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ÍSLENDINGADRÁPA AND ORAL TRADITION

THE University of Iceland's first professor of Icelandic philology was Björn Magnússon Ólsen who held this position from 1911–1918. One of his principal activities during the years 1913–1917 was the delivering of a series of lectures on the Íslendingasögur. These lectures were published some twenty years after his death, by which time many of his opinions had appeared in the writings of younger men, especially in the introductions to the Íslensk Fornrit series. In fact, it is now difficult to determine just how much of the material in these introductions owes its origins, directly or indirectly, to Björn himself.

It may perhaps be thought that he showed an unwarranted bias in allotting four of his seven years of office to the study of this one element of Icelandic literature, but if we take note of his methods or of his achievement, then we must also grant that the time was well spent, since Björn M. Ólsen's lectures are, I believe, pioneering works of unequalled value in the field of old Icelandic literature. This becomes only too clear if we compare the lectures with two other major contemporary works which dealt with the same material: *Die Anfänge der isländischen Saga*, by Andreas Heusler (1914), and the second edition of Finnur Jónsson's literary history (1920–24). As regards the Íslendingasögur these two works now stand as memorials to two great scholars on the wrong track, whereas Björn's lectures prepared the way for present-day methods and opinions, and they retain their value, in many respects, even today. He takes the written text as being the principal object of research; he fully acknowledges the role of the author; he investigates sources and influences; he notes the relation of the sagas one to another and plots the growth and development of the genre.

'How did the sagas originate?' This is a question which Björn poses, and he answers himself: 'There can be little doubt but that

their roots lie in oral tradition, in the stories that were told of the saga heroes. This can be seen both in the material of the sagas and in their diction and narrative construction, all of which bear a strong similarity to a style of oral delivery. There must have been a great many unwritten stories in circulation in Iceland in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and there were "sagnamenn" (experienced story tellers) who took it upon themselves to entertain others with stories, as for example the man who related the journeyings of Haraldr harðráði and other stories at Haraldr's court, and the priest Ingimundr Einarsson, who together with Hrólfur af Skálmarnesi provided entertainment with fornaldarsögur at the feast at Reykhólar in 1119.¹

Although Björn is eager to assert the importance of an oral tradition, he nonetheless recognizes that the written saga is specifically the author's own work. Here I quote: 'The more fully we come to understand our sagas, the further we take ourselves into them, and the more carefully we investigate them, the more we come to recognize the fact that they are creative works, and that it was an artist who held the pen'; and he goes on to say, 'sometimes there are also written sources existing behind the sagas.'²

It may be said that Björn's successors, the representatives of the 'Icelandic School' have continued along the same path, dividing responsibility for the Íslendingasögur between the 'tellers of tales' and the writers, those who finally committed the sagas to parchment. But there are those who are not prepared to content themselves with this uncertain division of labour. Some maintain that the sagas were transcribed directly from an oral rendering, possibly taken unaltered from the lips of the narrator, whereas others postulate pure deskwork which made use of literary motifs and exemplar without any reference to an original traditional story. Even the verses in the sagas are then to be looked upon as the writer's own falsifications, put together so as to lend the saga an apparent authenticity, almost certainly in imitation of the konungasögur where the verses are of genuine historical value.

There is a certain irony in the fact that Björn M. Ólsen, the great disciple of the oral tradition, should actually find himself stimulating extreme disbelievers by initiating this train of thought.

¹ *Um Íslendingasögur*, Safn til sögu Íslands VI, 3, Reykjavík, 1937-39, p. 9.

² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Those who wish to point to written sources for the sagas have an easier task than those who would seek out a genesis based on oral tradition. 'I believe in oral tradition', is sometimes heard, and the choice of words is obviously revealing. Men of the 'literary school' can point to clear cases of similarity of matter and diction with earlier writings, both native and foreign, whereas their opponents are in extreme difficulty, since any traces of an oral tradition which may have existed are now indiscernible from the rest of the written text.³

Some disputants are so heated in their belief in oral sources that they consider themselves to be in no need of supporting evidence. They rate it as self-evident that men in earlier times were constantly retelling the stories of their forefathers, especially before the 'literary period', and regard these versions as forming the main stem of the written sagas. Others, not quite so heated, attempt to produce indirect evidence for the existence in oral form of original models for the sagas. In the contemporary sagas, there are references to public story-tellings, and the two best known are those quoted by Björn Ólsen: the wedding at Reykhólar in 1119, and the Þáttur of Þorsteinn the Story-teller who gave an account of the travels of Haraldr harðráði. In the Íslendingasögur oral accounts are often referred to, and notice is sometimes taken of the fact that these accounts do not agree, one with the other ('Menn segja . . .'; 'Svá er sagt at . . .'; 'Sumir segja . . . en aðrir segja . . .'). In Droplaugarsona Saga a man is also named as having recounted the whole saga. Events in the Íslendingasögur are often supported by verses attributed to the saga characters themselves. Scholars in later times have pointed to the views of Árni Magnússon who maintained that this type of poetry has only been preserved, 'because people knew those sagas of which the poems gave short summaries.'⁴ Sometimes the genealogies of men living in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are traced back to leading saga figures and some

³ I deliberately avoid using the older terms 'free prose' and 'book prose'. Few scholars now uphold Heusler's theory of a form of 'free prose', which was handed down from generation to generation and finally committed to writing 'mit der Treue eines Phonographes'. Most scholars now agree that the Íslendingasögur are the works of specific writers and do not adopt any particular 'Lehre' or theory, but attempt to approach the sagas from a variety of different view points, just as they would other forms of literature.

⁴ *Árni Magnússons levned og skrifter* II, København, 1930, pp. 139-40.

consider that the detailed and accurate knowledge shown of the places described in the sagas points to the existence of oral versions which were current in those areas.

These arguments, however, have little effect on the confirmed sceptics. To them, the account of the Reykhólar wedding feast is extremely unreliable, especially since it was not written until long after the event and contains no reference to Íslendingasögur in oral form, only fornaldarsögur. Even less to be trusted is *Þorsteins þáttur sögufróða*, since the description of the events which he is supposed to have recounted is of purely literary origin, based on foreign motifs. There is no mention in any of the saga-groups, except in the Íslendingasögur themselves, of material which they contained having ever existed in oral form, and this can not in itself be accepted as reliable evidence. It is quite clear that in some of the later sagas, references to oral versions of the story are included simply to deceive the reader and induce a sense of trust in the saga. References to specific persons may be viewed in the same light. It has also long been recognized that the verses in the later sagas were composed as the saga was written, and that certain verses in the earlier sagas also appear to be suspect, as for example in *Egils Saga*; in recent years the verses in the sagas have come under increasingly heavy attack, such that none of the Íslendingasögur may now be considered secure in this respect. Genealogies were amongst the earliest material to be written in Icelandic, as may be seen from the *First Grammatical Treatise*, but they need not necessarily have been more than an empty list of names. Detailed local description may also demonstrate nothing more than the fact that the author of the saga was well acquainted with that specific territory.

In his interesting book, *Über die Entstehung der Isländersagas*, Walter Baetke attempts to demonstrate that there are no oral versions supporting the Íslendingasögur and that they are works of purely original composition. My severest criticism of the book is that at one point the argument clearly breaks down and suddenly postulates the existence of an oral tradition.⁵ It is possible to make various criticisms

⁵ 'It must be admitted that both during the saga-period, as well as in later times, there were, here and there, certain recollections, *frásagnir*, or anecdotes concerning the characters and events of the period in circulation in Iceland.' *Ibid.*, p. 80 (translated).

of Baetke's approach, but I can only see that belief in the oral tradition will benefit by having its acceptability thus tested.

I am myself one of those who 'believe' that the *Íslendingasögur* are based on oral sources, yet even the most devoted disciple may have his moments of doubt. The difficulty comes when he needs to declare his belief and produce actual evidence. It would be extremely valuable to be able to present incontestable proof of the existence of at least some oral sources for the *Íslendingasögur*. This would take one weapon from the hands of the most vehement objectors, those who even doubt whether the leading characters of the oldest sagas ever existed at all, except in the minds of their creators. In my opinion it is possible to produce this type of conclusive evidence, and anyone who wishes to present this view must of course adduce detailed and secure arguments by way of support, just as is to be expected when literary sources come under scrutiny. I have a number of cases of this type in mind, and I now intend to discuss one of them.

In AM 748 I, 4to, at the end of the manuscript on a single leaf, there is a poem entitled *Íslendingadrápa Hauks Valdisarsonar*. As is well known, this is, amongst other things, the main manuscript of Eddic verse after the Codex Regius. The *Íslendingadrápa* is written in a distinctive hand which has been dated at approximately 1300, or possibly the beginning of the fourteenth century; it is difficult to be more exact than this, and a leeway of some decades must be allowed for on either side. A number of scribal errors suggest that this is not the original, but it may be considered a fairly good copy, as far as it extends. The last part, which must have been on the following leaf, is now missing. Twenty-six stanzas and two lines of the twenty-seventh remain.

Finnur Jónsson maintained that the *drápa* could hardly have been more than thirty stanzas long in its original form, but it is not clear what led him to this conclusion.⁶ There is no refrain in the poem in its present form, although it is entitled a *drápa*.

The poem certainly derives its name from the fact that a number of leading Icelanders from early times are mentioned in it, together with

⁶ *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie* II², Københ., 1923, p. 107.

some description of their outstanding deeds and eventual fates. The main heroes may be numbered as being twenty-seven in all:

Brodd-Helgi	Bjarni skáld
Geitir [Lýtingsson]	Grettir [Ásmundarson]
Bjarni Brodd-Helgason	Þorleifr [jarlsskáld]
Þorkell Geitisson	Ormr skógarnef
Helgi Droplaugarson	Gaukr Trandíllson
Helgi Ásbjarnarson	Gunnarr [Hámundarson]
Grímr Droplaugarson	Míðfjarðar-Skeggi
Þórólfr Skalla-Grímsson	Síðu-Hallr
Egill Skalla-Grímsson	Þorsteinn Síðu-Hallsson
Glúmr Geirason	Hólmgöngu-Bersi
Hallfröðr [vandræðaskáld]	Kormakr [Ögmundarson]
Þórálfr Skólmsón	Þórarinn kappi Steinarsson
Finnbogi rammi	Hólmgöngu-Starri
Ormr Stórolfsson	

In addition, a number of men are mentioned as having been closely connected with those just listed:

Sörli Brodd-Helgason	Hákon jarl [Sigurðarson ?]
Aðalsteinn [sigrsæli]	Þorbjörn [öxnamegin]
[Haraldr] Gunnhildarson	Óláfr [völubríótr]
[Hákon] Aðalsteinsfóstri	Gizurr [hvíti]
Eiríkr jarl [Hákonarson]	[Hrólfkr] kraki

and Þórhaddr who was slain by Þorsteinn Síðu-Hallsson. Fitjar, a district in Norway and the sword Sköfnungr are also mentioned in the drápa.

The author of the drápa is otherwise completely unknown. It has been supposed that he was the grandson of Hreinn Styrmisson, Abbot of Hítardalur and Þingeyrar, and that his mother, Valdís Hreinsdóttir, was married to Magnús Þorláksson of Melar. According to this, our poet should have been alive in the second half of the twelfth century, and possibly somewhat beyond the year 1200; the problem, however, is that this is no more than the purest guesswork, supported only by the fact that the name Valdís is extremely rare. Another doubtful suggestion identifies him with a certain Víga-Haukr who flourished in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Scholars have, in any case, not been in complete agreement as to the composition date of the *Íslendingadrápa*.

The first and only detailed study of the poem appeared a hundred years ago, when it was published, with notes and explanations, by Theodor Möbius in 1874. The edition was a millennial presentation from Germany on the occasion of the one thousandth birthday of the settlement of Iceland. It was, in fact, a year of birthdays, since in 1874 Wilhelm the First, Kaiser of Germany and King of Prussia, was 77 years old, and he too was presented with a publication in honour of the occasion which included Möbius' edition of *Íslendingadrápa*.

It seems not totally inappropriate that Icelanders themselves should give the poem some attention, now that our eleven hundredth anniversary is approaching. This is not to forget that a number of our countrymen have already conducted a certain amount of research into the poem, the latest being Bjarni Einarsson in *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*.

Möbius and Bjarni hold similar views as to the date and composition of the poem. Möbius maintains that it could scarcely have been composed before the mid-thirteenth century, basing his conclusion both on its free and simple stylistic structure, and also on the fact that a great deal of the material concerning the various heroes appears to be taken not so much from oral descriptions, as from the written sagas, the majority of these being, apparently, written after 1250. Möbius also refers to Guðbrandur Vigfússon who dated the poem as being composed at the end of the thirteenth century. Bjarni Einarsson writes that, 'the poem was apparently composed after the majority of the *Íslendingasögur* had been written; that is, according to the normally accepted dating, late in the thirteenth century.'

Finnur Jónsson touches on the poem in his literary history, and places it in the second half of the twelfth century, a century earlier than Möbius.⁷ The editors of *Íslensk Fornrit* have adopted Finnur Jónsson's view, since they consider the *drápa* to be older than the relevant sagas — that is, if they discuss the matter at all.

Jón Helgason has offered the opinion that the sanctity of Jón Ögmundarson is referred to in the verse in the *drápa* about Síðu-Hallr who was one of Jón's ancestors, and that the poem must therefore have been written after 1200, when Jón was recognized as a saint:⁸

⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 107-108.

⁸ *Norges og Islands diktning*, Nordisk kultur VIII: B, 1953, p. 141.

Átti élbjóðr hrotta
 ágætr sonu mæta,
 dýrr skóp himna harri
 höfuðsmanna veg sannan.

(The great warrior had worthy sons. The Lord of Heaven made great honour of these chieftains.) I have already brought attention to this verse in the introduction to *Eyfirðinga Sögur*, and there I pointed out that *Síðu-Hallr* was in fact the forefather of three bishops who lived in the twelfth century; that is *Klængr Þorsteinsson* and *Magnús Einarrsson* of *Skálholt*, in addition to *Jón Ögmundarson* of *Hólar*, and in my opinion this could be a sufficient explanation of this stanza of the *drápa*.⁹ On further examination, however, it seems to me most likely that the poet is here using the word 'sonu' literally, referring to sons rather than to descendants generally, and this is also the view which *Möbius* puts forward. The names of five sons of *Síðu-Hallr* are recorded, and most of them in terms of high praise, and the stanza after the one just quoted in the *drápa* recalls the deeds of one of his sons, *Þorsteinn*.

From what has been said so far, it is clearly necessary to examine the date of *Íslendingadrápa* and its relation to the sagas in greater detail. Three possible explanations suggest themselves:

1) That the *drápa* is older than the sagas and is, like them, supported by oral sources, without there being any direct connection between the two forms.

2) That the *drápa* is later than the sagas, which the poet used as his source.

3) That some of the sagas are older than the poem and some younger. The poet used those sagas which were available to him, but relied otherwise on oral accounts.

In examining the first of these possibilities one might initially attempt to establish the independent dates of the *drápa* and the sagas, but it is also constructive to look for any discrepancies between the accounts that the two forms offer of certain events. Such inconsistencies could then demonstrate that the poem was not entirely dependent upon the written forms as we now know them. Thirdly, it is also

⁹ *Íslensk fornrit IX*, p. xcvi, cf. *Möbius, op. cit.*, p. 48.

possible that the drápa itself contains internal evidence which suggests the use of either written or oral sources.

In relation to the dating of the poem, I would first like to examine certain points of style. Möbius maintains the view, as was mentioned earlier, that the free and simple stylistic structure of the Íslendingadrápa ('die leichte und einfache Fügung des Vortrags'), points to a composition date later than the mid-thirteenth century. It is not easy to make such general characteristics of style into a criterion for dating verses, particularly since the development of dróttkvæði is often a long drawn out process such that there may be wide ranging variations of style between the poets of any single period, despite an overall development towards stylistic simplicity.

It is my impression, however, that the form of the drápa is actually considerably complex, and therefore likely to be of an early date. The kennings are multiple and intricate, and the sentence structure highly interwoven. I would consider that this type of poetic technique belongs more to the twelfth than to the thirteenth century. There are also certain linguistic characteristics in the poem which suggest an early date of composition.

The rhyme, for example, in a number of 'aðalhendingar' demands the early forms *fiŋg* (v. 7, l. 6) and *giŋg* (13,8; 14,6). The alternative forms *feng* and *geng* are also of an early date, but are more to be expected in later periods.¹⁰ In the manuscript, the first example is written *feng*, in accordance with the form current at the time of writing, but the remaining two are abbreviated with a superscript stroke.

Also in one 'aðalhending', the vowels *o* and *a* (13,6) are rhymed together, and it is generally believed that this particular rhyming pair disappeared late in the twelfth century.¹¹

The word *óþáum* (or *óþúm*) also appears in a non-assimilated form (19,8). After 1200, the contracted form *óþám* is normally to be expected.¹² In the manuscript under discussion the word appears as *óþám*,

¹⁰ Finnur Jónsson, *Det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog*, pp. 98-99.

¹¹ Hreinn Benediktsson, Phonemic Neutralization and Inaccurate Rhymes, *Acta phil. Scand.* 26, 1963, p. 11.

¹² Adolf Noreen, *Altnordische Grammatik I* (1970), p. 115 (and works there cited).

and this clearly demonstrates the time gap, between composition and copy.

The preposition *ept* has this short form (21,6), which is accepted as being current only until the mid-twelfth century. It was gradually replaced in the thirteenth century by the longer *eptir*, which had previously only been known as an adverb.¹³

We should not leave this part of the discussion without considering any grammatical characteristics which might, on the other hand, suggest the later composition date proposed by Möbius. There is one example which at first sight might seem to point in this direction. The word *höldr* which in the earliest Icelandic manuscripts is written with *lð*, is in two instances rhymed with words containing original *ld*: *aldri* (25,7) and *Felldi* (26,1). The development *lð* : *ld* should not usually occur before the second half of the thirteenth century, or even later. But the explanation seems to be that originally there were two different words, one containing *lð*, the other *ld*.¹⁴ This suggestion is supported by the fact that *höldr* is rhymed with words in *ld* in verses attributed to early poets: *hald* : *hölda*, Vellekla 11 (Skjaldedigtning AI, 124); *hölda* : *halda*, Vellekla 21 (Skjalded. AI, 127); *meld* : *höldi*, Vestrfararvísur 2 (Skjalded. AI, 241); *hugfylldra* : *hölda*, Glymdrápa 7 (Skjalded. AI, 23) etc.

It is generally accepted that the oldest Íslendingasögur were written shortly after 1200, and the latest in the second half of the fourteenth century. Using the examples that I have just listed, I would conclude that the language of the Íslendingadrápa points explicitly to a composition date earlier than even the earliest of the Íslendingasögur.

Our second consideration was possible inconsistencies between the drápa and the sagas. Although it superficially appears that the two forms provide almost identical accounts of the relevant incidents, it is nonetheless possible to detect certain deviations, and also certain points at which the drápa provides greater detail than would be conceivable, were it based completely on the sagas that we know of today. The main examples of this type will now be discussed:

¹³ Finnur Jónsson, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-123.

¹⁴ See H. Pipping, *Till frågan om l- och n-ljudens kvalitet i nordiska språken*, Studier i nordisk filologi VI, 5, Helsingfors, 1915, pp. 29-31; cf. Jakob Benediktsson, *Um tvenns konar framburð á ld í íslenzku*, *Íslenzk tunga* 2, 1960.

Brodd-Helgi is described in the poem as the father of Sörli (v. 3), but Sörli is not mentioned either in *Vápnfirðinga Saga*, which here would be the potential written source, or in any of the versions of *Landnámabók*. There is, however, a separate þáttir about him connected with *Ljósvetninga Saga* in a number of manuscripts. The introduction to *Íslenzk Fornrit*, vol. 10, dates the þáttir from the second half of the thirteenth century.

In the fourth stanza of the poem we are told that Bjarni Brodd-Helgason killed, in addition to Geitir, most of the other men who were responsible for his father's death, whereas in *Vápnfirðinga Saga* only one man extra is named as having been killed in this connection.

There is no mention in the sagas of Glúmr Geirason's battle alongside King Haraldr Gráfældr at Fitjar, which appears in verse eleven of the poem, despite the fact that some verses about this battle in the *konungasögur* are attributed to Glúmr himself. More noteworthy still is the fact that in *Reykðæla Saga*, which contains the greatest amount of material about Glúmr, it is Þorkell his brother and not he himself who received a sword from a dead man.

In *Orms Þáttir Stórolfssonar* it is said that Jarl Eiríkr Hákonarson commanded sixty men to attack Ormr on an open plain, and that he took a pole, and swung it in all directions so that no one dared to come near him. The account in the *drápa* states that Ormr challenged twelve of Eiríkr's men to single combat, and that Eiríkr told them to try their skill with Ormr ('leitask fyrir'), when he began to attack them with the pole.

In *Íslendingadrápa* there is mention of two heroes who are otherwise apparently almost unknown: Bjarni Skáld (v. 16) and Þórarinn Kappi Steinarsson (v. 26).¹⁵

These discrepancies between the *drápa* and the sagas would natur-

¹⁵ Möbius suggests that Bjarni Skáld is the poet named in one of the main manuscripts of *Skáldatal*, who is thought to have composed an elegy on Ólafr Tryggvason, but it is probably Jarl Hákon Sigurðarson who is referred to in the *drápa*. However likely this may be, it does not bring us much closer to discovering who Bjarni Skáld actually was. Þórarinn Kappi Steinarsson is most likely the same man as Þórarinn Illi who is mentioned in *Vatnsdæla Saga*. In the saga it is clear that he was involved in a duel with Hólmgöngu-Starri, but we are not told how the duel ended. The *drápa* however suggests that Starri was the victor.

ally give cause for suspicion if one were to maintain that the poem was built entirely on the sagas. One would need then to consider the existence of written material which is now lost, or of different versions of the sagas we do know, but which are nonetheless no longer extant. We do in fact know of the existence of at least one saga which has since been lost about a hero in Íslendingadrápa, Gaukr Trandilsson.¹⁶ Had Haukr, however, composed the drápa from written sagas in the late thirteenth century, it still seems unlikely that such a large number of sagas should have been lost containing the variant elements which he uses.

It is interesting at this point to look at other poems about early heroes, despite the fact that they are all much younger than Íslendingadrápa. The oldest of this group is the so-called 'Allra Kappa Kvæði', which is to be found in Pergament 4to no. 22, in the Royal Library in Stockholm, a manuscript from the first half of the sixteenth century.¹⁷ One 'kappakvæði' is attributed to Þórður Magnússon who lived in the sixteenth century, and one to Björn Jónsson from Skarðsá, who died in 1655.¹⁸ All these poems differ from Íslendingadrápa in two ways: They do not diverge in the slightest from the written sagas or rímur, and therefore appear to be based on them. They concentrate on the leading figures in the sagas, whereas Haukr very often restricts himself to what are in fact the secondary characters in the now extant versions. If, for example, he had used Reykdæla Saga as a source, he would have assuredly chosen to speak about either Vémundr Kögurr or Víga-Skúta, or both, but not Glúmr Geirason. Haukr's choice of subjects explicitly suggests that he was using oral sources. It also suggests that such oral forms of the stories did not necessarily incorporate the material of the written sagas and that in these oral accounts, some of the figures that receive little attention in the written versions assumed an importance quite comparable to that of their 'literary' counterparts.

¹⁶ See Jón Helgason, in *Heidersskrift til Gustav Indrebø*, Bergen, 1939.

¹⁷ Printed in *Arkiv for nordisk filologi* I, 1882.

¹⁸ A discussion of these poems is to be found in *Kvæðabók úr Vigur*, ed. Jón Helgason, Kaupmannahöfn, 1955, introd. pp. 35-37. Incomplete editions in *Arkiv* IV, and *Timarit hins íslenska bókmenntafélags* VIII, 1887.

If we now move on to consider the possibility of internal evidence in *Íslendingadrápa*, we can immediately establish that there is no mention whatsoever of any written source, anywhere in the poem. (This of course does not prove that Haukr did not know the written sagas.) The poet does, on the other hand, frequently refer to oral sources. On nine occasions he indicates that he has heard something about what he is describing by using the expression 'frá ek' (verses 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 19, 21, 23, 25). The expression 'kváðu þjóðir' (v. 18) has exactly the same implication.

If we propose that the manuscript of the *drápa* was written about 1300, and that the poem itself was composed somewhat earlier, then we are equally suggesting that the *drápa* is older than some of the written sagas, or at least older than their surviving versions. This is certainly true of *Grettis Saga* and of *Orms Þátr Stórolfssonar*, and may possibly apply to *Njáls Saga* also. Is it not then possible that Haukr would have used the earlier written sagas as his source material, even though he had access to the younger sagas only in oral form? In fact there is nothing to suggest that he did this. There is equal inconsistency between the *drápa* and both the older and younger sagas. *Vápnfirðinga Saga* is thought to be one of the oldest sagas, written in the second quarter of the thirteenth century. *Reykðæla Saga* is considered slightly younger, and *Orms Þátr* is from the fourteenth century. The relation of the *drápa* is, in other words, the same, to older and younger sagas alike.

The main reason why some scholars believe that the *drápa* is based on written sagas, is the fact that there is, at a number of points, an extremely close similarity between the two forms in certain small details. The main examples of this will now be considered:

Helgi Droplaugarson is described as heathen in stanza six of the poem, and in *Droplaugarsona Saga* it is said that he was killed, 'one year after the missionary Þangbrandr came to Iceland', in other words two years before Christianity was accepted by the Alþing.

In the poem (v. 8) we read that Grímr Droplaugarson went in to Helgi Ásbjarnarson, and placed a sword through his body (hann 'gekk inn at Frey linna foldar'). This should be compared with the thirteenth chapter of *Droplaugarsona Saga*.

Þorsteinn Síðu-Hallsson killed five men in one morning, including Þórhaddr (v. 23); see Þorsteins Saga, chapters five and six. A gap in the saga makes an exact comparison impossible, but we read, at least, that Þorsteinn went out to kill early in the morning ('snimma of morgin').¹⁹

Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi wounded sixteen men, and killed two, when Gizurr the White attacked him (v. 20); see Njáls Saga, chapter 77.

Hólmgöngu-Bersi was victorious against thirty-five men with his sword (v. 24); see Kormaks Saga, chapter 16.

In the last two examples it so happens that the sagas contain verses which also include this exact reference. In Njáls Saga, there is a verse which is attributed to Þorkell Elfaraskáld, an otherwise unknown poet, which also states that Gunnar wounded sixteen men and killed two. The similarity is, therefore, with the verse, rather than with the saga as such, so it may be suggested there is a direct connection between it and the drápa. In Kormaks Saga there is a verse attributed to Hólmgöngu-Bersi, in which he claims to have killed thirty-five men with his sword. It is more than likely that Haukr knew these verses, and took his references straight from them.

In Droplaugarsona Saga there are verses about the death of Helgi Ásbjarnarson, composed by Grímr Droplaugarson. In one he says that he has made a reddened sword stand in Helgi's body (látið 'roðinn sárvönd' standa á Helga), and I believe that another verse may be interpreted as saying that the killing took place inside. It is equally not unlikely that Haukr knew these verses also.

In Þorsteins Saga there is a lacuna at the point which would best bear comparison with the drápa, as mentioned earlier. There are no verses in those parts of the saga which have survived down to the present day, but there are a number in the þáttir which is called Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar, and which is believed to have been

¹⁹ In the introduction to the *Austfirðinga sögur* (*Íslensk fornrit XI*), Jón Jónhannesson suggests that the close connection between Droplaugarsona Saga and the Íslendingadrápa may be explained by the fact that Haukr knew an earlier summary of the story from the twelfth century. On the other hand he considers that the author of Þorsteins Saga may well have known Íslendingadrápa. This shows how important it is to regard the poem in its entirety. Such explanations cannot be used indiscriminantly to explain similarities between the drápa and the sagas.

copied from Þorsteins Saga when the latter was still complete. It is perfectly possible that there were verses in the lacuna previously mentioned, and that Haukr took his references about the time of day and the five killings from them. We would need, otherwise, to postulate the existence of a very exact oral source which both Haukr and the saga writer had recourse to.

It should also be mentioned that Haukr apparently knew Egill's verse in Egils Saga about the battle on Vínheiðr. 'Helt, né hrafnar sultu, / Hringr á vápna þingi', says Egill, and 'þreklundaðr fell Þundar / Þórólfr í gný stórum', which should be compared with: 'Hrings fell á því þingi / Þórólfr í gný stórum', in the drápa.

In Einar Ól. Sveinsson's opinion, Haukr is doubtlessly following verse 29 of Hallfreðar Saga when he says that Hallfreðr 'sótti konung snjallan; seggr fekk et hæsta hald tveggja döglinga'.²⁰

The reference to Helgi Droplaugarson's being a heathen at the time of his death cannot be traced to any extant verse. The battle in Eyvindardalr, on the other hand, in which Helgi was killed, is recorded in the annals as having taken place in 998. It is not clear in what way the three sources, the drápa, the saga and the annals, are connected, and it is not possible to establish whether Haukr took his information from a written or oral source, or from a lost verse.

In conclusion, I would like to draw together the results of my investigations into Íslendingadrápa. It was composed before the first of the Íslendingasögur, and in all probability, in the twelfth century. The poet did not use any written sagas as source material. When there is agreement between the drápa and the saga in small details, this is, in some cases, completely attributable to early verses known both to the drápa poet and the saga writer, and in other cases, it is not possible to distinguish between lost verses and oral tradition as the common source.

Íslendingadrápa contains, therefore, incontestable proof of the fact that there were stories in circulation, in oral form, concerning the leading figures in the Íslendingasögur, and also other characters who never received much attention in the written forms. The drápa also provides certain proof that some of the verses in the Íslendingasögur

²⁰ *Íslensk fornrit VIII*, p. lix.

are older than the sagas themselves, and that the saga writers used them as sources. The extent to which points of detail in the drápa seem to be almost completely related to the early verses, does however suggest that such oral versions as existed behind the Íslendinga-sögur were generally insubstantial and under-developed.