstöðum segir sína meiningu*, ed. Indriði G. Þorsteinsson (Reykjavík: Örn og Örlygur, 1971), 151–56 at 156.

aldrei verið til?⁶² Það væri hliðstætt, og sagan skrifuð á sömu öld og okkar sögu. Þessa háskólagengnu hálfvita okkar ætti að kæra fyrir landráð. Ef þetta er ekki rétta nafnið á þessari starfsemi, hvað heitir hún þá? Mér er spurn, hvað eigum við að gera með handritin heim ok fá þau í hendurnar á þessum mönnum?”⁶³

But even among the “university educated” there were those such as Óskar Halldórsson, who felt that Sigurður Nordal went too far with his interpretations in *Hrafnkatla* and that the saga, rather than being complete fiction, did owe something to regional traditions.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, continued research on the primary sources and changes in our understanding of

62 After reviewing the primary sources, Sverrir Jakobsson comes to the conclusion: “Man kan nemlig godt behandle Harald Hårfagre som en mytisk person, hvis en myte defineres som en fortelling om begivenheter som ikke fant sted, men til tross for det var en del af stammes eller et folks bevissthet om sin fortid”, “Erindringen om en mægtig Personlighed”: Den norsk-islandske historiske tradisjon om Harald Hårfagre i et kildekritisk perspektiv,” *Historisk tidsskrift* 81 (2002): 213–30 at 228. This does not seem to have caused particular outrage in Norway.

63 “The latest research is this, that Ingólfur Árnarson never existed ... What does one think the Norwegians would say to that if they were told that *Heimskringla* is an absolutely unreliable history to its core and that Haraldur hárfagri never existed? That took place at the same time and the saga written at the same time as our history [*Landnámabók*]. These university-educated half-wits of ours should be prosecuted for high treason. If that is not the correct name for this kind of activity, what is one to call it? I am asked, what does it benefit us to involve ourselves in “Manuscripts Home!” and to put them in the hands of these people?”, “Úr Öldungadeildinni,” *Tíminn* 55.66 (March 20, 1971): 6 [quotation, col. 4] (this article appeared exactly one month before the celebrated return of the first manuscripts to Iceland from Denmark, April 22, 1971). Reprinted in Helgi Haraldsson, *Engum er Helgi líkur*, 72–76 at 74–75. Likewise: “Mér þykir til dæmis svo vænt um Njálu, að ég mundi aldrei svívirða hana með því að ræða um það við neinn, hvort hún er skáldsaga frá rótum” [‘I am so fond of *Njáls saga*, for example, that I would never dishonour it by discussing with anyone, whether or not it is fiction to the core’], “Orðið er frjálst: Náttúruskyn Þórhalls og ljóðasmekkur Steingríms,” *Tíminn* 52.177–178 (August 23–24, 1968): 8, 15; 2, 15 [quotation, pg. 8, col. 4]. Reprinted in *Engum er Helgi líkur*, 93–105 at 96. This work of Helgi’s appears to have sold sufficiently well for a second volume to appear: Helgi Haraldsson, *Skýrt og skorinort: Helgi á Hrafnkelsstöðum ræðir umbúðalaust um menn og málefni*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson (Reykjavík: Örn og Örylgur, 1974), edited by no less than the director of the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar. Here the “university educated” come in for their share of praise and the tone is much less strident.

64 Óskar Halldórsson, *Uppruni og þema Hrafnkels sögu*, Fræðurit 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1976). See Shaun F. D. Hughes, “Óskar Halldórsson, *Uppruni og þema Hrafnkels sögu* ...” *Scandinavian Studies* 52 (1980): 300–08, a review which attempts to position Óskar’s work in the then ongoing debates about *Hrafnkels saga*.

the nature of texts have continued to undermine the certainties that existed in previous centuries on the historical reliability of Icelandic documents originating in the thirteenth century. Even “okkar saga” (*Landnámabók*) was called into question in 1974.⁶⁵ But the reaction to this and similar revelations has been muted. As Ármann Jakobsson points out, despite the fact that the subsequent researches of Sveinbjörn Rafnsson and others have continued to challenge the reliability of *Landnámabók* and similar sources, deepening our understanding of why that is so, the response outside the Academy has been to pretend such research does not exist.⁶⁶ This suggests that the binaries “truth/falsehood,” “history/fiction,” have become unproductive and that a different approach is called for. Ármann suggests:

Síðan verða fræðimenn að forðast gamlar ímyndaðar andstæður á borð við ‘uppspuna’ of ‘sannleik’ eða ‘sagnfræði’ eða ‘skáldskap’. Hér eru á ferð bókmenntatextar sem jafnframt eru sagnfræðrit síns tíma. *Sannleikann* er ekki að finna í þessum ritum, aðeins ‘sannleik’ hvers og eins sagnaritara.⁶⁷

In his “Formáli” to the saga collection preserved in MS Icel. 32, Halldór Jakobsson makes his contribution to a debate which has continued with varying degrees of intensity down to the present. He is open to the argument that not everything designated as a *saga* is “history,” but he still

65 “Ju längre tillbaka i tiden man anser at Landnama ursprungligen författats, desto större blir sannolikheten för ändringar och interpretationer.” Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, *Studier i Landnámabók: Kritiska bidrag till den isländska fristatstidens historia*, Bibliotheca historica Lundensis 30 (Lund: Gleerup, 1974), 123.

66 Ármann Jakobsson, “Hvað á að gera við *Landnámu*? Um hefð, höfunda og raunveruleikjablekkingu íslenskra miðaldasagnarita,” *Gripla* 26 (2015): 7–27 at 9–10 (footnote 9). To the works listed there might be added the controversial volume 1: *Frá landnámsstíð til 1700*, Gunnlaugur Haraldsson, *Saga Akraness*, 2 vols. (Akranes: Uppheimar, 2011) which on the one hand discusses the unreliability of the written sources (164–65, 171–77) and then goes on to devote an entire chapter to “Landnám Bresasona” (183–200) complete with detailed maps and genealogies as if this was in fact the “history” of the region. Páll Baldvin Baldvinsson, “Saga Akraness eitt,” *Fréttatíminn* 2.27 (July 8, 2011): 30 draws attention to the “[h]áskaleg umgengni við heimildir” [‘reckless handling of sources’] in this work.

67 “Then scholars will have to sacrifice old conceptual oppositions along the line of ‘false’ and ‘true’ or ‘history’ or ‘fiction’. Here we are talking about literary texts which are the historical writings of their time as well. THE TRUTH is not to be found in these writings, only the ‘truth’ of each and every saga-writer (historian).” Ármann Jakobsson, “Hvað á að gera við *Landnámu*?” 22.

believes “history” is possible and that with prudence one can recognize it when and where one encounters it.

Appendix

[2^r]

Formáli.

Sògur þær sem bók þessi inniheldur hefi ec⁶⁸ göðu fólki til skemtunar & gamans í hjáverkummm uppskrifad þær eru flestar gamlar og víða of lærdum monnummm í þeirra skrifum Citeradar enn þar fyrir vil ec eingummm þar ummm tru telia að þær að öllu leiti sannar sieu; Vorir Ellstu og bestu sògu skrifarar hafa að greint þær og gefed of þrennslags sògur hvað efninu vídvíkur.

1^o. Eru þær Sògur sem einunges til gamans og skemtunar eru of lærdum og skarpvitrummm monnum til Dæg[ra]stittingar⁶⁹ uppdictadar, og ei er hid allra minnstar hæfi til af slíkummm er all mikill fiðldi að flækiaz medal vor, og margar eru Viðuliga under lok lidnar, sumar lika afftur nýliga og á vorummm dogum úr Framandi tungumälum ä Islensku settar af slíkum finn eg í þessari bók Soguna of Þialar Jone Svipdagssýne og Roosania.

Hin fyrri er víst 200 ära gomul edur meir og annad hvert of einhvörummm hugvitzsòmum Islendíng uppdictud eins og Ärmanns, Bärðar Snæfells äss, Viglundar og fleiri soddann, edur og úr þýsku edur Ensku utlögð ä þeim tymum sem þær þjóðer höfdu hier hondlun og ärliga umgengni vid landz folkid. Rosaniae sogu hefe eg lesid prentada ä Dönsku nú fyrir einum 50 a⁷⁰ 60 árummm hvar eftter einhvör Islendíngur hefur hana utlagt, er hún siánnliga til gamans samann sett eins og önnur Roman edur Fabula, og er med firsta skrifud ä Italiensku, med öllu til hæfislæs.

2^o. J Annari grein læt eg þær Sogur sem að sonnu eitthvert til hæfe er til so sem bædi að þeir menn hafa til verid er þær ummm tala, og lika sum af þeim til fellum sked, er þar í fräsogur færast, enn þessar Sogur eru þó so fullar of fänytum fabulum, og liga æfentyrum, konstugliga blöndudum vid það lited sem satt er í þeim, að ömoguligt er að greina sannleikann frä

68 Abbreviations are expended in italics in a manner consistent with the spelling of the manuscript.

69 The abbreviation has to be resolved -ra but the abbreviation looks like that for *id* or *ad*. However it is used again in a word that has to be read “anna[ra]” – see footnote 80.

70 The reading here is clear, and I interpret the “ä” as preposition with the temporal meaning “towards,” translated here as “fifty to sixty years.”

skröksogunum, hier af er micill fiöldj hiá oss slíkar sem Saga of Herravd og Bosa, [2^v]/ Ørvaroddi þ sem eignar einum þad⁷¹ mörgum mönnum til heirer þ Hrolfi Gatrekssyne og soddann fleiri, hier til heirer Sagann af Eigli og Asmunde sem hier efttir filgia enn hvert eg skal virða søgu Þiriks af Bern so micils veit ec eckj, hún synist mier ad mestu leiti eiga heima i Einúngis uppdictudu sogunum þvij hvorki kiemst med neinu moti heim hennar ártal vid þær Longobardisku Chronicúr, og víða er hun full med þeckianligar skroksogur og fanítar fabulur finst og ecki i neinum Historium sem eg hefi lesed ad þeir menn hafi til verid er hun talar so praktugliga umm, fyrir utann Þidric þ er sogurnar kalla Theodoricum de Verona þ siälfann Attila Kong og Sigurd Fabnis bana, Enn med eingu móti giet eg komid því heim, ad allir þeir hofðingiar, hafi getid verid samtíða ä Dögum.

Eingin vafi er ä umm soguna af Sigurdi Þogla ad hún er þeckianliga uppdictud og lík möður sinne sogunne af Flores og Blanceflur hveria hun Citerar.

3°. Sogurnar of Ragnar Lodbrök og Än Bogsveiger eru of ollum hier skrifudum ad minni meining náskilldazar sannleikanum, þö er i þeim eitt og annad sem virkiliga smackar helldur ijkusamliga. Eg vil nú ei taka firir mig ad sijna hvad skinbarliga Rangt og ösatt margt er Anfært i þesum sogum einasta vil eg litid eitt tala um Ragnars søgu þö ei nema i stuttu máli. Þad er öfæd ad su saga giörir ein Ragnar Dana kong of tveimur og eignar honum beggia þeirra börn og bedrifttir, i Noreg er enn nú su saga heil ad mestu i Almuga munni, sem veit ad syna og seigia frá Spangarheidi hvar ein stulka ad nafni Otlag⁷² hefur nilega lifad og sagt sig bera nafni einrar fátækrar stulku er þar hefdi uppalist og sydan giftt einum Dönskum Konge enn nafnid hafi hafi halldist i sinne ætt, þar siest enn Aatlag höien, þ Aaslagar hæd þ sokollud, hvar sagt er hún verid hafi þä hun sat ad fie um daga, og, skamt þar frá er ein vík sem enn i dag er kollud Gullvíkinn, hvar Almugi vill segia ad Harpa su hafi fundist, er Heimer hafdi med ferdir, þä hann [3^r]/ var drepinn af Äka. Eirn lækur Rennur þar og skamt frá, er Nordmenn seigia Kräka hafi verid vön ad þvo sier i, og kalla hann enn i dag Kräkulæk; mä oll þessi örnefni enn nú finna i Stafängurs stiftti i Norege.

71 Thanks to Haukur Þorgeirsson and Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson of the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar i íslenskum fræðum for help in resolving this abbreviation.

72 Corrected from "Oetlag."

Sä hálærði Sagna skrifari Thormodur Thorfason seigir, Ragnar þann sem átti Aslaugu fæddann vera Anno *Christi* 720. og Ríkt i 40 ár þar til hann var drepinn i Englande of Ella sem ad sönnu callast Kongur. enn meinaz þó ei verid hafa yfer Kongur Englands. Thormodur gietur þess og, ad þessi Ragnar hafi verid yfer 70. ära Gamall þá han dó;

Allur annar Ragnar Lodbrök er sä sem drepinn var i Englandi ä Dog-umm Hinns heilaga Jätmundar kongs, hann var fader Ingvars og Ubba sem þang[ad]⁷³ heriudu sydann, og hefndu hanns ä Jätmundi kongi grimmeliga, hier umm Ano 870. Hann meinast og verid hafa fadir Björns Jarnsíðu, er umm sama skeid eftter⁷⁴ sogunum heriadi i Frachlandi, og er það af þessum tveimur sem sä meistari hefur giört ein Ragnar Lodbrok, er soguna hefur Componerad, hvert þesse sydari Ragnar hefur veridnockurn tyma Kóngur i Danmörk veit eg ei, þó er hann so nefndur af Villhialmi meistara, Gormur hin Gamli, var þá kongur i Danmörk, er því lykast þessi Rangnar⁷⁵ hafi verid annad hvert, hans unndir kongur edur ein hver Sæköngur, sem marger voru ä þeim dögum. Hier fyrir utann eru ætt[ar]⁷⁶ tölurnar frá Ragnar Lodbrök hinum Elldra allt til Haraldz kongs Hårfagra oc til vorra daga so skyrar, ad og vel med ärtalinu samstemandi ad ömöguligt synist þær til baka ad Reka, og af öllum lærdum mönnum sem ec hefi lesid eru þær fyrir gilldar og sannar Alitnar. Siest so af þessu ad seirni partur þessarar sögu er ad mestu leiti of öllum álitum godur og sannferdugur.

J þeim firri parti kemur eitt og annad fyrir sem synist eiga micid skilt vid fabulur og ijkusamar fräsogur. Sied hefe eg skrifad efttir þann Margfroda Professör Arna saluga Magnusson, ad Sigurdur Fabnisbani og þeir Budlungar og Giúkungar hafi lifad seint ä siottu ölld, einhverstadur [3^v]/ [n]edarliga⁷⁷ vid fliötíd Rín, måske i því stóra Kóngsríki sem kallad var Austrasia og innehellt Burgundiam, Schweitz, og mörg fleiri lond og ríki; J Ragnars sögu 2 capitulum þar sem talar umm fædüng Volsungs kongs, er án efa ijkt og ösatt, sama i þeim 5ta er talar um ylgíuna er verid skilldi hafa mödir Siggeirs kongs, sä 8de Capitulum sem seigir fra Alaga hömunum er of sama surdeigi, so og er það margt umm fabnerz Sigurdar

73 The word has been trimmed in the margin, but the tail of the “g” is clear, and there is a mark above it that might be part of the abbreviation for “ad.”

74 Most of the abbreviation has been trimmed away.

75 So misspelled in the text.

76 The edge of the page where this abbreviation should appear seems smudged.

77 Only one minim of the first letter is visible, but it is probably an “n.”

og Brinhildar vidskyftti sem micid ötrúlegt synist, hvad eg vil ðdrumm frammeiges efttir láta umm ad dæma, enn allmargar og næstum allar vorar sògur eru med þeðu iðkiu marke Brendar, Enn og Snorra Sturlusónar Eigen Chronica, sem af ðllum er hallden hin truannligasta, lika so Olafs saga Triggvasónar, finnst allvíða meingud med Muka dictum og Otruligum iðkiumm, eirnig Olafs kongs Saga, og adrar fleiri. Sagann af Sverrir kongi Er ad sonnu samansett umm siälfz hans daga, ad sumra Meinöng undir hans eiginn til siön þo⁷⁸ finnaz i henni nockrar Hiätruar fullar heimsku fräsogur, minna er Af sliku ad finna i sögu Haconar kongs gamla, enn allra minst er og eckert það hefi ec i Sturlungu fundid getid, sem eg hefi ei leidst til ad trúa, fyrir utan eina oc adra þar upptalda fyrirburdi sem þo folk ä þeirri hiätruarfullu trugernis ölld, so vel sem siälfur sògurarinn Sturle⁷⁹ lögmatur Þordarsön, hefur ad vösu sanna halldid; allt hid sama er ad sei-gia umm Landnämu, Niälu, Vatnsdälu, Laxdälu, Svarfdälu, Liosvettinga Sögu, Eirbiggiu, allar synast þær truannligar þo ad i þeim finast hier og hvar þreifannligar iðkiur, i sumum meiri, sumum minne, og mætti þar umm margt fleira til stirköngar framme færa ef Rumid leifdi.

Fyrir utann allar hier greindar Sögur og adrar þeirrar lijka, sem eru ærid margar ad greinast Sogurnar i alleina Islenskar, og eckert snertande önnur lond, edur Utlenskar lytid edur Eckert vidkomandi Islande, og enn þær sem ná bædi til Islands og anna[ra]⁸⁰ landa þær sijdustu eru flestar.

Enn nú eru þær Sögur sem menn vita vüst til hafa verit enn eru so under lok lidnar ad ei er efttir hiä of nema nafnid eitt slikar hefe eg fundid efter filgiande, first er

Saga of Einari Syni Gislis er drap Giafalld hirdmann Magnuss kongs Berbeins i [4^r]/ Noregi. þeirrar sogur er gietid i Sögu Jons Ogmundssonar Helga Hólabiskupz.

Saga of Sigurdi hiört er nefnd af Snorra Sturlusyne.

Saga Gröms frá Kroppe, er nefnd i Grettirs Sögu.

Saga af Þorgils Hollusyne, og Saga of Niardvikingum nefnast i Laxdäli.

Saga of Bædmodi Gerpi og Grömulfi atque Saga of Þordi Geller nefnast i Landnämu.

78 Corrected from what looks like "þag."

79 So in the manuscript.

80 The abbreviation reads [id], which cannot be correct.

Saga Af Hrængvidi Jötun og Vikinga. Af Olafi Lidsmanna kóngi.

Saga of Hrok Svarta og Ormi Bäreayar Skaldi nefnast allar i Sturl-
úngu.

Hier fyrir utan*n* er Skiöldúnga saga, og Heidarvíga saga.

Sögu of Þórir kongi Hundsföt og Agnar Kóngi, getur i Hrólfs Sögu
Kraka.

Saga Af Esphælingum*m* er nefnd í Liósvetnunga sögu; Og eru án efa
margar fl[ei]ri⁸¹ slíkar sem undir lok eru lidnar og menn vita ei hvors inne-
halldz verid hafa. Eg hefe san*n*liga oftt forundrad mig yfer því*j* ad einginn ä
þeðsari Upplystu skrifgiörnu olld skuli taka sier fyrir hendur ad giegnum*m*
ganga Vorar Gomlu Sogur. Ad gi[öra]⁸² þær i vissar Ætates. og upplysa
hvað, af, og i þeim er satt edur ösatt, sem ad vi[ssu]⁸³ er aðvellðara ad sei-
gia enn giöra þö efa eg ei ad lærder menn i Kaupenhaf[n]⁸⁴ þar sem eru so
göd äholld og undirbuningur med allt slag giæte mikid i því*j* giör[a]⁸⁵

Hvað ährærir Söguna af Än Bogsveiger, synist mier hún öll stadist
gieta og [ei]⁸⁶ Olíkt ad Än þeði lifad hafi i Noregi fá*m* ärum ädur enn
Haralldur kongur Hi[nn]⁸⁷ Hárfagri bræt sig þar til Rikis og Eiddi öllum
fylkis köngú*m*.

Preface.

The sagas which this book contains I have written up in my spare time
for good folk for their amusement and pleasure. They are most of them
old and widely mentioned by learned people in their writings, and for this
reason I wish to persuade no-one that they are in every respect true. Our

81 Only the “fl” is visible on the outer margin and the next line begins with “ra.”

82 The end of the word has been trimmed at the edge of the page, and what is missing can be
at most one or two letters or an abbreviation.

83 The end of the word has been trimmed, but this seems a reasonable guess for what was
meant,

84 The end of the word has been trimmed.

85 The expected form would be “giöra;” the resolution of the abbreviation sign, a supersc-
ript “o,” must also be meant to include the palatal glide. The end of the word has been
trimmed.

86 A negative seems to be required here, and I would suggest that “ei” or “eigi” has been lost
when the leaf was trimmed.

87 The first letter is clearly the cursive form of “h” majuscule. The following minim does not
close up with the second one, so it is an “i” followed by the first minim of “nn,” the end of
the word having been trimmed.

oldest and best writers on history have made distinctions among them and given us three kinds of sagas according to subject matter.

1. First are those sagas which are made up purely for pleasure and amusement by learned and intelligent people as a diversion, and there is not the least amount of value in such, of which there is a very large number floating around among us, and many others have without doubt perished. Some also again recently and in our days have been translated into Icelandic from foreign languages. Of such I find in this book, the sagas of Þjálar-Jón Svipdagsson and Rósanía.⁸⁸

The first is certainly 200 years old or more and either made up by some clever Icelander such as are *Ármanns saga*,⁸⁹ *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, *Víglundar saga* and more of a similar kind, or translated from German or English in those times when those nations had trade relations here and yearly contact with the country's inhabitants. *Rósanía saga*⁹⁰ I have read printed in Danish now some fifty to sixty years ago.⁹¹ Using this text some Icelander has translated it. It is clearly composed for amusement just like other romances or fables, and was at first written in Italian. It is completely unfounded.⁹²

2. In the second category I place those sagas in which to be sure some truth exists, in that both their characters have existed which they speak about, and likewise some of the events took place which occur there in the narratives. But these sagas are, however, so full of worthless fables and lying fairy-tales,⁹³ mixed in a contrived manner with that little that is true in them so that it is impossible to sift out the truth from the false stories. Of these there is a great number among us, such as *Bósa saga og Herraúðs*,

88 *Rósanía saga* is translated from French via Danish, but *Þjálar-Jóns saga* is a fourteenth-century Icelandic composition.

89 Halldór is being coy here as his version of this saga had already appeared in print in 1782.

90 Halldór seem to hesitate between marking the first vowel of *Rósanía* long (-oo-) or short as here. Usually the word is indeclinable, but here it is treated as a Latin first declension feminine noun ending -ae in the genitive.

91 Since Halldór was 55 when he wrote this Preface, these figures mean no more than to indicate some time in his youth. The publication referred to is: Bastian Stub, *En Smuck Historie om Rosanie, fød af Kongelig Byrd, en Prinsesse, opfostred of en Bunde ... of Italiensk paa Dansk* (Copenhagen: n.p., 1708).

92 That is, completely without truth.

93 On the complicated range of meanings for the word *ævintýri* over the centuries, see Shaun F. D. Hughes, "The Old Norse *Exempla* as Arbiters of Gender Roles in Medieval Iceland," in *New Norse Studies*, ed. Jeffrey Turco, *Islandica* 58 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 2016), 255–300 at 268–71.

Örvar-Odds saga, (who possesses in one person what belongs to many individuals), *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* and more of a similar kind. To this group belongs the *Saga af Eigli og Ásmundi* which follows hereafter. But whether or not I ought to esteem *Þiðreks saga af Bern* so much, I do not know. It seems to me for the most part to belong to the purely made up sagas because its chronology in no way at all agrees with the Langobardic chronicles,⁹⁴ and throughout it is full of recognizably false stories and useless fables. Also one does not find in any history or chronicle which I have read that those people have existed which it tells so magnificently about except for Þiðrekur (whom the histories⁹⁵ call Theodoricus de Verona) himself, King Attila and Siguður Fáfnisbani.⁹⁶ But in no way am I able to confirm that all of these rulers might have been contemporaries at the time. There is no doubt concerning *Sigurðar saga þögla* that it is obviously made up and likewise its source, *Flóres saga og Blankiflúr*, which it cites.⁹⁷

3. The sagas of Ragnar loðbrók and Án bogsveigir are, of all the ones written here, in my view, most closely connected to the truth, although there is in them this and that which really has the flavour of being rather

94 Paulus Diaconus, *De gestis Langobardorum libri VI*. There are several sixteenth-century editions, the most recent appearing in Leiden in 1595 and again in Leiden in 1617 as part of: *Gothicarum et Langobardicarum rerum scriptores aliquot veteres*. In 1781, Halldór published his *Chronologiæ tentamen edur Tima-Tals Registurs Ágrip* (Hrappsey: Magnús Móberg, 1781). This appeared in two states in the same year, an earlier one with the sub-title *Fræ Upphæf allra Skapadra Hluta til vorra Daga*, and a latter state with a re-set title page lacking the sub-title. This version also adds new front matter including a dedication of the volume (in Danish) to bishop Finnur Jónsson (v–viii). In this work at A4^{r–v}, Halldór lists the published chronologies he drew upon and states: “Þá auctores sem miner Originales citera hefe eg bona fide anfært á margine út undann hveriu árstali” (“Those authors which my sources cite, I have in good faith placed in the margin alongside each chronological entry”) (A4^v). Paulus Diaconus first appears alongside the entry for 552 C.E. (E2^r). This suggests that he may have never actually consulted Paul’s work.

95 Here *sögurnar* must mean historical works in Latin such as Paulus Orosius, *Adversus paganos historiarum libri septem*, of which there are numerous early editions including one published in Leiden in 1738. In his *Chronologiæ tentamen*, Halldór first mentions Orosius at D1^v in connection with the entry for 108 C.E.

96 In his *Chronologiæ tentamen*, E1^r, Halldór notes the death of Þiðrekur in a battle against Attila, A.D. 451.

97 In *Sigurðar saga þögla* chapter 3, which concerns Sedantiana, the daughter of Flóres and Blantzefflúr, reference is made to *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*. See Loth, *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, 2: 93–259 at 99–100; *Riddarasögur*, Ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 6 vols. (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, Haukadalsútgáfan, 1954), 3: 95–267 at 102 [here chapter 2]).

exaggerated.⁹⁸ I will now not undertake to demonstrate how obviously much in these sagas is wrong and untrue, only I will say a little about *Ragnars saga*, although no more than just a brief comment. It is indisputable that this saga makes one Ragnar king of the Danes out of two individuals, and attributes to this one the children and exploits of both of them.⁹⁹ In Norway this saga is still complete for the most part in the common oral tradition¹⁰⁰ which knows how to show and tell of Spangarheiði, where a young woman by the name of Otlaug¹⁰¹ recently lived and said she bore the name of an impoverished young woman who had grown up there and afterwards married a Danish king, for the name had persisted in her family. There one can still see Aatlaug Høien (Áslaugar hæð), so called, where it is said she had been when she sat over her sheep during the day, and a short way away from there is a bay which still today is called Gullvíkin, where the common people say that that harp was found which Heimir had along on the journey when he was killed by Áki.¹⁰² A stream

98 This is the first of five such occasions where Halldór uses words derived from *að ýkja* (to exaggerate) to refer to narratives or aspects of narratives that are in his opinion fantastic, that is untrue. For an annotated translation of *Áns saga bogsveigis* see “Áns saga bogsveigis: The Saga of Án Bow-Bender,” trans. Shaun F. D. Hughes, in *Medieval Outlaws: Twelve Tales in Modern English*, ed. Thomas H. Ohlgren, Rev. ed. (West Lafayette: Parlor Press, 2005), 290–337 and further Shaun F. D. Hughes, “The Literary Antecedents of *Áns saga bogsveigis*,” *Medieval Scandinavia* 9 (1976): 196–235. See also: “The Saga of An Bow-Bender,” *The Hrafnista Sagas*, trans. Ben Waggoner (New Haven, CT: Troth Publications, 2012), 159–85, 216–20.

99 For a contemporary exposition of this thesis see the work of Rory McTurk, especially *Studies in Ragnars saga loðbrókar and its Major Scandinavian Analogues*, Medium Ævum Monographs 15 (Oxford: Society for the Study of Mediæval Languages and Literature, 1991), 1–50. On the other hand, Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, *Vikings in the West: The Legend of Ragnarr Loðbrók and His Sons*, Studia Mediaevalia Septentrionalia 18 (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2012) argues for only a single figure, the historical Reginheri, the Dane who led the attack on Paris in 845 and who may have been called “loðbrók” [‘Ragnar loðbrók on the other hand is a fictional character’], 269–76.

100 “[Í] almuga munni.” Lit. “in the common mouth.”

101 Þormóður Torfason in *Series dynastarum et regum Daniæ* (Copenhagen: Joh. Melchior Lieben, 1702), 35 gives the alternative “Otloug-vel Aatloug-.” See Jón Helgason, “Átlaug på Spangereid: Oversigt over optegnelser af et norsk localsagn,” in *Nordiske studier: Festskrift til Chr. Westergaard-Nielsen*, ed. Johannes Brøndum-Nielsen et al. (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1975), 79–89 at 84. See also Frans-Arne Stylegar, “Áslaug-Kraka fra Spangereid og Ragnar lodbrok: Lindesnesområdet som kulturell ‘melting pot’ i vikingtid og tidlig middelalder,” in Jacobsen, *Den nordiske histories fader*, 128–61.

102 On Heimir’s harp and his killing by Áki see *Ragnars saga*, chapter 1: *Vølsunga saga ok Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ed. Magnus Olsen, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk

also runs there in the vicinity, in which the Northmen say Kráka was in the habit of washing herself, and it is still called Krákulækur today. One may still find all these place-names in the Stavanger District in Norway.¹⁰³ The learned scholarly historian, Þormóður Torfason, says that the Ragnar who married Áslaug was born Anno Christi 720 and that he ruled for 40 years until he was killed in England by Ælla who in truth may be called a king, but however this does not require him to have been high king of England.¹⁰⁴ Þormóður also says that this Ragnar had been over 70 years old when he died. A completely different Ragnar loðbrók is he who was killed in England in the days of Saint Edward the king. He was the father of Ingvar and Ubba who raided there afterwards and avenged him cruelly on King Edward around about 870. He [Þormóður] thinks him to have also been the father of Björn *járnsíða* who around the same time according to the saga raided in France. And so it is from these two that the master, who has composed the saga, has made one Ragnar loðbrók. Whether or not the later Ragnar had been sometime king in Denmark, I do not know, although he is so named by Master William.¹⁰⁵ Gormur *inn gamli* was then king in Denmark. It is most likely this Ragnar had been either his

litteratur 36 (Copenhagen: S. L. Møller, 1906–1908), 111–16; *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, 4 vols. (Reykjavík: Íslandingasagnaútgáfan, 1954), 1: 107–303 at 221–24.

103 These contemporary traditions are printed by Þormóður Torfason at the end of Book 1, chapter 4, “De fabulosis Islandorum monumentis,” (“Concerning the Legendary Records of the Icelanders”), in his *Series dynastarum et regum Danie*, 30–37 at 35–36, and in Part one, Book 10, chapter xlv of his *Historia rerum Norvegicarum*, 1: 491; *Norges Historie*, ed. Titlestad, 2: 226–29, and in Norwegian by Jonas Ramus, *Norriges Kongers Historie* (Copenhagen: Pet. Nørwig, 1719). For appropriate extracts see Jón Helgason, “Átlaug på Spangereid,” 79–89.

104 This information did not make it into Halldór’s *Chronologia tentamen*.

105 I.e., William of Jumièges. See *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, ed. Elisabeth M. C. van Houts, 2 vols., Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), Bk. I [Table of Contents], *Bier filius Lothroci regis Dacie filio* (Björn, son of King Lothbroc of Denmark) (1: 8–9); Bk. 1.1: Quo tempore pagani, cum Lotroci regis filio, nomine Bier Coste quidem Ferree, procurante eius expeditionem Hastingo, omnium paganorum nequissimo, a Noricis seu Danicis finibus eructantes [‘At that time heathen belched forth from Norse and Danish lands with the son of King Lothbroc, named Björn Ironside, whose expedition was organized by Hasting, the most wicked of all the pagans’] (1: 10–11). See also Bk. 1.4, 1: 16–17, and van Houts’ introduction, 1: xxxvii. Latin editions of William’s work were published in Frankfurt in 1603 and in Paris 1613. See further Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, 65–68, 158–59, 164–90.

under-king or some sea-king as many were in those days. Here, apart from this, are the genealogies from Ragnar loðbrók the elder all the way to King Haraldur *hárfagri* and to our day, so clear and so completely in agreement with the chronology, that it seems impossible to find fault with them, and they are considered reliable and true by all the scholars whom I have read. One sees also from this that the latter part of this saga is for the most part considered by all to be good and trustworthy.

In the first part this and that occurs which seems to have much in common with fables and exaggerated narratives. I have seen it written by the late very learned professor Árni Magnússon that Sigurður Fáfnisbani and the Búðlungar and Gjúkingar may have lived in the sixth century somewhere in the south along the River Rhine, perhaps in the large kingdom which was called Austrasia and contained Burgundia, Switzerland and many more lands and kingdoms. In *Ragnars saga* chapter 2, there where it is telling about the birth of king Völsungur, it is clearly made up and untrue; the same in the fifth where it tells of the she-wolf which is supposed to have been the mother of king Siggeir. The eighth which tells of the enchanted shapings¹⁰⁶ is of the same mixture.¹⁰⁷ So also is much concerning the dealings of Fáfnir, Sigurður and Brynhildur which seems greatly unbelievable which I will leave aside for others in the future to further evaluate. But a great number and almost all of our sagas are branded with this mark of exaggeration, even also Snorri Sturluson's own chronicle which by everyone is considered the most truthful;¹⁰⁸ likewise also *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* one finds everywhere polluted with monkish sayings and unbelievable exaggerations;¹⁰⁹ even King Ólafur's saga and many others.¹¹⁰

106 These are the enchanted *hamar* or shapings which Sigmundur and Sinfjötli discover in the forest and which change them into wolves.

107 For Halldór *Völsunga saga* comprises the opening chapters of what he calls "Ragnars saga."

108 Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnason, 3 vols., Íslensk fornrit 26–28 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1941–1951). Halldór seems to be equivocating here. On the one hand, "everyone" considers the contents of *Heimskringla* to be true, but on the other hand the narrative contains "marks of exaggeration," i.e. fantasy, at least so far as Halldór is concerned. But these episodes may in fact have been considered true at the time the work was written, a position he takes when he discusses *Sturlunga saga* a few lines further on.

109 *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson, 3 vols., Editiones Arnarnæðæ, series A: 1–3 (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard and Reitzels Forlag, 1958–2000).

110 *Ólafs saga hins Helga: Efter pergamentaandskrift i Uppsala Universitets-bibliotek, Dela-*

The saga of King Sverrir is for a fact put together during his lifetime, in the view of some under his own supervision; even so, one finds in it some stupid stories full of superstition.¹¹¹ One finds less of such matter in *Hákonar saga gamla*,¹¹² but the least amount of all is in *Sturlunga saga* and nothing there that I have been able to find mentioned which I am disinclined to believe in except for this and that recounted vision which nevertheless people in that superstitious, credulous century as well as the saga-writer Sturla Þórðarson himself, had certainly held to be true. The very same is to be said about *Landnáma*, *Njála*, *Vatnsdæla*, *Laxdæla*, *Svarfdæla*, *Ljósvetninga saga*, *Eyrbyggja*. They all appear believable even though in them one finds here and there palpable exaggerations, in some more, in some less, and one might present much more in confirmation of this if the space allowed.

In addition to all the sagas mentioned here and the others of their ilk, which are a great many, the sagas separate themselves into completely Icelandic ones and not treating other countries, or foreign ones having little or nothing to do with Iceland and further those which involve both Iceland and other countries. These last are the most numerous. Now further are those sagas which one indeed knows have existed and but which have now so completely disappeared that nothing remains with us except the name alone. Of such have I found those which follow here. First is:

The saga of Einar Gillis who killed Gjafaldur the retainer of king Magnús berbein in Norway. Their saga is mentioned in the saga of saint Jón Ögmundsson, bishop of Hólar.¹¹³

gardieske samling nr. 8^{II}, ed. Oscar Albert Johnsen, Den Norsk Historisk Kjeldeskrift-kommission (Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1922) and *Saga Óláfs konungs hins Helga: Den Store saga om Olav den Hellige*, ed. Oscar Albert Johnsen and Jón Helgason, 2 vols., Norsk Historisk Kjeldeskrift-Institutt (Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1941).

- 111 *Sverris saga*, ed. Þorleifur Hauksson, Íslenzk fornrit 30 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2007).
- 112 *Hákonar saga I og II*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson og Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, 2 vols., Íslenzk fornrit 31–32 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2013).
- 113 Towards the conclusion of “Gísels þáttur Illugasonar” it says that Gisl (Gils) who killed King Magnús’ retainer Gjafaldur had a son called Einar “ok er mikil saga frá honum” (and there is great saga concerning him). *Biskupa sögur*, ed. Sigurgeir Steingrímsson *et al.*, 3 vols. in 4, Íslenzk fornrit 15–17 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1998–2003), 15.2: 317–35 at 334. In older editions of *Jóns saga Helga* attributed to the monk Gunnlaugur Leifsson, “Gísels þáttur” is printed as chapters 9–14. *Biskupa sögur*, [ed. Jón Sigurðsson, Gubrandur Vigfússon *et al.*] 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Hið íslenzka bókmenntafélag, 1858–1878), 1: 213–260 at 221–27.

The saga of Sigurður *hjörtur* is named by Snorri Sturluson.¹¹⁴

The saga of Grímur frá Kroppi is named in *Grettis saga*.¹¹⁵

The saga of Þorgils Hölluson and the saga of the Njarðvíkingar are named in *Laxdæla*.¹¹⁶

The saga of Böðmóður gerpi and Grímulfur and the saga of Þórður gelli are named in *Landnáma*.¹¹⁷

The saga of Hröngviður the giant and the Vikings, of Ólafur the king of the Liðsmen, the saga of Hrókur svartir and Ormur Bárreyjarskáld are all named in *Sturlunga saga*.¹¹⁸

Here in addition are *Skjöldunga saga* and *Heiðarvíga saga*.¹¹⁹

The saga of King Þórir hundsfót and King Agnar is mentioned in *Hrólfs saga kraka*.¹²⁰

114 See chapter 5 of *Hálfdanar saga svarta* in *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnason, 1: 88.

115 See *Grettis saga Ásmundarson*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, Íslensk fornrit 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1936), chapter 62, 205.

116 See *Laxdæla saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslensk fornrit 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1934), chapter 67 (*Þorgils saga Höllusonar*), p. 199; chapter 69 (*Saga Njarðvíkinga* [probably “Gunnars þáttur Þiðrandabana”]), 202 and fn. 2 with a reference to xxxviii–xxxix).

117 See *Landnámabók S 160* (*Böðmóðs saga gerpis ok Grímólfs*) (*Íslendingabók Landnámabók 1*: 198); *Landnámabók S 98* (*Þorgils saga gellis*), (*Íslendingabók Landnámabók 1*: 140).

118 In *Sturlunga saga*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson *et al.*, 2 vols. (Reykjavík: Sturlunguútgáfan, 1946), see “Geirmundar þáttur heljar skinns,” chapter 2 (*Hróks saga svarta*) (1: 7); *Þorgils saga ok Haflíða*, chapter 10 (*Saga frá Hröngviði víkingi*, *Saga frá Óláfi Liðsmannakonungi*, *Saga Orms Bárreyjarskálds*) (1: 27). In *Sturlunga saga*, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Reykjavík: Mál og Menning, 2010) the references are: *Hróks saga svarta*, 1: 3, *Saga frá Hröngviði víkingi* etc., 1: 22.

119 Of *Skjöldunga saga* only the “Sögubrot af fornkonungum” and the Latin epitome of Árngrímur Jónsson (1568–1648) survive (see *Danakonunga sögur*, ed. Bjarni Guðnason, Íslensk fornrit 35 [Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1982], 46–71 and 4–38. The manuscript containing the first 15 chapters of *Heiðarvíga saga* perished in the great fire of Copenhagen in 1728, and their contents were reconstructed from memory in the heavily Danish-influenced Icelandic of the eighteenth century by Jón Ólafsson frá Grunnavík (1705–1769). For *Heiðarvíga saga* see *Borgfirðinga sögur*, ed. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, Íslensk fornrit 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1938), 213–328.

120 In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, chapter 21, it says that great stories (“miklar sögur”) were told of Þórir konungur hundsfótur (*Hrólfs saga kraka og Bjarkarímur*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 32 [Copenhagen: S. L. Møller, 1904]), 57; Guðni Jónsson, *Fornaldar sögur 1*: 55 [there chapter 29]). On the other hand, the saga merely says in chapter 9 that Agnar konungur Hróarsson is frequently mentioned in old stories (“fornar sögur”) and that he became more famous than his father (Finnur Jónsson, *Hrólfs saga kraka* 27, 28; Guðni Jónsson, *Fornaldar sögur 1*: 24, 25 [there chapter 12]).

The saga of the Espælingar is named in *Ljósvetninga saga*;¹²¹ and there are without doubt many more such which have vanished and people do not know what their contents may have been. I have truly often pondered myself over this, that in this Enlightened century eager to write things up, no one should have taken upon themselves the task to go through our old sagas, to place them in accurate periods, and to indicate what of and in them is true or not true — which to be sure is easier to say than to do. Although I do not doubt that the learned people in Copenhagen where there are such good facilities and resources in many ways, might be able get a great deal done.

As for the saga of Án bogsveigir. It seems to me all of it could have happened, also [not]¹²² unlikely that this Án may have lived in Norway a few years before king Haraldur the Well-Haired¹²³ made his way on to the throne and wiped out all the regional kings.

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121 *Espælinga saga* is mentioned at the beginning of *Þórarins þáttr*, a text associated with *Ljósvetninga saga* in manuscripts: *Ljósvetninga saga*, ed. Björn Sigfússon, Íslenzk fornrit 10 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1940), 141–47 at 143.

122 See the textual note for this emendation.

123 It has proven difficult to succinctly translate *hárþagri* which means “having a splendid head of hair” — presumably in opposition to the fate of many of having a *skalli* or bald head. “Fair-haired” is a problem for while “fair” may mean “adequate” or “excellent” it also means “blond” (which Haraldur may have been), but hair colour is not necessarily implied in *þagri*. “Fine-haired” suffers from a similar problem in that while “fine” may mean “excellent” it also means “thin” or “not-coarse.” “Well-haired” may not please everyone as it has been suggested that it could be interpreted as having hair like a well (*brunnur*) or a hole in the ground.

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EFNISÁGRIP

Halldór Jakobsson — um sannleik og skáldskap í sögunum (1789).

Lykilorð: Halldór Jakobsson, MS Icel. 32, Þormóður Torfason, Robinsonades, sannleikur í sögunum, Sigurður Kristjánsson, Hrafnkatla, Gerpla

Handritið Icel. 32 í Houghton bókasafninu við Harvardháskóla hefur einkum að geyma fornaldarsögur með hendi Halldórs Jakobssonar (1734–1810). Halldór sjálfur bætti við formála sem hér er gefinn út og þýddur í viðauka. Í þessum formála reynir Halldór að flokka sögurnar eftir því hversu mikið sannleiksgildi þeirra er. Hann hefur ekkert á móti skáldsögum/lýgisögum en telur að það ætti að viðurkenna að þær eru til skemmtunar og ekki sögulegar heimildir. Greinin fjallar því næst um eðli sagnfræðinnar og þær áskoranir sem fyrstu sagnfræðingar Norðurlanda þurftu að fást við. Þeirra á meðal var Þormóður Torfason sem fyrst og fremst þurfti að treysta á fornaldarsögur sem heimildir fyrir fornsögu Skandinavíu. Skilin á milli sagnfræði og skáldskapar urðu enn óskýrari þegar bókinn *Robinson Crusoe* kom út árið 1719, og þess bókaflóðs (svo-kallaðra ‘Robinsonades’) sem í kjölfar hennar fylgdu. Tvær slíkar bækur voru gefnar út árið 1756 á Hólum. En jafnvel þar voru lærðir menn sem áttuðu sig ekki á að sögur þessar voru skáldskapur en ekki sögulegar heimildir. Þegar dró að lokum 18. aldar voru hlutirnir

farnir að breytast, og þegar Carl Christian Rafn gaf út þýðingar sína á fornaldarsögum á árunum 1822–1826, var þeim lýst sem ‘goðfræðilegum og rómantískum’ sögum. En spurningunni um hvort sögur af hinum ýmsum tegundum væru sannar eða ekki hafði enn ekki verið svarað. Árið 1886 byrjaði Sigurður Kristjánsson að birta útgáfuröð ævintýrasagna sem hann fullyrti að væru að hluta til sannar, þótt hann raunar virðist ekki hafa verið tekinn á orðinu. Enn fremur var efast um sannleiksgildi Íslendingasagna, t. d. af Sigurði Nordal í bókinni *Hrafnkötlu* (1940). Ekki voru allir þó reiðubúnir að samþykkja þessa þróun í rannsóknum og túlkun eins og sést t. d. í deilum sem urðu þegar *Gerpla* eftir Halldór Laxness var gefin út árið 1952. Ein afleiðing þessa er sú, að gjá er á milli fræðimanna sem vantroysta öllum miðaldaheimildum og áhugamanna um sagnfræði sem halda áfram að nota þessar heimildir þegar þeir rita byggðasögu.

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