

NORA KAUFFELDT

WHAT'S IN A NAME?
*Revisiting Crymogæa, Vatnshyrna,
and Pseudo-Vatnshyrna*

In 1609, a history of Iceland titled *Crymogæa* was published in Hamburg. It was written between 1596 and 1603 by Arngrímur Jónsson (1568–1648), most likely at the episcopal seat of Hólar, where he served as rector of the Latin school and as episcopal chaplain. In order to situate Iceland within the learned history of the world, he drew on a wide range of sources – classical, European, and Icelandic – selecting and juxtaposing them to make the country's past and present credible and comprehensible abroad. Among these sources was *Watzhyrna*.

The name *Vatnshyrna*¹ evokes both excitement and grief among scholars. Excitement, because it is believed to have been one of the largest compilations of *Íslendingasögur* from the Middle Ages. It is thought to have been commissioned by Jón Hákonarson (b. 1350) in Viðidalstunga, North Iceland, around 1390–1400, containing no fewer than seven or nine *Íslendingasögur* and three *þættir*. Stefán Karlsson suggested that the entire manuscript may have been written by Magnús Þórhallsson, the illuminator and one of the two scribes of *Flateyjarbók*.

Grief follows, however, because the manuscript was destroyed in the Great Fire of Copenhagen in 1728, when a large portion of the University Library was lost, leading to a long history of scholarly misunderstanding and attempts at reconstruction.

To further complicate matters, in 1860, Guðbrandur Vigfússon mistakenly considered a vellum fragment (AM 564a 4to) to be the last surviving piece of the burnt codex that the manuscript collector and scholar Árni

1 I use *Vatnshyrna* when referring to the elusive or ambiguous manuscript whose identity remains unclear. I use **Vatnshyrna* to refer specifically to the reconstructed manuscript proposed by Guðbrandur Vigfússon, which was adopted in scholarship from 1860 to 1970 and treated as established fact in subsequent research. *Watzhyrna* refers to the source cited by Arngrímur Jónsson, and *Membr. Res. No. 5* denotes the burnt manuscript also referred to by Árni Magnússon as *Vatnshornsbók*.

Magnússon nicknamed *Vatnshornsbók* when he had it on loan from Peder Hansen Resen. Ásgeir Jónsson, an assistant to Árni Magnússon, made copies of the manuscript between 1686 and 1688. The copies Ásgeir made are often valued as scientifically accurate and have frequently been taken at face value, as stand-in-eyewitnesses for the lost manuscript, which has raised suspicion from more material-focussed scholars when it comes to the treatment of these copies as medieval texts.²

John McKinnell (1970) has already pointed out that the manuscript that Árni Magnússon called *Vatnshornsbók* should rather be called *Membrana Reseniana No. 5* (*Membr. Res. No. 5*), which is the shelf-mark it had in Peder Hansen Resen's collection, to avoid indicating relations that might not exist with a source that is mentioned in Arngrímur Jónsson's *Crymogæa* and that he calls *Watzhyrna*. But McKinnell found Stefán Karlsson's argumentation that *Membr. Res. No. 5* was written by only one scribe that he identified as Magnús Þórhallsson (Stefán Karlsson 1970 b) so convincing that he thought it unnecessary to hold on to the doubt that he formulated himself:

Strictly speaking, the original for Árni Magnússon's paper copies should probably be referred to as *Membrana Reseniana* rather than *Vatnshyrna*, in case Árni was mistaken in identifying it as *Vatnshyrna* [...]. When *Vatnshyrna* is referred to in this article, it is therefore the Ms. which Árni calls *Vatnshornsbók* which is meant (McKinnell 1970, 313).

But Árni never connected the source *Watzhyrna* in *Crymogæa* and the manuscript he called *Vatnshornsbók*.³ This connection only came into the world

2 Mår Jónsson has convincingly shown that not all of the copies believed to derive from *Membr. Res. No. 5* were copied directly from the parchment manuscript itself. Rather, some of them appear to be composites, based on copies made by Ketill Jörundarson from another manuscript, supplemented with corrections and additions inserted by Árni Magnússon. See Mår Jónsson, "Scribal Inexactitude and Scholarly Misunderstanding: A Contribution to the Study of *Vatnshyrna*," in *Frejas Psalter: En psalter i 40 afdelinger til brug for Jonna Louis-Jensen*, ed. Peter Springborg and Bergljót Soffía Kristjánsdóttir (Copenhagen: Den Arnamagnæanske Kommission, 1997), 119–127.

3 See Guðbrandur Vigfússon. *Bárðarsaga Snæfellsáss, Viglundarsaga, Þórðarsaga, Draumavitranir, Völsapáttir*. Kjöbenhavn: Nordiske Literatur-Samfund, 1860. XI: „At Árni Magnússon da han skrev sine annotationes til Are frodes Schedæ ikke har kjendt Sammenhængen

in 1860 when Guðbrandur Vigfússon searched for Arngrímur's source. To avoid further confusion, I will follow McKinnell's suggestion and refer to the burnt manuscript from Resen's collection as *Membrana Reseniana* No. 5 because this is the name it had in the catalogues when it burnt, and we know what it contained when Árni had it (see AM 226a 8vo f.58v).

In 1970, Stefán Karlsson refuted Guðbrandur Vigfússon's assumption that *Membr. Res. No. 5* and AM 564a 4to once belonged to the same codex, and McKinnell (1970) subsequently reconstructed a vellum manuscript that included AM 564a 4to as well as two other vellum fragments from Árni's collection, namely AM 445b 4to and 445c I 4to. McKinnell baptised this newly reconstructed manuscript *Pseudo-Vatnsþyrna*, which makes the bewilderment about the complex entanglement complete, since the name *Pseudo-Vatnsþyrna* reflects the research history surrounding AM 564a 4to rather than doing justice to the actual manuscript. A name is sometimes a burden, and in this article, I will examine the naming history of *Vatnsþyrna*, *Vatnsþornsbók*, and *Pseudo-Vatnsþyrna* and argue that renaming these manuscripts would facilitate better research.

During the high tide of saga writing in medieval Iceland, the transmission of regional sagas is characterised by the production of compilations – meaningful combinations of texts or text variants.⁴ Even if Guðbrandur

viser hans Yttring (Additam. 6 pag. 246): *Ipse quoque Arngrimus Crymogæa p. 77 eundem alsherjargoði vocat; manuscriptum quoddam Kjalnes. historiam, Barði Snæfellsens um Dei vitam et nescio quid ultra continens secutus, quod a possessoris ut existimo prædico citati libri pagina 62, 77, et 113, Vatnsþyrnam denominare placuit.*" (That Árni Magnússon, when he wrote his annotations on Are Frode's schedule, did not recognise the context is shown by his statement (Additam. 6 pag. 246): Arngrímur himself, in *Crymogæa* p. 77, also calls him alsherjargoði; he follows a certain manuscript containing the history of Kjalnes, the life of Bárðr Snæfellsáss, and something else unknown. It appears to have been named *Vatnsþyrna*, presumably after the estate of its owner, as referenced in the cited book on pages 62, 77, and 113.) All translations are my own. Unfortunately, it is not possible to trace the original note by Árni Magnússon, as the reference Guðbrandur Vigfússon provides (Additam. 6 pag. 246) cannot be verified.

- 4 The term *compilation* is usually applied on a textual level, describing a combination of individual texts that are rearranged, varied, and shaped into a new text-work. The compiler is thus someone who "transcribes the works of others, but with the freedom to add [...] [and to] rearrange the material in order to make it fit his needs" (Johansson 2018, 122, 125). *Sturlunga saga* provides an example in this sense. Here, however, I use *compilation* on a material level: to refer to the combination and variation of sagas – understood as open and unstable texts whose variants are linked through Wittgenstein's concept of *Familienähnlichkeit* (family resemblance) – together with other texts, such as genealogies, whose arrangement and editing are coordinated within a specific codex. In contrast, a *collection* is an assemblage

Vigfússon implied that **Vatnshyrna* was a collection and McKinnell reconstructed a codex, they were never researched as proper compilations. This is, to some extent, understandable, given that Membr. Res. No. 5 is lost and no material analysis of its structure is possible. However, the lack of physical evidence never prevented saga editors from using the seventeenth-century paper copies as material for reconstructing the medieval texts,⁵ nor did it stop Stefán Karlsson from analysing the script of the copies of *Membr. Res. No. 5* and treating it as a medieval hand in order to support his conclusion that Magnús Þórhallsson had written the entire manuscript (see Stefán Karlsson 1970 b).

**Vatnshyrna* and *Pseudo-Vatnshyrna* have been consistently referred to in scholarship but never explored as compilations in their own right. Instead, they have always been treated as quarries for best-text variants rather than meaningful works in themselves. In the following, I will compile what appears to be common knowledge about *Vatnshyrna* and *Pseudo-Vatnshyrna* and go back to the beginning – when the name *Vatnshyrna* emerges in scholarship – and trace the name and the connected manuscripts in research history.

I will put forward a way to untangle the two manuscripts that have been mentioned in one breath for the last fifty years by examining how Arngrímur Jónsson treated *Watzhyrna* and other sources, which also gives insight into the usage and understanding of written sources in early modern historiography. I will further propose a reconstruction of the manuscript hitherto known as *Pseudo-Vatnshyrna* and introduce the new name *Melabók* that allows a new view of the creation of compilations in the Middle Ages in Iceland.⁶

of texts without mutual influence. Medieval scribes may not have distinguished between the two, and the distinction is not always clear, particularly because many codices have yet to be examined with regard to the narratological and editorial interplay of their components. In this article, I use *collection* for cases where scholarship has treated texts in manuscripts as independent, without considering their deliberate arrangement or interrelation within a codex.

- 5 Some of the widely used Íslendingasögur editions of *Íslenzk fornrit* are based on the seven-teen-century paper copies that are supposed to derive from Membr. Res. No. 5. For the mentioned sagas, these copies are the only so-called complete accounts. This is for example the case for *Eyrbyggja saga* (AM 448 4to).
- 6 The conviction that *Melabók* is an appropriate name for the remake of *Pseudo-Vatnshyrna* is the result of many conversations with Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, to whom I am grateful.

I. Vatnshyrna – Quid est?

The problem is that it is often unclear what exactly is meant when referring to *Vatnshyrna*.⁷ Are we speaking of the lost manuscript that Árni Magnússon referred to as *Vatnshornsbók*, the source Arngrímur Jónsson called *Watzhyrna*, or the hypothetical codex **Vatnshyrna* reconstructed by Guðbrandur Vigfússon? Scholarship thus far appears to have operated on the assumption that at least the first two are the same. Even though some revisions and new insights have emerged, this identification has never been seriously questioned.⁸ While Guðbrandur Vigfússon arrived at the conclusion that *Watzhyrna* and Árni's *Vatnshornsbók* are the same by eliminating alternative possibilities based on probability (Guðbrandur Vigfússon, 1860, see also analysis below), Stefán Karlsson went further. Building on the assumption that Membr. Res. No. 5 and *Melabók* (formerly *Pseudo-Vatnshyrna*) are sister compilations and closely related, he asserted that there is no doubt that one or the other is identical with Arngrímur's *Watzhyrna* (Stefán Karlsson 1970 b, 280).⁹

- 7 See for example the *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur*, edited by Rudolf Simek and Hermann Pálsson, first published in 1987 and revised in 2007, which states the following under the entry **Vatnshyrna*: “**Vatnshyrna* [...] ist der Name einer im Brand von Kph. 1728 zum Großteil [sic] vernichteten Pergament-HS von Isländersagas, die anscheinend Ende des 14. Jhs. für Jón Hákonarson von Viðidalstunga, den ersten Besitzer der Flateyjarbók hergestellt wurde. Sie enthielt folgende Sagas: Flóamanna saga, Laxdæla saga, Hænsa-Þóris saga, Vatnsdæla saga, Eyrbyggja saga, Kjalnesinga saga, Króka-Refs saga, Stjórnu-Odda draumr, Viga-Glúms saga, Harðar saga, Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss, Þórðar saga hreðu, Bergbúa þáttur, Kumlbúa þáttur, Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar.” (**Vatnshyrna*: [...] is the name of a parchment manuscript of Icelandic sagas that was mostly(!) destroyed in the Copenhagen fire of 1728. It was apparently produced at the end of the fourteenth century for Jón Hákonarson of Viðidalstunga, the first owner of Flateyjarbók. It contained the following sagas ...). Most interestingly, the only connected shelfmark is AM 564a 4to (7 folios), and the connected literature is limited to: “Jakob Benediktsson, Arngrimi Jonæ Opera Latina Conscripta IV, Kbh. 1957; J. McKinnell, The Re-construction of Pseudo-Vatnshyrna (Opuscula 4), Kbh. 1970 (= BiblArn 30); Stefán Karlsson, Um Vatnshyrnu (ibid.); idem, ‘V.’ (KLN 19), 1975; J. McKinnell, ‘V.’ in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*, New York 1993.” This suggests that the editors were well aware of the re-evaluations by Stefán Karlsson and John McKinnell, whose work convincingly demonstrated that AM 564a 4to was not, in fact, part of whatever *Vatnshyrna* may have been. However, the outdated entry continues to confuse students and scholars alike. Cf. Rudolf Simek and Hermann Pálsson, eds., *Lexikon der Altnordischen Literatur*. 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 2007), 412–13.
- 8 See for example Valgerður Hilmarsdóttir. “Myndin af Vatnshyrnu. Draumaþættir í AM 555h 4to, AM 564c 4to og AM 564a 4to: varðveisla og efnisleg tengsl” (MA thesis, Háskóli Íslands, 2013).
- 9 “Á hvorn veginn sem þessu hefur verið farið má að öllu saman lögðu fullvíst telja að þessi

I will argue that there is reason to question this equation and that such doubts can never be fully ruled out, as we must acknowledge that *Membr. Res. No. 5* is lost and that the surviving copies offer only very limited access to the composition and contents of the medieval codex. Furthermore, the relationship between *Membr. Res. No. 5* and *Melabók* does not appear as close as Stefán suggested, since the sagas preserved in both compilations differ significantly in their redactions. It therefore cannot be concluded that it would make no difference which of the two manuscripts, if any, served as Arngrímur's source.

Crymogæa and the Emergence of Watzhyrna in Scholarship

The following analysis will demonstrate how Arngrímur employed varying levels of detail in his referencing and formatting practices to signal quotations from different kinds of sources. His overall conceptual framework drew on contemporary historiographical methods, particularly those articulated in Jean Bodin's *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* (1572, see Middel 2016, 110). As Kim P. Middel has noted, Arngrímur adopted Bodin's concepts of government and structured *Crymogæa* into three books in order to present Iceland's past and present in terms intelligible to an international learned audience (Middel 2016, 116). He quoted *Watzhyrna* three times in the first book (Arngrímur Jónsson 1609, 62, 77) – which is “a general encyclopedia on Iceland's geography, language, people, customs and government” (Middel 2016, 116) – and once in the second book that is dedicated to the history of aristocratic rule in Iceland (Arngrímur Jónsson, 113).

Figures 1–3 show how *Watzhyrna* is referenced. In general, quotations in Icelandic, single words and place names are set in Fractura to distinguish them from the main text, which is set in Antiqua. When Arngrímur quotes directly from an Icelandic source, the quotation is indented and set in a separate paragraph.

Resensbók hafi verið hluti af því handriti sem Arngrímur lærði nefndi Vatnshyrnu, en af þeim þremur sögum sem hann vitnar til með Vatnshyrnu nafni var Kjalnesinga saga ein í Resensbók.” (Whichever way this has been handled, it can be considered certain, when everything is taken into account, that this Resen manuscript was part of the manuscript that Arngrímur the Learned referred to as Vatnshyrna, but of the three sagas he refers to by the name Vatnshyrna, only Kjalnesinga saga was in Resen's book.)

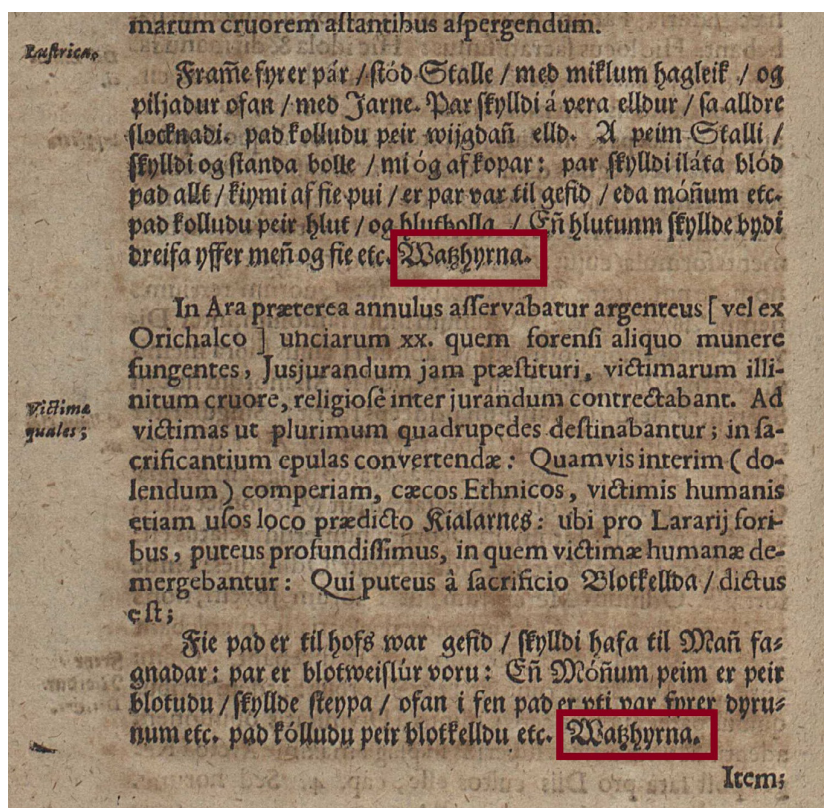


Figure 1: Watzhyrna reference in Crymogæa p. 62. *Bekur.is*. Public domain.

Watzhyrna is the first Icelandic source that is both typographically distinguished and named. Árni Magnússon identified the excerpts on page 62 as stemming from *Kjalnesinga saga*, though they may alternatively derive from a redaction of *Eyrbyggja saga* (see the letters further down), and the one on page 113 as excerpts from *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, while he could not identify the one on page 77. Guðbrandur Vigfússon came to the conclusion that this must be taken from *Þórðar saga hreðu* (see Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1860, XI). However, these considerations, which have never been questioned in scholarship, rest on the general assumption that *Watzhyrna* is the nickname of a manuscript that was named after the farm where it was kept and that it preserved several different sagas. By analysing how Arngrímur

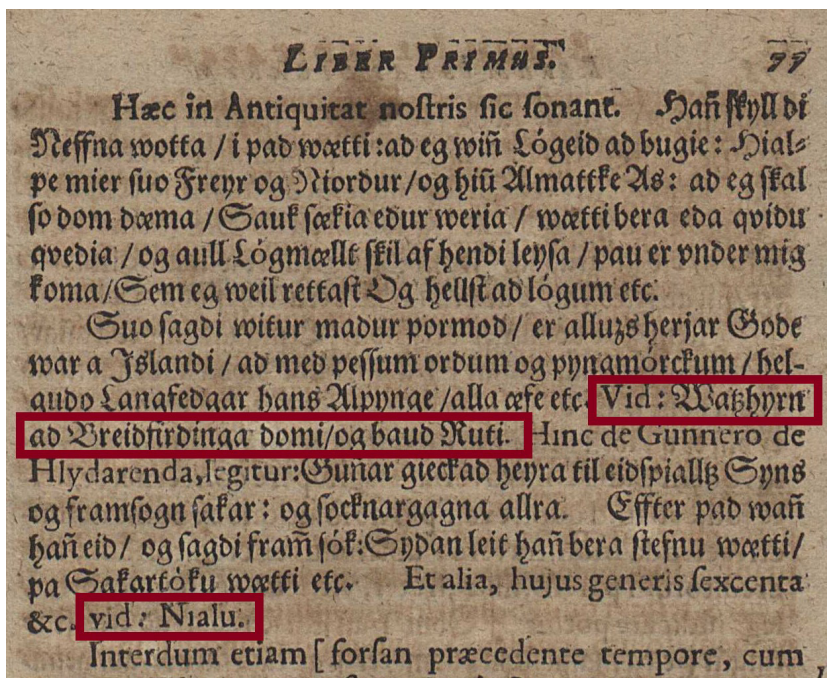


Figure 2: Wazhyrn [sic!] reference in Crymogæa p. 77. Bækur.is. Public domain.

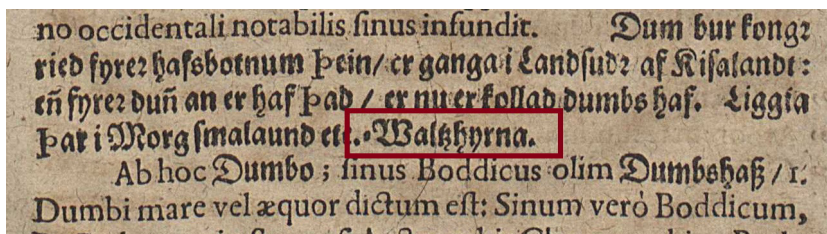


Figure 3: Watzhyrna reference in Crymogæa p. 113. Bækur.is. Public domain.

referenced other Icelandic sources, I will argue that his manner of referring to *Watzhyrna* corresponds more closely to his way of referring to other sagas than to manuscripts.

For example, when Arngrímur refers to *Jónsbók*, he identifies it as a codex and specifies both the relevant section (*Búnaðarbálkur*) and chapter (see for example Arngrímur Jónsson, 66).

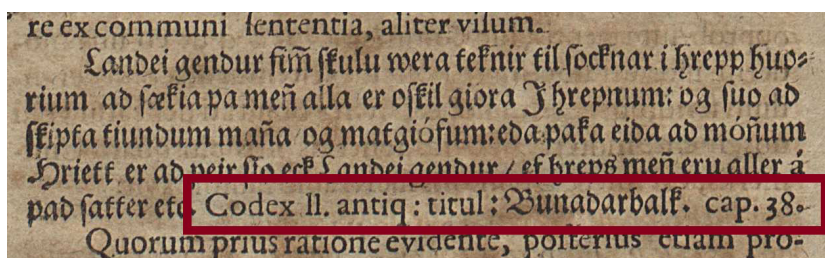


Figure 4: Crymogæa p. 66. Quotation from Jónsbók, Búnaðarbálkur, with manuscript indication. Bækur.is. Public domain.

Arngrímur makes it clear that this is a manuscript understood as a book. A similar way of citation but in a different layout is used when he refers to his methodological role model Bodin. He introduces the text with a source attribution – usually giving the author, the work, and the relevant chapter

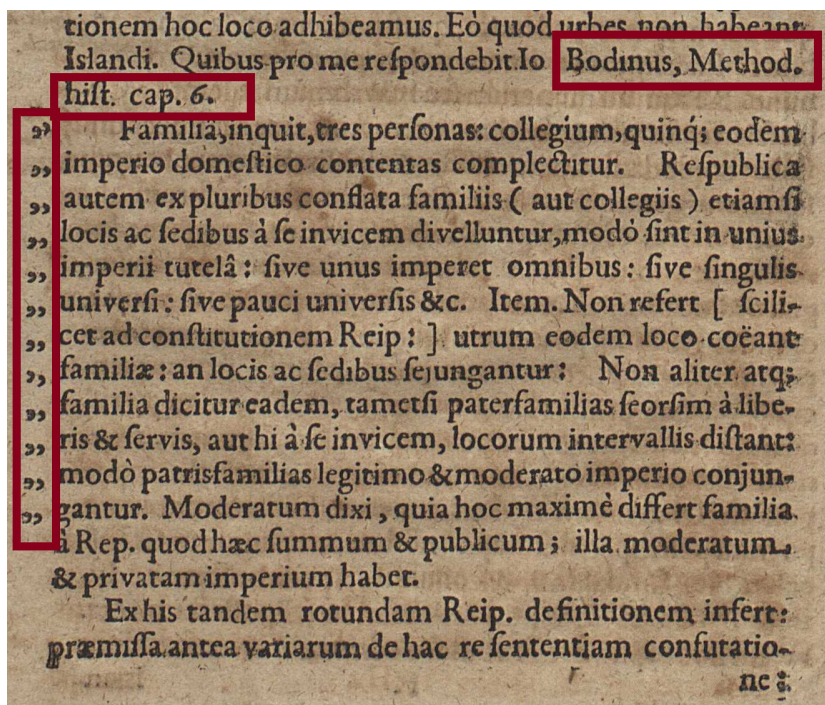


Figure 5: Crymogæa p. 58, Latin source indication. Bækur.is. Public domain.

– and marks it in the margin with quotation marks. It should be noted here, as Middel (2016, 116) has pointed out, that Arngrímur slightly misquotes Bodin, showing that he altered the texts he used at times, whether deliberately or not.¹⁰

By contrast, when Arngrímur refers to certain sagas, he distinguishes whether he is quoting directly from an Icelandic source – placing the saga’s name at the end of the quotation and marking it typographically in Fractura (see the examples of *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Laxdæla saga* quotations below; Figures 6–7) – or whether he is paraphrasing or merely reporting information drawn from a saga in Latin, in which case he does not employ typographic distinction but only gives the source (see the example from *Gísla saga Súrssonar* below; Figure 8). In both cases, however, he seems to treat the saga references as references on the level of text rather than of manuscript.

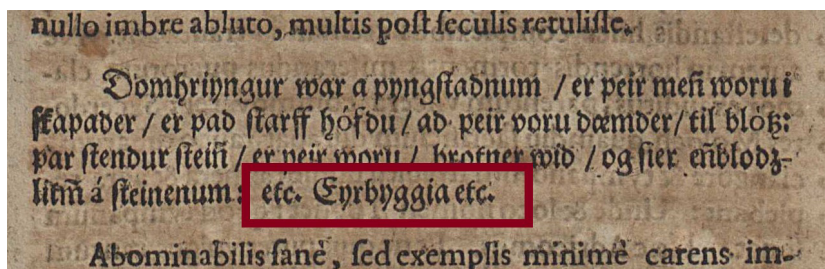


Figure 6: Crymogæa p. 63. Example 1 for a direct saga quotation.

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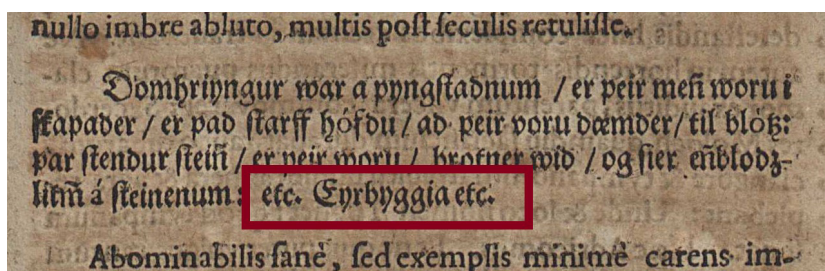


Figure 7: Crymogæa p. 102. Example 2 for a direct saga quotation.

Bekur.is. Public domain.

10 “... for Bodin had written that a familia consists of five persons and a collegium of three” (Middel 2021, 116). In the same manner, he quotes Augustine’s *De civitate Dei* (Arngrímur Jónsson, 34) and other authoritative sources.

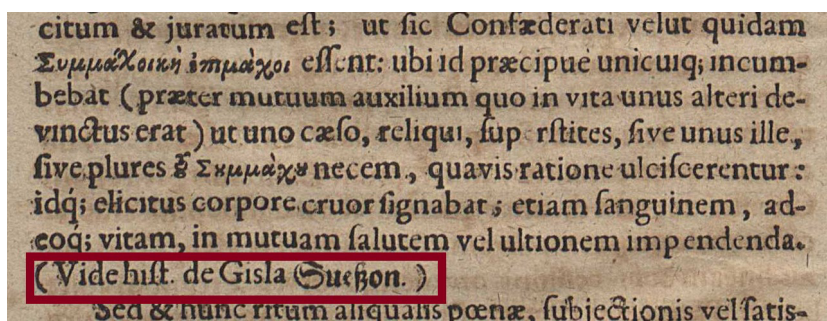


Figure 8: Crymogæa p. 102. Example for an indirect saga quotation.
Bekur.is. Public domain.

In the same manner, both directly and indirectly, he quotes *Wigslóði* (*Víglóði*) – written and abbreviated in several variations – which is a part of *Grágás* dealing with manslaughter and bodily injuries. He often provides chapter numbers (see, for example, Arngrímur Jónsson, 73: wigsl, [without chapter]; 78: wygsloda/24; 83: wijgsleda: 15; 98: Wigsl. 62). These chapter numbers indicate that he refers to a specific manuscript, as they are later additions not found in all manuscripts that existed in his time. However, he did not specify which manuscript he used, referring only to the particular section.

As has been demonstrated, Arngrímur never uses manuscript names when referring to Icelandic sources, citing only texts or parts of texts. The only instance in which he explicitly indicates a material source is when citing *Jónsbók*, which he does not name but references as a codex, specifying the section *Búnaðarbálkur*. It therefore seems unlikely that he would use a title referring to an entire manuscript, as he apparently never does so when citing sources known to us.

Based on Arngrímur's manner of citation and source attribution, it thus cannot be concluded that *Watzhyrna* refers to a manuscript. An alternative is that *Watzhyrna* refers to a specific saga or textual tradition now lost.

One scenario, though highly speculative, is that Arngrímur had access to a defective manuscript, similar to AM 564a 4to, in which textual boundaries were unclear, so he understood the fragments as one text. Another possibility is that sagas now known to us were indeed assembled in a condensed redaction and that this led him or others to assign the name

Watzhyrna, either based on the farm where the source was kept – potentially Vatnshorn í Línakradalur (see below) – or on the place where the narrative is centred. This could correspond to the way all known redactions of *Eyrbyggja saga* are composed – featuring only loosely connected episodes that all focus on the regional history of Snæfellsnes. If this were the case, parts of the redaction of *Þórðar saga hreðu* – now known as the fragmentary version and preserved in AM 564a 4to – together with textual components from *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and the temple description known from *Kjalnesinga saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga* may have been compiled into a new textual work, which was then named *Watzhyrna*.

EXCURSUS: *Vatnshyrna saga*?

In two letters to Árni Magnússon, Halldór Þorbergsson suggested in 1696 and 1699 that the source Arngrímur refers to as *Watzhyrna* corresponds to what they know as *Eyrbyggja saga*, arguing that the information Arngrímur provides appears only in that saga.

Reikdælu hef eg bædi sed og lesid þá er eg var úngur, hún var í láni hjá mínum sal: fòdur, enn hvor hana átti, man eg ei. Þess er og ad giæta ad sögurnar eru adskilianlega nefndar: so sem ein hiá oss sem nafnkend er Eirbyggja, hefur og annad nafn og er nefnd Vatnshyrna, so citerar Sra. Arngrímur hana í sinni Crýmogæa og færir þar inn dæmi mörg sem ei finnaz í sögum nema Eýrbýggju. Þad hefi eg gaumgæfilega samanleitt, má so vera um fleiri sögur. (Halldór Þorbergsson 1696, NKS 1836 4to, No. 2, 46)

And

Um Reikdælu minnist eg ad í henne væru nefndir Askill Godi og Vermundur Kögur. Þad kann vel vera sem þer skrifid ad öðru nafni se nefnd. so sem Eirbyggja, er vær svo nefnum, kallaz af S^{ra} Arngrími Vatnshyrna. (Halldór Þorbergsson 1699, NKS 1836 4to, No. 2, 47)¹¹

11 'I have both seen and read Reikdæla when I was young; it was on loan to my late father, but I do not remember who owned it. It should also be noted that the sagas are named

Stefán Karlsson dismissed Halldór's interpretation by suggesting that while it is possible Halldór recalled a manuscript known as *Vatnshyrna* that included *Eyrbyggja saga*, it is equally likely that Halldór simply mistook the reference to *Vatnshyrna* that has been attributed to *Kjalnesinga saga* – specifically the passage concerning a temple – for a passage from *Eyrbyggja saga*, since the content and wording are notably similar. As a result, Stefán concludes that Halldór's remarks hold little scholarly value (see Stefán Karlsson 2000, 338). Nevertheless, the very fact that Halldór assigns not only this passage but obviously also other passages that were attributed to *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Þórðar saga hreðu* instead to *Eyrbyggja saga* illustrates that individual narrative elements cannot always be attributed unambiguously to a single saga; rather, they seem to have circulated independently and been integrated selectively into different redactions (see Gísli Sigurðsson 2004). This is particularly evident in *Eyrbyggja saga*, whose episodic structure demonstrates how diverse narratives could be compiled to reflect a spatial interest.¹² Even if it is unlikely that Arngrímur intended to refer to another redaction of *Eyrbyggja saga* – given that he explicitly cites other passages under that saga's title (see Figure 6 above), implying he saw the sources as distinct – Halldór's identification still provides valuable insight into the seventeenth-century understanding of *Eyrbyggja saga*. Moreover, Halldór clearly perceives the citation as originating from a single saga rather than a compilation. To dismiss his attribution merely as an error would, therefore, overlook both the inherently variable and fluid nature of the transmission of *Íslendingasögur* and the sophisticated distinctions Arngrímur applied when citing his sources in *Crymogæa*. Furthermore, all extant versions of *Kjalnesinga saga* contain

differently: for example, one known to us as *Eyrbyggja* has another name and is called *Vatnshyrna*. Thus, Sr. Arngrímur cites it in his *Crymogæa* and includes there many examples that are found only in *Eyrbyggja saga*. I have carefully compared this, and it may be the case with other sagas as well' (Halldór Þorbergsson 1696, NKS 1836 4to, No. 2, 46). And 'Of Reikdæla I remember that in it are named Askell Goði and Vermundur Kögur. It can well be that it will be written to you that other names are named, just like *Eyrbyggja*, that we call so, that Sr. Arngrímur calls *Vatzhyrna*' (Halldór Þorbergsson 1699, NKS 1836 4to, No. 2, 47).

- 12 I wrote about this in my Master's thesis: "hann fór út um fjörðu ok upp á fjall. Landschaft, Wege und Wetter in der *Eyrbyggja saga*" (Masterarbeit zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades Master of Art, Nordeuropa Institut, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, 2016, unpublished).

more extensive text within the passage than that cited by Arngrímur. It is, therefore, plausible that Arngrímur was citing yet another distinct version of the temple description, one separate from the two known versions in *Kjalnesinga saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga*. This possibility is further supported by the fact that Árni Magnússon apparently did not recognise the passage now attributed to *Þórðar saga breðu*. That *Vatnshyrna* was considered a saga at a certain point in time is supported by at least two lists in which *Vatnshyrna* (*Vatnshirna saga*) appears as a saga title.

In 1777, the Swedish priest Uno von Troil, who became archbishop of Uppsala in 1786, compiled the outcome of his 1772 expedition to Iceland in his book *Bref rörande en resa til Island*. He met the clerical and intellectual elite in Iceland to add to his knowledge about the island (Lefter 2025, 45). In his fourteenth letter about Icelandic literature, he noted the interest of the Icelanders in their own history and included a list of Icelandic texts that according to von Troil were mostly written between the eleventh and fourteenth century, of which some circulate in modern print editions (von Troil 1777, 147–69).

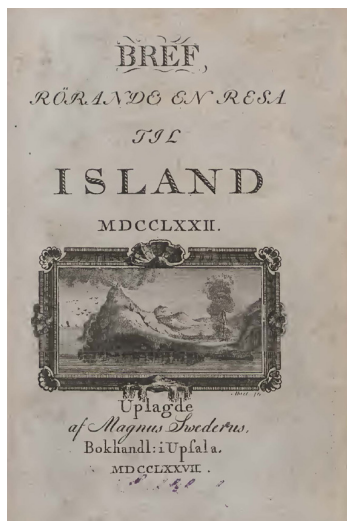


Figure 9: Titlepage of Uno von Troil, *Bref rörande en resa til Island* 1772. Bækur.is. Public domain.

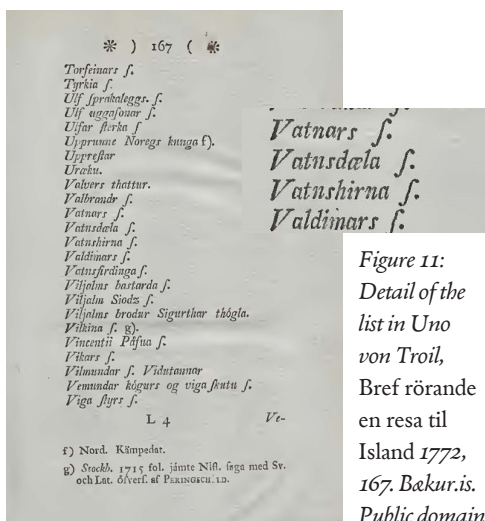


Figure 10: *Vatnshirna saga* in Uno von Troil, *Bref rörande en resa til Island* 1772, 167. Bækur.is. Public domain.

Figure 11: Detail of the list in Uno von Troil, *Bref rörande en resa til Island* 1772, 167. Bækur.is. Public domain.

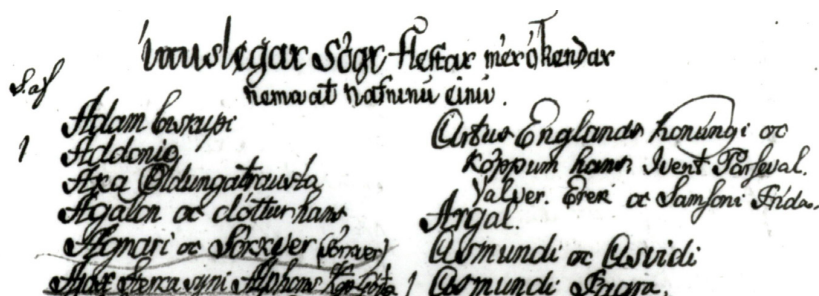


Figure 12: AM 1055 4to p. 40. Digital reproduction courtesy of Sprogsamlinger, University of Copenhagen.

Uno von Troil notes that not all sources may be of value, but that they nevertheless bear witness to the eagerness of the Icelanders to preserve the knowledge of their past (von Troil 1777, 147).¹³

Among these accounts he lists “*Vatnshirna saga*”. Lefter demonstrates that von Troil’s knowledge of Iceland was largely mediated through his Icelandic contacts, among whom Bishop Finnur Jónsson, Amtmann Ólafur Stephensen, the physician and naturalist Bjarni Pálsson, and Bishop Hannes Finnsson were particularly significant. It is therefore likely that the list of sagas included in *Brefrörande en resa til Island* was not compiled by von Troil himself but originated from this scholarly network (see Lefter 2015, 45–47). This in turn attests that the existence of a *Vatnshirna saga* was intelligible in these circles. It remains uncertain whether the entry *Vatnshirna saga* is independent of Arngrímur’s *Crymogæa*, which von Troil cites as a source (von Troil 1777, 11). In any case, the source from which the list was assembled treats *Vatnshirna* as a saga, whether or not it depends on Arngrímur.

In 1838, Einar Bjarnason (1785–1856), an active scribe in the Skagafjörður district of northern Iceland, compiled a register of Icelandic scribes and sagas (*AM 1055 4to*). Under the heading “Ýmislegar sögur, flestar mér ókendar, nema að nafninu einu” (Various sagas, most of them unknown to me except by name), he recorded sagas that he had either heard of or found in other lists, among them *Vatnshyrnu* (*AM 1055 4to*, p. 44).¹⁴

As Lukas Rösli observes, Einar Bjarnason recorded titles he had either heard of or found in other lists, without classifying them by motifs, themes, or chronology, relying instead on mediated knowledge circulating

13 I am indebted to Patrizia Huber for drawing my attention to the existence of this list.

14 I thank Lukas Rösli for drawing my attention to this list.

as a saga or a single text bearing this name a hundred years after the publication of *Crymogæa*, rather than as a manuscript containing several sagas. This suggests that the assumption that *Watzhyrna* was a manuscript is not an indisputable fact but a hypothesis that Árni Magnússon implied when he identified the quotes with sagas known to him and that was reinforced by Guðbrandur Vigfússon.¹⁵

II. In search of **Vatnshyrna*

To my knowledge, Guðbrandur Vigfússon was the first scholar to attempt to determine what Arngrímur meant by his reference to *Watzhyrna*. Guðbrandur laid out his considerations in his 1860 edition of *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*. By comparing the beginnings of the different versions of *Þórðar saga hreðu* known to him with Arngrímur's quotation, he concluded that the quote must come from this saga and that Arngrímur used AM 564a 4to, which also preserves *Bárðar saga*, as his exemplar. Since Arngrímur also refers to *Watzhyrna* when he quotes a text that Árni Magnússon attributed to *Kjalnesinga saga*, Guðbrandur inferred that the original manuscript to which AM 564a 4to belonged must also have included *Kjalnesinga saga*. Based on the catalogues available to him, he searched for a manuscript containing all three sagas. Unable to locate one that preserved them together, he concluded that the burnt Membrana Reseniana No. 5 must have been the source, as Resen's 1685 catalogue of his book collection indicates it preserved *Kjalnesinga saga*. He further identified the fragment AM 564a 4to (and one leaf of AM 445c I 4to¹⁶), which contains parts of *Bárðar saga* and *Þórðar saga hreðu* (both on folio 2), as a remnant of the burnt manuscript.

After Stefán Karlsson convincingly demonstrated in 1970 that these fragments could not have belonged to the same codex (1970 b), Jón Helgason offered a simple explanation for the absence of the two sagas from *Membr. Res. No. 5*: they had presumably been torn out before the

15 Árni Magnússon attributed Arngrímur's quotations of *Watzhyrna* to *Bárðar saga*, *Kjalnesinga saga*, and another saga he could not identify, which indicates that he understood the source as a manuscript containing several individual sagas (see Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1860, XI).

16 Some leaves of AM 564a 4to and AM 445b 4to were at the time archived under the shelf-mark Add. 20 fol., before being divided into their current form (see Stefán Karlsson 1970 b, 281).

manuscript came into the possession of Peder Hansen Resen, as has happened with other manuscripts (Jón Helgason 1985, 52). This explanation was necessary to maintain the prevailing assumption that *Watzhyrna* refers to *Membr. Res. No. 5*, which Árni called *Vatnshornsbók*.

What do we know about Membr. Res. No. 5?

In the 1680s, Árni Magnússon borrowed several manuscripts from Peder Hansen Resen. One of them was *Membr. Res. No. 5*. In two notes, one about *Eyrbyggja saga* (AM 267 8vo) and one on a copy of *Vatnsdæla saga* (AM 128 fol.), he refers to a manuscript he calls *Vatnshornsbók*.

About *Eyrbyggja saga* he writes: “Eyrbyggjur flestar á Islandi hygg eg sieu eptir Vazhornsbók er nu stendr in bibliotheca Resen” (AM 267 8vo f.26r; Figure 14).¹⁷

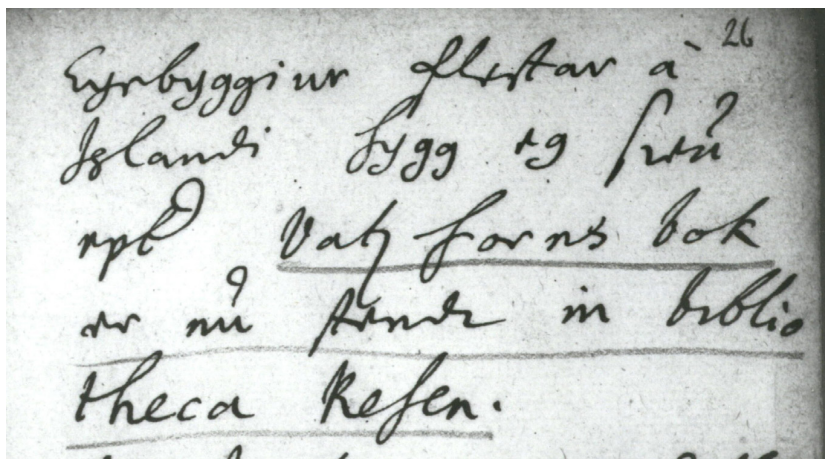


Figure 14: AM 267 8vo f.26r. Digital reproduction courtesy of Sprogsamlinger, University of Copenhagen.

About *Vatnsdæla saga* he notes: „Watnsdæla Sagann virdest mier vera eins og þær almennelegu, id est, tekenn ur Vatnshornsbokenne, sem nú á heima in Bibliotheca Reseniana Hafniæ.” (AM 128 fol.; Figure 15).¹⁸

17 “Most *Eyrbyggja saga* [manuscripts] in Iceland, I believe, are based on *Vatnshornsbók*, which is now kept in the Resen Library.”

18 “*Vatnsdæla Saga* seems to me to be like the common ones, that is, taken from *Vatnshornsbók*, which now resides in the Resen Library in Copenhagen.”

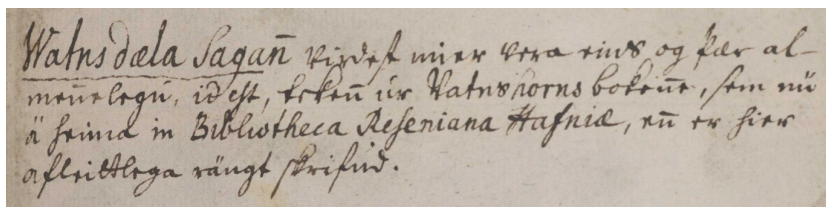


Figure 15: AM 128 fol. Flyleaf. Digital reproduction courtesy of Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, hosted at handrit.is.

Since Membr. Res. No. 5 is the only manuscript preserving *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Vatnsdala saga* in the collection from Resen, Stefán Karlsson concluded that this must be the one Árni refers to as *Vatnsbornsbók*. Stefán speculates that Árni used this name after he came across the reference in *Crymogæa* (Stefán Karlsson 1970 b, 280), although there is no evidence for this connection and it seems rather unlikely that Árni would make a note about *Crymogæa*, identifying *Kjalnesinga saga* – which is part of Membr. Res. No. 5 – and *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, which is not part of the codex, and leaving one reference unidentified without stating that he had the codex that Arngrímur used once on loan. Guðbrandur Vigfússon interpreted this as a sign that Árni was not aware of the connection that he was about to establish (Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1860, XI). It is more plausible that Árni used this nickname since he knew that Resen got the codex from Árni Hákonarson of Vatnsborn in Haukadalur (see Jón Helgason 1985, 52–53, and Valgerður Hilmarsdóttir 2013, 10). However, this codex was lost when the University Library in Copenhagen burnt to the ground in 1728, leaving only traces in catalogues and notes. The surviving single-text copies derived from it provide only limited access to the medieval composition of the original manuscript; consequently, all conclusions must be approached with particular caution in order to avoid circular reasoning.

Membr. Res. No. 5 was a vellum codex, probably produced in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, that consisted of at least seven sagas and three þættir. The following description of the manuscript is found under Nr. 5 in the catalogue *Petri Johannis Resenii Bibliotheca Regiæ Academiæ Hafniensi*:

Nr. 5. Codex Islandicus Membraneus M. SS. Contines

1. *Hiftoriam Incolarum Australis Islandiæ dictam Floamanna saga*
2. *Hiftoriam Incolarum occidentalis Islandiæ; Vulgo Laxdæla saga*
3. *Hænfathoreri Hiftoriam antiquum Jus Islandiæ valde illustrantem*
4. *Watez-Dæla saga; Hiftoriam Watnez Dalefensium Borealis Islandiæ, Leges Duelli pulchre attingentem*
5. *Eyrbyggja saga, Hiftoriam de occidentalis Islandiæ Incolis, Theologiam gentilium Arctoorum explicantem*
6. *Kjalne Singa saga, Hiftoriam de incolis Kjalnesensibus Australis Islandiæ Theologiæ gentilium itidem multum Lucis Affenterem*
7. *Krokarefi Hiftoriam ad Cognitionem Grønlandiæ (ut antiquitus fuit) valde necesariam*¹⁹

Guðbrandur based his assumption that AM 564a 4to must be a remnant of the burnt codex, and thus Arngrímur's source, on the catalogue in which the *þættir* were not listed as separate texts. This may explain why he did not perceive what Stefán Karlsson, a hundred years later, would make the central point of his argument to disentangle the manuscripts.

Árni catalogued the codex in his notes as follows (Figure 16).

19 Peder Hansen Resen, "Petri Johannis Resenii Bibliotheca Regiæ Academiæ Hafniensi Donata Cui Præfixa Est Ejusdem Resenii Vita" (Copenhagen, 1685), 369–70. (No. 5. Icelandic parchment codex in manuscript. Contains: (1) The history of the inhabitants of southern Iceland, called *Flóamanna saga* (2) The history of the inhabitants of western Iceland, commonly known as *Laxdæla saga* (3) The story of *Hænsa-Þórir*, greatly illuminating the ancient law of Iceland (4) *Vatnsdæla saga*, the history of the Vatnsdalur people of northern Iceland, beautifully addressing the laws of duelling (5) *Eyrbyggja saga*, the history of the inhabitants of western Iceland, explaining the theology of the pagan northerners (6) *Kjalnesinga saga*, the history of the inhabitants of Kjalarnes in southern Iceland, also greatly illuminating pagan theology (7) The story of *Króka-Refur*, very necessary for the understanding of Greenland (as it was in ancient times).

4. Thomas, Idgu Erkitps
 (cantuar.) fragmentu.
 fol. pag. 262.

+ 5. Floamanna Saga.
 Laxdela Saga.
 Hensu þoriss Saga.
 Vatzdela Saga.
 Eyrbyggja Saga.
 Kralnesinga Saga.
 Kroka Refs Saga.
 Stidonu odda Draumr.
 Bergbua þattr.
 2. Drauma vitranr.
 fol. p. 369-70.

Figure 16: AM 226a 8vo f.58v. Digital reproduction courtesy of Sprogsamlinger, University of Copenhagen.

Árni Magnússon added the three þættir – *Stjörnu-Odda draumr*, *Bergbúa þáttir*, and *Kumlbúa þáttir* – in his notebook.²⁰ Guðbrandur, however, appears not to have had access to this notebook, as he would otherwise likely have realised that these þættir appear twice in his reconstruction of **Vatnshyrna* – once in AM 564a 4to, which he believed to have been separated from the original codex before coming into Resen's possession as Membr. Res. No. 5, and once in Membr. Res. No. 5 itself, where the þættir were also preserved. However, Guðbrandur sets the groundwork for all the following confusion when he states:

Naar vi nu slaaer sammen Cod. Res. (Vatnshornsbók) med de førmtalte Membranlevninger, saa passer Codex i sin oprindelige Heelhed til Arngríms Citater, da Kjalnesingasaga netop findes i Cod. Resen. I sin Heelhed har Codex altsaa indeholdt: 1) Flóamannasaga, 2) Laxdælasaga, 3) Hænsaþóris saga, 4) Vatnsdælasaga, 5) Eyrbyggjasaga, 6) Kjalnesingasaga, 7) Króka-Refssaga, 8) Vigaglúmssaga, 9) Harðarsaga, 10) Bárðarsaga, 11) Þórðarsaga, 12) Bergbúaþáttir, 13) Kumlbúaþáttir, 14) Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar. Denne Membran har altsaa været en af de allerstørste islandske Membraner, den er skrevet ved Aar 1400, og er mærkværdig ogsaa derved, at den kan kaldes et Søster-Haandskrift til den berømte Flatøbog, som Slutningen af Flóamannasaga (den forreste Saga i Bogen) og Þórðar saga hreðu (den sidste i Bogen foruden de smaae þættir) viser. (Guðbrandur Vigfússon, x–xi)²¹

20 An introduction and edition of the relevant parts of the notebook can be found in Stefán Karlsson 1970 a.

21 'When we now join together Cod. Res. (Vatnshornsbók) with the aforementioned membrane remnants, then the codex in its original wholeness fits Arngrímur's quotations, since Kjalnesingasaga is precisely found in Cod. Resen. In its wholeness, the codex has therefore contained: (1) Flóamannasaga, (2) Laxdælasaga, (3) Hænsaþóris saga, (4) Vatnsdælasaga, (5) Eyrbyggjasaga, (6) Kjalnesingasaga, (7) Króka-Refssaga, (8) Vigaglúmssaga, (9) Harðar saga, (10) Bárðar saga, (11) Þórðar saga, (12) Bergbúaþáttir, (13) Kumlbúaþáttir, (14) Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar. This membrane has therefore been one of the very largest Icelandic membranes; it is written in the year 1400, and is remarkable also in that it can be called a sister manuscript to the famous Flateyjarbók, as the ending of Flóamannasaga (the foremost saga in the book) and Þórðar saga hreðu (the last in the book besides the small þættir) shows.'

Since Árni referred to a parchment manuscript that was part of Resen's library as *Vatnhornsbók* and this manuscript also included *Kjalnesinga saga*, Guðbrandur came to the momentous conclusion that

Enten maa vi nu antage at der har existeret 2 Membraner 1) af samme Navn, der 2) begge vare skrevne paa samme Mands (Jón Hakonssons) Foranstaltning 3) begge i samme Format (folio) 4, der begge indholt Kjalnesingasaga. Umuligheden af, at alt dette kunne støde sammen, er indlysende, den anden Udvei er altsaa, at vi her have to Dele af den selvsamme Codex, der i det 17de Aarh. er bleven adskilt, hvoraf Halvdelen er kommen i Resens Eie, den mindre, Slutningsdelen, derimod bleven tilbage i Island og nogle Levninger af den komne i Arni Magnússons Eie. (Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1860, X)²²

**Vatnshyrna in Scholarship*

What Guðbrandur effectively did was to construct a new codex by combining Membr. Res. No. 5, AM 564a 4to, and a single leaf from AM 445c I 4to (for further information on these manuscripts, see below). Only this brainchild can truly be called **Vatnshyrna*. It existed from 1860 to 1970, when Stefán Karlsson and John McKinnell finally revisited Guðbrandur's examinations and showed that AM 564a 4to never belonged to Membr. Res. No. 5.

However, Guðbrandur's conclusion was soon widely accepted, as Finnur Jónsson expressed in 1880:

Dr. Guðbrandur Vigfússon hefur í formálunum fyrir Bárðarsögu (Nordiske Oldskrifter XXVII Kbh. 1860) og Fornsögum (Leipzig 1860) ljóslega sýnt og sannað að þessi 8 blöð, sem nú eru til, séu leifar af skinnbók þeirri, sem Arngrímur lærði kallaði Vatnshyrnu,

22 'Either we must now assume that there have existed two parchment manuscripts: (1) of the same name, (2) both were written at the same man's (Jón Hákonarson's) instigation, (3) both in the same format (folio), (4) both contained *Kjalnesinga saga*. The impossibility that all this could coincide is obvious. The other way is thus that we here have two parts of the very same codex, which in the seventeenth century was separated, of which one half came into Resen's possession, the smaller, final part, however, remained in Iceland, and some remnants of it came into Árni Magnússon's possession.'

og að á hans dögum hafi að minnsta kosti þessar sögur verið á henni: 1. Flóamanna saga, 2. Laxdæla saga, 3. Hænsa-Þóris saga, 4. Vatnsdæla saga, 5. Eyrbyggja saga, 6. Kjalnesinga saga, 7. Króka-Refs saga, 8. Glúma, 9. Harðar saga, 10. Bárðar saga, 11. Þórðar saga hreðu, 12. Bergbúa þáttir, 13. Kumlbúa þáttir, 14. Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar. (Guðmundur Þorláksson and Finnur Jónsson 1880, XV)²³

Later research on *Crymogæa* also accepted Guðbrandur's conclusions and continued to speculate about Arngrímur's using of Guðbrandur's **Vatnsþyrna*. In 1957, Jakob Benediktsson identified **Vatnsþyrna* as one of the main sources for most of the *Íslendingasögur* used by Arngrímur. He finds arguments for the usage of all the parts bound together by Guðbrandur. He does so despite the fact that, in most cases, pure information is taken from the sagas without explicitly citing them as sources. For example, he states:

From the sections which here follow below, it will be seen that AJ used all the sagas in 1 [Membr. Res. No. 5] and Bárðar saga and Þórðar saga from 2 [AM 564a 4to]. It is reasonably certain therefore that Vatnsþyrna was AJ's source for all these texts. There is at least nothing which suggests the use of different sources, except possibly in the case of Eyrbyggja saga. (Jakob Benediktsson 1957, 92)

For the usage of *Laxdæla saga* Jakob states: "Vatnsþyrna [...] was undoubtedly his source" (Jakob Benediktsson 1957, 96). Since *Eyrbyggja saga* seems not to fit in Jakob's argumentation, he declares outright:

The readings here do not agree with those of the Vatnsþyrna-copies [...], but since they also differ from other manuscripts of Eyrbyggja, it is probable that AJ himself was, at least partly, responsible for

23 Dr. Guðbrandur Vigfússon, in the prefaces to *Bárðar saga* (Nordiske Oldskrifter XXVII, Copenhagen 1860) and *Fornsögur* (Leipzig 1860), clearly demonstrated and proved that the eight leaves now preserved are remnants of the parchment book which Arngrímur the Learned referred to as *Vatnsþyrna*, and that in his time at least the following sagas were included in it: 1. Flóamanna saga, 2. Laxdæla saga, 3. Hænsa-Þóris saga, 4. Vatnsdæla saga, 5. Eyrbyggja saga, 6. Kjalnesinga saga, 7. Króka-Refs saga, 8. Glúma, 9. Harðar saga, 10. Bárðar saga, 11. Þórðar saga hreðu, 12. Bergbúa þáttir, 13. Kumlbúa þáttir, 14. Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar.

the variants. The fact that AJ does not cite *Vatnsþyrna* in this instance might seem to suggest that he used a different text. (Jakob Benediktsson 1957, 93)

Arngrímur makes extensive use of information that later scholarship has attributed to specific sagas, such as genealogies or biographical details about historical figures. However, he often does not cite these details with reference to a particular source. For example, when Arngrímur refers to a genealogy connected to Scotland that is known from different versions of *Flóamanna saga* – preserved respectively in Membr. Res. No. 5 and *Melabók* (AM 445b 4to) – Jakob Benediktsson asserts that “*Vatnsþyrna* was certainly his source” (Jakob Benediktsson 1957, 94). I have examined all sagas preserved in Membr. Res. No. 5 and *Melabók* for which Jakob identifies *Vatnsþyrna* as Arngrímur’s definitive source, and must conclude that, in most cases, particularly for those preserved in both manuscripts, it is not possible to conclusively determine the source that Arngrímur used.

Even following Jakob’s own reasoning – namely, that Arngrímur freely adapted his sources as needed – it remains unclear how we are to decide when he copied directly and when he altered the material. Jakob insists that **Vatnsþyrna* was Arngrímur’s definite source at points where direct text comparison is not possible, whereas he hesitates to decide which manuscripts were used by Arngrímur when a direct text collation is actually possible. For example, in cases where, according to Jakob, *Flateyjarbók* was used – a manuscript that permits direct comparison – he states:

For the Kings’ sagas proper, however, AJ also used other texts, parallel to Flat. (expanded saga of Olaf Tryggvason, Óláfs saga helga, Hulda), so that it is often impossible to decide, whether his material comes from Flat. or from the comparable text; sometimes, it can be shown, that the two texts have been combined. (Jakob Benediktsson 1957, 83)

Arngrímur never referred to *Flateyjarbók* explicitly – nor to any compilation that might correspond to that manuscript under a different name – as a source, either as a manuscript or as a textual authority. While it remains possible that he had *Flateyjarbók* on loan for his project, he certainly did not make a note of it. As has been shown above, he never used manuscript nicknames to designate his sources. Even within Jakob’s reasoning, it

seems highly unlikely that Arngrímur would explicitly refer to a comparatively modest manuscript such as *Watzhyrna* by its nickname while leaving a monumental work like *Flateyjarbók* entirely unmentioned.²⁴

Stepping outside Jakob's ultimately unconvincing analysis, a close collation reveals that, in most instances, we cannot determine with certainty which manuscript Arngrímur used – or whether he introduced variations himself.

Conclusion I: What's in a Name?

The name *Vatnshyrna* refers to a work cited by Arngrímur Jónsson in his *Crymogæa* (1609), which contained information now associated with three different sagas: *Kjalnesinga saga*, *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, and *Þórðar saga hreðu*. For this reason, scholars have so far assumed that a codex called **Vatnshyrna* must have included at least these three sagas.

As shown above, Arngrímur's citations and the attribution of additional sources do not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that his references to *Watzhyrna* designate a specific manuscript. Arngrímur treats this source as a single text. The manner in which he quotes the texts he refers to as *Watzhyrna* resembles his citing of *Laxdæla saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga*. Furthermore, he never refers to manuscript names in his entire work.

While it cannot be ruled out that Arngrímur had Membr. Res. No. 5 or *Melabók* as an exemplar, this cannot be proven either. Whatever he may have cited cannot – and should not – serve as the basis for assuming the existence of a codex titled *Watzhyrna*.

We can assume that there was a manuscript that made its way from the farm Vatnshorn in Haukadalur to Copenhagen through Árni Hákonarson in 1681, where it entered the Resen collection in 1686, was catalogued by Peder Hansen Resen and Árni Magnússon, copied by Ásgeir Jónsson, and burnt in 1728. The exact age of this manuscript and whether it contained more than what survived in the Resen collection cannot be determined.

In any case, neither the lost manuscript nor its copies should be referred to as *Vatnshyrna*, as a connection to the source cited by Arngrímur cannot be excluded, but certainly cannot be proven either. It should be referred to as *Membrana Reseniana* No. 5, as this marks the first tangible point in the history of scholarship where we can trace this now-lost manu-

24 Since Jakob Benediktsson assumed that AM 564a 4to was a remnant of *Watzhyrna*, he believed he had an example of the layout of **Vatnshyrna* at hand.

script with certainty. One could argue that the name *Vatnshornsbók* was also used by Árni Magnússon and is thus a legitimate name for Membr. Res. No. 5. Given the confusion of the last 200 years concerning this manuscript, I would instead suggest withdrawing from this charged title. Consequently, the reconstructed manuscript hitherto known as *Pseudo-Vatnshyrna* should also be freed from the burden of this name.

Membr. Res. No. 5 and *Melabók* overlap in only three sagas and three *þættir*, which is not a substantial amount for a manuscript of such size. Moreover, the versions of the sagas present in both differ considerably. We have two different redactions of *Eyrbyggja saga* (M and V) and the so-called long and short versions of *Flóamanna saga* and *Vatnsdala saga*.

By reconsidering the naming conventions and research history of these manuscripts, we can create space for a more nuanced understanding – one that acknowledges the uncertainties while respecting the material and textual evidence that remains. Furthermore, recognising the possible errors in past assumptions allows for a fresh evaluation of how medieval Icelandic texts were transmitted, compiled, and interpreted over the centuries.

In what follows, I will show what new perspectives emerge when the codex reconstructed by McKinnell is viewed impartially and independently of its misclassification in the past.

III. Remaking *Melabók*

The analysis above clears the way for *Melabók* to finally be examined as an independent and carefully composed manuscript in its own right. The three fragments, hitherto named *Pseudo-Vatnshyrna*, have been studied in detail by John McKinnell. He found the fragments to belong to one manuscript when examining the binding holes of nearly all parchment fragments in the Arnarnagæan collection (McKinnell 1970). His careful analysis provides an invaluable foundation for understanding the physical structure of the fragments. His proposed sequence of the leaves, however, necessarily remained tentative, as he did not address the narratological relationships between them. This opens the way for a renewed study that combines codicological evidence with a materially informed narratological approach, allowing the manuscript to be examined as a coherent, intentionally composed compilation.

The reconstructed *Melabók* presented here consists of twenty-four remaining parchment leaves that are archived under three separate shelf-marks: AM 445b 4to, AM 564a to, and AM 445c I 4to. The original format of the parchment may have been folio, even though it is catalogued today as 4to. The leaves appear to have been trimmed and possibly rebound, although we have no information as to when, or by whom, this was done. We also know nothing about when these leaves were bound together in the first place. However, some of the sagas follow each other on one leaf or bifolio, as can be seen in Table 1, so there is no doubt about certain text connections (such as genealogy/*Landnáma*; *Flóamanna saga*/*Eyrbyggja saga*; *Bárðar saga*/*Þórðar saga*/þættir). Others leave space for debate. The texts that are preserved in the manuscript are as follows:

Reconstructing Melabók	Manuscript folio
Ættartölur (Genealogies)	AM 445b 4to f.1ra–1va16
Landnámabók Melabók	AM 445b 4to f.1, f.2
-----End of fragment -----	
Flóamanna saga	AM 445b 4to f.4–f.5rb
Eyrbyggja saga	AM 445b 4to f.5rb–f.11v
----- End of fragment -----	
Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss	AM 564 a 4to f.1–f.2r
Þórðar saga hreðu	AM 564 a 4to f.2v–f.4r
Bergbúa þáttir	AM 564 a 4to f.4r–f.4v
Kumlbúa þáttir	AM 564 a 4to f.4v
Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar	AM 564 a 4to 4v
----- End of fragment -----	
Vatnsdæla saga	AM 445b 4to f.3
----- End of fragment -----	
Gísla saga	AM 445c I 4to ff. 2r–5v
----- End of fragment -----	
Víga-Glúms saga	AM 445c I 4to f.1
Víga-Glúms saga	AM 564 a 4to ff.5r–7r
Harðar saga (most likely later addition)	AM 564 a 4to f.7r–7v

Table 1: Reconstruction of *Melabók* (AM 445b 4to, AM 564a 4to, and AM 445c I 4to).²⁵

25 This reconstruction has been examined and deemed possible on codicological grounds by Vasare Rastonis, conservator at the Árni Magnússon Institute in Reykjavík, to whom I am grateful.

I follow McKinnell's sequence with only one exception. He placed AM 445b 4to f.3 (*Vatnsdæla saga*) in between *Flóamanna saga* and *Landnáma Melabókar* but admits that it could have been somewhere else within the codex (McKinnell 1970, 331–34).

If a landscape-oriented narratological approach towards the design of the remaining fragments is taken, we see that a more or less circular order from the southwest to the northwest is established by the regions that form the main places of action of the respective saga plots.²⁶ Thus, from a compositional perspective, a position of the *Vatnsdæla saga* fragment after the þættir would be more plausible. From a codicological view both positions are possible but must remain speculative. However, an overall consideration of all texts together makes the position of *Flóamanna saga* as the first saga after the genealogies and the name-giving *Melabók* redaction of *Landnámabók* in the compilation more likely. If this sequence is considered plausible, it can help us to better understand the overall conception of the codex.

Melabók as a Genealogically and Spatially Structured Compilation

In the current state of reconstruction, the compilation starts with a previously unexplored genealogy that connects many historical figures featured in the compiled texts, culminating in a marriage between one of Snorri goði's daughters and Þorgrímr sviði (see AM 445b 4to f.1v l.16). Þorgrímr sviði is also the father of Sigríðr Þorgrímsdóttir, who, together with Ámundi Þorsteinsson Síðu-Hallssonar, is one of the two main ancestral figures at the heart of this genealogy, alongside Þorsteinn Síðu-Hallsson, whose dream is also recorded in the compilation. The people of Melar descend from this line, so this deviation in the marriage record is not trivial; it constructs a lineage linking the *Melamenn* directly to Snorri goði, maybe legitimising their political status in the west. This is crucial since directly on the verso side follows the so-called *Melabók* redaction of *Landnáma* (see Figure 17).

26 The term material narratology was coined by Lena Rohrbach and aims to incorporate the crucial aspects of material philology into a historically informed narratology; for a more detailed discussion of the approach, see Kauffeldt 2025.

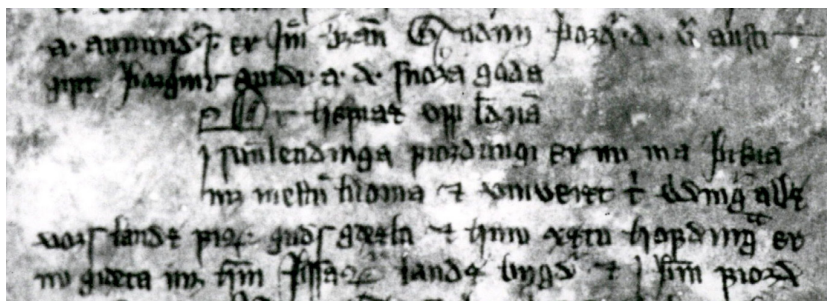


Figure 17: AM 445b 4to f.1va. Digital reproduction courtesy of Sprogssamlinger, University of Copenhagen.

The name *Melabók Landnámu* was given to this redaction by later scholars, because many of the genealogies it preserves can be traced to the people of Melar (*Melamenn*) in the thirteenth-century. It has been assumed that either Snorri Markússon (d. 1313) or his son Þorsteinn bóllóttir (d. 1353) – who was the abbot of Helgafell at the time – was responsible for the composition of this redaction (see Jakob Benediktsson 1968, LXXXIV).

Grammatically, the Icelandic term *Melabók Landnámu* implies that *Melabók* is a type or subset of *Landnáma*. This is not incorrect regarding this section, but it places emphasis on the textual affiliation to the *Landnáma* tradition rather than the compilation it belongs to. It frames the register of settlement included in *Melabók* as defined by its connection to *Landnáma*, which narrows the perspective on its actual transmission context and obscures its relationship to the other texts in the codex. Most significantly, this phrasing reflects how scholarship has treated this redaction – as a derivative witness to *Landnáma* as a whole, as seen in the *Íslenzk fornrit* edition (see Jakob Benediktsson 1968). That edition constructs a synthetic text by combining all known redactions. While this could be useful for comparison, it conceals the manuscript's original function.

I argue instead that we should refer to this section as *Landnáma Melabókar*. This genitive reversal is more than a linguistic detail; it challenges how we understand textual affiliation. It reflects the material reality of the manuscript by positioning *Landnáma* as the text and *Melabók* as its manuscript context – not the reverse. This shift underscores that the redaction deserves recognition as a distinct textual tradition within its compilation, not merely as an abbreviated or fragmentary version of a normative

Landnáma. Indeed, I would argue that there is no such thing as a “Melabók redaction” of *Landnáma* apart from the compilation of which it forms part. While this may sound radical, it simply reverses the logic of the *Íslensk fornrit* edition, which extracts and reassembles variants in a decontextualized way. Instead, I propose we understand this redaction as part of a materially and narratively unified compilation – one shaped by its function as a narrative prologue to the sagas that follow, and by its position within the codex.

This redaction begins not by situating Iceland within the Nordic realm nor with Ingólfr Arnarson’s settlement of the island, as might be expected, but with the settlement of the southern quarter. This indicates that the purpose is not to provide a comprehensive national history but rather to foreground specific regional and familial narratives. Its position immediately following the genealogy leaves no doubt that these texts were intended to belong together. The section begins with the common formulation “HER hefiaz upp landnam j Svinlendinga fjiordungi ...” (AM 445b 4to f.1va l.17)²⁷ and is marked by a faded initial. It is clear that nothing is missing but that this redaction is meant to begin with the settlement of Skógar that is marking the border of the Sunnlendingafjórðungur. Although the fragment is damaged and the full geographic extent cannot be reconstructed – the remaining fragment ends in the Westfjords – the intention is clear: to anchor the manuscript within a specific topographical world. The redaction is not merely shorter in that it does not elaborate on the respective settlements and for the most part only mentions names and places – it is selective. It is telling that no edition of *Landnáma Melabókar* includes the preceding genealogy that links the first settlers of the respective regions to the people of Melar in Borgarfjörður. This omission reflects the fact that the compositional logic of the manuscript – how the texts were deliberately structured and interconnected – has not yet been fully examined.

The southernmost location in Iceland in all the compiled texts is found in *Flóamanna saga*. But the events that are placed in Iceland in the region of Flói feature only as a narrative framework while the main plot follows one person, Þorgils örrabeinsfóstri, to Norway, the British Isles, and Greenland. Whereas the title *Flóamanna saga* suggests a regional saga focused on the people of Flói, the alternative, lesser-known title reflects

27 The *Melabók* redaction of *Landnáma* that is preserved in AM 445b 4to is transcribed and published in: Finnur Jónsson 1900, 235–42.

the saga's now more familiar character as a heroic narrative. The oldest title that has come down to us is *Sagan af Þorgils Þórðarsyni kölluðum örrabeinsfóstra*, in ÍB 45 4to from 1683.²⁸ As a heroic saga, it stands out from the collection of regional sagas, but a position at the beginning of the compilation would make sense if it were understood as an exposition of the narrative (and the genealogical) space of the entire compilation.²⁹ The opening passage in Norway mentions specific places where battles took place, not just regions (as in the exposition of other sagas). Chapter two introduces Ingólfr's family from Dalsfjörður á Fjöllum (Dalsfjord in Vestlandet north of the Sognefjord). Ingólfr's genealogy differs from that in *Sturlubók*, from which the rest of the passage is taken; instead, the genealogy resembles the *Melabók* redaction of *Landnáma*. This adjustment suggests that the fragments were not put together later but were intended as a compilation from the beginning. This may also explain why the account of Ingólfr's settlement, attested in *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók* redactions, is omitted in *Landnámu Melabókar*: the narrative is instead incorporated within *Flóamanna saga*.

The compilation then continues with *Eyrbyggja saga*, where Snorri goði plays a central role. Its narrative is spatially anchored almost entirely along the southern shore of Breiðafjörður, with the single exception of one farm on the south coast of Snæfellsnes. Most likely, *Eyrbyggja saga* was followed by *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, which complements the saga sites of *Eyrbyggja saga* and concentrates on the region under the Snæfellsjökull. *Bárðar saga* is consecutively followed by *Þórðar saga hreðu* (see AM 564a 4to f.1–4). The two sagas connect through the person of Miðfjarðar-Skeggi, who marries the daughter of Bárðr in Greenland and brings her back to the Miðfjörður region in the north of Iceland. The codex preserves the so-called *fragmented version of Þórðar saga hreðu*, which contains episodes and additional regional information as well as a genealogy that is not found in other medieval versions of the saga.³⁰ The two texts follow each other on

28 The beginning of the saga is missing in AM 445b 4to. A copy that presumably derives from Membr. Res. No. 5 (AM 517 4to) also lacks a title. Therefore, we cannot determine with certainty the saga's original name at the time it was written in the thirteenth or fourteenth century.

29 For further discussion of *Melabók* as a spatially anchored codex see Kauffeldt 2025.

30 Elisabeth I. Ward (2012) has conducted a detailed study of the different textual traditions of *Þórðar saga hreðu*.

f.2 of AM 564a 4to. *Þórðar saga* is followed by three þættir: *Bergbúa þáttir*, *Kumlbúa þáttir*, and *Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar*. We go back to the Westfjords with *Gísla saga* and on to the Húnavatns region with *Vatnsdæla saga*, followed by *Víga-Glúms saga*. The beginning of *Harðar saga* seems to be a later addition and not part of the original plan for the compilation (see Stefán Karlsson 1970 b, 302).

The sequence of the texts within the codex suggests that it was designed as a compilation – understood as a meaningful combination and variation of texts that refer to each other – from the outset. Despite the presence of three different hands in the codex, the texts were not assembled at random but were deliberately selected and arranged. There is no doubt that *Flóamanna saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga* were meant to follow each other, and all three hands are present on the respective leaves (AM 445b 4to f.4r–f.11v; see also McKinnell 1970, 327).

With the exception of *Flóamanna saga*, all these sagas respectively concentrate on Snæfellsnes, the Westfjords, Húnaþing, and Eyjafjörður in Iceland. The regions marked out by the naming of places and the routes between them do not overlap but complement each other to build a coherent space that is briefly introduced by the borders given in the *Landnáma* redaction. Since this redaction bears the name *Melabók* after the people of Melar and the compiled saga versions and interpolated genealogies (for example in *Þórðar saga*) appear to be connected to this text, it seems reasonable to expand the name to include the whole compilation.

Methodological Implications of a Material-Narratological Approach

Much work has been done on the textual variations of sources, in the sense that we analyse how a text changes in different manuscripts. This is important since in that way we can understand that there is no such thing as one solid text, but rather a lot of variants and iterations of single episodes. Much less work has been done to understand the interplay of individual texts in their respective transmission contexts. Are the variants in different manuscripts perhaps due to the respective context, that is, to the other texts found in the compilation? Do they complement each other? Are omissions in individual texts because this information can already be found elsewhere in another text? Is additional or divergent information necessary to fulfil the particular purpose of the compilation?

I think that the composition of *Melabók* is to be understood in exactly this way. The individual elements of the compilation do not stand independently; rather, they are closely interconnected. An analysis that takes the material-narratological approach seriously must consider all the texts preserved within the compilation while also limiting its reading to the portions of the sagas actually present in the surviving fragments – as the compilation's original extent remains uncertain. A crucial first step in such an analysis is to place the material transmission itself at the centre – and this is precisely why it is so important to end the misconception of (*Pseudo-*)*Vatnshyrna*.

Some variants of the sagas preserved in the manuscript discussed here have been labelled the 'long' or 'fragmented' version of a particular saga because they include material not found in other versions or omit passages present elsewhere. However, the notion of a 'long version' relies on the assumption that passages attested in other, mostly later manuscripts must also have been part of this earlier version – rather than recognising that the missing passages in the surviving fragments might simply not have been included, and that the manuscript represents an entirely distinct redaction of the same narrative, historical, or spatial complex.

By taking the whole compilation into account, further research might show that certain saga redactions are 'custom-made' for the purpose of the specific manuscript.³¹ This may also have been the case with the source Arngrímur used and called *Watzhyrna*, so that the attribution of the four quotations to individual sagas is misleading and rather points to a specific redaction of familiar legal and genealogical material.

Conclusion II: Untangling *Watzhyrna*, *Vatnshornsbók*, and *Melabók*

Stefán Karlsson demonstrated that Guðbrandur Vigfússon mistakenly identified AM 564a 4to as part of Membr. Res. No. 5, but he did not question the assumed connection to Arngrímur's *Crymogæa*. Guðbrandur's construction of **Vatnshyrna* has thus set a research confusion in motion that continues today. The confusion also remains because Stefán does not

31 An in-depth material-narratological analysis of *Melabók* is in progress as part of the author's doctoral dissertation.

doubt that Arngrímur used one of the two manuscripts as his exemplar and that the three sagas must therefore have been all together in at least one of the two manuscripts. It is thus time to move beyond this foundational assumption that either Membr. Res. No.5 or *Melabók* was the source that Arngrímur Jónsson referred to as *Watzhyrna*.

In the following discussion, I will thus evaluate Guðbrandur's arguments for this equation in detail.

He argues that there is little probability for the existence of two vellum manuscripts that

1. have the same name
2. were both commissioned by Jón Hákonarson
3. have the same format (folio)
4. both preserve *Kjalnesinga saga*.

With regard to point (1), it is not certain that the names in question refer to the same place. While Guðbrandur equates them, there is no strong evidence that Arngrímur's use of *Watzhyrna* reflects the later designation *Vatnshornsbók*, which derives from the last known location where Membr. Res. No. 5 was kept in Iceland.

Notably, in 1538, Bishop Jón Arason of Hólar sold the estate Vatnshorn in Línakradalur to a woman named Guðrún Jónsdóttir. Her name is recorded in the register of *Diplomatarium Islandicum* with the nickname *Vatnshyrna*.³² The estate belonged to the church holdings of Viðidalstunga, which was still within the domain of Jón Hákonarson's family.³³ Línakradalur is mentioned

32 *Diplomatarium Islandicum*. Íslenzkt Fornbréfasafn, Vol. 10, 1169–1542. Reykjavík, 1911–1921, 803 and 900.

33 Ibid, 380–81:

“breff vm vatzhorn. Vier Jon med gudz nad biskup a holum giorum godum monnum kunnigt med þessu voru opnu brefi ad vier haufum gefit og golldit Gudrunu Jonsdottur vegna einars Jonssonar brodur hennar jordina vatzhorn fyrir xxc er liggur j linakradal j widudalstungu kirkiu sokn med aullum þeim gognum og giædum sem greindri jordu a ad fylgia med logum. Og til meiri audsyningar og sanninda hier vm setium vier vort jnsigli fyrir þetta bref er giort var a mel j midfirdi manudaginn næstan epter natiuitatem marie virginis anno christi saluatoris m d xxx og viij ar.”

(letter on Vatnshorn. We, Jón, by the grace of God bishop at Hólar, make known to honourable men by this open letter that we have given and paid to Guðrún Jónsdóttir, on behalf of Einar Jónsson, her brother, the land Vatnshorn for 20 [hundred], which lies in Línakradalur, in the parish of Viðidalstunga, with all those rights and privileges that belong to the said land and are to follow according to law. And for greater clarity and confirmation

only in the so-called longer redaction of *Þórðar saga*, so we cannot know whether it was preserved in *Melabók* as well. However, it lies at the centre of the geographical space delineated in all the sagas concerning Þórður *hreða*. It is striking that the *Melabók* redaction of *Þórðar saga* (“fragmentary version”) was supplemented with a genealogy tracing down to Jón Hákonarson of Víðidalstunga. This connection hardly seems coincidental.

Arngrímur grew up in the north as part of the household of Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson and was the headmaster of the Latin school at Hólar when he wrote *Crymogæa*. It therefore cannot be ruled out that he obtained a manuscript from a farm in the north rather than from the Dalir region. One possible scenario is that Arngrímur was working with a damaged manuscript – similar to AM 564a 4to – in which no clear textual boundaries were discernible. He or others may have named it after the farmstead from which this manuscript originated or which was central to the narrative, possibly Vatnshorn in Línakradalur. Árni Magnússon supposed that the name *Watzhyrna* used by Arngrímur derived from the farmstead he may have borrowed it from, without specifying which Vatnshorn may have been meant (see Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1860, XI). Even if Árni’s naming of Membr. Res. No. 5 as *Vatnshornsbók* pointed to Vatnshorn in Haukadalur, this does not necessarily mean that Arngrímur had the same place in mind.

As for point (2), the connection to Jón Hákonarson is based on the genealogies included in the paper copy of *Flóamanna saga* (AM 517 a 4to) – believed to be a copy of Membr. Res. No. 5 – as well as in the fragment of *Þórðar saga* preserved in AM 564a 4to. But the association of the *Flóamanna saga* copy with Membr. Res. No. 5 has been challenged in the work of Már Jónsson.³⁴ The connection of either manuscript to Jón Hákonarson, therefore, cannot be assumed without reservation. Moreover, it is entirely possible that Jón commissioned multiple codices, as the content reconstructed for both manuscripts overlaps in only three sagas – and even these are preserved in differing redactions.

With regard to point (3), the fact that the manuscripts share the same format is not, in itself, a persuasive argument. The folio format was com-

of this, we place our seal on this letter, which was made at Melur in Miðfjörður Wednesday next after the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, in the year of Christ our Saviour 1538).

34 Even if Stefán Karlsson dismissed Már’s critique (see Stefán Karlsson 2000, 358), the dispute shows how contested the copy attribution still is.

mon for saga compilations in the late medieval period, and its occurrence here cannot be regarded as a meaningful point of identification.

Turning to point (4), Guðbrandur's claim that *Kjalnesinga saga* was part of both manuscripts is equally problematic. The fragments he refers to (AM 564a 4to and AM 445c I 4to, fol. 1) do not, in fact, preserve the saga. His assumption rests solely on the fact that Arngrímur cites a text later identified by scholars as *Kjalnesinga saga*. Since Guðbrandur's broader argument depends on identifying Arngrímur's *Watzhyrna* with Árni Magnússon's *Vatnshornsbók*, and on his erroneous combination of Membr. Res. No. 5 with AM 564a 4to and AM 445c I 4to, fol. 1, he appears to project a prior assumption onto the material – deriving his conclusion from premises that are themselves unproven. This form of circular reasoning cannot serve as a valid basis for establishing the manuscript's identity and must therefore be rejected as methodologically unsound.

For the sake of completeness, it should also be noted that Guðbrandur Vigfússon combined AM 564a 4to and Membr. Res. No. 5 because he believed this to be the only possible evidence of a manuscript that contained all three of the sagas he assumed to be cited by Arngrímur. But there was in fact another manuscript – AM 471 4to (1450–1500) – which was known to him only in its seventeenth-century rebound form.

The manuscript is a palimpsest, and the part containing the beginning of *Bárðar saga* was separated and is now preserved in AM 489 I 4to, together with other sagas. A new table of contents was created for this reorganised codex (AM 471 4to) on the page that preserved the end of *Bárðar saga*. Even if it was already rebound in Arngrímur's time, the existence of the original manuscript demonstrates that other compilations were extant that included the same three sagas Arngrímur is allegedly citing. The older manuscript (AM 471 4to + AM 489 I 4to) contained, among others, *Bárðar saga* and *Þórðar saga hreðu* (placed consecutively, as in AM 564a 4to), followed by *Króka-Refs saga* and then *Kjalnesinga saga*, which Guðbrandur Vigfússon was evidently unaware of.³⁵ This argument carries weight only within the internal logic of Guðbrandur Vigfússon's own

35 Even if a collation of the texts cited by Arngrímur Jónsson with those found in these two codices reveals significant textual differences, later studies ought to have taken this manuscript into account. More importantly, the information Arngrímur provides about Þórður in his Latin text differs considerably from the information available in all other known versions of the saga.

reconstruction and loses its relevance once the foundational assumptions behind his identification are called into question.

Embracing the Limits of Material Sources

In light of the analysis above, it appears that Arngrímur Jónsson used the term *Watzhyrna* to refer to a saga, not a manuscript. The reason why Arngrímur chose the name *Watzhyrna* remains uncertain.

A direct connection between Árni Magnússon's *Vatnshornsbók* – which he knew had come from the Vatnshorn estate in Haukadalur and had been copied for him – and *Crymogæa* cannot be sufficiently demonstrated. The continued use of the name *Vatnshyrna* is therefore misleading and should be avoided.

The manuscript fragments that John McKinnell has termed *Pseudo-Vatnshyrna* are better referred to as *Melabók*, since no secure link to Membr. Res. No. 5 (formerly *Vatnshyrna*) can be established. Although three sagas appear in both, they differ markedly in content and redaction. The recurrence and development of the genealogical material within the narrative texts suggest a carefully conceived compilation, in which the sagas were varied and arranged with deliberate thematic and genealogical coherence. *Melabók* thus represents a complex and regionally grounded compilation that connects individuals and places in the west and northwest of Iceland.

By contrast, the original scope and structure of Membr. Res. No. 5 remains unknown, and any assumptions about its lost content must therefore be avoided.³⁶

By challenging long-standing assumptions and offering a material-narratological reading of the extant fragments, I hope this study paves the way for a more grounded and nuanced understanding of medieval Icelandic manuscript culture and the principles that informed the compilation of saga codices.

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36 The relationship between the paper copies and Membr. Res. No. 5 requires further investigation.

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SUMMARY

What's in a name? Revisiting *Crymogæa*, *Vatnshyrna*, and *Pseudo-Vatnshyrna*

Keywords: *Vatnshyrna*, *Pseudo-Vatnshyrna*, *Melabók*, Arngrímur Jónsson, *Crymogæa*, saga compilations, manuscript reconstruction, Icelandic manuscript culture

The compilation known as *Vatnshyrna* has long occupied a significant yet problematic position in Old Norse-Icelandic studies. This article revisits the research history and reconstruction of *Vatnshyrna* and *Pseudo-Vatnshyrna*. These are thought to be two of the largest compilations of *Íslendingasögur* from the medieval period. Since the nineteenth century, scholars have assumed that *Vatnshyrna* was a codex referred to by Arngrímur Jónsson in his 1609 work *Crymogæa* and that it could be identified with the manuscript *Membrana Reseniana* No. 5, also known as *Vatnshornsbók*. This assumption was implemented by Guðbrandur Vigfússon in 1860 and has profoundly shaped scholarship since, despite being based on speculative and circular reasoning. Although Stefán Karlsson demonstrated that Guðbrandur was mistaken in identifying AM 564a 4to as part of Membr. Res. No. 5, he did not question the assumed connection to Arngrímur's *Crymogæa*, which contributed to further confusion in subsequent scholarship.

By examining how Arngrímur Jónsson engages with his sources in both form and content, I argue that his source *Watzhyrna* more likely refers to a single text – possibly a misunderstood or defective manuscript – rather than to a codex containing at least three distinct sagas. This interpretation challenges the long-standing search for a lost compilation and calls for a shift in approach. I advocate a material-narratological perspective that takes seriously both the textual variants

found within the surviving compilations and the nature of the sources Arngrímur himself used. I argue for retiring the name *Vatnshyrna* in favour of more materially grounded designations. To avoid confusion, the burnt codex Árni Magnússon called *Vatnshornbók* should be referred to as *Membrana Reseniana* No. 5, as this shelf-mark is the only certain point we have regarding the content of the manuscript. The fragments previously grouped under the name *Pseudo-Vatnshyrna* – namely AM 564a 4to, AM 445b 4to, and AM 445c I 4to – should instead be referred to collectively as *Melabók*. This name, already attached to one of the fragments, more accurately reflects the narrative structure of the manuscript and avoids the confusion that has plagued the name *Vatnshyrna*. The article also proposes that *Melabók* should be understood not merely as a container of saga texts but as a carefully constructed compilation with a clear regional and genealogical coherence. The genealogies presented in the opening pages are echoed and elaborated throughout the sagas, suggesting that the selection and redaction of texts was done with a deliberate structural vision. Unlike *Vatnshyrna*, whose content and composition remain unknowable, *Melabók* offers a tangible and interpretable body of texts, which can now be examined as a whole.

By challenging long-standing assumptions and offering a material-narratological reading of the extant fragments, I hope this study paves the way for more grounded and nuanced understandings of medieval Icelandic manuscript culture and the principles that informed the compilation of saga codices.

ÁGRIP

Hvað binst við nafn? *Crymogæa*, *Vatnshyrna* og *Pseudo-Vatnshyrna* enn og aftur

Efnisorð: *Vatnshyrna*, *Pseudo-Vatnshyrna*, *Melabók*, Arngrímur Jónsson, *Crymogæa*, safnrit handrita, endurgerð handrita, handritamenning

Safnritið sem þekkt er undir heitinu *Vatnshyrna* hefur lengi haft mikilvæga en flókna stöðu í rannsóknum á forníslenskum sögum. Þessi grein fer í saumana á rannsóknarsögu og endurgerð *Vatnshyrnu* og *Pseudo-Vatnshyrnu* sem taldar eru með stærstu safnritum Íslendingasagna frá miðöldum. Frá því á 19. öld hafa fræðimenn talið víst að *Vatnshyrna* hafi verið handrit sem Arngrímur Jónsson vísaði til í *Crymogæu* árið 1609 og ætti við handritið *Membrana Reseniana* No. 5, einnig þekkt sem *Vatnshornsbók*. Guðbrandur Vigfússon gekk út frá þessari forsendu árið 1860 og hún hefur mótað fræðin síðan enda þótt hún byggist á tilgátum og hring-skýringum. Stefán Karlsson sýndi að vísu fram á að Guðbrandur hefði haft rangt fyrir sér þegar hann taldi AM 564a 4to vera hluta af Membr. Res. No. 5 en Stefán efaðist ekki um tengingu Guðbrands við *Crymogæu* Arngríms. Það hefur stuðlað að áframhaldandi ruglingi í síðari rannsóknum.

Með því að skoða hvernig Arngrímur Jónsson vann úr heimildum sínum, bæði að formi og efni, færi ég rök fyrir því að tilvísun hans til *Watzhyrnu* eigi frekar við

einn texta – hugsanlega vegna misskilnings um handritsbrot – en til handrits sem hafi geymt að minnsta kosti þrjár aðskildar sögur. Þessi túlkun ögrar hinni langvarandi leit að týndu safnríti og kallar á breytingu í nálgun. Ég mæli með efnis- og frásagnarfræðilegu sjónarhorni sem tekur alvarlega bæði textabrigði í varðveittum handritum og eðli þeirra heimilda sem Arngrímur notaði. Ég legg til að nafnið *Vatnshyrna* verði lagt af í þágu heita sem byggjast á traustum efnislegum grunni. Til að forðast rugling legg ég til að brunna handritið sem Árni Magnússon kallaði *Vatnshornsbók* verði tengt við *Membrana Reseniana* No. 5 þar sem þessi tenging er eini öruggi punkturinn sem við höfum varðandi efni handritsins. Brot sem áður voru flokkuð sem hluti af *Pseudo-Vatnshyrnu* – þ.e. AM 564a 4to, AM 445b 4to og AM 445c I 4to – ætti þess í stað að nefna sameiginlega *Melabók*. Þetta heiti, sem þegar er tengt einu brotinu, endurspeglar betur frásagnarskipan handritsins og forðast þann rugling sem fylgt hefur nafninu *Vatnshyrna*.

Í greininni er jafnframt lagt til að *Melabók* verði ekki aðeins lesin og túlkuð sem ósamstætt safn sögutexta heldur sem úthugsað safnrít með skýru svæðisbundnu og ættfræðilegu samhengi. Ættartölurnar í upphafi enduróma og eru útfærðar í sögunum. Það bendir til þess að val og ritstýring textanna hafi byggst á heildstæðri sýn á samsetningu verksins. Innihald og samsetning *Vatnshyrnu* verður aldrei þekkt en með því að sameina þessi brot undir heitinu *Melabók* fæst áþreifanlegt og túlkanlegt safn texta sem nú er hægt að skoða í heild sinni.

Með því að ögra langlífum forsendum sem byggðust á tilgátum og hring-sönnunum og beita þess í stað efnis- og frásagnarfræðilegri túlkun á hin varðveittu handritsbrot vona ég að þessi rannsókn ryðji braut fyrir heimildamiðaðan og dýpri skilning á íslenskri handritamenningu miðalda og þeim grundvallarsjónarmiðum sem mótuðu samsetningu handrita fornsagnanna.

Nora Kauffeldt

University of Basel and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Nora.Kauffeldt@unibas.ch