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## ÞJÓSTÓLFS SAGA HAMRAMMA

### *The Case for Forgery*

IN the twelve-volume edition of Icelandic sagas published by Guðni Jónsson in 1946, is to be found an entertaining adventure entitled *Þjóstólfs saga hamramma*.<sup>1</sup> Numerous tales attested only in younger paper manuscripts are included there, for the unbroken scribal continuity in Iceland often preserved now-lost medieval sagas or parts thereof. Until recently, there has been no reason to believe that *Þjóstólfs saga* was not an important link to the past, if only as part of a long literary tradition based on older oral material.<sup>2</sup>

Between the Middle Ages and modern times, however, the author grew in stature, and slavish imitation could be relabelled plagiarism. It is the thesis of this paper that in post-Renaissance Denmark, especially eighteenth-century Denmark, with its emphasis on the authenticity of sources and the value of the sagas as historical repositories, the re-arrangement of a well-known saga's plot (which we would now call plagiarism), sold to a historian as genuine, constituted forgery.<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that the saga must be without literary merit, but even if the element of fraud is subtracted and original authorship established, one is left, at best, with post-medieval unoriginality. The primary value of

<sup>1</sup> *Íslendinga sögur* (Reykjavík, reprint 1953), VIII, 361–397. To Jónas Kristjánsson go my thanks for his help and the many useful suggestions which he has made to me, as well as to Stefán Karlsson for putting at my disposal his expertise in the still to be adequately described history of post-sixteenth-century Icelandic.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., for example, *Ísl. sögur*, I, xxvi: "Í safn þetta höfum vér tekið upp allmargar ungar Íslendinga sögur, jafnvel frá 19. öld. . . . Þær eru í sjálfu sér engu ómerkari en sumar af sögunum frá 14. öld og samdar með sömu aðferðum sem þær. Þær eru ritaðar í anda og stíl Íslendinga sagna."

<sup>3</sup> This view was also held in 18th-century England: "Forgery, or the *crimen falsi* is . . . 'the fraudulent making or alteration of a writing to the prejudice of another man's right'," William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (Oxford, 1769; reprint Brussels, 1966), IV, 245.

*Þjóstólfs saga*, it would appear, lies in the insight it affords into the scholastic milieu of eighteenth-century Denmark.

Two manuscripts of the saga are extant. The older manuscript, *Add. 376, 4to* in the Royal Library in Copenhagen, has been dated to the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup> The younger manuscript, *JS. 225, 4to* in the National Library in Reykjavík, was made by Jón Sigurðsson in the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> It was used as the basis for Guðni Jónsson's edition, but since it is a copy of *Add. 376, 4to*, the manuscript cannot be used to triangulate back to an older, common source.

The hand on the older manuscript has been said to resemble that of Guðmundur Helgason Isfold, an Icelandic student who enrolled in the University of Copenhagen in 1755.<sup>6</sup> However, an inspection of most of the 81 manuscripts in Copenhagen and Iceland attributed to him has shown that it cannot be his work. The hand has been found to belong, rather, to Þorleifur Arason Adeldahl, born ca. 1749 to Ari Þorleifsson and Helga Þórðardóttir. He was a student in Copenhagen from 1771 and received a baccalaureate degree on August 6, 1774, but his further studies were not completed due to his heavy drinking. For a short time he served as a non-commissioned officer in the king's body-guard, but lost the position due to negligence and became, in 1777, a common soldier. It was reported by Bishop Hannes Finnsson, however, that although irresponsible, Adeldahl possessed a quick, sharp mind.<sup>7</sup>

There is considerable evidence to indicate that *Þjóstólfs saga* is no older than 1771, having been composed by Adeldahl and sold as a copy of a medieval Icelandic work. First of all, it is noteworthy that no other manuscript has ever been known to exist, nor does the saga seem to have ever been mentioned in older sources. In addition, the language evidences numerous modern forms, such as *bangsi* 377,25; 384,13 for *björn* 'bear', the loanwords *mumli* 369,14 from Danish *mumle* 'mumble', *svoddan* 388,12 Danish *sådan* 'in that way', *lyst* 396,5 Danish *lyst* 'desire', the loan phrases *enn nú* 390,16 from Danish *endnu* 'still',

<sup>4</sup> Kr. Kålund, *Katalog over de oldnorsk-islandske håndskrifter i det store kongelige bibliotek og i universitetsbiblioteket* (København, 1900), p. 446.

<sup>5</sup> *Ísl. sögur*, VIII, xii. Páll Eggert Ólason and Jón Guðnason, *Íslenzkar æviskrár*, 6 vols. (Reykjavík, 1948–76), III, 266–268. Bjarni Jónsson, *Íslenzkir Hafnarstúdentar* (Akureyri, 1949), p. 174.

<sup>6</sup> *Ísl. sögur*, VIII, xii. *Íslenzkar æviskrár*, II, 153.

<sup>7</sup> *Íslenzkar æviskrár*, V, 171–172. *Íslenzkir Hafnarstúdentar*, p. 119.

*hafa nokkut upp á sik* 375,11 Danish *have noget på sig* 'to count for something', the neologism *brúkyrði* 388,25 'boasting', presupposing Danish *bruge* (also borrowed as *brúka* 388,8) 'use', and the form of article in *þeirra stærstu manna* 365,12.<sup>8</sup> Even the title seems to be a modernism, for the epithet *hamrammi* in Old Icelandic should indicate someone who is capable of changing his shape or going berserk, which Þjóstólfr never does. The modern Icelandic *hamrammur*, on the other hand, is used to mean someone who is incredibly or supernaturally strong, and the saga obviously intends this usage. After Þjóstólfr has brought Þiðrandi's runaway horse to a standstill by grabbing its tail, the owner says, "You are a strong man, Þjóstólfr, and I will now lengthen your name and call you Þjóstólfr hamrammi" (365,30–366,2).

Adeldahl was certainly an accomplished scribe, known to have written at least 36 additional works comprising over eleven thousand pages. Most of these are copies of manuscripts housed in the Arnarnæan collection and were made for P. F. Suhm. It is obvious that Adeldahl, like other Icelandic students at that time, earned money through scribal work for the noted Danish historian and bibliophile.

Several features of Adeldahl's transcriptions are of importance. Of the 36 manuscripts, at least 35 seem to have been written for Suhm, for they either contain his own marginal notes or have been traced to his personal collection by Kålund.<sup>9</sup> In 33 of the works, the exact source of the copy is stated on the title page. Furthermore, Adeldahl signed his own name to 32 of his transcriptions. On the other hand, *Add. 376, 4to*, the manuscript of *Þjóstólfs saga*, is unsigned, has no source stated, and does not appear to have been owned or checked by Suhm. Based on the 36-manuscript group, the chances of this happening by accident are one in almost four thousand.

In support of the assumption that important information about the copy was often omitted when deception was involved, it should be noted that *Nks. 1886, 4to* is the only manuscript of the 36 which contains

<sup>8</sup> Less conclusive, but noteworthy in the aggregate are: *til oss* 377,9 for *til vár*, *rinni* 385,9 for *renndi*, *gaardi* 367,26 for *garði*, *os* 369,11 for *oss*, and *vila* 381,29 for *vilja* (also a possible incorrect archaization based on Old Icelandic *vili* as opposed to modern *vilji*). For convenience, all page and line references are to the edition, not to the manuscript.

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, *passim*.

neither a signature nor a source quotation. The contents of this volume comprise a treatise on runes by Björn Jónsson á Skarðsá (1642), a *Ráðning Brynhildarljóða*, and a commentary on the *Völuspá*. Evidently the source manuscript disappeared sometime before the end of the nineteenth century, for it was not recorded by Kålund in his catalogues of Icelandic manuscripts in Copenhagen.<sup>10</sup> Whether this loss or misplacement was due to Adeldahl cannot be stated with certainty, but the connection arouses suspicion. Moreover, in *Nks. 1778b, 4to*, from the same group, three out of the four sagas there have no source given, and it is known that all three also disappeared from the source manuscript *AM 109a, 8vo*.<sup>11</sup> This latter manuscript was once handled by Adeldahl, for he copied *Hálfðánar saga Eysteinnssonar* from it as *Nks. 1756, 4to*.

Two additional manuscripts have not been included in the above 36-member control group because they are so problematic. The first, *Nks. 1585, 4to*, does not quote a manuscript source, and the flyleaf states that the original was not from the Arnamagnæan collection, but rather "et til laans bekommet Manuscript fra Island in 4to" ("a manuscript in quarto on loan from Iceland"). Although all but five pages are written in Adeldahl's hand, the title page bears the name M. Magnusen! The signature is identical to that found on many manuscripts housed in the Royal Library and most likely belongs to Markús Magnússon, an Icelandic student in Copenhagen at the same time as Adeldahl (1771–1779).<sup>12</sup> The hand not by Adeldahl deviates somewhat from Magnusen's usual orthography, although it very probably represents his hasty cursive, a variety of which appears on *Nks. 1789, 4to*, *Nks. 1790, 4to*, and slightly less hurried on *Nks. 1776, 4to*.

The second problematic manuscript, *AM 839, 4to*, has been attri-

<sup>10</sup> In Kr. Kålund, *Katalog over den Arnamagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, 2 vols. (København, 1889–94), II, 571 is listed a *Tractatus um Runer*, ms. *Steph. 21*, from the first half of the 18th century, and in 1963 a fragmentary commentary by Björn Jónsson á Skarðsá on *Heiðreks saga*, a versified riddle, a *Radning Brynhildar lioda* and *Vr Harbardz liödum* were transferred from *AM 164, 8vo* to their original, late 17th-century *AM 167a–b, 8vo*. If the latter manuscript was the source of *Nks. 1886, 4to*, it should be noted that much of *AM 167a–b, 8vo* was copied as *Nks. 1891, 4to* by Þorlákur Magnússon Isfiord around the same time.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 397.

<sup>12</sup> *Íslenzkar æviskrár*, III, 472–473. *Íslenzkir Hafnarstúdentar*, p. 118.

buted to Adeldahl by both Kålund and an unidentified hand, too distinct to necessarily be Suhm's.<sup>13</sup> This would make the work the only one by Adeldahl in the Arnamagnæan collection. What is most interesting is that the manuscript appears *in place of* the original, which must have been removed almost coevally with the transcription. Kålund states that a later hand has added to the manuscript description in the old catalogue: "is a copy recently turned in for a number, since lost, from which it is written."<sup>14</sup> The most plausible explanation is that the copyist lost or sold the original immediately after copying it (otherwise there would have been more information about the source), and had to supply a replacement. Although there is neither source designation nor original signature on the copy, the later addition of Adeldahl's signature by someone else would indicate that Adeldahl might have been blamed for the loss of the original. He had evidently used the lost manuscript, for a different transcription in his hand, *Chronica*, now *Nks. 875, 4to*, is stated by Adeldahl to be a copy of "a paper original, No. 839 in quarto from the Arnamagnæan library." This transcription by Adeldahl once belonged to P. F. Suhm, numbered 37, 4to in his collection.<sup>15</sup> It would appear that Suhm received the copy he had contracted for and that the current *AM 839, 4to* is the replacement Adeldahl had to supply. However, the hand on the replacement, contrary to the opinions of the unknown person who attributed it to Adeldahl and of Kålund as well, appears to me to be the work again of M. Magnusen. It is possible that Magnusen lost the original after making his own copy, but if Adeldahl bore the blame for the loss, as the later ascription makes appear likely, Magnusen's work must have very soon followed Adeldahl's. The previously discussed *Nks. 1585, 4to*, signed by Magnusen but written chiefly by Adeldahl, shows that the two men worked closely together, and the possibility exists that Magnusen's replacement was made from Adeldahl's copy.

The single signature on *Nks. 1585, 4to* could mean that Adeldahl

<sup>13</sup> Kålund's Arnamagnæan catalog, II, 229.

<sup>14</sup> In this case the old catalog meant is neither *AM 456, fol.* nor *AM 384, fol.*, but *AM 477, fol.* It was not written by Jón Ólafsson as Kålund states, but rather by Jón Þorkelsson, *Íslenzkar æviskrár*, III, 289–290 (personal communication from Jón Helgason).

<sup>15</sup> Kålund's Royal Library catalogue, p. 411.

had become a *persona non grata* as a copyist, being forced to sell his transcriptions with the aid of Magnusen. The former seems to have fallen out of favor with Suhm, for the Dane appended to a note on the flyleaf of *Nks. 254, fol.*: “Den er ellers meget ilde af skrevet, ligesom alt med Adeldahl” (“Otherwise it is very poorly copied, just like everything by Adeldahl”). In addition to the problematic *AM 839, 4to*, there are other source manuscripts which may be missing leaves due to Adeldahl’s negligence, a flyleaf correctly copied in *Nks. 1021, fol.* but now missing in *AM 308, 4to*, and leaves gone from *AM 587e, 4to* and *AM 669c, 4to*, other parts of which Adeldahl used for *Nks. 1760, 4to* and *Nks. 1598, 4to*.

If the missing manuscripts or portions thereof had made Adeldahl’s presence undesired either at the Arnamagnæan collection or as Suhm’s scribe, it would be significant if *Þjóstólfs saga* turned out to be neither a copy of an Arnamagnæan manuscript nor sold to Suhm. It certainly does not seem that the saga was extant in Copenhagen (or elsewhere) at the time Adeldahl was there. There was a plethora of *Grettis saga* manuscripts, however, and the events in *Þjóstólfs saga* are sufficiently close to arouse the suspicion that the former was the donor. Þjóstólfr, like Grettir, has an unpromising childhood and kills a man at age 14. After a neighbor has lost sheep and had his shepherd murdered, Þjóstólfr takes the job and chases down the troll. There ensues an episode where the troll is induced to help the hero slay her relatives in a cave, similar to common folktale versions, cf. *Hálfðanar saga Brönuþóstra*, *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*. Þjóstólfr then breaks into the grave of Karl the Red and takes a sword and treasure (but the battle with the barrow dweller has been replaced by a conversation—in verse). His host helps him prepare for a voyage abroad and gives him a sword (plus a shield, a blue cloak and gloves embroidered with gold). Þjóstólfr then meets Earl Hákon, who is displeased with him because the hero had killed a member of his court, and Þjóstólfr is forced to fight with a polar bear. (The actual battle, however, resembles more closely that in *Finnboga saga ramma* or in *Vilmundar saga viðutan* than Grettir’s battle with the bear in the cave). Then, in a passage reminiscent of *Auðunar þáttur vestfirzka*, the earl first asks to buy, then asks to receive as a gift the hero’s marvelous gloves, but the latter replies that they are for someone else. After leaving the court, Þjóstólfr meets a group of vikings, defeats

the leader in various sports (cf. perhaps Grettir's encounter with Björn Hítðalakappi) and then reluctantly kills him in battle. On the hero's subsequent trip to Denmark, he gives the gloves to King Harald and is well rewarded, before returning to Earl Hákon (cf. *Auðunar þátr*). While at the latter's court, Þjóstólfr is baited by Már and they part after having words (cf. Björn and Grettir at Þorkell's farm). Þjóstólfr takes a wife (unlike Grettir) before engaging in a troll episode similar to that at Sandhaugar. He then visits King Ólaf Tryggvason and is baptized, an event which proceeds much more smoothly than does Grettir's baptism. Both sagas end with a tour of duty in the Varangian guard in Miklagarð.

It is obvious both that *Þjóstólfs saga* has borrowed from *Grettis saga* and that Adeldahl was familiar with the story. He copied in *Nks. 1134, fol.* from *AM 614a-b, 4to* Jón Guðmundsson's versified version of the saga, not yet edited: "Litid Inntak Grettirs Saugo í rímur snuid." *Auðunar þátr* was also known to Adeldahl, for he copied it from *AM 217c, fol.* as *Nks. 1702, 4to*. Even the aquatic battle with the bear can be found in a manuscript (*AM 162c, fol.*) transcribed by Adeldahl as *Nks. 1785, 4to*. Although he did not copy *Finnboga saga ramma*, itself, it is probable that he at least knew the title, which could well have suggested the epithet in the title of his own work. The corresponding aquatic battle in *Vilmundar saga* was also known to Adeldahl's colleague, M. Magnusen, who knew the story from two manuscripts, copying it once from *AM 586, 4to* as *Nks. 1250, fol.*

Since Suhm has made no comments on the *Þjóstólfs saga* manuscript, and since Kålund has not attributed it to Suhm's library, it is probable that a different collector purchased the bogus work. Assuming only one copy of the forgery was ever produced, practically the only possible candidate can be Professor Bernhard Møllmann, head librarian of the Royal Library in Copenhagen from 1748 to his death on July 25, 1778. The auction catalog of Møllmann's personal library lists among the 850 manuscripts the "Saga af Þióskolfi Hamrama Svarfdælskum."<sup>16</sup> The fact that Møllmann was half blind in his later years and that he possessed a reputed soft spot in his heart for needy students certainly made him an ideal person to be deceived by the hoax.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore,

<sup>16</sup> *Recensio Librorum quos relinquebat moriens Bernh. Møllemanus* (Havniæ, 1783), Manuscripta, p. 55 (no. 441).

it looks as if he had been misled on at least one other occasion into buying a saga forgery, namely *Hafgeirs saga Flateyings*, written between 1774 and the fall of 1776.<sup>18</sup>

It is almost a certainty that Adeldahl and the forger of *Hafgeirs saga*, Þorlákur Magnússon Isfiord,<sup>19</sup> were more than acquaintances. Besides being members of the Icelandic community in Copenhagen for over five years together, they both enrolled at the university there on the same day (December 24, 1771), both had the same preceptor (Wadskjár), both often used manuscripts from the Arnamagnæan collection for their copies and both did most of their work for the same man, P. F. Suhm. Although their works appear to be independent, there is a reasonable probability that the idea of a forgery and the choice of a victim were not.

Of the two forgers, Adeldahl seems to have had a poetic bent. In his transcription of *Grettis rímur* he even made a gratuitous marginal note drawing attention to a strophe in only two lines.<sup>20</sup> Several occasional verses of his are preserved in a large volume with over two hundred contributors, now housed in the National Library in Reykjavik.<sup>21</sup> Adeldahl's literary pursuits, whatever their motivation, were evidently unsuccessful, most certainly from a financial point of view, and he is said to have died in Copenhagen, poverty stricken.<sup>22</sup>

The available evidence indicates that *Þjóstólfs saga hamramma* was composed by an Icelandic student in Copenhagen, Þorleifur Arason Adeldahl, between 1772 (more likely ca. 1774) and the middle of 1778 (but probably 1777). It was evidently a forgery, with the primary model being *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, apparently in *rímur* form, and the victim of the deception was the well-known Danish historian and librarian, Bernhard Møllmann.

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<sup>17</sup> *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, Povl Engelstoft and Svend Dahl, ed., 27 vols (København, 1933-44), XVI, 468-469.

<sup>18</sup> "Hafgeirs saga Flateyings: An Eighteenth-Century Forgery," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* (April, 1977), pp. 155-164.

<sup>19</sup> *Íslenzkar æviskrár*, V, 160. *Íslenzkir Hafnarstúdentar*, p. 119.

<sup>20</sup> "N.B. her er en Strophe i 2. linier," *Nks. 1134, fol.*, p. 145.

<sup>21</sup> *Lbs. 852, 4to* and a copy, *Lbs. 269, 4to*. Cf. *Skrá um handritasöfn Landsbókasafnsins*, Páll Eggert Ólason, 3 vols. (Reykjavík, 1918-37).

<sup>22</sup> *Íslenzkar æviskrár*, V, 172. *Íslenzkir Hafnarstúdentar*, p. 119.