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## THE ICELANDIC SAGAS AND SAGA LANDSCAPES

### *Writing, Reading and Retelling Íslendingasögur Narratives*

#### Introduction

ACADEMIC STUDY of the ways in which the corpus of *Íslendingasögur* has been transmitted and read in Iceland from medieval to modern times typically takes as its point of departure the extant manuscripts in which texts of the sagas are preserved. Around 65 extant medieval parchment manuscripts contain *Íslendingasögur* texts and the number of post-medieval paper manuscripts is many times this.<sup>1</sup> As is now widely recognised – and reflecting a discernible ‘material turn’ in the humanities more widely – recent critical approaches to medieval Icelandic literature increasingly emphasise the material contexts of, and vehicles for, the preservation and transmission of the *Íslendingasögur* and other genres of medieval Icelandic literary production.

Critics are less concerned with determining the nature of long-lost and thus intangible ‘original’ texts (and with attempting their reconstruction), and more interested in the analysis of more concrete aspects or trends pertaining to the material evidence that survives. The physical and textual

1 On the preservation of *Íslendingasögur* in medieval parchment manuscripts, see Emily Lethbridge, “*Hvorki glansar gull á mér / né glæstir stafir í linum*”: A Survey of Medieval Icelandic *Íslendingasögur* Manuscripts and the Case of *Njáls saga*,’ *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 129 (2014): 53–89. A search and rough count of copies of *Íslendingasögur* texts preserved in post-medieval manuscripts in the Handrit.is online catalogue returns over 1200 individual records but the total number of manuscripts is fewer than this, since many manuscripts are compilations containing several sagas (thus some records will be duplicates). However, the catalogue does not currently hold information about Icelandic manuscripts in collections other than the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum in Reykjavík; Den Arnamagnæanske samling, Nordisk forskningsinstitut, University of Copenhagen; Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn, Reykjavík; as well as a handful of Icelandic manuscripts that are in the Swedish Royal Library, Stockholm.

diversity that manuscripts of the same work display is placed under greater scrutiny, as is the nature of the unique physical and textual features of individual manuscripts.<sup>2</sup> Such approaches result in new literary- and socio-historical perspectives and appreciation of, for example, the engagement of scribes and readers with the texts and books that passed through their hands, the potential of individual works for rewriting and reinterpretation (as well as a more nuanced understanding of what external factors might have shaped these processes), and the reciprocal influence and relationship between manuscript culture and print culture.

Another key material context as far as questions about the origins and transmission of the *Íslendingasögur* are concerned is the Icelandic landscape. The natural, topographical contours of the previously uninhabited land, together with the settlement patterns of those who colonised the island from the late ninth century onwards, were an important source of inspiration for the composition of narratives about these first settlers and their descendants – first orally articulated, and later set down in written form. Equally, the landscape (and evidence for settlement and life in and around it such as place-names and man-made structures) was a crucial vehicle for the transmission of these narratives, alongside the parchment and paper manuscripts that were produced and circulated from the thirteenth century up until the early twentieth century.

The aim of this article is to attempt to bring these two material contexts for the transmission and reception of the *Íslendingasögur* together, and to emphasise the simultaneous and equal importance of both manuscript and landscape contexts for the continuity that might be said to be one of the hallmarks of this genre's transmission over time. Such a consideration of Icelandic landscapes as a medium for transmission alongside the parchment and paper tradition might be seen as a natural extension of the 'material turn' that has shaped recent approaches to medieval Icelandic literature.

- 2 See, e.g., Emily Lethbridge, 'Gísla saga Súrssonar: Textual Variation, Editorial Constructions, and Critical Interpretations,' in *Creating the Medieval Saga: Versions, Variability, and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Saga Literature*, ed. Judy Quinn and Emily Lethbridge (Odense: Syddansk University Press, 2010), 123–52 (and other essays in the same volume) and 'Authors and Anonymity, Texts and Their Contexts: The Case of Eggertsbók,' in *Modes of Authorship in the Middle Ages*, ed. Else Mundal, Slavica Rankovic and Ingvil Budal (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2012), 343–64; Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, 'Expanding Horizons: Recent Trends in Old Norse-Icelandic Manuscript Studies,' *New Medieval Literatures* 14 (2012): 203–23.

Scholars have devoted considerable time to attempting to better understand the factors that, from the early twelfth century onwards, might have moved Icelanders to embark upon a programme of textualisation in the vernacular language, producing texts that belong to a wide range of historical, legal and narrative genres: “Icelanders ... cultivated their own history with vigour out of proportion to their resources and population size”, notes Diana Whaley, for example.<sup>3</sup>

Little attention, however, has been paid to the ways in which these written outputs (with the *Íslendingasögur* in the spotlight but also *samtíðarsögur*, *biskupasögur*, and *þættir*, although these saga genres will not be considered in the present article) were accessed and communicated in both landscape and manuscript contexts at once. This is, arguably, necessary for a fuller understanding of the processes by which the *Íslendingasögur*, in particular, were first composed as written narratives and have lived subsequently in local and national consciousness for a millennium or so – albeit as responses, initially and subsequently, to different socio-political, economic and environmental events and contexts, that fulfilled differing functions for different groups of people, at different times.<sup>4</sup>

3 Diana Whaley, ‘A Useful Past: Historical Writing in Medieval Iceland,’ in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 161. An older but still important contribution to this debate is Kurt Schier, ‘Iceland and the Rise of Literature in ‘Terra Nova’: Some Comparative Reflections,’ *Gripla* 1 (1975): 168–81.

4 With respect to this (and following the suggestion of one of this article’s two anonymous reviewers, although this is not the place to develop this idea at length), it is useful to distinguish here between three principal time periods, since in each case, the transmission and reception of the sagas might be said to be characterised by distinct influences. Firstly, there is the period in which the sagas were initially written down and subsequently transmitted (the late twelfth to fourteenth and fifteenth centuries), during which time society and power structures underwent great change, not least following Iceland’s submission to foreign rule with all of the consequences that ensued on a local and national level. Saga narratives played a particular role in the ideological construction of identity and legitimacy, and in later developments or adjustments regarding these constructions, for example. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries constitute the second period, this being a time when Icelanders in Copenhagen (not least those studying and working for patrons at the University of Copenhagen, founded in 1479, Arngrímur Jónsson ‘hinn lærði’ being foremost amongst them) began to alert the wider world to the great potential of the sagas as sources for writing national histories. This external and growing scholarly interest continued into the eighteenth century. Finally, the third period spans the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the sagas were put to use once again in distinctive historical and political nationalist contexts, both in Iceland and in other Scandinavian countries.

In what follows, the role of the landscape in the creation of the sagas will be examined first, with a focus on how place-names were a source for saga-writing, and on the complex relationship between 'saga places' and places in the 'real' landscape that are identified as saga places.<sup>5</sup> Next, indoor and outdoor contexts for saga reading or retelling in Iceland from the medieval to the modern period will be discussed, with the parallel transmission of saga narratives in both environments being stressed. Finally, hypertext literature and reading modes will be looked to as a theoretical model for better understanding the ways in which Icelanders in the past navigated around the worlds of these narratives, and – with these narratives to hand – their own world.

## Landscape as the first saga manuscript

Fundamental to the argument of this article is a consideration of the parallels between landscape and manuscript as vessel or channel for the communication of narrative material, and the ways in which landscape can be 'read' as intertextual narrative. It is worth noting at the outset of this study that the term 'landscape' is widely acknowledged as being a far from neutral term: rather, it is a cultural, political and ideological construct whose meaning or significance is constantly undergoing reconfiguration and reinterpretation.<sup>6</sup> The metaphorical idea that landscape can be 'read' is not a new one, and is central to disciplines such as historical geography,

5 The narrative function or role that the landscape plays in the written *Íslendingasögur* themselves will not be considered here, though this is a field rich with possibility and much remains to be done building on existing studies such as Paul Schach, 'The Anticipatory Literary Setting in the Old Icelandic Family Sagas,' *Scandinavian Studies* 27 (1955): 1–13; Helen Damico, 'Dystopic Conditions of the Mind: Toward a Study of Landscape in Grettissaga,' *In Geardagum: Essays on Old English Language and Literature* 7 (1986): 1–15; Ian Wyatt, 'Narrative Functions of Landscape in the Old Icelandic Family Sagas,' in *Land, Sea and Home: Proceedings of a Conference on Viking-period Settlement at Cardiff, July 2001*, ed. John Hines, Alan Lane and Mark Redknap (Leeds: Maney, 2004): 273–82; Eleanor Barraclough, 'Inside Outlawry in Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar and Gísla saga Súrssonar: Landscape in the Outlaw Sagas,' *Scandinavian Studies* 82 (2010): 365–88 and 'Naming the Landscape in the *landnám* Narratives of the *Íslendingasögur* and *Landnámabók*,' *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 36 (2012): 79–101.

6 See, e.g., Denis Cosgrove's seminal monograph *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), also Matthew Johnson, *Ideas of Landscape* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007) for further discussion and references.

landscape archaeology and environmental history.<sup>7</sup> For present purposes, it might be noted that this idea entails, on the one hand, the notion of ‘reading’ landscape as a physical entity in order to better understand its component parts and thus navigate around it physically, and on the other hand, the notion of landscape as a medium which preserves and even actively communicates narrative, and thus enhances navigation both physically and also culturally or ideologically.<sup>8</sup>

Although new or material philological approaches to medieval Icelandic literature and textual culture emphasise the anachronism inherent in looking back to lost archetype manuscripts of ‘original’ saga texts, the idea of the landscape itself as the original manuscript is a persuasive one – even if the precise ‘text’ inscribed on it cannot be recovered. Indeed, if landscape is to be seen and read as a manuscript, it is best regarded as a palimpsest – a manuscript which is characterised by multiple stages and reuse, with accretions of text building up over time, newer text being written over older, scraped-away text.<sup>9</sup> This analogy will be returned to in the ensuing discussion about place-names in *Íslendingasögur* texts.

As is well known, Iceland was settled permanently and comprehensively in the late ninth century though archaeological and environmental research suggests that prior to this, the island may have been one of several Northern Atlantic outposts that were used as temporary, seasonal bases

- 7 William Hoskins’s *The Making of the English Landscape*, first published in 1955, is key here (Toller Fratrum, Dorset: Little Toller Books, 2014, second edition). See also, more recently, Richard Muir, *The New Reading the Landscape: Fieldwork in Landscape History* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000).
- 8 See, e.g., J. Duncan and N. Duncan, ‘(Re)reading the Landscape,’ *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 6 (1988): 117–26; W. Cronon, ‘A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative,’ *The Journal of American History* 78 (1992): 1347–76; Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).
- 9 This metaphor is common in landscape history: for an overview of scholarship, see Oscar Aldred, ‘Time for Fluent Landscapes,’ in *Conversations with Landscape*, ed. Karl Benediktsson and Katrín Anna Lund (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), at 69–70. Aldred (69) cites O. G. S. Crawford who, over sixty years ago in his book *Archaeology in the Field* (London: Dent and Sons, 1953), set forth the idea that “The surface of England is a palimpsest, a document that has been written on and erased over and over again” (at 51). The metaphor of the story-layered landscape is employed by Carol Hoggart in a short article that explores how Iceland was “mapped through association with human story” (‘A Layered Landscape: How the Family Sagas Mapped Medieval Iceland,’ *Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies* 16 (2010), 1).

for walrus-hunting or other resource-gathering, and written sources such as *Íslendingabók* claim that Christian hermits or ‘papar’ were present but fled the island when the Norse settlers arrived.<sup>10</sup> Before the conversion to Christianity and the formal, Church-sponsored or driven introduction of book-making, early Icelandic society and culture was an oral one.<sup>11</sup> Story-telling (in conjunction with place-naming) would have been one important means by which the first settlers transformed the unfamiliar space of the new land into their own cultural landscape, and by which they and their descendants maintained connections with their homelands.<sup>12</sup>

Stories about the settlement period and about the early settlers and events must have been rooted in physical places, around Iceland, directly bound up with topographical knowledge: people wrote themselves and their stories into the landscape by claiming land, naming it after themselves and events that happened at particular places (as well as on the basis of the appearance of natural landscape features), and imprinting their lives upon it (not least by introducing agricultural practices to it). In turn, by connecting stories and specific places together (e.g. farmsteads, boundaries, natural landmarks), place-names (and the people or events associated with those places) became more memorable. Anecdotes were passed down orally from one generation to another: geography, in conjunction with genealogy, provided a robust and tangible framework around and within which to organise narrative material.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the first sagas or settlement-generation

10 On walrus-hunting, see Karin M. Frei et al., ‘Was it for Walrus? Viking Age Settlement and Medieval Walrus Ivory Trade in Iceland and Greenland,’ *World Archaeology* 47 (2015): 439–66. On the papar, see, e.g., Barbara Crawford, ed., *The Pappar in the North Atlantic: Environment and History. The Proceedings of a Day Conference held on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2001* (St Andrews: University of Saint Andrews, 2002).

11 See, e.g., Judy Quinn, ‘From Orality to Literacy in Medieval Iceland,’ in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, 30–60; Gisli Sigurðsson, ‘Orality and Literacy in the Sagas of Icelanders,’ in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 285–301.

12 With regard to the latter point, it is notable that a cluster of place-names found around the Kjalarnes area (e.g. Esja, Melar, Garðar, Akranes, Kjós, Laxá, Sandvík, Leiruvogur) have direct equivalents on the Hebridean island of Lewis, western Scotland. See Magne Oftedal, ‘The Village Names of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides,’ *Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap* (1954): 201–24.

13 The extent to which these oral sagas were comparable to the written sagas we have preserved in manuscripts from the thirteenth century onwards, not least with regard to length and style, has long been a matter of debate in saga scholarship. See, e.g., Carol Clover, ‘The Long Prose Form,’ *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 101 (1986): 10–39; Theodore M. Andersson,

stories were read directly out of the landscape.<sup>14</sup> Later, these topographically-anchored anecdotes were remediated in writing. Jürg Glauser has drawn on cultural memory theory in considering what influences the “ancient stories” were subjected to in the process of their “recording, codifying and theologizing”:

“The semiotization of the landscape, previously empty and undescribed, and therefore meaningless and without sense, proceeds in a manner not dissimilar to modern stories and legends. In the Icelandic sagas ... one constantly finds at crucial points a ‘mapping’, a descriptive record of the landscape and of nature ... By narrative means, a place-name is thus established to whose literary description the fiction immediately following it can refer repeatedly. [The excerpt from *Egils saga*] also shows how a transformation of nature into culture occurs, in that nature – in the concrete form of the Icelandic landscape surrounding the community – is ‘described’ by the sagas, i.e. endowed with signs and so filled with significance. This ‘locating’ of culture, a semiotization of the landscape ... forms a trope of memory”.<sup>15</sup>

Narrative was thus a central dynamic in the appropriation, dissection and mapping of the landscape, and in its being imbued with historical, cultural and political significance.

‘The Long Prose Form in Medieval Iceland,’ *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 101 (2002): 380–411; articles in *Oral Art Forms and their Passage into Writing*, ed. Else Mundal and Jonas Wellendorf (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2007); Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method*, trans. Nicholas Jones (London and Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

14 It is worth pointing out here, too, that the landscape itself is far from static and passive, and often imbued with significant agency in the sagas and in other narratives or accounts of the settlement (e.g. *Landnámabók*), actively influencing the settlement paradigm.

15 ‘Sagas of the Icelanders (*Íslendinga sögur*) and þættir as the Literary Representation of a New Social Space,’ in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, 209. Other studies which deploy memory studies in tandem, directly or indirectly, with the role that the landscape played in the creation and storage of cultural memory include Pernille Hermann, ‘Saga Literature, Cultural Memory, and Storage,’ *Scandinavian Studies* 85 (2013): 332–54; other articles in this special issue of *Scandinavian Studies* (edited by Pernille Hermann and Stephen Mitchell); and essays in *Minni and Muninn: Memory in Medieval Nordic Culture*, ed. Pernille Hermann, Stephen Mitchell and Agnes Arnórsdóttir (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014). See also Kirsten Hastrup, *A Place Apart: An Anthropological Study of the Icelandic World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).



## Place-names as a source for saga writing

In the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, when the written composition and transmission of the *Íslendingasögur* was initiated, place-names around Iceland – in conjunction with oral anecdotes about the settlement age that had accreted around these place-names – must have been an important source for those who took quill in hand and cast (or recast) the sagas in writing. For each written saga, the extent to which existing place-names may have been used as a source alongside other sources by the person responsible for determining that saga's written composition or form must have varied. These other sources would have been both oral in form (material such as genealogies, laws, or other traditions) and written, with the latter comprising such vernacular texts as existed (e.g. *Landnámabók*) and foreign or learned material (e.g. ecclesiastical texts).<sup>16</sup>

It is moot whether those who put the *Íslendingasögur* together in written form collected pre-existing, 'genuine' oral traditions that were associated with specific places and place-names and worked them up in writing, or alternatively took certain place-names and used them as the spark of anecdotal inspiration, creating characters and events out of them and moulding these anecdotes into bigger and more coherent wholes. Most likely, a combination of the two approaches was utilised, perhaps in differing proportions from one saga to another. The same holds for what we might surmise about the role of place-names as a source for material we find in *Landnámabók*. And in an attempt to consider the ways in which the Icelandic landscape might have contributed to and shaped the written *Íslendingasögur*, *Landnámabók* – as an example of early historical writing – can give us useful insights into how knowledge about historical figures and events was organised first and foremost on a spatial basis in conjunction with genealogy.<sup>17</sup> The manner or rhetoric by which individual settlers

16 See further Carol Clover, 'Icelandic Family Sagas (*Íslendingasögur*),' in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. Carol Clover and John Lindow (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985. Reprinted 2005), 239–315.

17 See Margaret Clunies Ross, 'The Development of Old Norse Textual Worlds: Genealogical Structure as a Principle of Literary Organization in Early Iceland,' *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 92 (1993): 372–85, and 'Textual Territory: The Regional Dynamic of Medieval Icelandic Literary Production,' *New Medieval Literatures* 1 (1997): 9–30. See also Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Land-Taking and Text-Making in Medieval Iceland,' in *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages*, ed. Sylvia Tomasch and



are presented in *Landnámabók* ('Settler X claimed land at Y, and lived at X-bær/staðir') is replicated time and again in the *Íslendingasögur* in passages which describe the claiming, naming and settling of local areas.

Place-names in the *Íslendingasögur*, particularly in passages that describe the discovery, naming, and claiming of local areas, have a range of characteristics and can be divided into different types or categories. They are often transparent (or seem to be – on which more below) in terms of the linguistic elements they are constructed from, and their simplex or compound meaning. They can be descriptive, reflecting the perceived appearance of a natural feature or area (e.g. Hvítá; Reykjanes). Some incorporate the relative cardinal position of a given natural feature or area to other features or areas (e.g. Norðurá; Vestfirðir). Some communicate information about natural resources associated with a specific place or area (e.g. Álftanes, Skógar). Some incorporate a personal name, either as the first element of manmade structures such as farms (e.g. Grímkelsstaðir), or as the first element of a natural feature of the landscape (e.g. Hallmundarhraun). Finally, some place-names seem to commemorate an event (e.g. Orrustudalur, Orrustuhóll) or some act performed by an individual (e.g. Bjarnarhlaup), and thus seem to preserve the memory of something that happened (or is said to have happened) at a specific spot.

Sealy Gilles (Philadelphia PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 159–84. Though the versions of *Landnámabók* that survive in extant manuscripts date to the thirteenth century and later, the geographical organisation of the material, and the emphasis on specific, identifiable places and people and events associated with these places, must have been an original, twelfth-century structural principle. It is worth noting that though *Landnámabók* gives the impression of being comprehensive and encyclopedic, archaeological investigation presents a more complex picture of settlement around Iceland, not least having uncovered places/sites not mentioned in any textual sources (see, e.g., Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinsson, 'Creating a Past: A Historiography of the Settlement of Iceland,' in *Contact, Continuity and Collapse: The Norse Colonization of the North Atlantic*, ed. James Barrett (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 130–61). On place-names in *Landnámabók* (and their use as a source), see Jakob Benediktsson, Introduction to *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, Íslenzk fornrit, vol. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1968), cxi–cxliii; Oskar Bandle, 'Die Ortsnamen in der Landnámabók,' in *Sjötíu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni*, ed. Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1977), 47–68; Helgi Þorláksson, 'Sjö örnefni og Landnáma. Um ótengd mannanöfn sem örnefni og frásagnir af sjö landnemunum,' *Skírnir* 152 (1978): 114–61; Haralður Matthíasson, 'Um staðfræði Landnámabókar' (Reykjavík: Félag áhugamenn um réttarsögu, 1983).

However, as Þórhallur Vilmundarson has suggested in his ‘náttúru-nafnakenning’ theory, the origins of place-names that appear to incorporate a personal name, or to refer to an object (and that are presented on the basis of this assumption in *Landnámabók* and the *Íslendingasögur*), may in fact have been determined by topographical features rather than commemorating an individual or an object. In these instances, place-names which comprised a descriptive element attached to a natural feature or place were later reinterpreted as a personal name plus place or natural feature.<sup>18</sup> Subsequently, anecdotal traditions may have been created or grown up in order to explicitly or implicitly explain the name.

It is striking that in some sagas (for example *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, *Flóamanna saga*, *Gull-Þóris saga*, *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja*, *Kjalnesinga saga*, *Laxdæla saga*, *Vatnsdæla saga*), there is a high concentration of instances where the origins of place-names (both manmade structures and natural features) are given explicit narratorial explanation. In these sagas (and also in others, though at a lower frequency), a story is told that explains how a specific place came to have the name it bears – as a direct consequence of an event or person associated with that place. In *Harðar saga*, for example, of some 130 or so place-names, around 25 or 20% have some explicit or implicit narrative relevance. A similar proportion is found in *Flóamanna saga* (17 of 78 place-names); in *Kjalnesinga saga*, some 15 out of 40 (just under 40%) have an explicit or implicit anecdotal explanation. In other sagas, though, there are very few instances of these explicit place-name explanations: *Njáls saga*, for example (which mentions more than 200 place-names in total, the most in any single saga), contains only two such explicit place-name anecdotes.<sup>19</sup>

This lack of explicit recourse to place-name anecdotes in *Njáls saga* is as striking as the high proportion of them in other sagas – not least considering the fact that there are many local place-names associated with the saga and saga characters but not named in the written texts of the saga, or

18 Þórhallur Vilmundarson, *Um sagnfræði. Þróun sagnaritunar. Heimspækenningar um sögu. Heimildafraði* (Reykjavík, [n.p.]: 1969), and ‘-stad,’ in *Kulturbíotísk leksikon for norðisk miðdelalder*, vol. 16 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1971), 578–84. See also Helgi Þorláksson, ‘Sjö örnefni’ and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, ‘Harðar saga og uppsprettur íslenskra örnefna,’ *Skirnir* 166 (1992): 451–62.

19 These are found in chapter 72 and chapter 129, where it is explained how Þorgeirsvað and Káraoróf, respectively, acquired their names.

not in all texts. Well-known examples are the rock ‘Gunnarsklettur’ by the river Rangá (where Gunnar fought a fierce battle against Starkaður Barkarson and other enemies, *Njáls saga* chs. 62–63) and ‘Flosadalur’ on Þríhyrningur (where Flosi and his band of burners are said to have hidden themselves and their horses following the burning of Bergþórshvoll, *Njáls saga* ch. 130).<sup>20</sup> Either Gunnarsklettur and Flosadalur (and other comparable place-names associated with a saga but not named in written saga texts) were created or bestowed on places after written texts of sagas started circulating as a kind of landscape-based response to or reception of the saga, or, (in the case of this example) the highly literate figure behind the written composition of *Njáls saga* in the late thirteenth century chose not to use these place-names, thereby giving *Njáls saga* a distinctively different character in this respect when compared with sagas such as *Harðar saga* or *Kjalnesinga saga*.

In addition to considering the relative frequency of these explanatory place-name anecdotes from one saga to another, their distribution throughout individual saga narratives is also worthy of note. As might be expected, this kind of place-name rhetoric is most common in the passages in sagas which describe the settlement process – the claiming and naming of tracts of land, and the building of farmsteads. In this context, one place-name-related trope that has been examined is that of a primary settler distributing land amongst those who accompanied him or her, and these parcels of land each being named after the respective recipient. Anne Holtsmark has drawn attention to the passages in chapters 25 and 29 of *Egils saga*, which describe how twelve men accompany Skalla-Grímur when he meets King Haraldur and subsequently sail with him to Iceland; once there, each follower is given land. Grímur thus settles near Grímsá, Áni at Ánabrekka, Grímolfur at Grímolfsstaðir (Grímolfur is also associated with Grímolfslækur and Grímolfsfit, notes the saga), Grímar at Grímarsstaðir, Grani at Granastaðir, Þorbjörn krumur at Krumsshólar, Þorbjörn beigaldi at Beigalda, Þórður þurs at Þursstaðir, Þorgeir jarðlangr at Jarðlangstaðir.

<sup>20</sup> See further Emily Lethbridge and Steven Hartman, ‘The Initiative Inscribing Environmental Memory in the Icelandic Sagas and the Project Icelandic Saga Map,’ *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 131 (2016): 385.

Holtmark notes that the presentation of these men is curious, to say the least: “Hva er dette for slags følge å møte opp hos en konge med? Troll og løysinger og tusser! ... “tolv berserker” er et vanlig motiv i sagaene ... Skallagrim's følgesmenn er hamramme” [‘What kind of a following is this to arrive before the king? Trolls and lowlifes and freaks! ... “twelve berserkers” is a common motif in the sagas ... Skalla-Grímur’s followers are shapeshifters’].<sup>21</sup> Holtmark argues that these men’s function in the narrative is limited and that it is unlikely they represent any real ‘historical’ tradition; where, then, she asks, did the author get the names of these reprobates from? Could it have been the names were ‘documented’ in Mýrasýsla place-names?<sup>22</sup> The way in which the saga lists the followers and their new farms (all of which derive their names from the followers, according to the saga’s rhetoric) is suspiciously neat in Holtmark’s opinion: “Spørsmålet er om det er gjort på grunnlag av en ættetradisjon om Skallagrim's følge, eller om sagaforfatteren har diktet opp det groteske følget på grunnlag av stedsnavn han fant i omegnen av Borg” [‘The question is whether this was done on the basis of a family tradition about Skalla-Grímur’s following, or whether the saga author conjured up this grotesque company on the basis of place-names he found in the vicinity of Borg’].<sup>23</sup> Holtmark’s answer tends to the latter of the two possibilities.<sup>24</sup>

Parallel instances to this – that is, clusters of place-name explanations being associated with followers of the principal settler and presented early on in the narrative, in the sections that describe the arrival and establishment of the protagonists – can be found in *Laxdæla saga* (chs. 5–6) and *Kjalnesinga saga* (chs. 2–3). There are also examples in *Bárðar saga* (chs. 3–4) but *Bárðar saga*, together with *Harðar saga*, is characterised by recourse to this ‘place-name explanation’ rhetoric throughout its narrative. The issue of whether saga authors concocted anecdotes on the basis of place-names, or drew on ‘genuine’ traditions associated with place-names

21 ‘Skallagrim's heimamenn,’ *Maal og minne* 7 (1971): 97–105, at 99.

22 ‘Skallagrim's heimamenn,’ 100.

23 ‘Skallagrim's heimamenn,’ 101.

24 “Gårdene med navn etter folk med underlige tilnavn har ligget der omkring ham som forfattet Egils saga først på 1200-tallet, og han har av navnene laget set et bilde av Skallagrim's følge” [‘Farms with place-names derived from people with strange bynames surrounded the person who first authored *Egils saga* in the thirteenth century, and from these names he conjured up a picture of Skalla-Grímur’s following’], ‘Skallagrim's heimamenn,’ 103.

takes on a further significance because of its implications for where the *Íslendingasögur* – both as a whole corpus, and as individual narratives – might be placed on the spectrum of writing which has ‘genuine’ historical tradition at one end and fiction at the other (albeit fiction that was not necessarily intended as overt fabrication but more reconstruction of ‘what might have been’).

The high concentration of place-name explanations in *Harðar saga* and *Bárðar saga* has led critics to suspect that significant parts of these narratives are most likely to have been constructed on the basis of local place-names. Þórhallur Vilmundarson, in the discussion about *Harðar saga* in his introduction to *Íslenzk fornrit* volume 13, asserts that there is much “sem vekur efasemdir um áreiðanleik frásagnanna af Herði Hólmverjakappa” [‘that causes doubt with regard to the reliability of narratives about Hörður Hólmverjakappi’].<sup>25</sup> Þórhallur presents and analyses a number of examples of what he believes to be indisputable place-name folk-etymologies found throughout the narrative (Katanes, Geldingadragi, Gorvík, Kúhallardalur, Svínadalur, Leiðvöllur, Dögurðarnes).<sup>26</sup> He adds to this list 16 additional place-names that feature in the saga and have been thought by critics to derive more reliably from historical characters’ names: Þórhallur is not convinced, however, and finds them equally suspect with regard to their value as ‘historical sources’.<sup>27</sup>

Þórhallur provides alternative etymologies for each of these place-names (Kattarhöfði, Skroppugil, Auðsstaðir, Bollastaðir, Indriðastaðir, Indriðastígur, Brandsflesjar, Bláskeggsár, Geirshólmur, Geirstangi, Helgusund, Helguskarð, Hagavík) and points out too that it is odd that not a single place-name in the saga is said to be derived from the name of the saga’s hero, Hörður.<sup>28</sup> Kristian Kålund mentions the place-name ‘Harðarhæð’ on the promontory/spit Þyrilsnes and which, according to oral tradition as understood by Kristian Kålund, is said to be the place where Hörður died after having fought off his enemies and incurred great injuries.<sup>29</sup> But this

25 Introduction to *Harðar saga. Bárðar saga. Þorfsfirðinga saga. Flóamanna saga*, ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Íslenzk fornrit*, vol. 13 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1991), xxx.

26 Introduction, xxx–xxxiii.

27 Introduction, xxxiii.

28 Introduction, xxxiii–xli.

29 *Bidrag til en historisk-topografisk beskrivelse af Island* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1877), I, 291.

place-name is not found in written texts of *Harðar saga*, leading Þórhallur to conclude that it is not a place-name incorporating the personal-name ‘Hörður’ but rather the adjective ‘harður’, an element that is common in hill- and mountain-names.<sup>30</sup> Þórhallur’s conclusion is that “örnefni séu mikilvægur efniviður Harðar sögu, til þeirra hafi verið sótt nöfn margra persónanna og atburðir hafi í ýmsum tilvikum verið lesnir út úr örnefnum” [‘place-names are important (compositional) material in *Harðar saga*, the personal names of many characters having been derived from them, and, in some cases, events having been read out of them’].<sup>31</sup>

The treatment of and interest in place-names in *Bárðar saga* is comparable in many respects to what is found in *Harðar saga*. John G. Allee, in an article on place-names in *Bárðar saga*, comments on “the author’s special delight in place names” and observes that “somehow the author’s love of places becomes contagious. Thus to read *Bárðar saga* is to travel the land”.<sup>32</sup> Allee puts forward arguments for *Bárðar saga* being, in fact, two sagas – *Bárðar saga*, followed by *Gests saga*<sup>33</sup> – and a discernible difference in the distribution of, and interest in place-names in the two distinct parts is one of his principal pieces of evidence: “different minds were at work in *Bárðar saga* and *Gests saga* and ... the different attitudes of these two minds can be most clearly seen by studying the way place names are used”.<sup>34</sup>

Not only does Allee count twice as many place-names in the first part of *Bárðar saga* as in the second part (*Gests saga*) – 101 and 50, respectively – but in the second part of the narrative, the use of place-names is “completely utilitarian”, with place-names being “useful to identify people or routes of travel” or “real places (and historical people) [being used] to

30 Introduction, xl–xli.

31 Introduction, xli.

32 ‘A Study of the Place Names in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*,’ in *Germanic Studies in Honor of Edward Henry Seibt. Presented by his Colleagues, Students, and Friends on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday, March 3, 1968*, ed. Frithjof Andersen Raven, Wolfram Karl Legner and James Cecil King (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1968), 35.

33 The saga is divided in two and given two titles in the seventeenth-century manuscript BL Add. 4868: “Sagan af Bárði Dumbssyni, er kallaður var Snæfellsás” and “Sagan af Gesti, syni Bárðar Snæfellsáss”. For references to earlier scholarship on the saga’s bipartite nature, see Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, introduction to *Harðar saga*, lxxiii and fn 9.

34 ‘A Study of the Place Names in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*,’ 16.

gain verisimilitude”.<sup>35</sup> There is only one instance of an explanation for a place-name given in the second part of the saga (for that of Hítardalur, in chapter 13, where the saga states that “í þann tíma var Hít tröllkona uppi og bygði Hundahelli í þeim dal, er síðan var kallaðr Hítardalr” [‘at that time, the troll-woman Hít was alive and lived in Hundahellir, in the valley later called Hítardalur’]. In the first part of the saga, by contrast, a number of names are given “special attention” by the author, this constituting a veritable “onomastic outpouring” and “naming spree” in chapter 3.<sup>36</sup> Allee does not discuss in any detail the extent to which the posited author of *Bárðar saga/Gests saga* might have created the narrative out of existing place-names around Snæfellsnes and beyond, but he implies this may have been the process with the statement that “at least fictitiously, he [the author] claims either (a) to tell who did the naming, or (b) to explain how the place was named”.<sup>37</sup>

It may be that there is some relationship between the proportion of explicit explanatory place-name anecdotes or use of them as a source – whether the tradition associated with any given place-name is ‘genuine’ or pre-dates the writing of the saga, or is the construction of the saga-writer – and the posited date of the composition of respective sagas. Largely on the basis of style (and the inclusion of folk-tale related or fantastic material), most of the sagas that have a higher proportion of explicit place-name explanations (e.g. *Bárðar saga*, *Kjalnesinga saga*, *Harðar saga* – the version of this latter saga that is extant is thought to be a reworking of an older version) are those typically designated ‘post-classical’ rather than ‘classical’ sagas, and dated to the fourteenth rather than thirteenth century.<sup>38</sup> But texts of *Laxdæla saga* and *Egils saga*, on the other hand, survive in manuscripts that are amongst the oldest extant witnesses for the written *Íslendingasögur*, albeit fragmentary.<sup>39</sup> It seems then that it may be instead

35 ‘A Study of the Place Names in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*,’ 29–30.

36 ‘A Study of the Place Names in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*,’ 31, 33.

37 ‘A Study of the Place Names in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*,’ 33.

38 Vésteinn Ólason, ‘Family Sagas,’ in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 114–15.

39 The oldest extant manuscript witness of *Egils saga*, AM 162 a 0 fol., is dated to c. 1240–1260 (handrit.is) and manuscript evidence attests to *Laxdæla saga* being transmitted in written form at least as early as the mid-thirteenth century: the single leaf of AM 162 d II fol. containing a text of *Laxdæla saga* is dated to c. 1250–1300 (handrit.is).



a question of rhetorical style. In some instances, one function of this kind of explicit comment or narrative association of places with events and characters in the sagas is as a kind of corroboration or means of asserting the veracity of the story being told, not unlike the way in which skaldic verse is deployed in *Heimskringla* or other *konungasögur*, attributed to a poet and used to confirm or substantiate the description of the event just related.<sup>40</sup>

### Place-names and topographic discussion in Íslenzk fornrit editions

Þórhallur Vilmundarson, in his introduction to *Bárðar saga* in Íslenzk fornrit 13, is of the opinion that “höfundur Bárðar sögu hefur að verulegu leyti lesið persónur og atburði sögunnar út úr örnefnum” [‘the author of *Bárðar saga*, in a substantial way, read saga characters and events out of place-names’] and that (as Holtsmark suspected of *Egils saga* and Skalla-Grímur’s twelve followers) “Líklegt er, að það eigi við um fylgdarlið Bárðar” [‘It is likely that this applies to Bárður’s followers’].<sup>41</sup> Following a line of argumentation similar to that employed in analysing the place-names in *Harðar saga*, Þórhallur provides alternative etymologies based on natural features for many of the place-names in *Bárðar saga* said to have acquired their name as a result of an association with a character or an event.<sup>42</sup> And, as with Hörður and *Harðar saga*, the suggestion is also made that Bárður, too, may well have been the fictional creation of the saga author, and invented on the basis of place-names. Þórhallur goes further here, though, in sketching out a scenario whereby Bárður was literally conjured out of the Snæfellsnes landscape. Thus, certain place-names and prominent natural features in and around the Dritvík bay (the cliffs that enclose the bay, a rocky outcrop in the middle of the bay that is reminiscent of a ship and now bears the name ‘Bárðarskip’, the suggestion of a face in this outcrop which looks up to the glacier behind) may have been the inspiration behind the creation of a story about a supernatural character called Bárður who arrived from across the sea, made land at Dritvík with

40 See, e.g., Heather O’Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

41 Introduction, lxxxii.

42 Introduction, lxxxii–lxxxv.

his followers, settled on Snæfellsnes and subsequently – iron-pointed staff in hand – disappeared up into the glacier, after which he became known as ‘Snæfellsáss’ (from \*Snjófellsalfr).<sup>43</sup>

As Rory McTurk noted in his review of the *Íslenzk fornrit* volume, Þórhallur’s observations on the role that place-names and the landscape may have played in inspiring the written creation of *Bárðar saga* amounts, essentially, to a theory of saga origins, albeit not presented explicitly as such.<sup>44</sup> Though “by no means all Icelandic sagas can have originated in the way that *Bárðar saga* ... may have done”, comments McTurk, of all of the *Íslendingasögur*, *Bárðar saga* is one of those that best illustrates the potential of this theory, which “would not necessarily supplant the Book prose theory, with which the *Íslenzk fornrit* series has long been deservedly associated ... [rather] it would add an interesting dimension to the study of the complex question of how the sagas came into being”.<sup>45</sup>

The rootedness of the *Íslendingasögur* in their landscape settings, and the matter-of-fact presentation of and movement through places, is one characteristic that contributes to these narratives’ famous impression of verisimilitude.<sup>46</sup> Discussion of place-names and saga topography is found in every introduction to *Íslenzk fornrit* editions of the *Íslendingasögur*<sup>47</sup> but Þórhallur’s discussion and presentation of these ideas in the introduction to *Íslenzk fornrit* volume 13 distinguishes itself from commentary on place-names in *Íslendingasögur* in other *Íslenzk fornrit* volumes, however, by going much further. In older *Íslenzk fornrit* editions, the emphasis tends to be on the degree of ‘fit’ between descriptions of landscape in the saga texts and their modern-day equivalents. The perceived topographical ‘accuracy’ which any single posited saga author demonstrated, with the area he was writing about was used as an index for the saga’s ‘truthfulness’ and sometimes also marshalled as evidence for arguments concerning the location of any single saga’s composition.

The broader context for this approach is the compulsive ‘search for the

43 Introduction, lxxxv–xcī.

44 Review of *Harðar saga. Bárðar saga. Þorksfirðinga saga. Flóamanna saga*, ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 24 (1995): 166–70.

45 Review of *Harðar saga*, 170.

46 See, e.g., Schach, ‘The Anticipatory Literary Setting’.

47 Discussion is also found in local history journals such as *Múlaping*, and in the yearbook of the Icelandic Touring Association (*Árbók Ferðafélags Ísland*).

author' that characterised much saga scholarship up until the late twentieth century, when the move towards 'new' or 'material' philological approaches began to gain pace.<sup>48</sup> There is some discussion of 'historicity' in Þórhallur's analysis (e.g. of *Harðar saga* and the likelihood of Hörður being a fictional character) but his approach, however, puts the landscape in the foreground and rather than trying to explain instances of landscape-narrative mismatch, his discussion underlines the complex, reciprocal and processual relationship between place-names, natural features or other distinctive places, and the reception of narrative anecdotes bound to specific places.

The ways in which the sagas, too – especially once they were in written form – had an influence on the landscape (specifically, the cultural construction of the landscape over time, ever increasing and deepening the palimpsest-like qualities of the land), is drawn attention to as well in Þórhallur's discussion and in the footnotes about place-names throughout his edition. Bárðarskip – the ship-like rock in the middle of Dritvík bay – has already been mentioned, but there are numerous others. As is well known, it can often be difficult to establish when a place-name might have come into existence. In cases where place-names that are associated with *Íslendingasögur* characters or events exist but are not mentioned in the texts of the sagas, it is not unlikely that the written transmission of these narratives was a stimulus for the place-names' creation (although the possibility that they existed prior to the writing of any respective saga but were either deliberately not used, or not known of, cannot be discounted). The creation of these younger names may thus be seen to represent a kind of landscape-related reception or reader-/listener-response to the saga, an impulse to further write the saga into the landscape and into people's everyday experiences of it.

### Real-and-imagined *Íslendingasögur* places

The overlap between the world and landscapes portrayed in the written *Íslendingasögur* texts, and that/those familiar to the individuals and communities who participated in the transmission of the *Íslendingasögur* from medieval to modern times (whether by producing new manuscript copies

<sup>48</sup> See references in fn 2 above.

on the basis of older ones, reading aloud from manuscript or printed texts of the *Íslendingasögur*, or retelling parts of the narratives in other contexts or via other media) makes this situation of continuous reception via the landscape possible. As such, the sagas are a good example of what the geographer Edward Soja has called “real-and-imagined places”.<sup>49</sup>

Many hundreds of place-names are mentioned in the sagas. Sometimes, the same place is mentioned in several sagas, though in different narrative contexts; at other times, a place is named only once, in one saga. The great bulk of these place-names still exist and are in use today which means that – at first glance anyway – matching places named in the sagas with places in the Icelandic landscape that have the same name today is relatively straightforward, even dangerously seductive and compelling, with the possibilities for the one-to-one alignment of saga-places and ‘real-world’ places being hard to resist and influenced by political, ideological and economic factors.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, as has already been mentioned, the appearance of continuity with regard to the landscape, together with the impression of topographical accuracy conveyed by the sagas, is one of the features that contributes towards their famous sense of realism and verisimilitude, and has been the subject of attention by critics and editors.<sup>51</sup> In telling and

49 *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

50 See further Lethbridge and Hartman, ‘The Initiative Inscribing Environmental Memory in the Icelandic Sagas and the Project Icelandic Saga Map’, and Ólafur Rastrick and Valdimar Tr. Hafstein, eds, *Menningararfur á Íslandi. Greining og gagurýni* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2015).

51 *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* has been a key saga in this respect, with places and place-names in it being scrutinised by editors of the saga and other literary-historical critics arguing either for the saga’s historical veracity or its lack of it. See, e.g. Jón Jóhannesson, Introduction to *Austfirðinga sögur*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslenzk fornrit*, vol. 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1950); E. V. Gordon, ‘On *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*,’ *Medium Ævum* 8 (1939): 1–32; Sigurður Nordal, *Hrafnkatla* (Reykjavík: Ísafoldarprentsmiðja, 1940); O. D. Macrae-Gibson, ‘The Topography of *Hrafnkels saga*,’ *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 19 (1974–77): 239–63; Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, ‘Jökuldalsmenn og Hallfreðargata. Um staðfræði Hrafnkels sögu Freysgoða,’ *Múlaþing* 18 (1991): 12–28 and ‘Freyfaxahamarr,’ *Skáldskaparmál* 4 (1997): 238–53; Páll Pálsson, ‘Er Reykjásel Hrafnkelssögu fundið?’ *Múlaþing* 30 (2003): 84–85. In the case of *Hrafnkels saga*, the realism and detail with which journeys around the landscape are portrayed, for example, persuaded critics to believe it must be based on historical events and characters whose stories had been passed down orally and then put into written form.

listening or reading, much of the power of these narratives resides in their precise locatedness around Iceland.<sup>52</sup>

The oral anecdotes that were worked into written narratives were set in the landscapes in which the tellers/authors and audiences lived and moved around themselves. Some degree of topographic faithfulness was, presumably, a requisite in order for these narratives to be plausible, not least serving as a kind of local history. But there must always have been room for exaggeration or elaboration, too, with the landscape serving the dramatic requirements of plot, even if for the most part, the landscape stage of these narratives was familiar and realistic.<sup>53</sup> The section in *Grettis saga* which tells of Grettir's sojourn in the mythical and lush valley of Þórisdalur is one example of a possible liberty taken with the 'real' landscapes that the author(s) and audiences of *Grettis saga* would have known.<sup>54</sup>

In many cases, farms have stood on the same site for over a millennium and continuity can be assumed both with regard to place-names and the general contours of the landscapes. But in other cases, the situation is more complicated: place-names have been changed over time, been lost or moved around as settlements were abandoned and, sometimes, subsequently resettled at a later point in time.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, the Icelandic landscapes have also changed dramatically in various ways over the centuries since the time of the settlement in the late ninth century, both as a result of natural events (e.g. volcanic eruptions and glacial floods) and human impact.<sup>56</sup> Both the

52 See David Henige, "'This Is the Place': Putting the Past on the Map," *Journal of Historical Geography* 33 (2007): 237–53 on the power of the 'this is the place' dynamic or trope.

53 See Schach, 'The Anticipatory Literary Setting' and Wyatt, 'The Landscape of the Icelandic Sagas' on the narrative rhetoric of landscape in the *Íslendingasögur*.

54 See, e.g., Björn Ólafsson, 'Ferð í Þórisdal,' *Eimreiðin* 24 (1918): 206–17; Ásgeir Magnússon, 'Þórisdalur,' *Iðunn* 15 (1931): 277–84; Jón Gíslason, 'Sagan af því, hversu Þórisdalur er fundinn,' *Blanda* (1944–48): 333–55.

55 On changing settlement patterns in Hrafnkelsdalur, the valley where much of the action of *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* takes place, see Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, *Byggðaleifar í Hrafnkelsdal og á Brúardölum. Brot úr byggðasögu Íslands* (Reykjavík: Rit Hins íslenska fornleifafélags, 1991) and Stefán Aðalsteinsson, 'Bæjanöfn og bæjarrústir í Hrafnkelsdal,' *Múlaþing* 31 (2004), 57–68, for example.

56 See, e.g., articles and further references in Ramona Harrison and Ruth A. Maher, eds, *Human Ecodynamics in the North Atlantic: A Collaborative Model of Humans and Nature through Space and Time* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014).

appearance and quality of tracts of land have been altered, and settlement patterns.<sup>57</sup>

The relationship between the landscapes and places described in the sagas, those that the saga-authors knew, and those that others have known and experienced since (up until the present day), is thus a complex one. It is this merging and overlapping of 'real' and 'imaginary' worlds that makes the subject such an interesting one to study though. Better defining the nature of the reciprocal and recursive relationship between saga narrative, narrative stage, and the known or 'real' world in which those who first put the sagas down in writing lived and knew, and subsequently, those who copied or retold or listened to the sagas existed in, is a challenging but worthwhile enterprise. Not least, this requires broadening our understanding of what it meant to 'read' a saga text.

### Indoor and outdoor contexts for *Íslendingasögur* reading and transmission

The appearance and what is known of the provenance of a number of medieval parchment manuscripts that preserve texts of the *Íslendingasögur* (in quarto size, with economical use of parchment, making use of rubrication in red (and sometimes green) ink but without lavish illuminations) suggests that they were produced for domestic use rather than primarily as display items or to serve explicit ideological functions (e.g. lawbooks), although the cultural capital implicit in owning books may have played into the commissioning of a book with a specific text or set of texts.<sup>58</sup> The contents of these compilation manuscripts (especially the late medieval ones) are

57 *Landnámabók* notes a number of instances of landscape change between the time of the settlement and the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as a consequence of volcanic activity or other natural phenomena; references to farms being abandoned or renamed are also found in the *Íslendingasögur*. In post-medieval times, other eruptions such as Öraefa and Hekla, and erosion caused by the grazing of domestic livestock over large areas, laid great stretches of previously inhabited land to waste. See further, e.g., Elín Ósk Hreiðarsdóttir, Guðrún Alda Gísladóttir, Kristborg Þórsdóttir and Ragnheiður Gló Gylfadóttir, 'Abandoned Settlements at the Foot of Mt Hekla: A Study Based on Field Survey in Rangárvellir,' *Archaeologica Islandica* 11 (2015): 33–56.

58 See, e.g., Stefka Georgieva Eriksen, *Writing and Reading in Medieval Manuscript Culture: The Translating and Transmission of the Story of Elye in Old French and Old Norse Literary Contexts* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).

often diverse, with *Íslendingasögur* copied alongside other sagas assigned to the *fornaldarsögur*, *riddarasögur* or other saga genres, or other texts such as *exempla*. Similarly, many of the post-medieval paper manuscripts which contain *Íslendingasögur* texts also include texts from other genres, and appear to have been copied for the purpose of domestic entertainment and/or edification: title-pages and scribal colophons in post-medieval paper manuscripts (generally not present in medieval manuscripts) are evidence for this.

The chronology according to which events are said to have happened is the main structural organisational principle of the sagas, and modern readings and literary-critical studies of the *Íslendingasögur* – shaped to a significant degree by modern reading habits whereby texts are read on a consecutive, chapter-by-chapter basis – have tended to read and analyse them from start to end as whole units with introductory, middle, and concluding sections. The publication of editions and translations of the sagas divorced from their manuscript contexts, on a stand-alone, text-by-text basis, also implicitly influences critical approaches to and interpretations of sagas as individual, discrete narratives. The manuscript context of any single text – that is, which texts it is copied alongside – has rarely been taken into consideration in efforts to better understand how the sagas (or indeed most other medieval Icelandic literary texts, perhaps with the exception of skaldic poetry<sup>59</sup>) were interpreted or received over time in Iceland. The company which any single text keeps within the covers of a manuscript can have a significant impact on how that text might be read, which themes or motifs, for example, might be foregrounded, and even the genre to which a text might be assigned.<sup>60</sup>

Icelandic manuscripts were valuable possessions which were often passed down from one generation of a family to the next and they played a key role in the winter *kvöldvaka* tradition, from the medieval period

59 See further Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

60 See Emily Lethbridge, 'The Place of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* in Eggertsbók, a Late Medieval Icelandic Saga-Book,' in *Uppruni og þróun fornaldarsagna Norðurlanda; The Origins and Development of the Legendary Sagas*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson, Agnete Ney and Annette Lassen (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2012), 375–403; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, 'Ideology and Identity in Late Medieval Northwest Iceland: A Study of AM 152 fol.,' *Gripla* 25 (2014): 87–128.



up until the early twentieth century – albeit with their role varying and being contingent on changing tastes in literary entertainment and other external influences over time (such as the independence movement in the nineteenth century).<sup>61</sup> In the communal living and sleeping area of the Icelandic farmhouse, the *baðstofa*, members of the household would work at indoor chores each evening while one member read aloud from whatever manuscript or other printed material was owned or had been borrowed. In this communal, social space, the manuscript context would therefore have certainly influenced how texts were received by those listening and participating in the reading event. The transmission of texts preserved in saga manuscripts was shaped to a crucial degree by performance and re-oralisation, and by the dynamics between the individual(s) who took on the role of the story-teller and the assembled audience. In considering the transmission of *fornaldarsögur* literature, Stephen Mitchell has suggested that manuscripts may have been used “as a kind of promptbook for extemporized performative readings” rather than their texts being read word-for-word.<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, there is no reason to assume that, during the *kvöldvaka*, *Íslendingasögur* or other sagas were necessarily always read in their entirety

61 For discussion of manuscripts being handed down within families, see, e.g. Susanne M. Arthur, ‘The Importance of Marital and Maternal Ties in the Distribution of Icelandic Manuscripts from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century,’ *Gripla* 23 (2012): 201–33. On the tradition of the *kvöldvaka* in different historical periods, see Hermann Pálsson, *Sagnaskemmtun Íslendinga* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1962); Magnús Gíslason, *Kvällsvaka. En isländsk kulturtradition belyst genom studier i bondebefolkningens vardagsliv och miljö under senare hälften av 1800-talet och början av 1900-talet*. Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1977); Matthew J. Driscoll, ‘The Long and Winding Road: Manuscript Culture in Late Pre-Modern Iceland,’ in *White Field, Black Seeds: Nordic Literary Practices in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Anna Kuismin and Matthew J. Driscoll, (Helsinki: Finnish Literary Society, 2013), 50–63; Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, ‘Living by the Book: Form, Text and Life Experience in Iceland,’ in the same volume, *White Field, Black Seeds*, ed. Kuismin and Driscoll, 64–75.

62 *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* (Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 93. This kind of flexibility is in accordance with the freedom of scribes to alter the texts they copied from exemplars as they saw fit, whether to ‘correct’ factual information (topography, genealogy), update orthography and style, or improve the narrative. See also Stephen Mitchell, ‘The Saga-man and Oral Literature: The Icelandic Traditions of Hjörleif inn kvensami and Geirmundr heljarskinn,’ in *Comparative Research on Oral Traditions: A Memorial for Milman Parry*, ed. John M. Foley (Columbus OH: Slavica, 1987), 395–423; Hans Fix, ‘Text Editing in Old Norse: A Linguist’s Point of View,’ *North-Western European Language Evolution* (NOWELE) 31 (1997): 105–17.

(in the manner in which they are serialised on national radio today in Iceland), nor chapters read consecutively in the order they are found in the manuscripts. In contrast to the codex's predecessor, the volumen or scroll, whose contents could only be read continuously and consecutively, the design of the manuscript book made discontinuous reading as well as continuous reading possible, with blocks of text broken into smaller divisions and made navigable by means of rubrics and prominent capital letters or initials.<sup>63</sup> Someone reading from a manuscript (whether aloud or silently) could therefore flick backwards and forwards with (relative) ease and excerpt passages from different parts of the same saga, or from different texts. Comparable kinds of reading scenarios have been envisaged for manuscripts containing legal texts or ecclesiastical material but not for manuscripts containing literary texts which were intended for use in a secular context.<sup>64</sup>

Especially in cases where manuscripts contained a selection of sagas and other material, a scenario might be imagined whereby at the beginning of or during the *kvöldvaka*, the assembled audience might put in 'requests' to hear particularly entertaining passages or sections from one or several sagas and other texts, or decide on a theme (legal material, monster fights or encounters with the supernatural, ambush and death scenes, journeys, genealogical material) that determined which chapters or passages would be read aloud. As well as mood, such demands and performative excerpting depended to some extent too on the collective contents of any single manuscript, and what kind of thematically-determined motifs or strands might happen to be emphasised as the result of the combination of texts included therein.

Furthermore, the extent to which the *Íslendingasögur* narratives were likely to have been generally known without recourse to the written texts (arguably constituting a kind of collective/community national and local

63 See, e.g., Malcolm Parkes, *Pause and Effect: Punctuation in the West* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992); Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); William A. Johnson, 'Bookrolls as Media,' in *Comparative Textual Media: Transforming the Humanities in the Postprint Era*, ed. N. Katherine Hayles and Jessica Pressman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2013), 101–24.

64 See Jonas Carlquist, 'Medieval Manuscripts, Hypertext and Reading. Visions of Digital Editions,' *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 19 (2004): 105–18, at 108–109 on legal and ecclesiastical material.

canon, albeit more or less widely at different periods of time) meant that for a *kvöldvaka* audience, narrative chronology and causality were not prerequisites for following or enjoying the whole, if only implicitly rather than explicitly. Carol Clover has used the term 'immanence' to describe the over-arching familiarity with material about characters, events and places presented in the sagas.<sup>65</sup> A kind of excerpted, non-linear or thematic reading of the kind suggested above would have been possible because audiences possessed the framework of the immanent saga or saga world within which to fit in individual episodes that might be selected for reading aloud at any point in time. Importantly, command of this immanent saga world also entailed an implicit appreciation of the intertextuality of saga narratives, not least on the basis of overlapping characters, geography, and events described. This intertextuality is one of the corpus's defining characteristics – but again, is something that is less obvious to modern readers and critics when the sagas are approached on a text-by-text basis.<sup>66</sup>

A base-level familiarity with or knowledge of any saga narrative (whether from direct access to manuscript texts via reading/listening, or via impromptu oral retellings) meant that in outdoor contexts, these narratives would have been present in people's consciousness too, to varying degrees, as they existed in and moved around the landscapes in which the saga narratives are set. Here the recalling (and perhaps retelling) of narrative material was first and foremost determined by the landscape, rather than the order in which events are presented in the written texts, so people would have 'read' the sagas in a non-linear and fundamentally intertextual fashion by necessity. Movement, coupled with mental recall or retelling of material written out in full in the manuscripts, could be of different kinds. It might be of the eye looking over an expanse of landscape and focusing on one place or landmark after another, each in relation to the others. Alternatively it could be more active and physical, involving covering

65 Carol Clover, *The Medieval Saga* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982). See also Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition*; Jamie Cochrane, 'Síðu-Halls saga ok sona hans: Creating a Saga from Tradition,' *Gripla* 21 (2010): 197–234.

66 Where the intertextual character of the sagas has been studied, it has generally been framed in the 'rittengsl' debate, either specific references to other sagas being focused on or passages that seem to be shared by two sagas being analysed in order to determine which saga may have been the 'lender' and which the 'recipient'. See Theodore M. Andersson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins: A Historical Survey* (New Haven CT and London: Yale University Press, 1964); Carol Clover, 'Icelandic Family Sagas (*Íslendingasögur*)'.

shorter or longer distances on foot or on horseback, singly or in groups, in order to reach a specific destination such as the local or national assembly, or to tend to livestock in a circumscribed area.

There must, of course, have been some variation in the degree of familiarity that people had with the written or immanent *Íslendingasögur* corpus as a whole but presumably, they would know (or be most likely to know) the sagas and other stories associated with their local area – not least from hearing or learning them in the *kvöldvaka* context.<sup>67</sup> They could thus consciously correlate the narrative action and topography of any single saga or episode within a saga with the landscapes around them and familiar to them, and might also unconsciously do this too. Understanding of *Íslendingasögur* narratives was thereby conditioned by and filtered through people's first-hand experiential knowledge of the landscapes around them – landscapes in which they were situated, and directly tied to as a result of genealogical connections and local history. Thus while the manuscripts were the vessels indoors that contained and channelled saga narratives in fully-developed written form, simultaneously, the landscape acted as a medium through which these narratives were communicated outdoors.

Jonas Carlquist discusses a concept or technique called 'analogue linking' in his discussion of Swedish composite manuscripts containing ecclesiastical texts.<sup>68</sup> Carlquist gives the example of a mention of the Latin title of a hymn in a text about what is sung and when, found in the manuscript Cod. Lund. Mh 20 from Vadstena Abbey:

"At page 165r in this manuscript we read ... 'Whitsunday when the sisters sing the hymn 'Veni creator spiritus' at the third hour Saint Mechthild saw the Holy spirit ...'. Here ... the Latin quotation [is] an analogue link to a special hymn, which was known at the monastery. It might also be described merely as a reference, but I think that is to simplify the problem. When a medieval manuscript discusses, for example, a passage in the Holy Bible, only the initial words are given

67 The place of production of most medieval *Íslendingasögur* manuscripts cannot be ascertained; some clues regarding their geographical location post-production can be found in their provenance and ownership, but no systematic or large-scale study of the geographical distribution of production or provenance of medieval Icelandic manuscripts has yet been conducted.

68 Carlquist, 'Medieval Manuscripts, Hypertext and Reading,' 109.

in Latin (sometimes with a translation). This does not have to be a reference. The citation is a link to the whole passage known by the reader. By supplying the initial words the medieval writers did in fact link to the reader's knowledge, to his or her mental library".<sup>69</sup>

If we return to the metaphor of the Icelandic landscape as a kind of manuscript, a medium through which the *Íslendingasögur* narratives were accessed and communicated, then place-names might be said to have served a comparable kind of mnemonic referential or linking function to the 'analogue links' or keywords in the manuscripts discussed by Carlquist. Moreover, place-names and the saga-narrative-anecdotes or characters associated with them gave structure and order to the landscape, helping to make places memorable and to fix their relative, topographical positions in people's minds and thus aid physical (as well as ideological) navigation. Place-names might thus be seen as being the equivalent of the enlarged capital letters or red-inked rubrics that mark narrative structure in the manuscripts and make the written texts navigable, whether read chapter-by-chapter or in a non-linear or chronological fashion.

## Medieval and modern hypertexts

In the quotation above about 'analogue linking', Carlquist refers to the 'mental library' of those who used the Vadstena Abbey manuscripts he discusses. His article, which is called 'Medieval Manuscripts, Hypertext

69 Carlquist, 'Medieval Manuscripts, Hypertext and Reading,' 109–10; see also Jessica Brantley, 'Medieval Remediations,' in *Comparative Textual Media: Transforming the Humanities in the Postprint Era*, ed. N. Katherine Hayles and Jessica Pressman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2013), 201–20. A parallel may be identified in medieval Icelandic manuscripts: particularly in manuscripts that contain texts of *konungasögur* (as well as those with *Íslendingasögur*), the quotation of skaldic verse is frequently encountered. These verses serve different functions (evidential, rhetorical, dramatic etc). In some cases, longer skaldic poems have been broken up and individual verses are cited at different points, in other cases, a longer poem is referred to in the narrative and its title (and perhaps circumstances of composition) given, but only the first verse is quoted. It may be that the remainder of the poem was not copied out in full because the first verse was enough to trigger recall of the rest for those who were familiar with the poem; this has been argued for the first-verse quotation of longer poems in *Egils saga* (see, e.g., Judy Quinn, "'Ok er þetta upphaf": First-stanza Quotation in Old Norse Prosimetrum,' *Alvissmál. Forschungen zur mittelalterlichen Kultur Skandinaviens* 7 (1997): 61–80).

and Reading. Visions of Digital Editions', also presents the possibilities opened up by digital editions of medieval manuscripts and the texts they preserve, and he underlines the advantages and flexibility of hyperlinks as part of such editions, noting that "The editor may also insert new links that are not found in the original manuscript, but are needed for the modern reader's understanding. The material linked to can, for example, supply information about palaeography, historical linguistics, terminology, the critical status of the text, etc" as well as being used to give users access to texts, knowledge, or even rituals referred to in a manuscript's "original analogue links".<sup>70</sup> The kind of non-sequential reading such a linking framework offers is, it is suggested, akin to hypertexts as developed in modern computer terminology and digital contexts.

This theoretical idea is not developed to a great degree as the focus of Carlquist's article is more on what digital editions might look like. Over ten years on, much of what Carlquist discusses has been implemented as part of digital editions although a digital edition of a medieval Icelandic manuscript that comprehensively utilises these possibilities has yet to be released (multiple levels of transcribed texts, variant readings from other manuscripts, full lemmatisation, hyperlinks to other media or material etc). Following on from the parallels drawn above between how medieval Icelandic saga manuscripts were read by medieval and later Icelanders, and how the same narrative material was also simultaneously read out of the landscapes by the same people – that is, non-sequentially in terms of these narratives' chronology, and situated in the material context of the sagas' landscapes – the hypertext idea can be taken a stage further. Pertinent here, not least, are developments in media theory/new media theory, literacy studies and narratology that have taken place in the last decade in the wake of developments in digital technology and its influence in virtually all spheres of modern life.<sup>71</sup>

Marie-Laure Ryan offers the following definition of a hypertextual system:

"text is broken into fragments – "lexias," for George Landow; "text-rons," for Espen Aarseth – and stored in a network whose nodes

<sup>70</sup> 'Medieval Manuscripts, Hypertext and Reading,' 114.

<sup>71</sup> See, e.g., Ruth Page and Bronwen Thomas, eds., *New Narratives: Stories and Storytelling in the Digital Age* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2011).

are connected by electronic links. By clicking on a link, usually a highlighted phrase, the reader causes the system to display the contents of a specific node. A fragment typically contains a number of different links, offering the reader a choice of directions to follow. By letting readers determine their own paths of navigation through the database, hypertext promotes what is customarily regarded as a nonlinear mode of reading. The applications of the idea nowadays include the World Wide Web, educational databases, the on-line help files of computer programs, Ph.D. dissertations and other scholarly texts, and multimedia works on CD ROM, as well as poetry and literary fiction".<sup>72</sup>

Hypertext literature, one of many manifestations of contemporary digital textuality, was first developed in the 1980s; its development has seen several phases and rapid advancement, accompanied by growing scholarly critical engagement and narratological analysis.<sup>73</sup> Its hallmarks are reader-narrative interaction and a process-orientated, collaborative and performative dynamic, reflexivity, recursivity, multiple-path structures, non-linearity and fluidity, and open-endedness.

Conceptually, hypertext literature has been likened to a journey,<sup>74</sup> a supermarket shopping experience,<sup>75</sup> a kaleidoscopic experience.<sup>76</sup> Cruc-

72 Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 206.

73 See J. David Bolter, *Writing Space: Computers, Hypertext, and the Remediation of Print* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011. Second edition), and George Landow, *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006).

74 "The text as a whole is a territory, the links are roads, the textual units are destinations, the reader is a traveler or navigator, clicking is a mode of transportation, and the itinerary selected by the traveler is a 'story'," Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, 218.

75 "The reader browses along the links, takes a quick look at the commodities displayed on the screens, and either drops them into his shopping basket for careful study or moves on to other screens. This reader does not feel compelled to read the text in its entirety or to pay attention to every screen, because he sees the text not as a work held together by a global design but as a display of resources from which he can freely pick and choose ... In a variant of the supermarket scenario, the reader puts lexias into his shopping basket not to consume them individually but to use them as material to construct his own stories", Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, 219.

76 "The text consists of a collection of fragments that can be combined into ever-changing configurations through the random choices of the reader", Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, 219.



ially, as George Landow notes, “In a hypertext environment a lack of linearity does not destroy narrative. In fact, since readers always, but particularly in this environment, fabricate their own structures, sequences, and meanings, they have surprisingly little trouble reading a story or reading for a story”.<sup>77</sup> The scenarios outlined above for reading and accessing *Íslendingasögur* narratives fit this hypertext model very well, especially if one takes both media – manuscript and landscape – that the *Íslendingasögur* were transmitted via into consideration simultaneously. The reading modes sketched out are process- and performance-orientated, collaborative, non-linear or fragmentary (without affecting knowledge or ability to grasp the ‘whole’ story) as well as sequential, and open-ended.

In both the manuscript and the landscape contexts, place-names are the equivalent of hyperlinks.<sup>78</sup> Places and place-names were receptacles for stories, prompts and vehicles for the telling of them, and as such, place-names served both practical and functional purposes and more ideological ones, being an expression or manifestation of cultural identity and belonging or ownership, as well as suggestive indicators for perceptions of the environment. As a kind of hyperlink, place-names represented the explicit and immediate points of departure for anecdotes about characters and events, enabling and inviting connections between defined, written saga narratives. They were also implicit or deferred points of reference which fed into a system or world beyond written saga texts and that took in other types of textual tradition (e.g. folk-tales or narrative rewritings in other media). Jerome McGann notes that the library is the oldest hypertextual structure in the world.<sup>79</sup> A strong case could be made for the landscape-story-text matrix being a yet older hypertext model or articulation.

<sup>77</sup> *Hypertext* 3.0, 234.

<sup>78</sup> In some new media/digital text studies, arguably too much emphasis is placed on the conceptual break between print media and electronic media with regard to the structural continuity versus fragmentation of textual units, and the passivity versus participation and dialogic engagement of the reader with these textual units. Medieval manuscript culture, on the other hand, can be fundamentally characterised as being both dynamic and shaped by reader-text dynamics, not least through the re-oralisation of texts in certain contexts, and also in enabling texts to be accessed by readers in both a continuous and a segmented or fragmentary mode.

<sup>79</sup> *Radiant Textuality: Literature After the World Wide Web* (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 72.

## Conclusion: Narratives and navigation

Whether reading from a manuscript indoors, or mentally recalling and rehearsing material that is found in written form in the manuscripts while moving around the landscape outdoors, the reader chose different paths through the narrative(s), collecting and linking anecdotes or motifs together. The etymology of the Icelandic verb ‘að lesa’ (‘to read’), reflects this idea, deriving from Latin ‘legere’, ‘to collect, gather together’.<sup>80</sup> In Iceland, from the medieval period to modern times, parchment and landscape always operated in tandem as material media (and vehicles for narrative) around and through which people navigated, both physically and mentally. The anthropologist Tim Ingold argues that human lives “are not led inside places but through, around, to and from them, from and to places elsewhere”.<sup>81</sup> Ingold uses a compound word which happens to have an Old Norse etymological pedigree, ‘wayfaring’ (ON ‘vegr’, ‘way, path, road’ + ‘fara’, ‘to go, travel’), to describe “the embodied experience of this perambulatory movement” that characterises human existence in the world.<sup>82</sup>

Human existence unfolds along paths rather than being bound to places; the paths forged or followed by humans meet, intersect and are entwined. “Every entwining”, writes Ingold, “is a knot, and the more that lifelines are entwined, the greater the density of the knot. Places, then, are like knots, and the threads from which they are tied are lines of wayfaring”.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, knowledge of places is “forged in movement”, and “every place, as a gathering of things, is a knot of stories”.<sup>84</sup> The etymology of ‘text’ fits nicely here, suggesting a knitting or knotting together of elements to create a narrative of one kind or another: ‘text’ derives from the Latin ‘texere’, to weave or thread together and ‘textus’, that which is woven.<sup>85</sup> Returning to the metaphor of landscape as text introduced to-

80 *Íslensk orðsifjabók*, ed. Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon (Reykjavík: Orðabók Háskólans, 1989), 557–58.

81 *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 148.

82 *Being Alive*, 148.

83 *Being Alive*, 149.

84 *Being Alive*, 154.

85 *Oxford English Dictionary*, compact edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 2034–35; see also Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

wards the beginning of this article, we might add another metaphor: that of text or narrative as map. Both narratives and maps are frameworks used for organising knowledge in order to help us better understand the world and our place in it.<sup>86</sup> The way in which stories about and attached to specific places are used by individuals and communities as a means of aiding navigation – both physically, and emotionally or cognitively – has become a popular and fruitful subject of research by anthropologists focusing on cultures from around the world, both ancient and modern.<sup>87</sup>

The practical aspect or nature of place-names, and their importance for physical navigation and orientation as well as for transmitting narrative – especially where new lands are concerned – is underlined in a recent publication by Judith Jesch as part of a summary of Scandinavian naming practices.<sup>88</sup> The idea that the *Íslendingasögur* communicate, in part at least, something of the ‘mental map’ of early Icelanders has been explored by Gísli Sigurðsson and Tatjana Jackson.<sup>89</sup> The process of naming and

86 See, e.g., May Yuan, ‘Mapping Text,’ in *The Spatial Humanities: GIS and the Future of Humanities Scholarship*, ed. David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan and Trevor M. Harris (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 109–23; Robert T. Tally, *Spatiality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

87 See, e.g., Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*; also Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments* (Oxford: Berg, 1994).

88 *The Viking Diaspora* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), 43–54. See also Jesch, ‘Viking “Geosophy” and Some Colonial Place-names,’ in *Names Through the Looking-Glass: Festschrift in Honour of Gillian Fellows-Jensen*, ed. P. Gammeltoft and B. Jørgensen (Copenhagen: Reitzels Forlag, 2006), 131–45 and ‘Namings and Narratives: Exploration and Imagination in the Norse Voyages Westward,’ in *The World of Travellers: Exploration and Imagination*, ed. K. Dekker, K. Olsen and T. Hofstra (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 61–79. See also Stefan Brink, ‘Naming the Land,’ in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink with Neil Price (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 57–66, who writes that: “since place names are a mass material, their potential as socio- and cultural-historical sources becomes great ... since every name carries some historical information, place names can make the landscape ‘speak’ to us. The names give another dimension to the silent archaeological sources. They become small narratives that can be used in retelling the history of an early landscape” (57).

89 Gísli Sigurðsson, ‘Mynd Íslendingasagna af Bretlandseyjum,’ in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature. Sagas and the British Isles: Preprint Papers of the 13th International Saga Conference, Durham and York, 6th–12th August, 2006*, 2 vols., ed. John McKinnell, David Ashurst and Donata Kick (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, University of Durham, 2006), I, 278–87; Tatjana Jackson, ‘Ways on the “Mental Map” of Medieval Scandinavia,’ in *Analecta Septentrionalia: Beiträge zur nordgermanischen Kultur- und Literaturgeschichte*, ed. Wilhelm Heizmann, Klaus Bödl and Heinrich Beck (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2009), 211–20.

place-name explanation on the basis of anecdote in the *Íslendingasögur* is presented in these written narratives as being motivated by practical impulses, and must (prior to the writing down of the sagas, and subsequently) have been a means of aiding physical navigation by making specific places or landmarks more memorable and fixing the relative positioning of places more securely in mind. Equally, several ideological dynamics are at play: naming – and documenting the giving of these names via narrative, whether oral or written – serves the need to establish and legitimise a connection or a direct relationship with the land, not least, one that implies or communicates ownership and thus power.<sup>90</sup> Naming, in conjunction with movement, is the means by which – in the saga narratives, whether communicated indoors or outdoors – the unfamiliar, previously untrodden and unsettled landscape was made familiar, transformed into a cultural landscape, mapped and divided up between new settlers, and remained the patrimony or endowment of subsequent generations of Icelanders.

In order to understand the significance of the *Íslendingasögur* to Icelanders, locally and nationally, over time, it is crucial to define the nature of the relationship between places, place-names and the stories that they hold in crystalised form, and the longer written narratives that comprise the *Íslendingasögur* corpus. The *Íslendingasögur* were transmitted orally and in writing, and their continued transmission via manuscripts and the landscape in turn shaped people's continued engagement with, and perceptions of the landscape and the articulation of these stories in their written format. Icelanders used these narratives to navigate with, to help them understand their place in the world physically and existentially, both by looking backwards and remembering their ancestors and by looking forwards – not least, in the context of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fight for independence, for example.<sup>91</sup>

90 See Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*; and on naming as a performative speech-act in *Vatnsdæla saga* and *Landnámabók*, see Barraclough, 'Naming the Landscape'.

91 See, e.g., Ian Wyatt, 'The Landscape of the Icelandic Sagas: Text, Place and National Identity,' *Landscapes* 1 (2004): 55–72; Jón Karl Helgason, 'We Who Cherish *Njáls saga*: Alþingi as Literary Patron,' in *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga*, ed. Andrew Wawn (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1994), 143–61 and *The Rewriting of Njáls saga: Translation, Ideology and Icelandic Sagas* (Clevedon and Buffalo: Multilingual Matters, 1999); Reinhard Hennig, 'A Saga for Dinner: Landscape and Nationality in Icelandic Literature,' *Ecozon* 2 (2011): 61–71.

An approach that gives equal weight to both material contexts in which the *Íslendingasögur* were transmitted – parchment/paper and landscape – can draw out the nature of the active, experiential dynamics that characterised transmission beyond the evolution of saga texts from one manuscript to another, and with reference to the provenance of manuscripts. Just as “The landscape is never inert, people engage with it, re-work it, appropriate it, and contest it”,<sup>92</sup> so are narratives equally dynamic, rewritten and retold by every generation. When attention is directed only at the material preservation of the sagas in parchment and paper copy, only half the story of the sagas’ transmission is told. Despite the complexity of the relationship between the sagas and the landscapes in which they are set, the two cannot be divorced, and the ways in which the textual or literary meaning(s) of the *Íslendingasögur* have been constructed and shaped by the material contexts in which they have been transmitted over a period of nearly 1000 years can only come in to focus when landscape and manuscript as media are considered in tandem.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Barbara Bender, ed., *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives* (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 3.

<sup>93</sup> Grateful acknowledgement is made of the financial and practical support received from Miðaldastofa, Háskóli Íslands, RANNÍS (Rannsóknasjóður grant awarded for ‘Tími, rými, frásögn og Íslendingasögur’ project 2014–2016) and Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, Reykjavík, while this research was being conducted and written up. The author would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their feedback, and Christopher Callow for commenting on a draft.

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## EFNISÁGRIP

Íslendingasögur og landslag þeirra: Ritun, lestur og endursagnir Íslendingasagna.

**Lykilorð:** Íslendingasögur, varðveisla þeirra, handrit, landslag, örnefni, efnisleg textafræði, læsi, stiklertexti (e. 'hypertext')

Markmið greinarinnar er að skoða í sömu andrá handrit og landslag í sambandi við varðveislu og viðtöku Íslendingasagna. Þannig er dregið fram mikilvægi hvorutveggja (handrita og landslags) fyrir þekkingu Íslendinga á sögunum í aldanna rás. Þess háttar nálgun gæti talist eins konar eðlilegt framhald á því sem kallast á ensku „material turn“, sem hefur haft áhrif á aðferðafræðina við rannsóknir á íslenskum miðaldabókmenntum á seinni árum. Annarskonar aðferð, 'hypertext theory', er beitt til að skilja betur hvernig Íslendingar lásu eða nálguðust sögurnar, bæði innandyra og utan frá miðöldum til nútímans.

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