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THE LIBRARY AT BRÆÐRATUNGA

Manuscript Ownership and Private Library-Building in Early Modern Iceland¹

Iceland's medieval manuscripts were the subject of growing interest from European scholars in the early modern period. Organised efforts to collect and export Icelandic manuscripts of antiquarian value began in the seventeenth century and arguably reached their height in the early 1700s through the work of Árni Magnússon (1663–1730), professor at the University of Copenhagen.² Unlike Denmark and Sweden, Iceland did not have formal archival or library institutions for the collection and preservation of books and manuscripts during the early modern period. Libraries and literary activities at Iceland's medieval religious houses have been the subject of significant interest in recent years.³ Following the Reformation (1541–1550), Iceland's religious houses fell under the control of the Danish crown. There is no evidence of systematic destruction of moveable property during or following the Reformation (Gunnar Kristjánsson 2017).⁴ However, neither was any centralised effort made to preserve the older

- 1 I am grateful to Beeke Stegmann for permission to read the manuscript of her forthcoming book, as well as to the editors and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. The research for this article was supported by the Icelandic Research Fund, grant no. 218209-051.
- 2 On Árni Magnússon's activities, see Már Jónsson 2012. For a recent discussion of collectors and collection activities predating Árni Magnússon, see Gottskálf Jenson 2019.
- 3 For an overview, see Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2016. Book production at Helgafell was the subject of a recent symposium, held 3–4 March 2023 in Reykjavík in connection with the ongoing project Book Production at Helgafell Monastery in the Fourteenth Century (PI: Beeke Stegmann).
- 4 Hannah Ryley (2017) makes a convincing argument that dismantling books for use as bookbinding material was a common pre-modern practice, including recycling of outdated or worn-out liturgical manuscripts. That Icelandic bindings containing fragments of pre-Reformation liturgical manuscripts do not date overwhelmingly from the mid-sixteenth century is evidence against systematic, violent destruction of books and libraries as a performative act against Catholicism.

monastic libraries that did survive. The premises of manuscript-holding religious houses were converted into residences for the secular elite, who paid rents to the Danish king in exchange not only for control of the former monastery or nunnery but also associated tenancies and resource rights. An interest in medieval books or literary culture did not factor into their appointment.

One such elite family was that of Magnús Björnsson (1595–1662) and his wife Guðrún Gísladóttir (1588–1671). They managed the property of the former Benedictine monastery at Munkaþverá in Eyjafjörður in North Iceland, and the manor farm of Munkaþverá had also been Magnús's childhood home: his parents, Björn Benediktsson (1561–1617) and his wife Elín Pálsadóttir (1571–1637), had managed the monastery property from 1601. Magnús, the first documented owner of the famous Möðruvallabók codex, was one of Iceland's most powerful civil servants and is a well-known figure in Icelandic history. His active interest in the literature of the past is clear: he inherited, acquired and gifted medieval Icelandic manuscripts, as documented by Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson (1994). As discussed below, the family library included both the remnants of Munkaþverá's medieval library and their own acquisitions.

While Magnús Björnsson seems to have had a personal passion for medieval books, or at the very least to have recognised their value through interactions with philologists such as his cousin Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson of Skálholt (1605–1675), elite family libraries in early modern Iceland were not exclusively managed by male household heads. Indeed, as Susanne Arthur (2012) has demonstrated, many private manuscript owners in seventeenth-century Iceland were women who had received codices as part of their inheritance or dowry. The gendered aspect of manuscript ownership within Icelandic families and communities differed from that encountered in male-dominated early modern archival spaces (Parsons 2022).

The focus of this article is on the library of Magnús and Guðrún's second daughter, Helga Magnúsdóttir (1623–1677). Helga's namesake was her great-grandmother, Helga Aradóttir (c. 1538–1614), whose father Ari Jónsson, uncle Björn Jónsson and grandfather Jón Arason—the last Catholic bishop of Hólar—were hastily executed at Skálholt on 7 November 1550 for their role in the political and religious conflict sur-

rounding the Reformation.⁵ From birth, Helga Magnúsdóttir's life was deeply connected to that of her powerful ancestors; Jón Arason had spent time at Munkaþverá as a young man, and she belonged to the third consecutive generation of his descendants to occupy the former monastery.

A key source on Helga Magnúsdóttir's life is a biography composed a few days after her death by the Rev. Einar Einarsson (1649–1690) and preserved in AM 96 8vo alongside a eulogy read at her funeral by Bishop Þórður Þorláksson of Skálholt (Margrét Eggertsdóttir 1998). One aspect of Helga Magnúsdóttir's life that does not receive attention in her biography is her manuscript collection at her home in Bræðratunga. However, two vellum manuscripts from Bræðratunga were among the Icelandic manuscripts lost in the Fire of Copenhagen in 1728. Helga Magnúsdóttir was also the owner of the surviving medieval codex AM 152 fol., which she inherited from her father and has received considerable scholarly attention (cf. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2014a, 2014b). Late in her life, her cousin Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson of Skálholt bequeathed half of his own library of Icelandic manuscripts to Helga, meaning that Bræðratunga would have briefly housed one of the most important manuscript collections in the country.

As discussed in this paper, an inventory of the Bræðratunga estate from 1653, prepared the year after the death of Helga's husband, suggests that there were no more than a handful of books at Bræðratunga at this time. In contrast to her parents' book collection at her childhood home of Munkaþverá, which may have contained titles that had been at the monastery from the fifteenth century onwards (see below), Bræðratunga does not seem to have been a "bookish" household on Helga's arrival. Helga's books thus give an opportunity to examine practices of private library-building and the movement of manuscripts between regions of Iceland and generations of owners, expanding on earlier research by Susanne Arthur (2012), Guðrún Ingólfssdóttir (2016) and others.

5 Helga Aradóttir's namesake was probably her grandmother Helga Sigurðardóttir (d. after 1559), who was Bishop Jón Arason's partner.

The library at Munkaþverá

Helga Magnúsdóttir, like her brothers Gísli and Björn and sisters Jórunn and Solveig, spent her childhood in her parents' household at Munkaþverá. Her impeccable handwriting and surviving evidence of her adult correspondence demonstrate that she received an education that included writing and composition in addition to basic reading skills (see Parsons forthcoming). An emphasis on women's literacy beyond a basic reading ability was not unusual for her extended family, particularly among those living at or near the ecclesiastical centres of Skálholt and Hólar (Margrét Eggertsdóttir 2017).⁶

The children at Munkaþverá grew up in an environment where medieval vellum books were not only present but continued to be in active use: as reading objects, as material for bookbindings and as tools for developing childhood literacy. Munkaþverá's transition from sacred to secular space in 1551 was non-violent, and there is evidence that remnants of the medieval library survived at Helga Magnúsdóttir's childhood home some seventy-five years after the monastery's closure.

The former monastic library at Munkaþverá would mainly have contained volumes dating from the fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth century. A devastating fire in 1429 had claimed the lives of two of Munkaþverá's monks and destroyed the original complex, although individual books belonging to the older library may have been on loan elsewhere and thus survived.⁷ Einar Ísleifsson became abbot in 1435 and invested much of his effort in rebuilding the monastery and securing its finances.⁸ Liturgical books were among the items needed for the monastery, and an inventory from 1525 confirms that the monastery was well supplied with such books (DI 9, 305–7). At least two liturgical books were produced by Finnbogi Einarsson (d. 1532), who became abbot of Munkaþverá in 1524 (DI 9, 307).

As Kalinke points out, Munkaþverá housed numerous texts relating to Marian devotion in Latin and the vernacular. Finnbogi Einarsson copied

6 Guðrún Ingólfssdóttir (2016, 241) insightfully observes that the attitude of a girl's parents towards female literacy likely mattered more in determining whether she would learn to write than her social status in the community.

7 On the fire and the history of the monastery buildings, see Guðrún Harðardóttir 1996.

8 On Einar Ísleifsson's activities as abbot, see Janus Jónsson 1887, 206–8.

Mariúmessur allar ('the Masses of Our Lady'), and there was a *Mariú saga hin stærri*, a *Mariú saga hin minni* and a *Mariú historia* that Kalinke identifies as the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Kalinke 1994, 45). There were vernacular legends of saints and apostles: *Ólafs saga*, *Tómas saga*, *Benediktus saga*, *Martínus saga*, *Jóns saga biskups*, *Guðmundar saga*, *Jóns saga postola*, *Barlanus saga*, *Péturs saga* and a volume identified as *Meyja sögur* (i.e., virgin martyr saints' legends). In 1525, the prior Jón had in his keeping two manuscripts containing offices: the aforementioned *Mariú historia* and *Dýradags historia* (Office of the Feast of Corpus Christi). At least some of these manuscripts may have come from other religious houses to replace books lost in the 1429 fire, but the inventory provides evidence that book production took place at Munkaþverá as well.

The monastery's Latin liturgical books lost their religious function in post-Reformation Iceland, and their vellum was put to other uses over time. Unfortunately, no inventory survives of the books at Munkaþverá in the seventeenth century. Gísli Baldur Róbertsson (2006) has plausibly suggested that a paper copy of the Life of St Anne, now AM 82 8vo, was produced in the first half of the seventeenth century at Munkaþverá from an older exemplar still kept at the former monastery and subsequently bound in leaves from a fourteenth-century gradual that had been part of Munkaþverá's library. In 1525, Munkaþverá had a chapel for St Anne, with an altarpiece and a statue of St Anne (DI 9, 305). A Life of St Anne is not found in the 1525 inventory, but it might have been produced or entered the library after the inventory was compiled, not least given that the source text of the Icelandic translation was the 1507 Low German *De historie von hiligen moder sunte Anna* or the *St. Annen-Büchlein* (Bekker-Nielsen 1964; Wolf 2001).

One manuscript of saints' legends at Munkaþverá in Helga's childhood was the manuscript AM 232 fol., which contains *Barlaams saga og Jósafats*, *Mariú saga* with miracles, *Framför Mariú* (Transitus Mariae), *Jóns saga baptista* and *Heilagra feðra ævi* (Vitae patrum). It was discovered at Munkaþverá by Sveinn Torfason (c. 1662–1725), who received control of Munkaþverá after Helga's brother Björn lost his position as its proprietor in 1695 after accusations of mismanagement. Sveinn gave the manuscript to Magnús Jónsson (1679–1733), who presented the codex to Árni Magnússon in 1698. Helga's nephew Guðbrandur Björnsson (c.

1657–1733), who had grown up at Munkaþverá, recognised the book and told Áрни Magnússon that AM 232 fol. had belonged to his father Björn; he thought that Sveinn must have found it in some chest in the former monastery complex (AM 435 a 4to, 9v–10r). The presence of *Barlanus saga* in the 1525 inventory is evidence that this codicological unit had belonged to Munkaþverá since before the Reformation. However, only the codicological unit containing *Framför Maríu* could be hypothesised to have been written at Munkaþverá and kept there for the duration of its pre-Reformation history, as other sections of the manuscript predate the 1429 fire.⁹

Guðbrandur informed Áрни that his father taught him to read using AM 232 fol. (AM 435 a 4to, 9v–10r). Helga and her siblings too might have been given this manuscript for reading practice: a large vellum manuscript with generous margins would have been a durable reading primer. The manuscript shows signs of use for beginner writing practice: traces of a beginner writer's pen-strokes are visible in the outer margin on f. 22v. Other marginalia include rows of letters on ff. 5v and 30r.

According to a note by Áрни Magnússon in AM 645 4to, Guðbrandur Björnsson remembered that a very old vellum manuscript containing sagas of apostles had been at Munkaþverá in his childhood, which Áрни identified as AM 645 4to. Guðbrandur claimed that only one man in Eyjafjörður had been able to read it. The smaller manuscript's provenance is difficult to verify, as Áрни neglects to mention where or from whom he acquired it, but Áрни seems confident in his statement. AM 645 4to contains *Jarteinabók Þorláks biskups*, *Clemens saga*, *Péturs saga postola*, *Jakobs saga postola*, *Bartholomeus saga postola*, *Matheus saga postola*, *Andreas saga postola*, *Páls saga postola*, *Niðurstigningar saga* and *Martinus saga biskups*. The book was likely monastic property before it circulated among a secular

9 On *Framför Maríu* and the provenance of this manuscript, see Bullitta 2021. Bullitta suggests that some sixteenth-century names in the manuscript may have belonged to Helga's paternal ancestors and that AM 232 fol. was kept at the former monastery at Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur before the Reformation. While this may be correct, the names in question (Björn, Benedikt, Sigurður Jónsson and a priest named Jón) are common enough that secure identification is impossible, nor is the presence of names in marginalia always equivalent to ownership: long-term borrowing of manuscripts was common. After several generations at Munkaþverá, boundaries between family and monastery property were blurred. Guðbrandur, an evidently unbookish child who enrolled in the Danish army rather than the University of Copenhagen, believed that his father owned the book, but Björn presumably left it at Munkaþverá because he did not view it as his property.

readership, but it is impossible to know whether it came to Munkaþverá before or after 1550 (DI V, 288).¹⁰

Finally, a vellum copy of *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* and *Ólafs saga helga* (now AM 61 fol.), gifted by Magnús Björnsson to his wife's niece Jórunn Hinriksdóttir (c. 1614–1693), could possibly have been the *Ólafs saga* mentioned in the inventory of Munkaþverá. This manuscript has been identified as originating from a scribal network broadly associated with the Helgafell monastery (Ólafur Halldórsson 1966, 22, 27–29; see also Jón Helgason 1958, 67, 69–70). Jórunn moved north around 1630 to marry her second cousin Benedikt Halldórsson (1607–1688), whose parents managed the monastery at Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur. Jórunn later gave the manuscript to her daughter Ingibjörg (d. 1673), who married Bishop Gísli Þorláksson in 1664.¹¹

Other manuscripts in Helga Magnúsdóttir's childhood library belonged to her parents Magnús and Guðrún. Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson's list of manuscripts belonging to Magnús Björnsson contains ten manuscript items (including *Möðruvallabók*) that can be linked with some certainty to Magnús, three manuscript items that can be reasonably hypothesised to have been Magnús's and one instance of a lost manuscript that was probably borrowed from Magnús by Þorbergur Hrólfsson of Seyla (1573–1656), although it is unknown whether it was a paper or vellum copy (Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson 1994, 142–45).

One vellum manuscript belonging to Helga Magnúsdóttir, AM 152 fol., certainly had belonged to her father, as it contains a single-stanza verse on f. 138v proclaiming Magnús Björnsson's ownership, in addition to his signature on f. 57r. It is likely that the now-lost copy of *Þiðreks saga af Bern* that Árni Magnússon called *Bræðratungubók* also came from Munkaþverá.

10 A vernacular book of *postula sögur* and a copy of *Martinus saga* were at the monastery at Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur when an inventory was made in 1461.

11 Guðrún Ingólfssdóttir (2016, 241) raises the interesting question of whether Jórunn Hinriksdóttir could write. As she points out, a surviving legal document from 1688 is signed by her tenants, but Jórunn's name is not written in her own hand. However, Jórunn would have been around seventy-four years old at the time. Before eye surgery was an option, many older Icelanders had cataracts and other vision problems that prevented them from writing, including some former scribes. Jórunn wrote Bishop Brynjólfur a letter that he received in 1665; his response is preserved in AM 277 fol., 74v–77r. Her letter does not survive, so it cannot be seen whether she dictated her letter or directly held the pen.

The library at Bræðratunga to 1653

Most of Helga's close male relatives held secular administrative posts, including her brothers Gísli (1621–1696) and Björn (c. 1624–1697), both of whom held the position of *sýslumaður* or district administrator—Gísli in South Iceland, Björn in North Iceland. Helga's sisters Jórunn (1622–c. 1704) and Solveig (1627–1710) each married a *sýslumaður*. Although laws on consanguinity were strict, all five of Magnús and Guðrún's children married either a second cousin or a second cousin once removed, and Björn and Solveig married siblings.

Helga's biography emphasises her spiritual development rather than her secular accomplishments, but it gives an outline of major events in her life: she was engaged in her fifteenth year to her cousin *sýslumaður* Hákon Gíslason (1614–1652), married in 1639, widowed at twenty-nine. She and her husband lived first at Munkaþverá in her parents' household and later at Hólar in the household of Hákon's sister, Kristín Gísladóttir (1610–1694), who was married to Bishop Þorlákur Skúlason of Hólar (1597–1656). The couple remained at Hólar until 1643, when they left to establish their own household at Bræðratunga, which had been the home of Hákon's parents, Gísli Hákonarson (1583–1631) and Margrét Jónsdóttir (c. 1573–1658). Their seven children were born at Bræðratunga in 1644–1652, four of whom survived infancy: Elín (1644–1717), Vigfús (1647–1670), Sigríður (1648–1733) and Jarþrúður (c. 1651–1686). Helga was pregnant with their seventh child, a son, when news reached her at Bræðratunga that her husband Hákon had collapsed suddenly on 27 September 1652 and died. Sadly, their youngest child also died shortly after birth a few weeks later.

An inventory of moveable property in Hákon's estate from 1653 is preserved in AM 268 fol. Surprisingly, it lists only four books at Bræðratunga, all printed: a new Bible (printed at Hólar in 1637–1644 and obviously a gift from Hákon's brother-in-law, Bishop Þorlákur Skúlason); a New Testament; a book of house postils; and an old hymnal (AM 268 fol., 117v). Several factors may contribute to the near-complete absence of books at Bræðratunga in the 1653 inventory:

- Hákon does not seem to have been particularly bookish: he owned a large stable of horses but did not invest in a large personal library of printed books;

- Hákon's widowed mother, Margrét Jónsdóttir, was still alive and would presumably have remained the primary keeper of her family's books and manuscripts; and
- family manuscripts were not necessarily considered inventory in the same way as items of clothing, farming implements or other objects.

One extant manuscript that did belong to Hákon Gíslason is GKS 3672 8vo, a tiny copy of the law code *Jónsbók*, tightly bound in leather over wooden boards, with two intact metal clasps. The manuscript is plain but neatly written, and the leather binding has been stamped to produce an elegant volume. Two inscriptions, in different hands, on the first leaf declare Hákon Gíslason to be the owner.¹² His signature is also found on the inside of the rear board. The manuscript was copied in 1631 by an unknown scribe and is one of 103 surviving manuscript copies of *Jónsbók* from the seventeenth century, of a total of 286 manuscript copies in all (Már Jónsson 2004, 26–27). Hákon Gíslason's book is in an excellent state of preservation and seems to have been a practical “travel copy” of *Jónsbók* that could be taken on work-related journeys, with extensive marginal notes in the section on personal rights but no observed doodles, verses or other casual uses of the page that might suggest use outside administrative settings.¹³ On the verso side of the back flyleaf is a unique key to reading (or perhaps writing?) common manuscript abbreviations. This would have aided a less expert reader or writer whose main interactions were with printed books.

While conclusively demonstrating that inventories are not reliable sources of information on manuscript ownership, the inventory also makes it clear that library-building at Bræðratunga was Helga's project rather than Hákon's. His death was likely a motivation for acquiring a larger library: her biography states that she became a mother and father to her children following her loss (Margrét Eggertsdóttir 1998, 273), yet she lacked the formal education from which Hákon had benefited. Before their marriage,

12 “Hakon Gyslason A Mig med Riettu Enn Einginn Annar” (‘Hákon Gíslason is my rightful owner and none other’) and “Hakon Gyslason A Bokena med Riettu Enn Einginn Annar” (‘Hákon Gíslason rightfully owns the book and none other’) (1r).

13 The only other known manuscript with a potential connection to Hákon Gíslason, ÍB 315 a 4to, is highly fragmentary but might have once contained his notes as district administrator (see below).

Hákon had completed Latin school and spent time making connections abroad, and their son Vigfús needed to do the same to follow in his father's footsteps as a high-ranking administrator. Vigfús's biography (preserved in AM 96 8vo) highlights Helga's role in providing him with an excellent education, beginning alongside his sisters with the books at Bræðratunga. He next spent two winters in the household of the Rev. Erasmus Pálsson and two winters in the household of the Rev. Torfi Jónsson before he entered the Latin school at Skálholt in c. 1660 (Margrét Eggertsdóttir 2004, 238).¹⁴ Based on this, Vigfús learned at home until he was around nine, when he began learning the rudiments of Latin with some of the best-reputed educators in the country. After graduating in c. 1666, he was in Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson's service for two years before sailing for university studies in Copenhagen in 1668, returning in 1670.

Helga was financially independent and fully capable of managing her family's affairs herself, but she received support in her widowhood from her cousin Brynjólfur Sveinsson. She in turn provided unwavering support for his daughter Ragnheiður (1641–1663) when the young woman evidently confided to the older Helga in 1661 that she was pregnant by her Latin tutor. Helga kept Ragnheiður's secret, brought her to Bræðratunga to be out of the public eye, helped her birth the child and had the boy christened Þórður after her own illegitimate but highly accomplished uncle (AM 96 8vo, 71v–73v).

Skálholt is not far from Bræðratunga, and Helga's husband's family were Brynjólfur's patrons as a young man (Sigurður Pétursson 1998). Skálholt, like Hólar in the north, was an important centre of manuscript production in Iceland, not least during in the episcopacy of Brynjólfur Sveinsson in 1639–1674 (Margrét Eggertsdóttir 2010; Springborg 1977). It may have been partly due to Brynjólfur Sveinsson's interest in medieval manuscripts that Helga chose manuscripts from her father's estate as part of her inheritance; bringing codices from Munkaþverá facilitated their use in highly active scholarly circles in South Iceland.

Surviving correspondence shows that Helga and Brynjólfur remained close friends and allies for the duration of their lives, and she was the one

14 Erasmus Pálsson (d. 1677) was Árni Magnússon's great-uncle and the grandson and namesake of Erasmus Villadtsson (d. 1591), who was schoolmaster of the Latin school at Skálholt.

to prepare his body for burial, two years before her own death, and later to mark his burial site with a silver plate (Jón Halldórsson 1903–1915, vol. 1, 305, vol. 2., 376–80).¹⁵ Helga and Brynjólfur's membership to the Icelandic elite did not protect them from the loss of many loved ones: Helga's father died in December 1662, months before Ragnheiður succumbed to illness in March 1663, while Ragnheiður's brother Halldór died in Yarmouth, England, in 1666. Helga lost her beloved son Vigfús to measles in November 1670, four months after the passing of Brynjólfur's wife, Margrét Halldórsdóttir (1615–1670). The young Þórður—Brynjólfur's last living descendant—died at Skálholt in 1673.

Helga's biography indicates that her health and strength deteriorated rapidly after her son's death, although she could still hold a pen to sign her name on JS 28 fol. and AM 65 fol. on 31 January 1675. Both manuscripts had been personal gifts from Bishop Brynjólfur to Helga, which she passed to her daughters during her own lifetime: the former to her youngest daughter Jarþrúður and the latter to her eldest daughter Elín, who lived with her husband in Vatnsfjörður in the Westfjords. A comparable gift was presumably made to her middle daughter, Sigríður, and this may have been one of at least four folio volumes owned by Sigríður in the hand of Jón Erlendsson of Villingaholt, a highly favoured scribe in Brynjólfur's scholarly network, who also copied both JS 28 fol. and AM 65 fol. (see Appendix). *Bræðratungubók had already left Bræðratunga with Vigfús in 1668, as did a handwritten prayer book given to him by his sister Elín (see below) and possibly also his father's copy of *Jónsbók*. There was thus a steady inflow and outflow of books in the library of Bræðratunga, which appears to have been a key hub within a larger network of manuscript circulation and use rather than a centre of manuscript production like Skálholt or an endpoint for manuscript preservation as Árni Magnússon's library would become decades later.

15 Bishop Brynjólfur was the only pre-modern bishop of Skálholt known to have chosen a burial site outside the cathedral. Jón Halldórsson (1665–1736) is critical of Brynjólfur's nephew, Torfi Jónsson, and to a lesser degree Brynjólfur's other heirs, for neglecting the maintenance of the site, which already in Jón's day had vanished into the landscape. Part of Brynjólfur's private correspondence has survived in Árni Magnússon's collection, including copies of Brynjólfur's letters to Helga and a copy of a letter from Helga to Bishop Þorlákur Skúlason of Hólar, written only days after her husband Hákon's death. On Brynjólfur and Helga's friendship and letters, see Parsons forthcoming.

Dividing a library

According to Jón Halldórsson (1903–1915, vol. 1, 300), Brynjólfur Sveinsson's collection of printed books was worth at least 1000 *rikisdalir* in its day. He states that it left the country immediately after Brynjólfur's death: the *foged* Johan Klein brought his wife to Iceland, and she bore a son three weeks later, to whom Brynjólfur bequeathed his large collection of foreign books (in Latin, Greek and other languages). This child received Brynjólfur's printed titles, although Jón hints that Brynjólfur's mark could still often be found in books circulating in Iceland. He adds:

Sá góði biskup var og óspar að gefa hver lærðum mönnum, sem honum voru handgeingnir. En íslenzkar bækur sínar, sögur og aðskiljanlegar skrifaðar fræðibækur, gaf hann eftir sig frændkonu sinni, Helgu Magnúsdóttur í Bræðratúngu, og Sigríði Halldórsdóttur [sic] í Gaulverjabæ til helmíngaskipta (Jón Halldórsson 1903–1915, vol. 1, 300).

(The good bishop [Brynjólfur Sveinsson] was unstinting in gifting books to educated men within his intimate circles. But he bequeathed his Icelandic books—sagas and various hand-copied scholarly books—to his cousin Helga Magnúsdóttir in Bræðratunga and to Sigríður Halldórsdóttir, a half-share to each.)

A list made in 1674 by Bishop Brynjólfur of Latin, Greek and Hebrew books in his library contains 254 books (266 titles). Jón Helgason (1948) printed this list of titles but pointed out that it lacks books in the vernacular. Brynjólfur obviously owned printed books in Icelandic. He would certainly have owned a good selection of books in Danish and could hardly have owned no theology books in German. Following closer examination of all surviving sources on Bishop Brynjólfur's printed books, Jón Helgason convincingly concluded that the book list from 1674 was the collection that he bequeathed to Klein's infant son.¹⁶

Neither Helga nor Sigríður Halldórsdóttir (1622–1704), the wife of Brynjólfur Sveinsson's main heir Torfi Jónsson of Gaulverjabær (1617–

16 On Brynjólfur Sveinsson's printed books, see also Muratori and Sigurður Pétursson 2006.

1689), systematically marked books in their possession. Complicating the study of Sigríður Halldórsdóttir's books, the library at Gaulverjabær already contained many items produced, inherited or otherwise acquired by Torfi, who was Brynjólfur's nephew. One manuscript, AM 114 fol. (in Torfi's father Jón Gissurarson's hand), contains an inscription on f. 2r signed by Sigríður, dated 1691, declaring that she gave it to her son Sveinn Torfason. Immediately above this is an inscription from 1649 stating that her late husband is now the book's owner (uniquely incorporating Hebrew letters into the ownership statement). Jón Gissurarson, Brynjólfur's older half-brother, died in November 1648, and the manuscript's provenance can thus be reconstructed with unusual certainty. For other manuscripts, evidence for Sigríður Halldórsdóttir's ownership is through family ties with later owners: Páll Eggert Ólason (1927) traced the provenance of Ragnheiður Brynjólfsdóttir's copy of Hallgrímur Pétursson's *Passíusálmar* (JS 337 4to) to Sigríður Halldórsdóttir's great-grandson, Jón Björnsson (1731–1815). Similarly, a copy of the annals of Björn Jónsson of Skarðsá in Lbs 40 fol. contains marginalia in the hands of Brynjólfur Sveinsson and Sigríður's husband Torfi Jónsson; Sigríður and Torfi's daughter Ragnheiður (c. 1651–1712) received it, and it later passed to Ragnheiður's son-in-law, the Rev. Hannes Halldórsson (1668–1731). Manuscripts in Árne Magnússon's collection that may have passed from Brynjólfur to Sigríður include items from her sons Sveinn (e.g., part of AM 19 fol., AM 64 fol.) and Halldór (e.g., two leaves of AM 20 b I fol., AM 105 fol., AM 107 fol., AM 748 I b 4to) and Halldór's widow, Þuríður Sæmundsdóttir (e.g., AM 724 4to). A more extensive study of manuscript ownership among the descendants of Sigríður and Torfi would be valuable, as manuscripts may appear in catalogues under the names of spouses or other family members.¹⁷

The case of Helga Magnúsdóttir's library differs from that of Sigríður Halldórsdóttir in several important ways: (a) there is no evidence for her husband's participation in scribal networks, (b) she was a widow at the time she received the manuscripts from Brynjólfur Sveinsson and thus

17 For instance, a large volume of sagas and *þættir* copied by Jón Gissurarson and given to Árne Magnússon by Högni Ámundason (1651–1704) would have belonged to Högni's wife, Sigríður's daughter Þórunn Torfadóttir (1660–after 1709). Árne Magnússon disassembled this paper manuscript, cf. Stegmann forthcoming, potentially discarding evidence of provenance. See also Slay 1960, 146–57.

in full control of her property, and (c) any printed or manuscript books at Bræðratunga beyond the titles already mentioned would have been acquired by Helga or her children. Furthermore, while Brynjólfur's gift to Sigríður Halldórsdóttir could be interpreted as a symbolic gesture since the books would effectively become Torfi's, his gift of manuscripts to Helga Magnúsdóttir was to a woman and her three daughters. Given that Brynjólfur also hired a personal tutor for his daughter Ragnheiður so that she could learn Latin, he may have been influenced by contemporary humanist discourse on the value of women's education (Sigurður Pétursson 2001; see also Alenius 2011). Certainly, Brynjólfur's choice of recipients for his Icelandic collection points to a desire to place books in the hands of elite women.

The fate of a library

Helga's biography and eulogy mention a long-term illness that led to her death, worsening markedly after Vigfús's passing. Helga's eldest daughter, Elín, married the Rev. Guðbrandur Jónsson (1641–1690) on 25 August 1672 and moved with him to Vatnsfjörður in Ísafjarðardjúp the following year, when he also became provost for the region. Sigríður was to have married Halldór Brynjólfsson on his return from England, but he died during a plague outbreak in England. After Halldór's death, the bishop made significant gifts to Sigríður in his son's memory, including a copy of *Jónsbók* (see below). Sigríður did not seek another match until 1680, when her sister Jarþrúður married Magnús Sigurðsson (1651–1707) and the couple established their household at Bræðratunga. Sigríður married the Rev. Sigurður Sigurðsson (1636–1690) on 29 August 1680 and moved with him to Staðarstaður on the Snæfellsnes peninsula in West Iceland, where he became provost in 1681. Jarþrúður was the first of the sisters to pass away, on 3 May 1686. Her gravestone, which her husband Magnús likely commissioned, describes her death as occurring during childbirth, after three stillbirths.

The *stórabóla* smallpox epidemic in 1707–1709, which spread rapidly to West Iceland where Elín and Sigríður lived, had a devastating impact on Iceland and led to the extinction of Helga Magnúsdóttir's family line. Only two of her grandchildren survived the epidemic: Elín's youngest daughter Kristín Guðbrandsdóttir (1684–1733) and Sigríður's son Oddur Sigurðsson

(1681–1741). Oddur lost his fiancée Guðrún Gunnardóttir to smallpox and never married. Kristín married Vigfús Jónsson (1680–1727) in 1709, but the couple was childless. Like her cousin Brynjólfur Sveinsson, Helga Magnúsdóttir had no great-grandchildren, meaning that her library was not passed down from generation to generation as in the case of Sigríður Halldórsdóttir's family; Oddur was Helga's last living descendant.

Four of Elín's older children had lived to adulthood: Vigfús (1673–1707), Hákon (1677–1707), Helga (1679–1707) and Jón (1682–1707). Two siblings, Hákon and Helga, were married but had no children with their spouses, Ólöf Jónsdóttir (1685–1777) and Jón Hákonarson (1658–1748), both of whom survived the epidemic.¹⁸

Helga Sigurðardóttir (1683–1707) was the only daughter of Sigríður Hákonardóttir and Sigurður Sigurðsson to survive to adulthood. After Sigurður's death in 1690, Sigríður moved with Helga and Oddur to the farm of Rauðimelur syðri in Kolbeinsstaðahreppur in Hnappadalssýsla in West Iceland, where she continued to manage a large household. Helga Sigurðardóttir was rumoured to have been in a clandestine relationship with Oddur's assistant, Jón Sigurðsson (c. 1685–1720), to the displeasure of her mother and brother. Whether or not Jón and Helga had a tragic affair is unclear, but Jón Sigurðsson's *Tímaríma* from c. 1709 is a *roman à clef* in verse satirising Sigríður and Oddur.

The manuscript collector Árne Magnússon played a key role in ensuring the survival of several of Helga Magnúsdóttir's manuscripts, but he had a difficult relationship with some of her descendants and was unfortunate enough to lose two vellum manuscripts owned by her family in the Fire of Copenhagen, **Jónsbók* and **Bræðratungubók*. Árne Magnússon was in active contact with Vigfús Guðbrandsson before his death from smallpox in 1707, and it was Vigfús who gave him AM 152 fol. Árne's concern for preserving the manuscripts owned by Vigfús and his siblings in the wake of the smallpox epidemic can be seen in a letter to Hjalti Þorsteinsson of Vatnsfjörður from February 1708, in which he specifically asks to purchase manuscripts from Elín Hákonardóttir's family, if they can be convinced to part with them (Árne Magnússon 1920, 633–35).

Oddur Sigurðsson inherited his cousin Vigfús's saga manuscripts. Árne Magnússon had loaned Vigfús Guðbrandsson a copy of *Gull-Þóris saga* in

18 Ólöf Jónsdóttir's second husband was Sigurður Jónsson (1679–1761).

Ásgeir Jónsson's hand, AM 495 4to, and he recorded on a slip of paper at the front of the manuscript that it had taken until 1725 to reclaim *Gull-Þóris saga* from Oddur. Oddur was one of the most powerful men in Iceland at the height of his career in the 1710s, but he made many enemies and was stripped of his property and administrative position in 1724 and spent until 1730 seeking to regain control of his property. Oddur's forceful and overbearing personality and rapid rise to power in 1707–1714, in combination with a culture of heavy drinking among elite men, have long been noted as factors in creating a volatile and tense situation within the Icelandic administration (Jón Jónsson 1898). Within this context, Oddur and Árni had a complicated relationship: bitter animosity developed between them that softened somewhat in the 1720s, to the point where they corresponded and Oddur willingly lent him some manuscripts (see Már Jónsson 2012, 162–166, 186, 209).

If Árni Magnússon's relationship with Oddur Sigurðsson was poor, his relationship with Jarþrúður's widower, Magnús Sigurðsson of Bræðratunga, was worse. An initially cordial acquaintanceship deteriorated rapidly after Magnús accused Árni of seducing his much younger second wife, Þórdís Jónsdóttir (1671–1741), who was the granddaughter of Helga's brother-in-law Vigfús Gíslason. Magnús's accusations were baseless: he was an abusive husband to Þórdís, who fled to her sister in Skálholt after he beat her repeatedly while pregnant. Like many perpetrators of intimate partner violence, Magnús could not accept that Þórdís had left him to protect herself, and he spread rumours that Árni was responsible for destroying his marriage. Árni took the matter to court, demanding compensation for defamation, and he continued tenaciously to pursue the case against Magnús even after Magnús's death. Magnús's heirs (Þórdís and her children) would have been forced to compensate Árni had a final court ruling not come down in their favour. Magnús Sigurðsson inherited Jarþrúður's share of Helga Magnúsdóttir's library, which passed after his death to Þórdís and their children.

Manuscripts at Bræðratunga

The following manuscripts and fragments were either owned by Helga Magnúsdóttir or her children in the period up to her death in 1677.

1. *AM 152 fol.*

Árni Magnússon obtained this late medieval vellum manuscript of 201 leaves directly from Helga's grandson, Vigfús Guðbrandsson. Vigfús received the book from his mother Elín, and it belonged to Helga Magnúsdóttir before her. The book had earlier been the property of Helga's father Magnús Björnsson, whose ownership is solidified in a verse in his praise added to f. 139v. According to a note added to the manuscript, Árni Magnússon had previously been informed by Helga's brother Björn that she had inherited a vellum copy of *Grettis saga*, which is the first text in this manuscript. Given that this book was part of her inheritance, she would have brought it to Bræðratunga either following her father's death in 1662 or her mother's in 1671.

Stefán Karlsson (1970, 138) dated the manuscript to the first quarter of the sixteenth century. It preserves a total of eleven sagas copied by two scribes, who have been identified as the lay scribe Þorsteinn Þorleifsson of Svignaskarð (half-brother to the wealthy Björn Þorleifsson of Reykjahólar of the Skarðverjar family, who died after 1548) and the priest Jón Þorgilsson.¹⁹ Jón Helgason believed that Björn's great-grandfather Ari Jónsson had owned the manuscript, based on additions from 1545 (Jón Helgason 1958, 74–75). If this is correct, the codex could have been a family heirloom, although it should also be noted that Magnús Björnsson acquired an ancestral copy of *Jónsbók* that had passed out of the family (see below).

2. **Bræðratungubók*

**Bræðratungubók* is the name given to a lost codex identified in Árni Magnússon's catalogue of vellum manuscripts as a quarto copy of *Þiðreks saga af Bern*. According to Árni Magnússon's notes, he acquired **Bræðratungubók* from fellow scholar Þormóður Torfason (1636–1719), who received the book from Helga Magnúsdóttir (AM 435 a 4to, 142v–143r). Vigfús Hákonarson, Helga's son, visited Þormóður at his home in Norway in 1670 and delivered the volume. Þormóður was an appropriate recipient, given that he held the position of royal antiquary for Iceland from 1667. The gift established an advantageous connection between the

¹⁹ For a detailed study of AM 152 fol., see Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2014b.

young Vigfús and an influential scholar but sadly occurred within months of Vigfús's death. Áрни showed the book to the farmer Sigurður Guðnason (b. 1634) in 1704, who confirmed that the volume had belonged to Helga Magnúsdóttir.

Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson had one of his scribes, Jón Erlendsson of Villingaholt (d. 1672), make a careful copy of *Bræðratungubók (now AM 178 fol.) before Vigfús left Iceland in 1668. Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson suggests that Helga inherited *Bræðratungubók from her father, Magnús Björnsson (Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson 1994, 145). Unfortunately, Áрни Magnússon's notes on *Bræðratungubók do not survive. Virtually all that is known of *Bræðratungubók is that AM 178 fol. is a copy. Helga lent the manuscript to her cousin Brynjólfur but recognised that the recently appointed scholar Þormóður would also value this codex. Given that it was one of only two vellum copies of *Þiðreks saga af Bern* that Áрни Magnússon was able to acquire (both sadly lost in the 1728 fire), Helga's appraisal of her manuscript's worth for future scholarship was entirely correct.

3. *Jónsbók

In AM 37 b I 8vo, Áрни Magnússon describes in some detail a copy of the *Jónsbók* law code owned by Helga's daughter Sigríður Hákonardóttir, originally produced for Ari Jónsson in 1540. Áрни Magnússon had borrowed the *Jónsbók* manuscript, which regrettably was one of the volumes lost in the Fire of Copenhagen, and Sigríður's son Oddur Sigurðsson made a claim for compensation from Áрни Magnússon's estate (Áрни Magnússon 1920, 448). According to Áрни Magnússon's notes, Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson inscribed it with a statement dated 25 March 1651 that the book was his property and that he wished it to remain in the possession of Ari's descendants (AM 37 b I 8vo, 2v). Other ownership statements in the front of the book, copied by Áрни, indicate that the *sýslumaður* Hákon Ormsson (1613–1656) owned the book in 1640 and that a certain Sigurður Jónsson acquired it from a man identified as Grímur Jónsson in exchange for a printed copy of *Jónsbók*.²⁰ The latter exchange occurred after 1578, the year in which *Jónsbók* was first printed.

20 Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson (1994, 151) suggests that Grímur Jónsson was the parson for Húsafell (c. 1581–1654). The name is common enough that secure identification is impossible; Grímur may have been the well-to-do farmer at Akrar in Blönduhlíð (d. after 1618) who was a member of the *Lögretta* council in 1604–1616; Grímur could also be a nickname for Arngrímur or a similar name.

According to another note from Brynjólfur Sveinsson, he received **Jónsbók* as a gift from his cousin Magnús Björnsson, Helga's father, and gave it to his son Halldór Brynjólfsson. After Halldór's death in England in 1666, Brynjólfur had the volume rebound and gave it to Sigríður in Halldór's memory in 1668 (AM 37 b I 8vo, 7r–v). **Jónsbók* thus remained at Bræðratunga until 1680.

4. AM 65 fol.

According to an inscription signed by Helga Magnúsdóttir on f. 1r, Brynjólfur Sveinsson gifted her this large and beautifully bound manuscript of kings' sagas and skaldic poetry, and she in turn gave it to her daughter Elín Hákonardóttir on 31 January 1675. The scribe is Jón Erlendsson of Villingaholt, meaning that the manuscript was quite new when Helga received it from Brynjólfur. Árni Magnússon obtained the manuscript from Jón Hákonarson of Stóra-Vatnshorn (1658–1748), who had married Elín's daughter Helga Guðbrandsdóttir shortly before her death from smallpox in 1707.

5. JS 28 fol.

A similar inscription to that in AM 65 fol. appears on f. 3r of this neatly bound saga manuscript, which Helga Magnúsdóttir gave to her daughter Jarprúður Hákonardóttir. The date is the same: Bræðratunga on 31 January 1675. The scribe is also Jón Erlendsson of Villingaholt, and Helga Magnúsdóttir states that the manuscript was a gift to her from Brynjólfur Sveinsson. The manuscript remained in Iceland until Bogi Thorarensen sent it to scholar Jón Sigurðsson in Copenhagen in 1864.

6. AM 608 4to

This fragment of fourteen leaves in an unknown hand preserves sections of two *rímur* cycles by poet Guðmundur Erlendsson (c. 1595–1670): the biblical *Rímur af Móses* and *Rímur af Sál og Davíð* (composed in c. 1632–1634). Þórdís Jónsdóttir gave Árni Magnússon the manuscript in 1707, shortly after the death of her estranged husband Magnús Sigurðsson in Copenhagen.²¹ Its presence in Árni Magnússon's collection is somewhat unusual, as he was more interested in older literature, and the *rímur* are in

21 Árni Magnússon also borrowed AM 96 8vo from Þórdís Jónsdóttir, containing Þórður Þorláksson's eulogy for Helga Magnúsdóttir (see above).

a fragmentary state. Its provenance made it unique, however: it bears Elín Hákonardóttir's signature in the top margin on f. 15r.²²

Elín was a user of the manuscript but not necessarily an owner, as the manuscript remained at Bræðratunga until c. 1707. Magnús evidently inherited it from his first wife, Elín's sister Jarþrúður. Before Jarþrúður, it likely belonged to Helga, particularly in light of her origins in North Iceland and her years spent at Hólar. Guðmundur Erlendsson was a prolific and popular poet in North Iceland, and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir (2007, 2016) has demonstrated that he had close ties to the dynasty of bishops at Hólar, who were his patrons (see also Parsons 2020).

7. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf. Extravagantes 315

Margrét Eggertsdóttir (2004) identified the connection between this small (7 x 6 cm) manuscript of fifty-five leaves in Wolfenbüttel and the family at Bræðratunga in 1996. The manuscript contains Icelandic translations of prayers by Johann Habermann (1516–1590) and belonged to Elín Þorlákisdóttir (1639–1726) in 1659; she may also have been its scribe. She sent it to her much younger cousin Elín Hákonardóttir in 1668, who gave it to her brother Vigfús when he set off for his studies in Denmark. Although the prayer book is easily overlooked in comparison to an impressive volume like AM 152 fol., it is an instance of a type of woman's manuscript rarely found in Árni Magnússon's collection: a small but attractive volume of Lutheran prayers and hymns compiled for personal use. While Helga was never an owner of the manuscript, it can be considered as part of the library at Bræðratunga, if only briefly.

8. Lbs fragm 35

Helga Magnúsdóttir's signature is found on a fragment cut from a fifteenth-century antiphonary. Nothing is recorded of its provenance except that it came from the nineteenth-century collection of Valdimar Ásmundsson. Presumably, the fragment survived in the binding of another book, which unfortunately has been lost. Among the jottings on the fragment is the prominently written note "No. 3"—indicative of this being part of a larger book collection.

22 The writing is barely legible but appears to read: "Elena Hákonar dotter med eigin hand."

9. GKS 3672 8vo

As Hákon Gíslason's personal copy of *Jónsbók*, the manuscript would have passed to Helga Magnúsdóttir and her children. Its presence in the collections of the Royal Danish Library shows that it left Iceland at an unknown date, possibly with Hákon and Helga's son Vigfús in 1668.

?Lbs 675 fol.

Elín Hákonardóttir owned this saga manuscript and had Þorsteinn Eyjólfsson (1645–1714) rebind the manuscript for her, as stated by a note on the front flyleaf. The manuscript dates from the second half of the seventeenth century and is closely related to AM 152 fol., which was also in Elín's possession. According to the catalogue entry in the online catalogue of the National and University Library of Iceland, Lbs 675 fol. passed from Brynjólfur to Helga to Elín, which is plausible, but evidence for this provenance is not offered.²³ Since Elín, as Helga and Hákon's first-born, received presents directly from various relatives, including not only the manuscript from her cousin Elín but also high-status gifts from her grandparents Magnús Björnsson and Margrét Jónsdóttir (including two expensive chests and a painted wooden box with her name on it), it is not certain that Brynjólfur or Helga owned the manuscript before her (cf. AM 268 fol., 116r). Identification of the scribe would help clarify whether the manuscript originated from North Iceland (the scribal circles of Magnús Björnsson at Munkaþverá), South Iceland (the scribal circles of Bishop Brynjólfur) or even West Iceland (the scribal circles of Elín's husband's family at Vatnsfjörður).

?AM 178 fol.

This undated copy of *Þiðreks saga af Bern* was produced for Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson by the scribe Jón Erlendsson of Villingaholt. Árni Magnússon's notes state that he acquired it on loan from the Reverend Árni Jónsson of Hvítidalur (1666–1741) in 1707. Árni Magnússon decided that he wanted to keep it and offered in exchange a copy of *Þiðreks saga* in the hand of Þorbergur Þorsteinsson (1667/1668–1722). Árni Jónsson accepted, and the transaction was completed in 1708.

23 "Lbs 675 fol.," last updated 16 November 2021, <https://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/is/Lbs02-0675>.

Árni Magnússon's motivation for wanting this copy of *Bræðratungubók is clear: AM 178 fol. is a meticulous scholarly copy of the original. Jón Erlendsson retains the orthography of his medieval exemplar, including abbreviations, and blank spaces are left for the first initials of each chapter—a feature of the layout possibly mirroring the original. It is in extremely good condition, with no clues as to its ownership, such as names in the margins.

If Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson (1994) is correct in assuming that *Bræðratungubók came from Munkaþverá, Jón must have copied it between 1663 and 1668. After Brynjólfur Sveinsson's death in 1675, AM 178 fol. would have passed either to Helga Magnúsdóttir or to Sigríður Halldórsdóttir. Since Helga had sent *Bræðratungubók to Þormóður in Norway, there is reason to believe that AM 178 fol. would have been of personal interest to her. Furthermore, when examining the connections between Árni Jónsson and the two women, the most obvious link is that Árni Jónsson's wife, Ingibjörg Magnúsdóttir, was Helga Magnúsdóttir's illegitimate great-niece.

In 1668, one of Helga's nephews—Magnús Jónsson (1642–1694), the son of Helga's sister Jórunn Magnúsdóttir and her husband Jón Magnússon—married the well-to-do Guðrún Þorgilsdóttir (1650–1705). That same year, another woman—also named Guðrún, but whose patronymic is unknown—gave birth to a daughter fathered by Magnús. The infant, christened Ingibjörg (the name of Helga's maternal grandmother), was unlikely to have been welcomed into Magnús's household by his new bride. Ingibjörg's mother was probably a servant, and responsibility for raising the baby would have fallen largely to Magnús's father's family.

Helga possibly gave or bequeathed the manuscript to Ingibjörg in anticipation of her marriage, or to help provide for her future. At the time of Helga's death, Ingibjörg would have been about twenty, and a folio manuscript in excellent condition would have been a valuable asset as cultural capital. If AM 178 fol. formed part of Ingibjörg's dowry, this would also explain why Árni Magnússon needed to trade it for another seventeenth-century copy of *Þiðreks saga*, since Árni Jónsson was not legally permitted to give away his wife's dowry but could exchange the book for another of equivalent value.

Given the significance attached to children's given names in early mod-

ern Iceland, it is notable that Ingibjörg and Árne's eldest daughter, a girl born in 1697, was given the name Helga. There was no Helga in Árne's family, nor was there a Helga among Magnús Jónsson's paternal ancestors. Certainly, providing support for illegitimate children would be in keeping with Helga's behaviour towards her pregnant and unmarried cousin Ragnheiður Brynjólfsdóttir and Ragnheiður's infant (see above).

?*ÍB 315 a 4to*

ÍB 315 a 4to preserves two codicological units that once formed separate books of correspondence and notes on legal judgments (i.e., *bréfa- og dóma-bækur*). The first dates from 1670–1680. The latter section has been dated to c. 1640–1650, and the hand is probably Hákon Gíslason's. If these were Hákon Gíslason's personal notes made in connection with his administrative position, they presumably would have remained at least temporarily with his family at Bræðratunga after his death; further study would be valuable.

?*AM 115 fol.*

This copy of *Sturlunga saga* is closely related to AM 114 fol. (see above) and is in the hand of Jón Erlendsson of Villingaholt. Brynjólfur Sveinsson initially owned the manuscript, but it became the property of Hákon Gíslason's niece, Þorbjörg Vigfúsdóttir (d. 1698), according to a marginal ownership inscription on f. 339v. She had married the steward of Skálholt, Gísli Sigurðsson (1638–1666), in 1664, but he died not long after their marriage, and their only child, Vigfús, also died young. Her nephew Þórður Jónsson (1672–1720) gave the manuscript to Þormóður Torfason, who gifted it to Árne Magnússon in 1712. It is unclear whether Brynjólfur or Helga gave the manuscript to Þorbjörg.

?*Hyndlu rímur*

In a note accompanying AM 146 b I 8vo, Árne Magnússon notes that he had received a worthless copy of Steinunn Finnsdóttir's *Hyndlu rímur* from Þórdís Jónsdóttir. Steinunn Finnsdóttir (about 1640 – after 1710) was a *rímur* poetess active in South Iceland in the second half of the seventeenth century. She had been a servant at Skálholt in 1657–1662, prior to her marriage to Þorbjörn Eiríksson (their only known child, Guðrún

Þorbjarnardóttir, was born in 1671), and Helga Magnúsdóttir may have known her personally. AM 146 b I 8vo came from the Rev. Gísli Álfsson (1653–1725) and is the only known surviving copy of *Hyndlu rímur*.²⁴ Given that Árni Magnússon felt that Þórdís's manuscript preserved a poor copy of the text, it is reasonable to assume that he discarded it after receiving what he felt was a superior manuscript. It is impossible to determine whether Þórdís's copy had previously belonged to the family at Bræðratunga (like AM 608 4to) or was Þórdís's own.

The mechanics of an early modern Icelandic library

With a few exceptions, such as the libraries of the cathedrals at Hólar and Skálholt and the fabled library of Brynjólfur Sveinsson, described nostalgically by Jón Halldórsson (1665–1736) in his *Biskupa sögur*, private libraries in seventeenth-century Iceland appear to have been comparatively small.²⁵ Pearson's (2012, 2021) research on private book ownership in seventeenth-century England suggests that the average private library for which data on size survives held over a thousand books at the century's beginning and over three thousand by its end. The proliferation of printed titles readily available to reading audiences in larger book markets was not matched in Iceland, where the publication of new vernacular titles was limited to a single press at a given time and output fluctuated (cf. Halldór Hermannsson 1916, 1922). Theology in a broad sense (Bibles, hymnals, prayer books, house postils, catechisms and devotional books as well as titles intended for a narrower readership of trained theologians) was and remained the most represented subject area.²⁶ Pearson's (2010) observation that early modern libraries in England were typically multilingual and contained a high proportion of classical and patristic writings but comparatively few

24 On Steinunn Finnsdóttir and her poetry, see Hughes 2014.

25 According to Jón Halldórsson (1903–1915, vol. 1, 289), Bishop Brynjólfur kept "sitt góða bibliothek" ('his good library') in the Skálholt cathedral.

26 This was still true of private Icelandic libraries in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, cf. Sólrún Jensdóttir 1974–1977. Probate records, which have been researched extensively by Már Jónsson, are an increasingly important source on book ownership in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as are parish ministers' records on household ownership of core religious texts. However, it is probable that a person's private manuscripts were frequently omitted from probate records (a person's correspondence and personal papers were not included in such records).

literary titles would likely also have been true of learned Icelanders' libraries. However, a library such as Helga's was not built through commercial transactions with booksellers.

In contrast to the stationary nature of manuscript use within archives, where manuscripts' movements are tightly regulated and monitored, intact manuscripts in early modern Iceland appear as objects on the move. Practices of reading aloud to households from literary manuscripts meant that such manuscripts were widely in demand among scholars and non-scholars alike, and regular exchange of manuscripts between households enabled fewer manuscripts to cover greater ground and reach a larger readership. In such an environment, not everyone needed a private copy of every saga or romance title. Manuscripts belonged to a culture of active circulation: borrowing and lending across physical distances.²⁷ Within this context, the outright gift of a manuscript was a deeply meaningful act.

The marginalia on f. 1r of AM 61 fol. includes an inscription from an anonymous borrower, thanking both the person who had lent the book and the person who read it aloud and wishing pleasure to the listener ("Haf[e] sa heidur er liede, sa soma sem las, sa glede er hliðde, vale"). There is also a warning at the top of the same leaf to return the book in good condition ("Heilu læne skal huðr aptur skila"). This is remarkably similar to the conditions of use for books in a modern lending library and provides evidence for the informal networks within which books circulated, which often left few material traces. While manuscripts had owners, and ownership could be transferred between individuals, they should not be understood as items constantly present at a given household. *Möðruvallabók* circulated extensively within scholarly circles in Iceland while in Magnús's library (Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson 1994, 147–149). The same was true of **Bræðratungubók* and probably other items in Helga's library at Bræðratunga during her lifetime.

27 On early modern Icelandic manuscript culture, see Davíð Ólafsson 2010. As an example of how manuscripts could be borrowed across vast physical distances, the Rev. Eyjólfur Jónsson of Vellir (1670–1745) mentions in a note in AM 569 c 4to (2r) that his grandmother Björg Ólafsdóttir (c. 1617–1690) had heard the sagas contained in two vellum manuscripts that her parents at Breiðabólstaður in Vesturhóp borrowed for three years from Ögur in the Westfjords. The manuscripts had been lent in turn to Ögur by Gísli Hákonarson of Bræðratunga, Helga's father-in-law. Björg moved to Hólar as an adult in the early 1640s, where she married Rev. Sveinn Jónsson (1603–1687). She and Helga may thus have known each other.

Women and men could equally participate in networks of community exchange in early modern Iceland, as seen in the case of Helga Magnúsdóttir, Jórunn Hinriksdóttir and others. Women likewise participated enthusiastically in the project of building scholarly collections—lending books to be copied, selling or donating their personal libraries to collectors and acting as facilitators within their families and communities. These activities have greatly benefited the academic community, but the survival of manuscript heritage in archives came at a cost. Once manuscripts were securely stowed in a repository, women were no longer encouraged to act as co-participants in literary scholarship. This was a gradual process, but with the outcome that early modern women's roles in the preservation of literature were largely overshadowed by the efforts of university-educated men with institutional support for their work. The reciprocity that characterised manuscript culture within the community was lost.

Conclusion

While a philologist such as Brynjólfur Sveinsson or Árni Magnússon sought to build as complete a literary collection as possible, libraries such as Helga's were carefully curated from objects of deep personal significance. Helga had grown up surrounded by books, and as a widow who needed to manage single-handedly the education of four young children, acquiring books for her household at Bræðratunga was an important social strategy. Her library told the story of who her family was and where they had come from: from the printed Bible gifted by her husband's brother-in-law during their years at Hólar to the vellum leaves that spoke of a childhood spent at a former monastery.

Our understanding of seventeenth-century Icelandic libraries and manuscript ownership is heavily filtered through the lens of the interests of collectors such as Árni Magnússon. Strikingly under-represented among the manuscripts associated with Helga Magnúsdóttir are devotional works or books of hymns and religious poetry, with the exception of the highly fragmentary AM 608 4to and the Wolfenbüttel manuscript. As head of her household from 1652 to her death in 1677, Helga was responsible for both the financial and the spiritual well-being of Bræðratunga. Her biography

confirms that she knew and loved Hallgrímur Pétursson's *Passíusálmar*, first published at Hólar in 1666 (Margrét Eggertsdóttir 2017, Þórunn Sigurðardóttir 2007).²⁸ Like the *Passíusálmar*, a good proportion of the books acquired by Helga after 1653 may have been religious titles, which would have had an important function at Bræðratunga but were not enticing acquisitions for Árni Magnússon. In particular, didactic and conduct literature for women is a popular genre not represented in the surviving manuscripts but surely present in the household of a pious seventeenth-century matriarch and her three daughters (cf. Van Deusen 2017, 2021, 2022; Þórunn Sigurðardóttir 2017a, 2017b).

Helga Magnúsdóttir's management of her manuscripts displays both knowledge of their worth as antiquities and a desire to share them among family members and the scholars of her day. It is suggested here that she was motivated to choose *Bræðratungubók, AM 152 fol. and possibly other vellum manuscripts as part of her inheritance from her father in North Iceland because of her close connection with Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson of Skálholt and his scribal network. In this sense, Helga can be considered an active participant in scribal and scholarly circles, facilitating the movement of manuscripts between the north and south of the island, and it was no coincidence that Bishop Brynjólfur bequeathed half of his precious Icelandic manuscript collection to her. This was not only a final token of thanks and friendship but also a signal that he trusted her to ensure that his scholarly manuscripts would be used by future generations, something that he valued above preservation for preservation's sake alone.²⁹

28 She may even have met the poet in person at Skálholt, as Bishop Brynjólfur was his long-term patron (Margrét Eggertsdóttir 2014, 195, 199–200).

29 Cf. his comment to the Danish royal librarian Villum Lange in a letter of 10 July 1656 that “to shut manuscripts up in libraries abroad, where no one will ever be able to understand them, and thus keep useful sources away from capable readers forever [...] is indeed not to preserve old lore but to destroy it” (Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir 2009, 7).

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AM 105 fol.	AM 429 b 1 4to
AM 107 fol.	AM 569 c 4to
AM 114 fol.	AM 608 4to
AM 115 fol.	AM 724 4to
AM 152 fol.	AM 748 I b 4to
AM 162 c fol.	AM 37 b I 8vo
AM 268 fol.	AM 59 8vo
AM 277 fol.	AM 82 8vo
AM 243 4to	AM 96 8vo
AM 244 4to	AM 146 b I 8vo
AM 245 4to	GKS 3672 8vo
AM 262 4to	

Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, Institut for Nordiske Studier og Sprogvidenskab, Københavns Universitet, København

AM 19 fol.	AM 178 fol.
AM 20 b I fol.	AM 232 fol.
AM 61 fol.	AM 435 a 4to
AM 64 fol.	AM 645 4to
AM 65 fol.	

Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn, Reykjavík

ÍB 315 a 4to	Lbs 675 fol.
JS 28 fol.	Lbs fragm 35
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Appendix: Manuscripts from Oddur Sigurðsson

In addition to the manuscripts listed in the article, Árni Magnússon received a significant number of manuscripts and documents from Oddur Sigurðsson, not all of which came from Helga Magnúsdóttir. Many (e.g., AM 59 8vo, AM 243–245 4to, AM 416 a I–III 4to and possibly AM 262 4to) appear to have been inherited from his father and his paternal grandfather, Bishop Oddur Einarsson of Skálholt. However, some of Oddur’s manuscripts have an obvious connection with Bishop Brynjólfur and his scribal network, indicating a connection with Helga Magnúsdóttir. Árni Magnússon acquired some of these manuscripts from Oddur personally, but he also bought a number of items at an auction of Oddur’s books in Copenhagen. In 1730, following Árni Magnússon’s death, Oddur made a list of items for which he demanded compensation (Árni Magnússon 1920, 444–51), including **Jónsbók*. Of these, seven folio volumes are specifically stated to have belonged to his mother Sigríður and likely came from Bræðratunga ((a) a copy of *Sturlunga saga*, (b) a legal codex, (c) a copy of *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Laxdæla saga* and (d) a copy of *Hungurvaka* and a number of other items, all in the hand of Jón Erlendsson of Villingaholt; (e) a copy of *Stjórn* in an unknown hand; (f) a book containing annals in an unspecified hand; and (g) a copy of “Sæmundar Edda” in Brynjólfur Sveinsson’s hand), as did letters from Jón Vestmann to Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson and Helga’s husband Hákon Gíslason from 1647 and three parchment documents relating to Bræðratunga. Unfortunately, many of these items were plainly lost in the fire. The following items from Oddur in Árni Magnússon’s collection are also worth mentioning:

AM 1g fol. ff. 1r–3v

The manuscript contains three genealogies. The first (ff. 1r–3v) is in the hand of Jón Erlendsson of Villingaholt and traces the ancestry of Brynjólfur Sveinsson to Jón Arason and from Jón to Adam. The second and third are in an unknown hand. The second traces the ancestry of Helga Magnúsdóttir’s brother-in-law Vigfús Gíslason (1608–1647) to Odin (f. 4r–v), while the third traces the ancestry of Vigfús’s son Jón.³⁰ The first

30 Vigfús had two sons named Jón: Jón the Elder (1639–1681), who held the administrative position of *sýslumaður*, and Jón the Younger (1643–1690), a *sýslumaður* who infamously became bishop of Hólar in 1684.

genealogy was almost certainly commissioned and owned by Brynjólfur himself, and that it was combined with genealogies of Oddur's great-uncle and cousin supports the hypothesis that these leaves passed to Helga and from her to either Sigríður or Elín's son Vigfús.

AM 162 c fol. ff. 8–11

Árni Magnússon reconstructed this fifteenth-century vellum manuscript from fragments that, judging by the creases and wear marks, had been repurposed as binding material. Stefán Karlsson (1970, 138) identified the scribe as Ólafur Loftsson of Hvassafell (c. 1395–1458). According to Árni Magnússon, four leaves of *Sálu saga og Nikanórs* (ff. 8–11) had been used to bind a law codex copied by the scribe Jón Erlendsson of Villingaholt. Árni Magnússon believed the former owner or commissioner to have been Brynjólfur Sveinsson. Árni received the leaves in 1725 from Oddur Sigurðsson. This suggests that the law codex could have been among the manuscripts inherited by Helga Magnúsdóttir, particularly as Oddur Sigurðsson mentions a law manuscript owned by his mother Sigríður in Jón Erlendsson's hand. There is no indication of how, when or where Árni acquired the other seven leaves.

AM 429 b 1 4to

Árni obtained two leaves from Oddur Sigurðsson preserving a compilation of entries from four different historical annals for the years 1193–1210 in Jón Erlendsson of Villingaholt's hand. Given the scholarly nature of the work and the identity of the scribe, Brynjólfur Sveinsson is a plausible candidate for the commissioner of this work, and the manuscript may have passed from Brynjólfur to Helga. Given that only two leaves remain of this manuscript, however, it is impossible to determine its provenance with any certainty.

SUMMARY

The Library at Bræðratunga: Manuscript Ownership and Private Library-Building in Early Modern Iceland

Keywords: Helga Magnúsdóttir of Bræðratunga, Icelandic manuscript culture, circulation of manuscripts before 1700, private book ownership, early modern women's libraries

Library institutions did not exist in early modern Iceland, meaning that private ownership was central to the preservation of pre-modern manuscripts and literature. However, personal collections are poorly documented in comparison to the activities of manuscript collectors such as Árni Magnússon. This article examines the case study of Helga Magnúsdóttir (1623–1677) and book ownership at her home of Bræðratunga in South Iceland, concluding that Helga Magnúsdóttir engaged in library-building as a social strategy following the death of her husband, Hákon Gíslason (1614–1652). The inventory of the Bræðratunga estate from 1653 includes only four books, all printed. However, nine manuscripts are conclusively identified as having been at Bræðratunga at least briefly during the period from c. 1653 to 1677, and evidence for the presence of another five items is discussed.

Examination of surviving volumes suggests that Helga's goal was to participate in an active culture of sharing manuscript material across distances, rather than to accumulate a large stationary collection of printed books and codices for Bræðratunga. She thereby played an important but easily overlooked role in the survival of Old Norse-Icelandic literature in the early modern period. Of the manuscripts at Bræðratunga, at least two likely came from Helga's childhood home of Munkaþverá in North Iceland, the former site of a Benedictine monastery. Her cousin Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson of Skálholt (1605–1675) also gifted books to Helga and her family, and on his death she inherited half of his collection of Icelandic books and manuscripts, making her the owner of one of the most significant collections of Icelandic manuscripts in the country. The survival of books from Helga's library was negatively impacted by the Fire of Copenhagen in 1728, the extinction of her family line in the eighteenth century as a long-term consequence of the 1707–1709 smallpox epidemic and collector Árni Magnússon's antagonistic relationship with two of her children's heirs. Árni's relationship with Oddur Sigurðsson (1681–1741), Helga's grandson and last living descendent, did eventually improve; an appendix includes a list of manuscripts that Oddur loaned to Árni and may have come from the library at Bræðratunga.

ÁGRIP

Bókasafnið í Bræðratungu: handritaeygn og einkabókasöfn á Íslandi eftir siðaskipti

Lykilorð: Helga Magnúsdóttir í Bræðratungu, íslensk handritamenning, dreifing handrita fyrir 1700, bókaeygn einstaklinga, bókasöfn kvenna á árnýöld

Á Íslandi voru ekki sett á fót bókasöfn eða aðrar stofnanir til þess að halda utan um dýrmæt handrit og bækur á 17. öld heldur skipti handritaeygn einstaklinga sköpum fyrir varðveislu bókmennta. Þó er mun minna vitað um bókakost einstaklinga og einkabókasöfn á þessum tíma en um vinnu handritasafnara á borð við Árna Magnússon. Við andlát Brynjólfs biskups Sveinssonar (1605–1675) varð bókasafnið í Bræðratungu í Biskupstungum eitt mikilvægasta handritasafn hérlendis til skamms tíma en Brynjólfur arfleiddi frænku sína Helgu Magnúsdóttur í Bræðratungu (1623–1677) að öllum íslenskum bókum og handritum sínum til helmingaskipta við Sigríði Halldórsdóttur í Gaulverjabæ (1622–1704). Bókasafnið í Bræðratungu og hlutverk Helgu Magnúsdóttur við að byggja það upp er meginefni þessarar greinar. Færð eru rök fyrir því að Helga hafi átt frumkvæði að því að styrkja bókakost Bræðratungu strax eftir fráfall eiginmanns síns Hákonar Gíslasonar (1614–1652). Farið er yfir þau handrit sem tengja má við Helgu en að minnsta kosti níu handrit og handritabrot voru í Bræðratungu á tímabilinu um 1653–1677. Handritaeygn Helgu og barna hennar mun hafa verið liður í að styrkja samfélagslega stöðu fjölskyldunnar í Bræðratungu enda fól hún í sér virka þátttöku í handritamenningu samtímans. Því miður er varðveisla Bræðratunguhandritanna ekki góð. Tvö skinnhandrit frá Bræðratungu glötuðust illu heilli í brunanum í Kaupmannahöfn árið 1728 (*Bræðratungubók og *Jónsbók) en aðrir þættir koma einnig til. Aðeins tvö barnabörn Helgu lifðu stórubóluna af og bæði voru þau barnlaus þannig að safnið tvístraðist fljótt. Samband Árna Magnússonar, handritasafnara og prófessors, við erfingja barna Helgu var fjandsamlegt á köflum en hann deildi við Odd Sigurðsson lögmann (1681–1741) sem var síðasti eftirlifandi afkomandi Helgu og einnig við Magnús Sigurðsson í Bræðratungu (1651–1707) sem var ekill Jarþrúðar, yngstu dóttur Helgu, og sakaði Árna um ástarsamband við Þórdísi síðari konu sína eins og frægt er orðið. Þíða kom þó í samskipti Odds við Árna sem olli því að Árni fékk nokkur handrit að láni frá honum. Í viðauka er farið stuttlega yfir nokkur handrit Odds sem komu hugsanlega úr Bræðratungu.

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