MARTINA CEOLIN

ENDEAVOURING TO GRASP THE ELUSIVE

A New Study of Finnboga saga ramma

Finnboga saga ramma, 'The Saga of Finnbogi the Mighty,' is a fourteenth-century *Íslendingasaga* that tracks the restless life of Finnbogi Ásbjarnarson, an Icelandic chieftain's son, as it unfolds in tenth-century Iceland, Norway, and Byzantium. The narrative is compelling for several reasons, including how it challenges the commonly acknowledged taxonomy of saga genres, clearly combining elements that pertain to the repertoires of different saga genres. Moreover, the two main codices preserving the text, Möðruvallabók (AM 132 fol., 14th century) and Tómasarbók (AM 510 4to, mid-16th century), present it in two very different textual contexts, making its study from the perspective of genre even more significant.

This contribution analyses *Finnboga saga ramma* from the genre perspective, while considering the dynamics that characterize both the text itself and the two main codicological contexts in which it has been preserved and handed down to us. The aim is to shed light on the generic features of the text and to demonstrate how 'late' *Íslendingasögur* generally should not be considered texts of poor quality or eccentric, as has often been the case; rather, these are well-constructed narratives that deserve to be better studied and accounted for. As a corollary, it demonstrates how the analysis of such texts within their manuscript contexts is crucial for understanding and appreciating them better.[1]

1 The research for this contribution forms part of the project *ConTexts – Manuscript Transmission and Generic Hybridity in the 'Late'* Íslendingasögur, funded by the European Union (NextGenerationEU) under Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (Mission 4, 'Education and Research').

Genre as a Problematic yet Useful Critical Tool for Studying Saga Texts

The texts of the saga corpus that have come down to us are highly varied. Still, these texts display recurrent patterns and models of subject matter, setting, and style, which have induced scholars to gather them into distinct groups and to consider such patterns and models as markers of genre. These efforts, which scholars have performed since the late 1820s, have yielded the following, customary taxonomy: *konungasögur* (Kings' sagas), *Íslendingasögur* (Sagas of Icelanders), *samtíðarsögur* (Contemporary sagas), *fornaldarsögur* (Legendary sagas), *riddarasögur* (Chivalric sagas, both translated and indigenous), and *heilagra manna sögur* (Sagas of Saints). This taxonomy has proven to have a heuristic value, and it has become integrated into our way of thinking about sagas. But it remains a convention, as no individual saga fits strictly into the genre it has been ascribed to, all the more so considering the heterogeneity that characterizes the saga as a literary form overall.

Criticism of saga taxonomy has been strong since the 1950s and has grown in intensity over the last forty years. Critics consider the taxonomy obsolete and biased, as it results from modern reconstructive efforts, especially of nineteenth-century editors of the texts, which were informed by nationalistic views about culture. Moreover, little correspondence can be found between the customary labels and medieval terminology.[2] Criticism is levelled at the functionality of the taxonomy as well: it has been deemed unsatisfactory as an aid to understanding the sagas, inadequately accounting for the variety within the saga as a literary form, itself characterized by a mix of generic markers that renders it difficult to attribute a text to one taxon only. Indeed, scholars do not even agree on generic markers or on which markers should be adopted to identify and distinguish saga genres and subgenres; neither do they agree on the notion of genre itself, which is often taken for granted and left implied.[3] Finally, there is criticism that

2 Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 28. Cf. Terje Spurkland, "*Lygisǫgur, skrǫksǫgur* and *stjúpmæðrasǫgur*," in *The Legendary Sagas. Origins and Development*, ed. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012); Lukas Rösli, "Paratextual References to the Genre Term *Íslendinga sögur* in Old Norse-Icelandic Manuscripts," *Opuscula* 17 (2019).

3 For a discussion of these aspects see, for example, Massimiliano Bampi, "Genre," in *The*

too little attention has been given to the material aspects of sagas, namely to the ways in which they are preserved in the manuscripts, although such a line of thought is becoming more popular.[4] Criticism also concerns the fact that the importance and usefulness of studying manuscripts and text collections themselves from the perspective of genre have been largely overlooked by saga scholars.

Recent studies on the materiality of manuscript evidence from the European Middle Ages, including Icelandic manuscripts, have demonstrated that genre is a useful critical tool for approaching and investigating manuscripts and text collections, as it allows for a better understanding of them.[5] Consideration of the generic features of manuscripts and the dynamics of genre that can be identified within text collections can contribute to a more comprehensive view of them, as can consideration of how preserved material was selected and organized (in other words how compilers received the texts themselves or how they interpreted and appreciated them in the first place).[6]

While acknowledging the status of collections as evidence of reception, scholars have nevertheless found it difficult to guess, let alone determine, what the impulses were behind a given selection and arrangement of texts.[7] On the one hand, the choice of works might depend on criteria such as subject matter, form, or local interest; on the other hand, it could be simply dictated or influenced by practical circumstances, such as the pressure of time or the limited availability of exemplars. Likely, it was the result

Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas, ed. Sverrir Jakobsson and Ármann Jakobsson (London: Routledge, 2017); Massimiliano Bampi "Genre," in *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, ed. Massimiliano Bampi, Carolyne Larrington, and Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2020).

4 E.g., Emily Lethbridge, "Authors and Anonymity, Texts and Their Contexts: The Case of Eggertsbók," in *Modes of Authorship*, ed. Slavica Ranković et al. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2012); Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir and Emily Lethbridge, "Whose *Njála*? *Njáls saga* Editions and Textual Variance in the Oldest Manuscripts," in *New Studies in the Manuscript Tradition of Njáls saga: The historia mutila of Njála*, ed. Emily Lethbridge and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2018).

5 E.g., Karen Pratt et al. eds, *The Dynamics of the Medieval Manuscript. Text Collections from a European Perspective* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2017); Bart Besamusca, "The Value of Genre for the Study of Multi-Text Codices," in *Medieval Romances Across European Borders*, ed. Miriam Edlich-Muth (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018).

6 Besamusca, "The Value of Genre for the Study of Multi-Text Codices," 29.

7 Pratt et al., *The Dynamics of the Medieval Manuscript*, 25.

of a combination of choice and chance.[8] Perceptions of genre might also guide the selection of texts within a collection. Although genre is a modern critical tool, medieval compilers must have had an awareness of the existence of formal and thematic similarities between groups of texts.[9] Thus, a perceived generic similarity of texts, or a dissimilarity, might dictate the selection.

Genre might guide not only the selection of texts but also their organization within a codex, engendering meaningful interactions. For instance, there might be an intended progression in the collection, such as from recreation to instruction,[10] or a juxtaposition of texts might generate specific meaning. Neighbouring texts might highlight and reinforce particular messages present in otherwise ambiguous and polyvalent texts, or they might offer contrasting views on a subject.[11] Material contexts force dynamic intertextual reading and generate connections, which have a direct influence on how the texts are further received, or how they are ultimately interpreted and appreciated by their intended audiences, notably from the genre perspective.[12] At times, direct evidence of such an appreciation is present in the manuscripts themselves, in the form of paratexts. Comments and notes sometimes indicate how a text's genre was perceived externally by the scribes or compilers and by the readers of a text at a certain time.[13]

These perspectives are considered in this analysis of genre in *Finnboga saga ramma*, namely the dynamics that characterize both the saga narrative itself and the two main, differing manuscript contexts in which it has been preserved. Before delving into this, a brief analysis of the subgenre to which the saga has been ascribed, the 'late' *Íslendingasaga*, is merited.

8 Besamusca, "The Value of Genre for the Study of Multi-Text Codices," 28; Pratt et al., *The Dynamics of the Medieval Manuscript*, 25.

9 Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 4.

10 Besamusca, "The Value of Genre for the Study of Multi-Text Codices," 28.

11 Pratt et al., *The Dynamics of the Medieval Manuscript*, 30.

12 Emily Lethbridge, "*Hvorki glansar gull á mér / né glæstir stafir í línum*. Some Observations on *Íslendingasögur* Manuscripts and the Case of *Njáls saga*," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 129 (2014): 76; Pratt et al., *The Dynamics of the Medieval Manuscript*, 30.

13 Lukas Rösli, "Terminology," in *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, ed. Massimiliano Bampi, Carolyne Larrington, and Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2020), 58.

The Subgenre of the 'Late' *Íslendingasögur*

The term *Íslendingasögur*, 'Sagas of Icelanders', customarily designates a group of around forty medieval Icelandic prose narratives that centre on the lives of the first settlers of Iceland and their close descendants. They are set primarily in Iceland from the period of the Settlement (c. 870–930) up to the first decades of the eleventh century. At the core of these texts are battles and conflicts, mainly over property, social influence, and relations. These confrontations most often develop into full-fledged feuds that affect the characters' honour and status in society, and thus the course of the narratives as well. The majority of these sagas are district- and family-feud sagas, and the central characters are often Icelandic chieftains. Other sagas in the group focus more specifically on remarkable individuals, such as poets and outlaws; these tend to be more biographical in their nature.

Despite sharing common generic traits, such as setting and subject matter, these texts vary considerably in plot, theme, characterization, and style. That is to say, the texts within the group referred to as *Íslendingasögur* are quite varied. A subgroup of roughly eleven to sixteen sagas has been given the label 'post-classical', 'late/r', or 'young/er' *Íslendingasögur*, as they were produced mainly in the later period of saga-writing, during the fourteenth century, and they are attested primarily in manuscripts from the fifteenth. Despite affiliating with the *Íslendingasögur*, notably in terms of setting and subject matter, these sagas play with literary (and social) conventions and defy the customary taxonomy, which makes them particularly appealing to study. Yet scholars have so far largely neglected them for the same reasons, disregarding them because they are extravagant, 'contaminated' by romance,[14] lack the 'true' heroic spirit of the 'classical' *Íslendingasögur*, and not least because they are difficult to describe from the point of view of genre. Such neglect and criticism should be contextualized within the Icelandic Romanticist thinking and nationalist aims of the nineteenth cen-

14 E.g. Sigurður Nordal, *Um íslenzkar fornsögur*, trans. Árni Björnsson (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1968 [1952]), 110): *T. d. hefur aldrei ríkt teljandi ágreiningur um það, hvaða sögur skuli telja til hnignunartímabilsins á 14. öld vegna þeirra áhrifa, sem þær urðu fyrir af fornaldar- og riddarasögum, og sakir smekks og áhugamála höfundanna yfirleitt* ('There has, for example, never been any serious disagreement as to which sagas ought to be assigned to the period of decline in the fourteenth century because of the effect of the *fornaldar-* and *riddarasögur* on them, and because of the authors' taste and interests generally', trans. Martin Arnold, *The Post-Classical Icelandic Family Saga* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 143).

tury – when these evaluative distinctions of sagas were first made – the effects of which tended to linger throughout the twentieth century.

During the nineteenth century, the medieval Icelandic Commonwealth (930 to 1262–64) was idealized as a 'golden age' for Iceland's national character because of the freedom and the outstanding cultural production that characterized it.[15] The sagas became a particular source of national pride, and historical veracity became the main criterion by which they were judged. As a consequence, certain sagas came to be considered more valuable than others, which were in turn disregarded as inferior in quality. The *Íslendingasögur* that describe and glorify Icelandic origins were praised, as they clearly satisfied nationalist criteria, while other sagas, such as *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur* were dismissed as "among the dreariest things ever made by human fancy",[16] and as "the lowest and most miserable productions of Icelandic pens".[17] Hence the 'late' *Íslendingasögur*, which are especially heterogeneous from the genre perspective and often include elements from romance literature, also came to be regarded not only as having been 'contaminated' by that genre but also as evidence of a decline in cultural standards,[18] even as the product of a collective nervous breakdown.[19]

Thus, scholars started to make distinctions among the *Íslendingasögur*, and the first attempts were particularly biased. Guðbrandur Vigfússon, a leading scholar in the field of saga studies during the nineteenth century, subdivided these sagas into 'greater', 'minor', and 'spurious', on the basis of their plot, style, and composition.[20] He believed the 'greater' sagas to have a depth beyond all others, as they were "the production of literary men, working up existing scattered material into an artistic story".[21] The 'minor' sagas were authentic and embodied "more or less completely the original oral tradition as it was first committed to writing", although they lacked

15 Martin Arnold, *The Post-Classical Icelandic Family Saga*, 239.

16 William P. Ker, *Epic and Romance. Essays on Medieval Literature* (New York: Dover, 1908), 282.

17 Guðbrandur Vigfússon, "Prolegomena," in *Sturlunga saga Including the Íslendinga saga of Lawman Sturla Thordsson and Other Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1878), cxcvi.

18 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Dating the Icelandic Sagas. An Essay in Method* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1958), 125–26.

19 Peter Hallberg, *The Icelandic Saga* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), 145.

20 Guðbrandur Vigfússon, "Prolegomena," xxiv–xxvii.

21 Guðbrandur Vigfússon, "Prolegomena," xli.

the artistry of the greater sagas and, by contrast, tended to "sway loosely, following the fortunes of their hero".[22] At any rate, major and minor sagas made up the 'pure' Icelandic genre, the 'classical' texts, yet to be affected by the alleged fall of taste that characterized the literature which was produced after the thirteenth century. Indeed, Guðbrandur considered the younger sagas of the group, which he labelled 'spurious', to be partly spontaneous creations based on "hints in *Landnáma* and other sagas" and partly pure inventions "when the very dregs of tradition had been used up".[23] These were, in fact, the 'late' *Íslendingasögur*, although Guðbrandur included other sagas of the sort in the 'minor' group as well.[24]

Sigurður Nordal, another influential scholar in the field writing in the early 1950s, systematized the development of the *Íslendingasögur* by dividing them into five sub-groups, mostly according to their supposed time of writing (*aldur*) and development stage (*þróunarstig*).[25] The fourth group (*fjórði flokkur*) included sagas which he considered to be rewritings of older sagas (*endursamning eldri sagna*); most of these were, in fact, 'late' *Íslendingasögur*, while other sagas of the sort made up the fifth group of *Íslendingasögur* (*fimmti flokkur*), featuring the last written sagas – from the fourteenth century on – which also expressed a decline in the standards.[26] Thus, he still viewed them somewhat negatively, despite having labelled them in more neutral terms.

In the late 1950s, Stefán Einarsson also systematized the *Íslendingasögur* into five sub-groups, according to their supposed time of writing and to the narrative skills displayed by the authors.[27] He labelled the groups 'oldest' sagas, 'early-classical', 'spread of saga-writing', 'late-classical' sagas, and 'post-classical'. In the 'late-classical' group he included some of the "very greatest sagas", in terms of composition, which were, however, characterized by changes that distinguished them blatantly from the earlier texts of the genre: they displayed an "increasing stress on chivalrous romance", a "Christian tinge", and a "vulgarization of taste contrasting with the dignity

22 Guðbrandur Vigfússon, "Prolegomena," xli.
23 Guðbrandur Vigfússon, "Prolegomena," lxii–lxiii.
24 Guðbrandur Vigfússon, "Prolegomena," xlii–lxiii.
25 Sigurður Nordal, *Um íslenzkar fornsögur*, 110–11.
26 Sigurður Nordal, *Um íslenzkar fornsögur*, 110, 156–63, 167–69.
27 Stefán Einarsson, "The Family Sagas," in *A History of Icelandic Literature* (New York: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1957), 136–51.

of the earlier sagas".[28] Among them, was *Grettis saga* – a 'late' saga of the genre, according to some scholars. In the last, 'post-classical' group, Stefán included those *Íslendingasögur* which were written mostly between 1300 and 1350, thus the 'late' sagas of the genre, maintaining, though, that their authors had flung open the door to influence and borrowing from romance literature,[29] rather than talking about 'contamination' from the same, especially when rewriting older sagas. Thus, on the one hand, he still viewed the 'late' sagas in a biased way, as growing out of a decline in standards, while also naming them 'post-classical'; on the other hand, he considered them as the products of innovations that had taken place in saga writing, while proposing, in a subsequent study, to label them more neutrally as 'late-composed' sagas (*síðbornar sögur*).[30]

In the early 1990s, Vésteinn Ólason divided the *Íslendingasögur* into six sub-groups:[31] 'Sagas about Greenland and the Faroe Islands' (*sögur frá Grænlandi og Færeyjum*), 'Sagas of poets' (*skáldasögur*), 'Ancient sagas of disputes/family disputes' (*fornlegar deilusögur/ættadeilusögur*), 'Classical sagas of disputes' (*sígildar deilusögur*), 'Tragedies' (*harmsögur*), and 'Sagas of champions and wonders' (*sögur af köppum og kynjum*) or 'Young sagas of Icelanders' (*ungar Íslendingasögur*). In the latter group he included the youngest sagas of the genre, which he believed to relate their heroes' achievements with much exaggeration and improbability, while they also described paranormal phenomena with greater frequency than the previous sagas.[32] These were, in fact, the 'late' *Íslendingasögur*, which Vésteinn otherwise termed 'post-classical', still regarding them as being 'more fantastic' than the 'classical' sagas.[33] Thus, he still viewed them in a biased way, despite having identified the neutral label of 'young' sagas of the genre.

More recently, Martin Arnold has dedicated a monograph to these late sagas, studying them from a literary and a historical perspective, believing

28 Stefán Einarsson, "The Family Sagas," 145, 150.

29 Stefán Einarsson, "The Family Sagas," 150.

30 Stefán Einarsson, *Íslensk bókmenntasaga 874–1960* (Reykjavík: Snæbjörn Jónsson, 1961), 186–87.

31 Vésteinn Ólason, "Einstakar Íslendingasögur," in *Íslensk bókmenntasaga* 2, ed. Böðvar Guðmundsson et al. (Reykjavík: Mál og Menning, 1993); Vésteinn Ólason, "*Íslendingasögur,*" in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Philip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf (New York: Garland, 1993).

32 Vésteinn Ólason, "Einstakar Íslendingasögur," 82, 143–60.

33 Vésteinn Ólason, "*Íslendingasögur,*" 334.

that they should be assessed in light of the crucial change in the cultural and political experience of the Icelanders, or as the products of "a different consciousness from that of earlier generations".[34] However, he has still designated them 'post-classical', maintaining that there is a lack of generic labels that can be attached to them. Rebecca Merkelbach, then, has also reassessed the fictionality of these sagas,[35] and some attempts have been made to study them from other perspectives, notably the perspective of genre.[36] However, such contributions have been few, and the study of these sagas from within their material contexts has yet to be undertaken.

This is an attempt to bridge these gaps by analysing one particular 'late' *Íslendingasaga* from the genre perspective and considering the dynamics that characterize both the text itself and the two main codicological contexts in which it has been preserved.

Finnboga saga ramma

Finnboga saga ramma is an *Íslendingasaga* from the first quarter of the fourteenth century.[37] It has been labelled a 'late' or 'post-classical' *Íslendingasaga* both because of its late composition and because it shares part of the setting and part of its style with the sagas of the same genre that have been considered 'classical', while it also emancipates itself from them by widening their horizon. It does so both literally, as the protagonist reaches faraway places such as Byzantium – which nevertheless occasionally feature in 'classical' *Íslendingasögur* as well, such as *Laxdæla saga* – and figuratively, in that the author plays with conventions, such as by combining elements that pertain to different generic repertoires. Its primary manu-

34 Martin Arnold, *The Post-Classical Icelandic Family Saga*, 145.

35 E.g., Rebecca Merkelbach, "'The Coarsest and the Worst of the *Íslendinga Sagas:*' Approaching the Alterity of the 'Post-classical' Sagas of Icelanders," in *Margins, Monsters, Deviants: Alterities in Old Norse Literature and Culture*, ed. Rebecca Merkelbach and Gwendolyne Knight (Turhout: Brepols, 2020).

36 E.g., Phil Cardew, "The Question of Genre in the Late *Íslendingasögur*: A Case Study of *Þorskfirðinga saga*," in *Sagas, Saints and Settlements*, ed. Gareth Williams and Paul Bibire (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Massimiliano Bampi "Le saghe norrene e la questione dei generi," in *Intorno alle saghe norrene*, ed. Carla Falluomini (Alessandria, Italy: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2014).

37 Margrét Eggertsdóttir, "Finnboga saga ramma," in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*, ed. Philip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf (London: Routledge, 1993), 194.

scripts are Möðruvallabók (AM 132 fol.), from the fourteenth century, and Tómasarbók (AM 510 4to), from the middle of the sixteenth. The codices differ not only in terms of dating but also of content, which makes the study of the saga from the genre perspective even more significant.[38]

The story begins with an unfortunate event, the exposure of a baby. Ásbjörn Gunnbjarnarson, a tenth-century Icelandic chieftain, rejects his baby boy and orders the baby's mother, his wife Þorgerðr, to expose him to the elements. The baby boy is found by a poor, old couple – Þorgerðr's childhood tutors – who name him Urðarköttr ('scree-cat', because he was found in a scree). They decide to keep him and raise him, pretending that he is the fruit of their own love. The obvious impossibility of this forces them to confess the truth, and Urðarköttr eventually gains his biological father's favour through his own valour, strength, and wit. The boy rescues a sailor in peril who rewards him with precious gifts and by giving him his own name, Finnbogi. The boy then decides to travel abroad where the true adventure begins. On his way to Norway, intending to meet Earl Hákon Sigurðarson, he defeats a ferocious bear, which makes him instantly famous. He then kills a treacherous man, Álfr *aptrkemba* ('with swept-back hair'), and kidnaps his daughter, Ragnhildr, but treats her fairly. The lady is related to Earl Hákon, and the two head together to his quarters. While there, Finnbogi meets the Earl, who is known to be sceptical of Icelanders. Indeed, the Earl repeatedly tests Finnbogi with feats of strength and challenges that escalate in difficulty, fighting against bears and a *blámaðr* (a sort of troll). Finnbogi succeeds in all the endeavours and gains the Earl's favour. The Earl then entrusts him with a task, namely, to collect money in Byzantium on his behalf. Once there, Finnbogi meets the Byzantine emperor and accomplishes feats of strength for him as well (such as lifting up the emperor and his throne together) and eventually converts to Christianity. On his return to Norway, he meets with the Earl again and expresses his desire to go back to Iceland. The Earl grants him permission, so Finnbogi fetches Ragnhildr and they set sail together. The scenes are then set in Víðidalr, Vatnsdalr, and Strandir (North and Northwest

38 A small part of the saga is preserved on another, single vellum leaf, AM 162c fol. (15th century). It is more similar to the corresponding text of Tómasarbók than to that of Möðruvallabók (Jóhannes Halldórsson, *Finnboga saga* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1959), lxix). Being fragmentary and close to the text of Tómasarbók, it has not been considered in the present study.

Iceland), where a feud ensues between Finnbogi and an envious rival, Jökull Ingimundarson, escalating until they reconcile. Finnbogi then lives to an old age.

According to Margrét Eggertsdóttir, the saga "is not one of the better-crafted *Íslendingasögur*. Characterization is flat, and the plot little more than a repetitious series of episodes designed to present the hero in a favorable light."[39] It is true that some episodes or formulas are repeated throughout the narrative, usually three times, as when Finnbogi is recognized as having killed a mighty bear (chs. 12, 14, 15), when he tests three outlaws that pay him a visit (chs. 39, 40, 41), and when his rivals ambush him (chs. 27, 31, 35). However, such repetitions might serve the function of encouraging comparisons between similar episodes at different points of the narrative, which is not infrequent in the sagas,[40] while building up expectations, or failing to meet them, thus also playing with the same. Such repetitions might also function as a mnemonic device from when the saga was recited orally to an audience. It most probably circulated orally before it was written down, as is also suggested by its style, characterized by alliteration and "its use of unusual words that seem to belong to colloquial rather than to literary language".[41] It may even have been performed, I believe, as many of its scenes are vivid and dramatic, such as when Finnbogi encounters the mighty bear, who comically ignores him at first (ch. 11); when he helps Ragnhildr into a boat, taking her in his arms before she begins to cry (ch. 14); when Hrafn *inn litli* ('the Short') precedes Finnbogi and his riding-fellows by running in front of the horses (ch. 30); or when Finnbogi pretends to sleep and snores loudly to test the honesty of his unexpected guests (chs. 39, 40).[42] As soon as the protagonist returns to

39 Margrét Eggertsdóttir, "Finnboga saga ramma," 194.

40 Cf., for instance, *Laxdæla saga*, where the behaviour of characters belonging to different generations, in similar situations, is often paralleled or contrasted, implicitly as well.

41 Paul Schach, "Finnboga saga," in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph R. Strayer (New York: Scribner, 1985), 5:64–65; Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition. A Discourse on Method* (Cambridge, MA: The Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, 2004), 35–48.

42 Cf. Glynne Wickham, *The Medieval Theatre*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 4; he points out that "song, dance, wrestling, sword play, contests between animals, disguise, spectacle, jokes, disputation and ritual all figure, separately or compounded, in the drama of the Middle Ages". Cf. also Terry Gunnell, "'The Rights of the Player:' Evidence of *Mimi* and *Histriones* in Early Medieval Scandinavia," *Comparative Drama* 30 (1996): 2.

Iceland, though, the style becomes less colloquial, more elaborate, and the tone tends to be more serious and formal, probably due to the matter being treated, namely the feud between Finnbogi and his rival Jökull.

In any case, the characterization of the story and the characters is far from 'flat', and the narrative cannot be said to be poorly crafted. The saga is, on the whole, well written and compelling, often funny (as the episodes listed above testify), and somewhat provocative, as there are often exaggerations (especially of Finnbogi's strength), absurdities (as when the old couple pretend to have conceived the baby, or when a second bear is said to understand human speech (ch. 17)), and grotesque details that particularly recur in late medieval sagas (especially in connection with skirmishes or conflicts, such as throat-biting (chs. 29, 40), brains spurting out (ch. 29), or a man being split in two by means of a sword (ch. 35)). These narrative elements stand out even more by being woven into a 'traditional' *Íslendingasaga* setting. The author plays with conventions and innovates by drawing from repertoires that characterize other saga genres, notably *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*. The saga in fact presents three distinct blocks or sections, each of which can be ascribed to a specific saga genre. It begins as an *Íslendingasaga*, of a 'post-classical'/'late' type, as outlined below; once Finnbogi travels to Norway, it takes on the characteristics of a *fornaldarsaga*, followed by those of a *riddarasaga* when he travels to Byzantium. Finally, it takes on the qualities of a more typical *Íslendingasaga* when he returns to Iceland. Let us examine the sections in more detail:

– The initial section (chs. 1–9), which recounts Finnbogi's youth in Flateyjardalr, can be described as a 'post-classical'/'late' *Íslendingasaga* for its inclusion of absurdities (the old couple pretending to have conceived the baby), exaggerations (in connection with Finnbogi's strength (esp. chs. 5, 7)), genre-specific topoi (the child who is not loved by the father (ch. 6)) and topos-inversion (the baby who is exposed by a rich family and taken into a poor one, instead of the contrary[43]), as well as its description of the

43 *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* (ch. 3) and *Reykdæla saga* (ch. 7), for instance, relate that child exposure was practised in heathen times for economic reasons, when the available resources were scarce – such as during famine or in individual cases of poverty. However, other reasons for infant abandonment are also given in the sagas, notably social or personal, such as the illegitimacy of the child (e.g. *Vatnsdæla saga*, ch. 37) or gender preference (*Harðar saga*

protagonist, which paints him not only in a positive light (he is witty (ch. 6) and mature (ch. 8)) but also as heroically questionable (he plays pranks on servant-women (ch. 4)).

– The central section (chs. 10–21), which describes Finnbogi's trip to Norway to meet Earl Hákon, can be better described as a *fornaldarsaga*, for instance because it includes fantastic feats of strength (with bears (chs. 11, 17) and a *blámaðr* (ch. 16)). It can also be described as a *riddarasaga*, as in its description of the protagonist (e.g., ch. 20, where the loanword *kurteisi* ('courtesy, chivalry') is also used), especially once Finnbogi reaches Byzantium, where the emperor asks him to become Christian (chs. 19, 20).
– The final section (chs. 22–end), which recounts the protagonist's trip back to Norway and Iceland, can be described as a typical *Íslendingasaga* for its serious tone, the battles outlined in detail, and the typology of the paranormal creatures and episodes that appear (a shape-changing troll (chs. 29, 40), weather magic, and a scorn pole ritual (ch. 34)).

The juxtaposition of these different sections, in turn, triggers a 'cross-fertilization'[44] between them, or it causes them to interplay, thus enhancing the hybridity of the text. More precisely, some influence of *fornaldarsögur* is found in the initial section, testified by the presence of the topos of the child who is not loved by his father (ch. 6) and in the final section, where another topos, that of the *kolbítr* (lit. 'coalbiter', a layabout), appears (ch. 30). Some influence of *riddarasögur* is notably present at the beginning, as no detailed genealogy is presented, and in the final section, where the protagonist is described as being courteous (the adjective *kurteis* being used in chs. 36, 43). Here too, the love that blossoms between Finnbogi and his wife is emphasized (ch. 29), as is the acceptance of Christianity in both Norway (ch. 36) and Iceland (chs. 38, 43, 41). The final section includes grotesque details typical of 'post-classical' *Íslendingasögur* (chs. 29, 40, 35, 41), along with exaggerations of Finnbogi's strength (ch. 34) and funny details (those about Hrafn the Short (ch. 30) and Finnbogi snoring (chs. 39, 40) mentioned above).

ok Hólmverja, ch. 8). Cf. Carol Clover, "The Politics of Scarcity. Notes on the Sex Ratio in Early Scandinavia," *Scandinavian Studies* 60 (1988): 152–59.

44 Bampi, "Le saghe norrene e la questione dei generi," 100; Bampi, "Genre," (2017), 10.

The author thus constructed his work by drawing from different generic repertoires, depending on the narrative development he had in mind, which resulted in a series of sections that differ in genre. This in turn triggered generic hybridism or cross-fertilization between the sections. The use of these strategies shows that there was a logic behind the construction of the text and therefore that it cannot be considered incoherent or simplistic, as has sometimes been the case.[45] At the same time, it implies that the author was aware of narrative conventions of genre, or of their characteristic repertoires, anyway, an awareness he allegedly exploited to innovate and to imbue his narrative with deeper meaning. This can be appreciated, for instance, in regard to the representation of the past and its relation to the present,[46] such as by comparing the description of some events in the saga with the treatment of the same events in another *Íslendingasaga*, *Vatnsdæla saga*. The events in question concern the feud between Finnbogi and Jökull Ingimundarson, along with his family. In both narratives, the events are largely the same, but the differences among them are greater in number and in nature than their similarities, regarding both their artistic approach and the handling of the material. Allegedly, the narrative of *Vatnsdæla* is more 'polished', as it suppresses everything that does not serve the unwinding of the episodes, whereas *Finnboga saga* accommodates "various extraneous pieces of information" to enhance the treatment of the same episodes, notably the events that trigger the feud, the winter wedding in Vatnsdalur, and the end of the affair.[47] Thus, the two sagas represent different and independent treatments of a common, core material,[48] but they might also represent oral variants of the same story, each recounted from the point of view of the respective descendants, putting either Finnbogi or Jökull to the fore but without altering the general course of the events.[49]

The analysis of the saga from the genre perspective will now be deepened by considering the two main manuscript contexts in which the text has been preserved, Möðruvallabók (AM 132 fol., 14th century) and

45 Cf. Margrét Eggertsdóttir, "Finnboga saga ramma," 194.

46 Cf. Bampi, "Genre," (2020), 24, 29.

47 Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition*, 314–19.

48 Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition*, 314.

49 Margrét Eggertsdóttir, "Finnboga saga ramma," 194; Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition*, 320. A historical Finnbogi is mentioned in both *Landnámabók* and *Íslendingadrápa*. Sigurður Nordal, *Um íslenzkar fornsögur*, 167–68.

Tómasarbók (AM 510 4to, mid-16th century).

Finnboga saga ramma in Möðruvallabók

Möðruvallabók (AM 132 fol.), the 'Book of Möðruvellir', is a fourteenth-century manuscript collection that was produced in the north of Iceland, most likely at the priory of Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur, not far from the Benedictine monastery of Munkaþverá. Its first known owner was the lawman Magnús Björnsson from Munkaþverá (c. 1595–1662), who inscribed his name on it while at Möðruvellir in 1628, whence its own name.[50] It is a prestigious élite codex, as evidenced by its large size (folio), the disposition of the text on the page (in two columns), and the lack of marginalia. By the fourteenth century, when it was compiled, such type of codices usually included major texts such as homilies or laws; instead, Möðruvallabók contains eleven *Íslendingasögur*, including sagas or parts of sagas that are not found elsewhere (e.g., *Kormáks saga* and *Droplaugarsona saga*). That its contents were unusual for the time suggests that the production of *Íslendingasögur* as luxury artefacts was an innovation of the fourteenth century.[51] But there are reasons to believe that the extant codex does not fully represent the intentions of those who produced it.[52] One primary scribe was responsible for its production,[53] while a different scribe wrote the verses in *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, and a distinct rubricator added the red headings and possibly the initials.[54] The three scribes appear

50 Stefán Karlsson, "Möðruvallabók," in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*, ed. Philip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf (London: Routledge, 1993), 426; Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas. Iceland's Medieval Literature* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 2007), 208.

51 Michael Chesnutt, "On the Structure, Format, and Preservation of *Möðruvallabók*," *Gripla* 21 (2010): 156–57.

52 Chesnutt, "On the Structure, Format, and Preservation of *Möðruvallabók*," 148; cf. Lethbridge, "*Hvorki glansar gull á mér*."

53 His hand is also known from other manuscripts, mostly preserving religious texts, such as AM 229 II fol. (*Stjórn*) and AM 220 I fol. (*Priest's saga of Guðmundr Arason*). Cf. Sverrir Tómasson, "The History of Old Nordic Manuscripts I: Old Icelandic," in *The Nordic Languages. An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages*, ed. Oskar Bandle et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 798.

54 Beeke Stegmann, "Collaborative Manuscript Production and the Case of Reykjabók: Paleographical and Multispectral Analysis," in *New Studies in the Manuscript Tradition of Njáls saga: The historia mutila of Njála*, ed. Emily Lethbridge and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2018), 45–46.

to have collaborated closely,[55] but the leaves were not bound together at the time. This is likely because the scribes, who were professionals, intended to dispose of the texts for profit, binding them only in that circumstance.[56] Allegedly, the manuscripts remained loose up until the seventeenth century, when they were brought together and taken to Denmark by Björn Magnússon, son of Magnús Björnsson, the first known owner of the codex, to be given as a gift to Thomas Bartholin.[57]

An examination of the extant material has led scholars to assume that the codex we now have comprises the remains of two or three parchment codices. According to Chesnutt, the first two sagas, *Brennu-Njáls saga* and *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, which occupy several quires, were not originally meant to belong with each other or with the remaining quires.[58] *Njáls saga* ought to have been followed by its proposed, yet missing, sequel, **Gauks saga*, suggesting that the scribe envisaged a separate codex containing the two texts; and *Egils saga* is preserved within blank flyleaves front and back to protect the text inside, suggesting the careful arrangement of an independent codicological entity.[59] The remaining nine sagas seem to constitute a unit, in that they are copied continuously and are arranged in geographical order clockwise around Iceland – reminiscent of the original recension of *Landnámabók*.[60] This is true, at least, of the first five sagas in the group, while the last four break the order. In any case, the first saga of this third unit is *Finnboga saga*. It is not preceded by a blank flyleaf, and the ink of both the first leaf (100r) and of the penultimate leaf (113v, the saga ending on the following recto) is faded, suggesting that the manuscript was exposed to dirt and damp when it was lifted out of the pile of loose quires to be read.[61] The fact that the text begins on the very first leaf of its first quire has induced scholars to suppose that it was not originally meant to be the first of the unit or, in that case, it would have been preced-

55 Stegmann, "Collaborative Manuscript Production and the Case of Reykjabók," 45.

56 Chesnutt, "On the Structure, Format, and Preservation of *Möðruvallabók*," 154.

57 Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, "The Care of the Manuscripts in the Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland," *Care and Conservation of Manuscripts* 1, ed. Gillian Fellow-Jensen and Peter Springborg (Copenhagen: The Royal Library, 1995), 63.

58 Chesnutt, "On the Structure, Format, and Preservation of *Möðruvallabók*," 152–55; cf. Lethbridge, "*Hvorki glansar gull á mér*," 61–63.

59 Chesnutt, "On the Structure, Format, and Preservation of *Möðruvallabók*," 152, 155.

60 Chesnutt, "On the Structure, Format, and Preservation of *Möðruvallabók*," 153.

61 Chesnutt, "On the Structure, Format, and Preservation of *Möðruvallabók*," 152.

ed by a blank flyleaf, as is *Egils saga*. Thus, an additional saga manuscript may have originally preceded *Finnboga saga*, which would have been anticipated by a blank flyleaf. Considering the geographical sequence around Iceland in which the sagas of this part of the codex are ordered, Chesnutt speculates that the missing saga is *Gull-Þóris saga*.[62] This is an interesting hypothesis, as *Gull-Þóris saga* is, like *Finnboga saga,* a 'post-classical' or 'late' *Íslendingasaga*. It is highly speculative, however, and it is possible that no text ever preceded *Finnboga saga* in the codex. Rather, *Finnboga saga* itself might begin the third book or book section, as is suggested by the fact that it begins with an initial seven lines high, equal to that opening the first two sagas of the collection, *Njáls saga* and *Egils saga*, and much bigger than those appearing in the remaining sagas of the section.[63]

At any rate, *Finnboga saga* begins on quire 13, at the top left-hand corner of the first leaf (100r), and is disposed in two columns. It is not provided with an incipit or a rubric, although rubrics are otherwise numerous throughout the text of the saga (e.g., *Finnbogi braut hrygg í birninum* (103r; 'Finnbogi broke the spine of the bear', my trans.), or *Aflraun Finnboga* (105v; 'On Finnbogi's tests of strength', my trans.)). Nevertheless, as mentioned, the saga begins with an initial seven lines high, while the following chapter initials are usually three lines high. The only exception appears at the start of the chapter describing the protagonist's trip away to Norway, where the initial (<Þ>) is instead four lines high. This might visually signal the important change in the narrative, a change of setting, and thus of genre as well; notably, though, the beginning of the section describing the protagonist's return to Iceland is not equally highlighted. Marginalia are lacking, as one would expect of a prestigious codex.

As mentioned, one main scribe copied the texts of the codex. This suggests that he curated a selection of texts, regardless of the fact that the quires remained loose for some time after. It is therefore worth investigating, from the perspective of genre, what criteria may have guided his selection, possibly unveiling in turn how the scribe had received the texts himself. Among these criteria might be topography, although only two-thirds of the codex as we now have it is consistently ordered in this sense, as mentioned. The texts also share several topics or themes. Among them are friendship and enmity, pride and envy, personal ambition and social sta-

62 Chesnutt, "On the Structure, Format, and Preservation of *Möðruvallabók*," 153.

63 Sigurjón P. Ísaksson, "Magnús Björnsson og Möðruvallabók," *Saga* 32 (1994): 108.

tus, the relationship of Icelanders to kings, the acceptance of Christianity, and the feud – often the keystone of such sagas. There also seems to be a *fil rouge* connecting the texts that has to do with their possible moral or ideological message. On the whole, the texts address how an individual acts and reacts in society, and thus how he establishes himself or fails to do so, depending on both fate and human responsibility. As to the latter, the sagas of Möðruvallabók show that an excess of ambition and pride leads to failure, as do envy and corruption. This could also be read as social criticism relative to the time in which the texts were produced or to that in which the scribe himself operated. Some characters notably experience a turn of fortune after the conversion to Christianity is introduced, which seems to bring with it a message of hope. Finally, the texts might be selected because of their typology, as most of them are biographical, largely recounting the lives of poets, at times containing significant sections of poetry. In this regard, it is also important to stress that, although the texts are now classified as *Íslendingasögur*, they show the influence of *konungasögur* (*Egils saga*, *Víga Glúms saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*), *fornaldarsögur* (as *Finnboga saga* itself, *Kormáks saga*, *Fóstbræðra saga*), *riddarasögur* (notably *Laxdœla saga*), and of folktales (*Droplaugarsona saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*). This is not surprising, but some of the sagas, including *Finnboga saga*, are particularly heterogeneous.

Beyond their selection, the criterion for ordering the texts might again be geographical, at least for the first part of the codex as we now have it, even though the quires were assembled later on, and it is possible that other sagas were originally included in the collection.[64] Considering the extant codex and recalling that a single scribe copied the texts – continuously in the third section – it is possible and profitable to consider the texts as an organic whole that generated connections and forced dynamic intertextual reading.[65] Approaching text-collections holistically allows light to be shed on how material contexts impact the reception of texts, especially from the perspective of themes and genre.[66] Immediate textual contexts in particular generate significance and therefore carry implications for how the texts are interpreted.[67]

64 Cf. Chesnutt, "On the Structure, Format, and Preservation of *Möðruvallabók*," 153; Lethbridge, "*Hvorki glansar gull á mér*," 63.

65 Cf. Lethbridge, "*Hvorki glansar gull á mér*," 76.

66 Lethbridge, "*Hvorki glansar gull á mér*," 76.

67 Hans J. Orning, "Legendary Sagas as Historical Sources," *Tabularia "Études"* 15 (2015): 61.

Finnboga saga, within the codex as we now have it, appears after *Egils saga*, with which it shares typological and thematic elements: a biographical nature, the presence of an *utanferð* section (narrating the protagonist's trip abroad), the treatment of Icelanders' relationships to kings, and feud, as well as the inclusion of grotesque details, especially in connection with skirmishes or clashes. If *Gull-Þóris saga* ever appeared in between them, as Chesnutt speculates, it would have fitted in quite well, as it too includes an *utanferð* section, also juxtaposing narrative sections that can be ascribed to different genres, in the manner of *Finnboga saga*. Both sagas display influence of *fornaldarsögur*, and they have both been considered 'post-classical' or 'late' *Íslendingasögur*. *Gull-Þóris saga* goes as far as to include paranormal beings such as flying dragons, however, which would have made it an awkward follower of *Egils saga* – presuming *Egils saga* itself was meant to be part of the collection – although *Egils saga* also displays some influence of *fornaldarsögur*, but in a more subtle way.[68] *Finnboga saga* is followed by *Bandamanna saga*, 'The Saga of the Confederates', with which it shares thematic elements, most notably that of the poor child elevated to a higher rank in society. But while in *Finnboga saga* the poor child, Finnbogi, succeeds in life thanks to his own abilities, in *Bandamanna saga* the poor child (also the protagonist) succeeds through corruption, a juxtaposition that makes the latter narrative read like a satire of the lust for power and greed of the chieftain class of the time, despite its happy ending.

By reading *Finnboga saga* as part of Möðruvallabók, especially in its immediate context, one can better appreciate how it communicates certain momentous moral or ideological messages and is not pure diversion, although reading it alongside the more serious narratives highlights its entertainment value, or what might be considered its frivolity.[69] This, in turn, reveals the utility of the heterogeneity of the text from the genre perspective as the sections of the saga that pertain more to the *fornaldarsaga* and *riddarasaga* genres become more vivid.

68 Cf. Torfi Tulinius, *The Matter of the North. The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-Century Iceland* (Odense: Odense University Press, 2002).

69 Cf. Lethbridge, "Authors and Anonymity."

Finnboga saga ramma in Tómasarbók

Finnboga saga is preserved in another parchment codex, AM 510 4to, from the mid-sixteenth century.[70] The codex has been named Tómasarbók, or 'Book of Tómas', because it is partly written in the same hand as AM 604 4to, the compiler of which named himself Tómas.[71] This scribe was a professional, as were his brother and father, and the three worked together on AM 510 4to, as is stated at the end of the first saga, *Víglundar saga* (f. 8r): "þrir fegd*ar* [*sic*] hafa skrif*at* bok þ*essa og* bid*it til gud*s f*yrir* þ*eim* ollu*m*. Am*en*."[72] The father's hand has been identified only in parts of the codex,[73] while the main scribes (the two brothers) are also responsible for the several marginalia that appear and give important insights into the reception and use of the texts.

The text of *Finnboga saga* that is preserved in this codex is not derived from Möðruvallabók. It occasionally even appears to be older (*upprunalegri*), thus allegedly being closer to a previously extant redaction of the text (*frumrit*) which pre-existed Möðruvallabók as well.[74] But the text of Tómasarbók is otherwise clearly and widely corrupted, such that the Möðruvallabók version is the one upon which most editions of the text are based. The *Íslenzk fornrit* edition of the saga is based entirely on Möðruvallabók, though it includes, in the footnotes, the most noteworthy variants found in Tómasarbók.[75] These variants consist either in further information (e.g., ch. 16: *af þessu* (in M.) vs *af þessu ok af mǫrgum drengskap ǫðrum* (in T.); ch. 16: *fagnaði henni vel* (in M.) vs *með blíðu ok spurði hana, hvárt Finnbogi hefði gert vel til hennar* (in T.)); more precise information (e.g., ch. 7: *með nautum* (in M.) vs *með nautum á Eyri* (in T.); ch. 27: *synir Brettings ok synir Inga* (in M.) vs *synir Brettings þrír ok synir Inga tveir* (in T.)); differing information (e.g. ch. 23: *hann átti dóttur* (in M.) vs *systurdóttur* (in T.); ch. 23: *fimm saman* (in M.) vs *tíu saman í flokki* (in T.)); differing information and wording (e.g. ch. 10: *Þaðan er mér úlfs ván, er*

70 Jóhannes Halldórsson, *Finnboga saga*, lxix.

71 Jóhannes Halldórsson, *Finnboga saga*, lxix.

72 Þórdís E. Jóhannesdóttir, "Marginalia in AM 510 4to," *Opuscula* 17 (2019): 209–10, 212. 'A father and his two sons have written this book and prayed to God to intercede for them all. Amen' (my trans.).

73 Þórdís E. Jóhannesdóttir, "Marginalia in AM 510 4to," 210.

74 Jóhannes Halldórsson, *Finnboga saga*, lxviii–lxix.

75 Jóhannes Halldórsson, *Finnboga saga*.

ek eyrun sék (in M.) vs *Þat er satt, sem mælt er, at þaðan er úlfs ván, er alinn er* (in T.); ch. 11: *sumir skeptu exar, en sumir spjót* (in M.) vs *bjuggu ǫrvar, sumir skeptu spjót eðr sverð eðr sviður* (in T.)). All in all, these variants show that the text of Tómasarbók is fuller than that of Möðruvallabók, possibly reinforcing the hypothesis of its closer proximity to a former, original redaction of the text, while the differing information is significant when speculating about the audiences of the two manuscripts, attempted below.

Not only the text of *Finnboga saga* is different in the two manuscripts; so is its disposition on the page. While Möðruvallabók displays the text in two columns, Tómasarbók gives it in one column, the division into chapters also differing significantly between the two manuscripts. The chapters are much longer in Tómasarbók than in Möðruvallabók, at times dividing the text at the same points, while at others not doing so. As a consequence, the decorated initials also sometimes differ, in addition to being less high in Tómasarbók than in Möðruvallabók, usually two lines high as opposed to three. However, Tómasarbók also presents inconsistent cases where the initial is one, two, or three lines high. The height of their poles also varies frequently throughout the text, although they are almost always decorated. These differences are also significant in speculating about the audiences of the two manuscripts, as attempted below.

The main scribes of Tómasarbók also endowed the codex with several marginalia. These consist of comments, random phrases, verse-fragments, personal names, and religious invocations.[76] Interestingly, many of them appear with the text of *Finnboga saga* itself, mainly consisting of religious invocations and usually positioned at the top of the page as the custom had it: "s*anct*a fenen*n*a ora p*ro* nob*is*" (71r, 74v),[77] "j*esu*s" (73r), "g*ud* komi t*il* m*in*" (75r), "m*ar*ia gracia plena" (80r, 84r).[78] There are also many decorations, some of which are quite noteworthy and seemingly rather personal, such as a drawing of a bearded man's face (76r). The relationship of these marginalia to the main text has yet to be investigated, though it should be kept in mind that the majority of marginalia that appear in Icelandic manuscripts are unrelated to the text they accompany.[79] In any case, just as the

76 Þórdís E. Jóhannesdóttir, "Marginalia in AM 510 4to," 212–13.

77 No saint by the name *Fenenna* is known. For a discussion of the relevant speculation, see Þórdís E. Jóhannesdóttir, "Marginalia in AM 510 4to," 218.

78 Þórdís E. Jóhannesdóttir, "Marginalia in AM 510 4to," 214–15.

79 Matthew Driscoll, "Postcards from the Edge: An Overview of Marginalia in Icelandic

drawing of the bearded man's face testifies, from the fifteenth century on, marginalia became more personal than in earlier books, where they consisted mostly of corrections or additions to the main text.[80] This is consistent with the fact that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Icelandic manuscripts were primarily intended for household reading and were thus also less impressive in quality.[81] This is true of Tómasarbók, evident in its smaller size – a quarto, compared to Möðruvallabók's folio; in its many leaves that are very irregular in shape (e.g., 70r, 78r); and in the presence of the marginalia themselves.

The context of *Finnboga saga* in Tómasarbók consists of texts that can be ascribed to different genres of the current taxonomy: *Íslendingasögur* (*Víglundar saga*), *fornaldarsögur* (*Bósa saga, Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns, Friðþjófs saga*), indigenous *riddarasögur* (*Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns, Drauma-Jóns saga*), and a *konungasaga* (*Jómsvíkinga saga*[82]). Most of these texts are particularly heterogeneous, blending different generic repertoires that include, beyond those already mentioned, the folktale and the fairy tale. The texts share several topics and themes, notably the bridal quest, the relationships between foster-brothers and between Icelanders and kings, self-fulfilment, and descriptions of dreams and omens. On the whole, though, it is difficult to trace a clear *fil rouge* uniting the texts of the collection as the moral or ideological message seems to do in Möðruvallabók. That said, some of the sagas do show structural or modal similarity, as evidenced by the inclusion of notable poetic sections (esp. *Friðþjófs saga* and *Jómsvíkinga saga* – although verses in the latter are additions to earlier versions of the saga[83]). Some of them have also been considered to be sources for others that also appear in the codex (such as *Friðþjófs saga* for *Víglundar saga*, or *Bósa saga* for *Þorsteins þáttr*), although such connections remain speculative.

Manuscripts," in *Reading Notes*, ed. Dirk Van Hulle and Wim van Mierlo (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 36.

80 Þórdís E. Jóhannesdóttir, "Marginalia in AM 510 4to," 211.

81 Jóhanna K. Friðriksdóttir, "*Konungs skuggsjá* [The King's Mirror] and Women Patrons and Readers in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland," *Viator* 49, no. 2 (2018): 282–83.

82 The saga, however, has been much discussed from the genre perspective. Cf. Alison Finlay, "*Jómsvíkinga saga* and Genre," *Scripta Islandica* 65 (2014).

83 Cf. Judith Jesch, "*Jómsvíkinga Sǫgur* and *Jómsvíkinga Drápur*: Texts, Contexts and Intertexts," *Scripta Islandica* 65 (2014).

The texts of Tómasarbók seem to be organized to give the impression of a progression from recreation to instruction, at least thematically. The codex opens with sagas in which the bridal quest of the protagonists, as well as their adventures, plays an important role. This is true of *Víglundar saga* (*Íslendingasaga*), *Bósa saga* (*fornaldarsaga*), and *Jarlmanns saga* (indigenous *riddarasaga*). The collection then includes, in order of appearance, *Jómsvíkinga saga* (*konungasaga* – cf. note 82), which focuses on serious themes such as the relationship of the protagonists to kings and personal success, and *Finnboga saga*, which shares those themes, as exemplified by Finnbogi's interactions with Earl Hákon and the emperor of Byzantium, and the ways in which he gains their favour and succeeds. *Finnboga saga* is then followed by *Drauma-Jóns saga*, an indigenous *riddarasaga* that functions as an *exemplum* of good conduct. *Friðþjófs saga*, a *fornaldarsaga* in which the protagonist succeeds in his life by raising his low status, closes the collection.

If we read *Finnboga saga* in this other material context, especially its immediate context in the final part of the codex, its satirical character and the seriousness coming from the satire stand out when it is read after *Jómsvíkinga saga*, while the proximity of *Drauma-Jóns saga* brings the moral undertone of the saga to the fore. At the same time, the heterogeneous generic nature of the saga also stands out, as these sagas – like most sagas in the collection – display a blend of different narrative repertoires.

Concluding Remarks

An analysis of *Finnboga saga* from the genre perspective shows that the text is far from being flat and simplistic as has often been maintained but is rather compelling and well crafted. This better understanding of the text is enhanced by studying it within the two main codices where it appears. The two codices preserve the same version but with significant differences in wording, contents, and structure. The presentation of the text on the page also differs in the two codices, as does the division into chapters, which in turn affects the decorated initials. Möðruvallabók does not contain many marginalia along with the text, while the conspicuous presence of religious invocations and decorations in Tómasarbók mean that it does. This corresponds well with the fact that the latter codex is of less impressive quality,

being smaller (4to vs. folio) and including some quite irregular leaves. The contexts in which the text is inserted also differ: in Möðruvallabók the saga is preserved with other *Íslendingasögur*, though they display elements of other saga genres, whereas in Tómasarbók the saga is accompanied by texts that are very different from one another in genre, in addition to being internally heterogeneous, or that tend to juxtapose or blend elements pertaining to different generic repertoires in a more evident manner.

These aspects considered, it is very likely that the different scribes perceived the text differently, from the genre perspective, before including it in the respective collections. The scribe of Möðruvallabók seems to have viewed it as part of a prestigious legacy of texts, hence including it in his collection of major sagas, allowing its more serious and moral tone to stand out, though without losing its entertainment value. The scribes of Tómasarbók also seem to have wanted to highlight the moral undertone and satirical character of the saga, as well as its amusing nature, but they also seem to have wanted to stress how it communicates a more nuanced view of the past, best highlighted by the particularly heterogeneous overall nature of the texts in the collection.

The intended audience itself clearly had an impact on the selection and ordering of the texts in the codices. In Möðruvallabók, it most likely consisted of powerful people commissioning the specific collection, probably the same people whom the collection was meant to be sold to, or at least with similar recipients in mind. This may be supported by the fact that the main scribe of the codex also took care of the redaction of other five or six manuscripts and manuscript fragments, which mostly deal with legal and Christian matters.[84] Tómasarbók instead suggests a humbler public and was probably destined for household reading or for private use, given its codicological characteristics. Revealing in this regard may be the fact that one of its main scribes compiled a large collection of *rímur* as well (AM 604 4to), which also includes a significant amount of marginalia.[85] The text of *Finnboga saga*, therefore, functioned somewhat differently in the different communities in which and for which it was copied, with both the text itself and its presentation adapted to the different communicative situations and milieux.

84 Chesnutt, "On the Structure, Format, and Preservation of *Möðruvallabók*," 155–56.

85 Cf. Þórdís E. Jóhannesdóttir, "Marginalia in AM 510 4to," 209–10; Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas*, 380.

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ÁGRIP

Að reyna að fanga það sem ekki er hægt að festa hendur á: ný rannsókn á *Finnboga sögu ramma*

Efnisorð: *Finnboga saga ramma*, 'ungar' Íslendingasögur, bókmenntagrein, handritasamhengi, handritafræði

Finnboga saga ramma er Íslendingasaga frá fjórtándu öld sem segir frá flökkukenndu lífi íslenska höfðingjasonarins Finnboga Ásbjarnarsonar. Sagan berst frá Íslandi til Noregs og Grikklands. Frásögnin er áhugaverð af ýmsum ástæðum. Meðal annars er erfitt að fella söguna inn í hið almennt viðurkennda flokkunarkerfi fornsagna vegna þess að í henni eru atriði sem bera einkenni ólíkra sagnahópa. Við þetta má bæta að elstu og merkilegustu handritin sem varðveita textann, Möðruvallabók (AM 132 fol. frá 14. öld) og Tómasarbók (AM 510 4to frá miðri 16. öld), setja hann í mjög ólíkt samhengi sem gerir rannsókn á sögunni í ljósi rannsókna á bókmenntagreinum enn áhugaverðari.

Í þessari grein verður *Finnboga saga ramma* greind með hliðsjón af kenningum um bókmenntagreinar. Hugað verður jafnt að byggingu textans sjálfs og að því handritasamhengi sem hann birtist í. Markmiðið er að varpa ljósi bæði á almenn einkenni textans og mikilvægi þess að rannsaka 'ungar' Íslendingasögur – og miðaldasögur almennt – í samhengi íslenskrar handritamenningar.

SUMMARY

Endeavouring to Grasp the Elusive: A New Study of *Finnboga saga ramma*

Keywords: *Finnboga saga ramma*, 'late' *Íslendingasögur*, genre, manuscript contexts, codicology

Finnboga saga ramma, 'The Saga of Finnbogi the Mighty', is a fourteenth-century *Íslendingasaga* that tracks the restless life of Finnbogi Ásbjarnarson, an Icelandic chieftain's son, as it unfolds in tenth-century Iceland, Norway, and Byzantium. The narrative is compelling for several reasons, including how it challenges the commonly acknowledged taxonomy of saga genres, clearly combining elements that pertain to the repertoires of different saga genres. Moreover, the two main

codices preserving the text, Möðruvallabók (AM 132 fol., 14th century) and Tómasarbók (AM 510 4to, mid-16th century), present it in two very different contexts, making its study from the perspective of genre even more significant.

This contribution investigates *Finnboga saga ramma* from the genre perspective by giving equal consideration to the architecture of the text itself and the two main manuscript contexts in which it appears, in order to shed light on both the generic characteristics of the text and on the significance of studying 'late' *Íslendingasögur* – and medieval sagas generally – from within their material contexts.

Martina Ceolin
Department of Linguistics and Comparative Cultural Studies -
Ca' Foscari University of Venice
Ca' Bembo, Dorsoduro 1075
30123 Venice, Italy
martina.ceolin@unive.it