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NORNA-GESTS ÞÁTTIR AND  
HELGA ÞÁTTIR ÞÓRISSEONAR IN  
ICELANDIC MANUSCRIPTS

*A Literary Diptych Lost in Time*

Introduction

*Norna-Gests þáttir* (NP) and *Helga þáttir Þórisseonar* (HP) are two medieval Icelandic texts embedded within *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. In these short stories, Óláfr Tryggvason – the first Norwegian king to actively attempt the Christianisation of his kingdom – is confronted with both the pagan past and present of Norway while carrying out his missionary endeavour.<sup>1</sup> The two *þáttir* appear to have a special status within this larger context: although they function as digressions from the main narrative and have no direct impact on its development, they remain inextricably tied to the narratological framework of Óláfr Tryggvason's biography. Further, when one considers the term traditionally used for labelling the two texts, *þáttir* ('episode'), it will be clear that the intrinsic nature of these two tales is more complex than one would think.

Scholarship on the *þáttir* – both as a literary form and as a literary genre – gained momentum in the twentieth century,<sup>2</sup> yet there seems to be no unanimous agreement on the matter: *þáttir* are numerous and vary in length, can be ascribed to various literary genres, and exhibit different degrees of interdependence with the sagas in which they are embedded. While it could be said that a *þáttir* is shorter than a saga and typically em-

1 For a summary of NP, see Harris (1987), Sauer (1992), Würth (1993), and Consagra (2025a); for HP, see Hermann Pálsson (1985), Power (1993), and Consagra (2024a). A chronological reconstruction of the events in the two *þáttir* is provided below.

2 For a detailed overview of the research history on *þáttir*, see Würth (1991), Harris and Rowe (2005), and Rowe (2017).

bedded within a longer narrative, exceptions to this description do exist.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, a closer look at the development and usage of the term *þáttir* in medieval Icelandic manuscripts reveals considerable variation over time.<sup>4</sup> In short, there is no overarching or widely accepted definition of these texts.

The most fruitful approach to *þættir* has been to analyse them not as isolated narratives, but in relation to the broader manuscript contexts in which they appear.<sup>5</sup> Recent scholarship has, for instance, examined Flateyjarbók in detail.<sup>6</sup> Not only is it one of the most splendid manuscripts of the Icelandic Middle Ages, but it also serves as a fascinating example of how complex the interpolation of *þættir* and other texts into sagas can be. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* occupies the first part of this magnificent codex, alongside other texts, including the above-mentioned *NP* and *HP*.

Beginning with Flateyjarbók, the purpose of this article is to assess the presence of these two *þættir*, first in Icelandic parchment manuscripts, then in younger paper manuscripts. It will be argued that these texts were originally intended to function together as a literary diptych embedded within the narratological framework of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, demonstrating how they are related by means of medieval compilation practices by being interdependent on the one hand and, on the other, by being carefully inserted together in a broader literary context. Although previous scholarship has recognised the close relationship between the two *þættir*, no study has yet thoroughly examined this connection through the lens of the manuscripts in which they appear. After elucidating the relationship between *NP* and *HP*, it will be argued that, while originally intended as interdependent texts, they became separated from one another during later stages of their manuscript transmission. Ultimately, this study aims to offer a comprehensive account of the transmission history of these two *þættir* across the centuries.<sup>7</sup>

3 To name but one example, *Þorsteins þáttir þajarmagns* is considerably longer than *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra*. The degree of a *þáttir*'s independence from the context in which it appears can also vary greatly; *Þorsteins þáttir þajarmagns* again serves as a good example, as it functions as a stand-alone text in most of the manuscripts where it is preserved.

4 Cf. Lindow (1978).

5 As advocated by Ármann Jakobsson (2013) and previously emphasised by Lindow: "[I]t may be best to regard [the *þættir*] simply as anecdotes that made sense to medieval authors in the contexts in which we find them recorded" (1993, 661).

6 See in particular Würth (1991), but see also Rowe (1998; 2003; 2005) and Kaplan (2004; 2011).

7 Writing this article would not have been possible without the support of my doctoral

## A Complicated Relationship

As testified by the oldest manuscripts examined below, *NP* and *HP* are two *þættir* embedded within a *konungasaga*, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. When printed for the first time, they appeared together in some of the earliest printed works of Old Norse literature, initially in Iceland (*Saga þess háloflega herra K. Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, edited by Jón Snorrason in 1680), and later in Sweden (*Nordiska Kämpa Dater*, edited by Erik Julius Björner in 1737). However, when examining paper manuscripts and later printed editions, *NP* and *HP* are rarely found side by side and are by and large associated with the corpus of *fornaldarsögur*,<sup>8</sup> meaning that they appear outside their original context of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. Furthermore, it will also be possible to observe that *NP* appears more frequently than *HP*, both in paper manuscripts and printed editions.<sup>9</sup> The unbalanced presence of these two *þættir* is further paralleled by how much interest scholars have shown in these texts, which has been greater for *NP*.<sup>10</sup>

The relationship between these two *þættir*, as it appears, is quite complex and has evolved over time. Overall, it could be maintained that *HP* has received comparatively limited attention and literary comment, despite Andrew Hamer's description of it as "a sophisticated piece of litera-

committee. I am especially grateful to my main supervisor, Annette Lassen, who not only read numerous drafts but also kindly provided images of several manuscripts I needed to consult. I also wish to thank Margaret Cormack for her insightful comments, and the anonymous peer reviewers for their valuable feedback and constructive suggestions.

- 8 Advancing new hypotheses concerning the literary form (*þáttir*) and genre (*fornaldarsögur* and *fornaldarþættir*) of these texts is not among the aims of the present article as it would require a separate study. The debate surrounding these two main categories, form and genre, has been long and heated in medieval Icelandic scholarship – one can only hope that this contribution may in some way offer new insights on the matter from the perspective of a case-study focused on two *þættir* commonly ascribed to *fornaldarsögur*. For further discussion of the challenges involved, see Bampi (2017) and the references in previous footnotes.
- 9 Regarding paper manuscripts, see the table at the end of this article (from *η* to *ν*): *NP* appears in fourteen manuscripts, while *HP* is found only in three (*η*, *ω*, and *σ*). For a detailed discussion of the editorial history of the *fornaldarsögur* corpus, see Lavender (2015), where it will be possible to ascertain the more pervasive presence in print of *NP* compared to *HP*.
- 10 For *NP*, see Hollander (1916); Panzer (1925); Harris (1980; 1987); Harris and Hill (1989); Sauer (1992); Würth (1993); Cipolla (1996a; 1996b); Imhoff (2007); McDonald Werronen (2011); Uspenskij (2012); Quintana (2013); Consagra (2025a). For *HP*, see Hamer (1973); Hermann Pálsson (1985); Power (1985; 1993); Rowe (2004); Kalinke (2011); Consagra (2024a; 2024b).

ture” (1973, 194). Furthermore, as Elizabeth Ashman Rowe has remarked, “*Helga þáttir* is considerably enriched when its pairing with *Norna-Gests þáttir* is taken into account” (2004, 468). She highlights how the two *þáttir* are connected through both parallels and contrasts, suggesting that *HÞ* may function as a “negative exemplum” of *NÞ*. This is particularly evident in the portrayals of the two eponymous characters, Norna-Gestr Þórðarson and Helgi Þórisson. The former is an old, generous warrior who decides of his own volition to visit Óláfr Tryggvason, whereas the latter is a greedy young trader who would rather dwell in Glasisvellir, a pagan realm far from the Christian king. At the end of their lives, they experience two specular destinies: both Norna-Gestr and Helgi die in circumstances that seem to be juxtaposed, the former in salvation and the latter in damnation.<sup>11</sup>

In light of these observations, made some thirty years apart, a *recensio* of all Icelandic manuscripts containing *NÞ* and *HÞ* is necessary in order to shed light on the relationship between the two texts and its development throughout time. The investigation in the following sections will begin with the earliest vellum manuscripts, arguing that by considering the material and literary contexts in which they are first found, the two *þáttir* were originally intended to function as a pair.<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, this relationship will be further supported by an intertextual reference connecting the texts, followed by a chronological reconstruction of the events they depict. Following the thread that connects *NÞ* and *HÞ*, this article will then turn to an examination of the paper manuscripts.

## The Oldest Parchment Manuscripts of *Norna-Gests þáttir* and *Helga þáttir Þórissonar*

If one examines the earliest attestations of *NÞ* and *HÞ*, there are four Icelandic vellum manuscripts in which both texts appear:<sup>13</sup>

- 11 For a reading of *HÞ* as a spiritual conflict between Christianity and paganism, see Consagra (2024b).
- 12 Due to space constraints, a detailed literary analysis of *NÞ* and *HÞ* cannot be provided here. This topic will be addressed in greater depth in a forthcoming article, which forms part of my doctoral dissertation.
- 13 All manuscript shelf-marks and dates referred to henceforth are those provided in the catalogue entries of the following databases: *Handrit* (handrit.is), *ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* (onp.ku.dk), *Stories for All Time: The Icelandic Fornaldarsögur* (fasnl.net), and

α) GKS 1005 fol. (also known as Flateyjarbók), preserved at Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum (the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies) in Reykjavík, Iceland, and dated to the late fourteenth century, between 1387 and 1395. *NÞ* begins on line 34, column b of folio 45v and ends on line 57, column b of folio 47r; *HÞ* begins on line 57, column b of folio 47r and ends on line 49, column b of folio 47v.

β) AM 62 fol., preserved at Den Arnemagnæanske Samling (the Arnemagnæan Collection) in Copenhagen, Denmark, and dated to the late fourteenth century, between 1370 and 1400. *NÞ* begins on line 1, column b of folio 29r and ends on line 23, column a of folio 31v; *HÞ* begins on line 24, column a of folio 31v and ends on line 13, column b of folio 32r.<sup>14</sup>

γ) AM 309 4to (also known as Bæjarbók í Flóa), preserved at Den Arnemagnæanske Samling and dated to the late fifteenth century, around 1498. It is a copy of α. *NÞ* begins on line 29, column b of folio 23v and ends on line 24, column b of folio 25r; *HÞ* begins on line 24, column b of folio 25r and ends on line 8, column b of folio 25v.

δ) AM 54 fol. is preserved at Den Arnemagnæanske Samling and is dated to the late fourteenth century. However, the section of the manuscript containing *NÞ* and *HÞ* is a significantly younger supplement, written in the early sixteenth century, around 1510. *NÞ* begins on line 22, column a of folio 74v and ends on line 48, column a of folio 76r; *HÞ* begins on line 49, column a of folio 76r and ends on line 13, column b of folio 76v.

*The Skaldic Project* (skaldic.org). I would like to thank all the institutions across Europe that have provided me with scans of the manuscripts essential for this investigation. My sincere thanks go to Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum (Reykjavík, Iceland), Den Arnemagnæanske Samling (Copenhagen, Denmark), Kungliga biblioteket (Stockholm, Sweden), Universitetsbiblioteket (Oslo, Norway), Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn (Reykjavík, Iceland), and to all the helpful individuals at these institutions who assisted me in the demanding endeavour of collecting the necessary material. It should be noted that, given the number of manuscripts examined and their geographical dispersion across Europe, it was not feasible to account for codicological features such as quire structure, as doing so would have exceeded the scope of the present study.

14. It should be mentioned here that, in contrast to α, β does not label *NÞ* and *HÞ* as þættir, as Würth also points out: “Auch im AM 62 fol. überliefert, dort aber nicht als þáttir bezeichnet” (1991, 35).

This list provides an overview of how the two *þættir* are materially engaged with each other. First, the two texts consistently appear one next to the other, and they are always embedded within the narratological framework of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. Second, *NP* always precedes *HP*, never the other way around, and no other texts are interposed between them. This suggests that the two *þættir* never originally existed as independent narratives. On the contrary, it may be argued that the compiler or editor of the longest saga about Óláfr Tryggvason created and inserted these two stories as a metaphorical diptych, intended from the outset to be two inseparable parts of a whole.<sup>15</sup>

A diptych is an object composed of two panels that together form a paired set, a concept well known in medieval religious figurative art. It is likely that a scribe, editor, compiler, or any erudite individual in fourteenth-century Iceland would have been familiar with this idea. This seems especially plausible given that the anonymous person responsible for interpolating *NP* and *HP* was engaged in an endeavour of considerable religious significance: the creation of the longest saga about the first Norwegian king who actively attempted to convert his country to Christianity and who was, also in part, responsible for Iceland's conversion. It was the Icelanders, in fact, who regarded Óláfr Tryggvason as the "Apostle of the North" and who, from as early as the twelfth century, began a long tradition of saga writing about him. This tradition ultimately culminated in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, where he was no longer portrayed merely as a historical character of Scandinavian historiography but reimagined as a saintly figure through whose influence Iceland had embraced Christianity. In light of this, supposing a skilful and creative compilation practice on the part of the individual who embedded these texts within the broader context of Óláfr Tryggvason's biography does not appear too implausible.<sup>16</sup>

15 In this case in particular, in the D redaction of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. Ólafur Halldórsson argued that  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , the oldest manuscripts containing the D redaction, stem from the same source: "Texti ÓlTr í 62 er náskyldur þeim sem varðveittur er í Flateyjarbók, en þó er hvorugt handritið skrifað eftir hinu, heldur eiga þau sameiginlegt foreldri" (1963, 85).

16 A similar parallel in the Old Norse literary world has been suggested by Hallvard Lie, who argued that "Skaldenes karakteristiske syntaks betegner et språkkunstnerisk entrelacfenomen i nærmeste slekt med samtidens ornamentale kunstform" (1982, 224). Just as skaldic poetry – with its intricate *kenningar* and syntax – mirrors the complex interlacing of wood, stone, or metal typical of Viking Age visual art, so too might the literary composition of *NP* and *HP* evoke the diptychs used in churches across Scandinavia and Iceland following their conversion to Christianity.

To further substantiate the extant relationship between the two *þættir*, there is an additional element that emerges only through a close examination of the text of *NP*. As briefly noted by Hamer (1973, 204), when one carefully reads the tale of Norna-Gestr, there is one passage that, if interpreted in the light of the previous observations, serves to corroborate the connection between the two *þættir* suggested here:

Svá segja menn, at Gestr þessi kæmi á þriðja ári ríkis Óláfs konungs til hans. Á því ári kómu ok til hans þeir menn, er Grímar hétu ok váru sendir af Guðmundi af Glasisvöllum. Þeir færðu konungi horn tvau er Guðmundr gaf honum. Þau kōlluðu þeir ok Gríma. Þeir hófðu ok fleiri erendi til konungs, sem síðar mun sagt verða.<sup>17</sup>

[People say that this Gestr came in the third year of King Óláfr's reign. In that same year, there also came to him those men who were both called Grímr (pl. *Grímar*), who had been sent by Guðmundr of Glasisvellir. They brought to the king two horns, which Guðmundr had given him; these horns were both called Grímr as well. The two envoys also had other errands for the king, which will be told later.]

17 Henceforth, references to the manuscripts (my transcription) will be reported in footnotes according to the following nomenclature: *number* (folio/page); *r/v* (side, if foliated); *a/b* (column, if present); *number* (line). When necessary, quotes will be reported in standardised Old Icelandic (my standardisation) and/or in English (my translation). *α*: <lua feigia menn at g(estr) þessi kæmi á þriðja ári ríkis ol(afs) konungf til hans | a því are komu ok til hanf þeir menn er grímar hetu ok voru sendir af guðmunde | af glafif uðllum þeir færðu konungi hornn ij er guðmundr gaf honum þau | kolluðu þeir ok gríma þeir hófðu ok flæire eyrende til konungf sem síðar mun | sagt uerða> (f. 46ra7–11). *β*: <sva fl(egia) menn at þessi geftr kemí til olafs konungf a iij ári ríkis ol(afs). a því ári er ok | fl(agt) at þeir menn kemí til konungf er grímar h(etu) ok sendir af guðmundi af glafif | vðllum. þeir færðu konungi horn ij er guðmundr gaf konungi þau koll(udu) þeir ok gríma | þeir hófðu ok fleiri eyrendi til ol(afs) konungf sem síðan mun sagt verða> (f. 29rb27–30). *γ*: <luo feigia menn at g(estr) þessi kæmi á þridia ári rikif | ol(afs) konungf til hanf a því ári kuomu ok til hanf þeir menn er grímar hetu ok uoru sendir af guðmun || dí af glæfis uollum. þeir færðu konungi horn ij er guðmundr gaf honum. þav | kōlluðu þeir ok gríma. þeir hófðu ok fleiri erindi til konungf sem síðar mun | sagt verða> (ff. 23vb56–24ra3). *δ*: <suo feigia || menn ad þessi g(estr) kiæmi til k(onungs) a þridia are ríkis hans. a því are er ok fl(agt) ad | þeir menn kiæmi til k(onungs) er grímar nefnduz sendir af godmundi a glæfis | vollum. þeir færðu k(onungi) horn tuo er go(dmundr) gaf k(onungi) þau kollodo ok þeir gríma | þeir hófðu ok fleire erindi til O(lafs) k(onungs) sem síðar mun fl(agt) verða> (f. 74va47–b4).



The incident referred to in this passage of *NP* alludes to a scene that takes place in *HP*, in which Guðmundr of Glasisvellir sends his two envoys to visit Óláfr Tryggvason. This cross-reference, which may well go unnoticed, takes on a different significance when considered in light of the manuscripts discussed above, thus representing another piece of evidence attesting the close relationship between *NP* and *HP*. Not only does this passage provide chronological coordinates that situate the stories of Norna-Gestr and Helgi Þórisson within a specific moment of King Óláfr Tryggvason's reign,<sup>18</sup> but it also inextricably links the two *þáttir* through a cross-reference that functions as a hinge, connecting the two panels of the metaphorical diptych outlined above. While convenient for the purposes of the present investigation, the internal chronology of the two *þáttir* nonetheless warrants specific consideration.

## An Entangled Series of Incredible Events

The events depicted in *NP* and *HP* may appear implausible to a modern reader and fall short of contemporary standards of historical credibility. Consequently, as previously noted, the two *þáttir* have generally been considered as belonging to the corpus of *fornaldarsögur*. However, as testified by the oldest manuscripts that preserve them, *NP* and *HP* are embedded within one of the *konungasögur* – a saga genre traditionally regarded, in contrast to legendary sagas, as historical. It is important not to assume that events that might sound incredible to modern readers were perceived in the same way by a medieval audience. In particular, within the context of the saga on the first Norwegian king who promoted Christianity – arguably closer to hagiography than to historiography – the question of truth-

18 Norna-Gestr is said to arrive at Óláfr Tryggvason's court in the third year of his reign, which Adele Cipolla (1996a, 174 n.34) interprets as 997–998. The two envoys from Glasisvellir are reported to arrive at the Norwegian court at Álfreksstaðir on the eighth day of Christmas of that same year. As will be demonstrated below, their visit must have been conceived as preceding Norna-Gestr's arrival. If the opposite were true, it would imply that Óláfr Tryggvason was present in both Álfreksstaðir and Þrándheimr on the eighth day of Christmas in the following year – an impossibility, given the considerable distance between the two locations and the fact that the king was not credited with the gift of ubiquity. Although the reference in the *þáttir* is slightly ambiguous in this respect, the chronological reconstruction provided below will clarify the sequence of events.



value may well have receded into the background.<sup>19</sup> Jón Þórðarson, the scribe who was hired to write most of Flateyjarbók, offers an explanation for the inclusion of *exempla* (*ævintýri*) in his work as part of the introduction of a *þáttir* belonging to another king's saga:

En þó at hér standi í mörg þau ævintýr, sem eigi þykkir skilvísliga við söguna koma í upphafi, ok koma þó öll í einn stað niðr, áðr lúki, því at þau hníga ok hallast öll til vegs ok virðingar hinum heilaga Ólafi, annathvært sakir jarteignagörðar eðr frægðar ok framaverka, einarðar eðr öruggleiks, sem enn mun lýsast í eftirfaranda efni ok ævintýri.<sup>20</sup>

[Although here stand many tales which may not appear relevant to the saga at the beginning, they all come to the same place before their endings, for they all kneel before the Holy Óláfr and contribute to his honour and dignity, either by means of miracles, or glory and feats, fairness or fearlessness, upon which light is going to be shed in the following material and tales.]

Although this explanation is provided in the context of Óláfr helgi's biography, there is no reason to consider it unsuitable for texts embedded within the saga of Óláfr Tryggvason as well; after all, the biographies of both Norwegian kings in Flateyjarbók were copied by Jón Þórðarson. Moreover, if *NP* and *HP* are understood as *exempla*, their function within the saga of Óláfr Tryggvason becomes even more evident from a religious perspective.<sup>21</sup>

19 Cf. O'Connor, who argues that "[N]eat boundaries were much more messy in the Middle Ages, and *historia* could cover a multitude of sins [...] In Iceland, texts like the longer versions of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* show that *historia* could embrace wonder-tales" (2009, 366). For a discussion of the relationship between legendary sagas and historical writings, see Lassen (2012), and for how *NP* might have been perceived as "historical" in the Middle Ages, cf. Sverrir Jakobsson (2005, 209–213). On the comparison between *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* and hagiography, cf. Würth: "Die politische *ævisaga* wandelt sich zur *lífs saga* eines potentiellen Heiligen" (1991, 56) and Zernack (1998).

20 The passage cited is from the introduction to *Ásbjarnar þáttur Selsbana* (Flateyjarbók II, 322).

21 Ciklamini (1997) offers a comparison of certain Old Norse texts to medieval *exempla*. I am currently preparing a separate article that specifically compares *NP* and *HP* with the broader tradition of the European *exemplum*.

Be that as it may, verifying the historical veracity of the two *þettir* is not among the aims of this article, nor is determining whether they were regarded as historically authentic by a medieval audience. What can be stated with certainty, however, is that the episode in *HP* referred to above – the visit of the two envoys from Glasisvellir to Óláfr Tryggvason – allow us to pinpoint the time of Norna-Gestr's arrival at the king's court. If textual cues are followed, it becomes possible to reconstruct the internal chronology of the two *þettir* as follows:<sup>22</sup>

996 – (*HP*) During the summer, Helgi meets Ingibjörg, the daughter of Guðmundr of Glasisvellir, in a forest near Finnmörk. They spend three days together, eating, drinking, and sharing a bed. When they part, Ingibjörg gives Helgi two chests, one filled with gold, the other with silver, on the condition that he tell no one of their origin. Helgi uses part of the treasure to embellish his ship with a dragon head and hides the remaining gold and silver aboard. Around Christmas that year, a violent storm strikes the harbour, threatening the ship. As Helgi and his brother Þorsteinn go to ensure it is secure, they hear a crack, and two men abduct Helgi. After this, the storm subsides. When Helgi's father, the *hersir* Þórir, learns of the event, he visits Óláfr Tryggvason to seek help in finding his son.

997 – (*HP*) On the eighth day of Christmas,<sup>23</sup> three men arrive at King Óláfr Tryggvason's court in Álreksstaðir: one is Helgi, the other two are both named Grímr, and claim to have been sent by Guðmundr of Glasisvellir with his greetings and an offer of friendship. They present

22 Cf. *FASN* I, 305–335 (*NP*) and *FASN* IV, 345–353 (*HP*). It should be noted that the chronology adopted here follows the modern Gregorian calendar, in which the year begins on 1 January. This choice was made to ensure clarity and avoid potential misunderstandings. However, in order to provide the reconstruction presented below, it was necessary to consult sources that could provide insight into how the calendar year was structured in medieval Iceland, as the Gregorian calendar was not introduced until the sixteenth century. See in particular Larsson (1883, 9) and Beckman and Kálund (1914–1916, 8). Moreover, an earlier passage of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* in *Flateyjarbók* offers insight into the timing of *jól* celebrations: “Hann [Hákon konungr] skipaði þat í lögum at hefja jólahald þann tíma sem kristnir menn [...] en áðr var jólahald haft miðsveitarnótt, ok váru þá haldin þriggja náttu jól”, *Flateyjarbók* I, 56.

23 This is the event from *HP* referred to in the cross-reference examined above in *NP*, and it is said to have occurred on 1 January. As demonstrated in the previous note, *jól* was celebrated at the same time by both pagans and Christians during this period, so it can be reasonably assumed that the eighth day of Christmas corresponds to 1 January. As will be shown below, this same date recurs several times in the chronological structure of the two *þettir*.

the king with two exquisitely crafted golden drinking horns, which are also both named Grímr.<sup>24</sup> King Óláfr welcomes his guests and offers them seats, while the bishop blesses the horns. Upon seeing this, the two envoys angrily stand up, pour the drinks onto the floor, and extinguish the lights in the hall. A loud crack is then heard, after which the guests from Glasisvellir, along with Helgi, vanish. When a light is kindled, three men are found lying dead on the floor of the hall, with the two golden horns placed beside them. King Óláfr remarks that he has heard of Guðmundr of Glasisvellir, noting that he is skilled in the magical arts and considered dangerous. Following the incident, the king instructs his men to keep the horns and continue drinking from them, as they no longer pose any threat.

(NP) At an unspecified point in the same year, probably prior to wintertime,<sup>25</sup> Norna-Gestr arrives late in the day at Óláfr Tryggvason's court in Þrándheimr, where he is welcomed among the *gestir*, the lower-ranking members of the king's retinue.<sup>26</sup> That night, the Christian king witnesses an elf or spirit entering the house, despite the doors being locked. The next day, Óláfr learns that Norna-Gestr is not baptised, only prime-signed, which explains how the spirit was able to enter the house

24 As this episode demonstrates, the *þáttir* plays on the names of the two emissaries and the two horns, all of which are called Grímr. Jaqueline Simpson has drawn a parallel between *HP* and *Þorsteins þáttir bæjarmagns*: "These horns [the Grímar] come and go mysteriously like the Hvítar Horns of *Þorsteins þáttir [bæjarmagns]*, and, like them, are bound up with the fate of Óláfr Tryggvason; they are in possession of Guðmundr of Glæsisvellir, and at the same time it is clear from the fact that they are both named Grímr and are carried by two men also named Grímr that they must be rationalized and reduplicated variants of Grímr the Good [...]. Both stories seem to imply some form of perilous test administered by an established king to a younger rival; if the latter survives, possession of the horn is the symbol of his victory" (1963, 510). Cf. footnote 26 for similar wordplay in *NP*.

25 This can be inferred from Norna-Gestr's request to remain at the king's court. All redactions preserved in vellum manuscripts, though varying slightly, convey the idea that Norna-Gestr asks Óláfr for permission to stay among his men. The custom whereby strangers might request hospitality at court for the duration of a winter, in exchange for entertainment, is attested in the Old Norse-Icelandic literary corpus (Boberg 1966, 214, P320.1.; 215, PP337.). *α*: <hann bidr konung at duelliazft þa læingr med hirdinn | e> (f. 45vb56–57); *β*: <hann bidr konung | at dveliaz þar vm hrid> (f. 29rb15–16); *γ*: <hann bidr konung at duelliaz þar le | ngr med hirdinne> (f. 23vb48–49); *δ*: <hann bidr konung ad hann megi du | eliazk med hird> (f. 74va37–38).

26 It is interesting to note here the interplay between the character's name, Norna-Gestr, his request to be a *gestr* (guest) at the king's court, and the position he is granted among the *gestir* – that is, not among the *hird*, the king's retinue. Cf. footnote 24 regarding wordplay in *HP*.

during the night. When Norna-Gestr asks to remain at the king's court, his request is granted on the condition that he undergoes baptism.

998 – (*NÞ*) Shortly before Christmas, Úlfr inn rauði returns to Óláfr Tryggvason's court bearing many gifts. He had spent the summer running errands for the king and defended Vík against Danish attacks in the autumn.

(*HÞ*) On the eighth day of Christmas,<sup>27</sup> while King Óláfr Tryggvason is attending mass, three men appear at the church's entrance.<sup>28</sup> Two of them leave immediately, but the third, recognised as Helgi, remains. It soon becomes apparent that he is blind. King Óláfr and Helgi Þórisson engage in a conversation in which Helgi recounts the events of the preceding years, including his encounter with Ingibjörg in the woods and his subsequent abduction during the storm. Óláfr Tryggvason then asks about Guðmundr's realm, and Helgi replies that he has never seen a better place. The king wonders why Helgi has returned twice from Glasisvellir if it was so delightful; Helgi explains that it was the power of the king's prayers that brought him back. Helgi reveals that, during his visit to the court the previous year, the two envoys had been sent by Guðmundr of Glasisvellir to deceive Óláfr Tryggvason. However, their plan failed because the king recognised the danger and acted wisely by having the horns blessed. Helgi further explains that he was sent away from Glasisvellir this year because Ingibjörg was no longer able to sleep with him without suffering when she touched his naked body, and because Guðmundr could no longer withstand King Óláfr Tryggvason's prayers. Furthermore, Ingibjörg had clawed out Helgi's eyes, claiming that the women of Norway would not have enjoyed him for long. After this conversation, Þórir reunites with his son and thanks the king for rescuing him from "the hands of the trolls". Helgi then remains at the king's court for another year.

(*NÞ*) On the same day, on the eighth day of Christmas,<sup>29</sup> while Óláfr Tryggvason is at his court in Þrándheimr, Úlfr inn rauði presents him

27 This should correspond to 1 January, following the chronological framework outlined above.

28 Although the *þáttr* does not specify the location of this event, it must have occurred in Þrándheimr, unlike the previous year's incident, which explicitly took place in Álreksstaðir. This is supported by the subsequent episode reported in *NÞ* on the same day (see the following footnote).

29 This scene described in *NÞ* takes place on 1 January in Þrándheimr, the same day and location as the episode previously recounted in *HÞ* (see preceding two footnotes).

with the golden ring *Hnituðr* as a gift. This splendid artefact, said to have once belonged to King Hálfir,<sup>30</sup> is passed around among the men attending the celebration. While everyone is impressed by its beauty, Norna-Gestr does not seem to find anything extraordinary in it, claiming to have seen finer gold. The other *gestir*, appalled by this reaction, challenge him to a wager to determine whether he has truly seen gold more magnificent than that of *Hnituðr*. After this, Norna-Gestr performs *Gunnarsslagr* and *Guðrúnarbrögð in fornu* on his harp. The following day, Norna-Gestr presents a golden piece from Sigurðr Fáfnisbani's saddle ring, which proves to be of superior quality to the ring *Hnituðr*. King Óláfr Tryggvason, acting as judge, declares that Norna-Gestr has won the wager. Intrigued by this turn of events, the king asks to hear more of his guest's story. Norna-Gestr begins to recount his adventures as a retainer of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, reciting stanzas from *Reginsmál* as part of his narration.<sup>31</sup> During his performance, he also explains how he came into possession of the precious item that secured his victory in the wager. On the following day, Norna-Gestr continues with the tale of the aftermath of Sigurðr's death, quoting verses from *Helreið Brynhildar* as well.<sup>32</sup> After this, King Óláfr Tryggvason asks his guest about the sons of Ragnarr loðbrók, whom Norna-Gestr claims to have met during his lifetime. His account corresponds to a scene also found in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*.<sup>33</sup> Finally, the guest explains the origin of

30 This is Hálfir Hjörleifsson, the eponymous hero of *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, a *foraldarsaga* (FASN II, 93–134). In this context, the reference appears to serve as a deliberate contrast to another renowned legendary saga, *Völsunga saga* (FASN I, 107–218). Norna-Gestr not only recounts this story but also presents an even more splendid and prestigious artefactual witness, superior to the ring *Hnituðr*, said to have belonged to none other than Sigurðr Fáfnisbani himself, the main character of *Völsunga saga*. Later in *Flateyjarbók*, another *þáttir* embedded within *Óláfs saga helga*, *Tóka þáttir Tókasonar* (FASN II, 135–141), will also mention King Hálfir, see Consagra (2025b).

31 Norna-Gestr recites fourteen stanzas from *Reginsmál*. The first six, corresponding to stanzas XIII–XVIII, are composed in *fornyrðislag*, while the remaining eight, corresponding to stanzas XIX–XXVI, are in *ljóðaháttir*.

32 *Helreið Brynhildar* is recited by Norna-Gestr almost in its entirety – that is, thirteen stanzas, with the exception of *helmingr* 7. All of the stanzas are composed in *fornyrðislag*.

33 The events reported here by Norna-Gestr broadly correspond – with some variation – to chapters XIV and XV of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (FASN I, 219–285), in which Ragnarr's sons set out to raid Rome but encounter an old man along the way. When they ask him how long the road to Rome is, he shows them his worn shoes, prompting them to realise that the journey is too long and abandon their plan. In *NP*, Óláfr Tryggvason remarks that this old man must have been a spirit sent by God to protect one of Christianity's most sacred places (FASN I, 332).

his name: at his birth, a Norn cursed him so that his lifespan would last no longer than the burning of a candle placed beside his cradle. To protect him, his mother extinguished the flame and hid the candle. Because it remained unlit, Norna-Gestr lived for over three hundred years, allowing him to encounter figures such as Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, the sons of Ragnarr loðbrók, and other illustrious kings. Upon completing his tale, Óláfr Tryggvason offers to have him baptised, and Norna-Gestr accepts. Later, at an unspecified point in the year, the candle is rekindled and he dies, thus fulfilling the prophecy uttered by the Norn when he was a child.

999 – (*HP*) Helgi Þórisson dies at King Óláfr Tryggvason's court, thus fulfilling Ingibjörg's vengeful prophecy. The *þáttir* concludes by noting that Óláfr Tryggvason took with him the two horns gifted by Guðmundr when he set out to sea for the last time. These mysterious objects vanished along with the king when he disappeared from the ship *Ormrinn langi*.<sup>34</sup>

As can be surmised from the sequence of events outlined above, the chronology of *NP* and *HP* can hardly be considered haphazard. The scenes in the two *þáttir* occur in close temporal succession, culminating in the deaths of Norna-Gestr and Helgi, a reference to the battle of Svǫldr, and Óláfr Tryggvason's disappearance from the ship *Ormrinn langi*. While, as noted above, the events in these *þáttir* may be difficult to regard as historically credible by modern standards, this paper does not seek to assess their historicity. Rather, the primary concern is how these two *þáttir*, influenced by legendary material and likely intended as *exempla*, are related to one another and ultimately integrated within *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*.

To summarise, three main elements – supported by observations from previous scholars – strongly indicate a close interrelation between *NP* and *HP*. First, the oldest parchment manuscripts containing the two *þáttir* ( $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$ , and  $\delta$ ) consistently present them together, embedded within *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, in the same sequence and without any other text interposed between them. Second, all these manuscripts feature the same cross-reference, thereby inextricably connecting the two stories through an allusion from the former to the latter. Third, the intertwined chronology of events in both tales further reinforces their close connection.

34 According to the biography of the Norwegian king, this event is said to have taken place in September of the same year, during the battle of Svǫldr. See footnote 24 for a commentary on the disappearance of the horns.

Consequently, it is reasonable to hypothesise, as argued above, that the two *þættir* were originally conceived as two metaphorical panels forming a unified literary diptych. While the relationship between the two texts was clear during the first phase of their textual transmission (here represented by  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$ , and  $\delta$ ), this connection appears to have been lost in younger manuscripts, as will be demonstrated in the following sections.

## Two Parchment Manuscripts of *Norna-Gests þáttir* without *Helga þáttir Þórissonar*

In addition to the four codices mentioned above, there are two other parchment manuscripts that warrant separate examination:

ε) GKS 2845 4to, preserved at Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, dates from the middle of the fifteenth century, between 1440 and 1460. *NP* begins on line 5 of folio 13r and ends on line 18 of folio 19v; it is immediately followed by *Orms þáttir Stórolfssonar*, but *HP* is not included in this manuscript.

ζ) AM 567 V 4to, preserved at Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, dates from the latter half of the fifteenth century, between 1450 and 1500. This fragmentary codex preserves only the second half of *NP*, which begins on line 1 of folio 1r and ends on line 22 of folio 6r, and the beginning of *Orms þáttir Stórolfssonar*. Consequently, *HP* is absent where it would normally be expected.

These are the only other parchment manuscripts containing one of the two *þættir* examined in this article: both preserve *NP* without including *HP*. In each case, *Orms þáttir Stórolfssonar* immediately follows the tale of *Norna-Gestr*.<sup>35</sup>

The reason for excluding  $\epsilon$  and  $\zeta$  from the previous group of manuscripts is that neither contains *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* nor any other version of Óláfr Tryggvason's biography. The former is a composite

<sup>35</sup> The fact that *Orms þáttir Stórolfssonar* follows *NP* in both manuscripts, which date relatively close to each other in the fifteenth century, is tantalising; however, further exploration of this point lies beyond the scope of the present article.



collection of various texts (*NP* is preceded, for example, by *Bandamanna saga*, an *Íslendingasaga*),<sup>36</sup> while the latter is too fragmentary to determine whether it ever included any version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*.<sup>37</sup> The nature of these manuscripts notwithstanding, the central question here is whether the previously discussed cross-reference – the one pointing to the events of *HP* – appears in these two versions of *NP*. On folio 13v,  $\epsilon$  reports the same passage as found in the other vellum manuscripts examined previously.<sup>38</sup> However, in this case, the cross-reference does not lead to any other text, as *HP* is not included in the manuscript; the statement “síðar mun sagt verða” (‘will be told later’) thus hangs unresolved – like a diptych left with one panel and its hinges, but missing the second part. In the case of  $\zeta$ , a lacuna covers the first part of *NP*, making it impossible to ascertain whether the cross-reference to *HP* had ever been included.

It may therefore be inferred that  $\epsilon$  and  $\zeta$  mark the beginning of a second phase in the transmission of *NP*, in which the *þáttir* has gained the status of an independent text. This is evidenced by two main points: first, *NP* is no longer embedded within *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*; second, *HP* is not transmitted alongside it. Both features stand in clear contrast to what was observed in the first phase of transmission, as represented by  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$ , and  $\delta$ .

That *þáttir* began to circulate as independent texts as early as the fifteenth century has already been noted in scholarship, and it is therefore not unusual in itself.<sup>39</sup> However, if *NP* and *HP* were originally intended

36 Cf. Jón Helgason (1955).

37 It is therefore impossible, at present, to put forward any definitive suggestion in this regard; however, it seems highly unlikely that  $\zeta$  originally contained any version of Óláfr Tryggvason’s life. *Orms þáttir Stórolfssonar*, like *NP* and *HP*, is embedded in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, but it appears later in the narrative (in *Flateyjarbók*, for instance, *NP* and *HP* are found on ff. 45v and 47v, whereas *Orms þáttir Stórolfssonar* appears on ff. 69v–71r).

38  $\epsilon$ : <suo feigia menn at a(estr) þessi kæmi a þridia ari rikif ol(afs) | konungf a þuí ari komo ok til hans tueir menn er grimar hetu ok uoru fendir | af godmundi af glafif uollum þeir færdu konungi horn tau [sic!] er god | mundr gaf honum þau kailludu þeir ok gríma þeir hofdu ok fleiri er | inndi til konungf fem síþar mun fagt uerda> (f. 13v11–15).

39 Cf. Lönnroth, who maintains that “[T]he word *þáttir* was never used in the sense of an independent short story until the 15th century” (1975, 423). Würth quotes Lönnroth and concurs, arguing that “Eine selbständige Überlieferung der *þáttir* [der *Flateyjarbók*] setzt erst im 15. Jahrhundert ein” (1991, 37). More recently, Ármann Jakobsson has similarly stated that “[I]n the fifteenth century [...] signs of a new independence of the *þáttir* started to appear” (2013, 283).

to function as a pair, it is significant to emphasise that gaining the status of independent text entails the loss of the larger literary framework provided by *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. To return to the metaphor of the diptych, the two panels begin to appear as stand-alone, separate units – though some vestige of their connection still remains. The following sections will examine paper manuscripts in order to clarify how the relationship between *NP* and *HP* evolved during this second phase of transmission, when the two began to appear separated from each other and from their original context. This will be done primarily by tracing the intertextual reference from *NP* to *HP* discussed above.

## Paper Manuscripts from the Seventeenth Century

No sixteenth-century manuscripts containing *NP* or *HP* have survived – if they ever existed at all. To find further witnesses beyond the parchment manuscripts examined so far, one must turn to seventeenth-century paper manuscripts:

η) AM 313 4to, preserved at Den Arnamagnæanske Samling and dated around 1657, is the only surviving seventeenth-century paper manuscript containing both *NP* (between pages 170 and 199) and *HP* (between pages 301 and 310). Although both *þáttir* are included, they do not appear consecutively; rather, around one hundred pages separate them.<sup>40</sup>

θ) AM 202 i fol., preserved at Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, contains two versions of *NP* ( $\theta^1$  and  $\theta^2$ ), originally from different manuscripts but both dated to the seventeenth century. In  $\theta^1$ , *NP* begins on folio 1r and ends on folio 8v; in  $\theta^2$ , it begins on folio 9r and ends on folio 12v.

ι) AM 65 fol. is preserved at Den Arnamagnæanske Samling and is dated between 1625 and 1672. *NP* begins on folio 348r and ends on folio 363v.

κ) Holm Papp. 5 4to is preserved at the Kungliga biblioteket (the Swedish Royal Library) in Stockholm, Sweden, and is dated between 1630 and

40 *Indriða þáttir ilbreiðs* (pp. 201–236), *Þorsteins þáttir uxafóts* (pp. 239–276), and *Sörla þáttir* (pp. 277–299) are the texts inserted between *NP* and *HP* in this codex.

1670; it is a copy of  $\epsilon$ .  $NP$  is preserved between line 15 of folio 122r and line 14 of folio 126v.

λ) Holm Papp. 22 fol. (known as Húsafellsbók) is preserved at the Kungliga biblioteket and is dated shortly before the middle of the seventeenth century.  $NP$  begins on line 21 of folio 72r and ends on line 10 of 73v.<sup>41</sup>

μ) Holm Papp. 15 4to, preserved at the Kungliga biblioteket and dated between 1650 and 1700, is, like  $\kappa$ , a copy of  $\epsilon$ .  $NP$  begins on folio 9r and ends on folio 14r.

ν) AM 348 4to is preserved at Den Arnamagnæanske Samling and is dated between the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, between 1688 and 1730.  $NP$  is preserved between folia 1r and 25v.

As can be observed, of these seven manuscripts, only  $\eta$  contains both  $NP$  and  $HP$ . Upon close examination, it is evident that the previously discussed cross-reference from  $NP$  to  $HP$  is included in  $\eta$ , although this comes with two caveats. First, the reference is shorter and less detailed than the other versions – whether preserved in older, contemporary, or younger manuscripts. Second, the sentence explicitly refers to  $HP$  by mentioning its title (*Saga Helga Þórissonar*), a feature not paralleled in any of the other manuscripts examined in this study.<sup>42</sup>

Among the various codices discussed here,  $\lambda$  stands out as an exception, as it preserves a significantly abridged version of  $NP$  – more akin to a summary than a full rendering. The cross-reference to  $HP$  is virtually absent; the only narrative detail provided concerns the timing of Norna-Gestr's visit, with no mention at all of the events recounted in  $HP$ .<sup>43</sup>

41 It should be noted here that none of the databases consulted for this investigation list this manuscript among those containing  $NP$ ; its existence came to my attention purely by chance.

42  $\eta$ : <So feigja menn að geftur þefse | hefde komet á þridia áre rykis olafs kongs | á þui fama áre komu Grymar þeir er fende | Godmundur kongur a Glæfers uollum fém | seiger J fogu Helga þorer fónar> (p. 172, 17–21). It is worth noting that the reference mentions a “saga” of Helgi Þórisson, whereas the text is elsewhere more commonly referred to as a *þáttur*. A look at the titles of both *þáttir* in  $\eta$  reveals that they are designated as “sögu þáttur”: <Saugu þáttur Af norna Giefte> (p. 170) and <Hier Biriast sögu þáttur af þorfeine og Helga Norskum> (p. 301).

43  $\lambda$ : <Gestur kom til k(onungs) a | þridia áre Rijki hans> (f. 72r32–33).

A particularly interesting case is  $\theta$ , which uniquely contains two versions of *NP* originating from different sources. The first version,  $\theta^1$ , includes the phrase “síðar mun sagt verða” (‘will be told later’),<sup>44</sup> thereby referring to a subsequent text. In contrast, the second version,  $\theta^2$ , does not allude to any forthcoming account, although its reference remains similar to the others in mentioning events from *HP*.<sup>45</sup> Instead,  $\theta^2$  provides chronological information that aligns well with the reconstruction of events presented above. Unfortunately, it is impossible to ascertain whether either  $\theta^1$  or  $\theta^2$  was originally preserved alongside *HP* in their respective manuscripts.

Of the remaining manuscripts,  $\iota$ ,  $\kappa$ ,  $\mu$ , and  $\nu$  all include the cross-reference to the events of *HP* as described above, without any significant variation. With regard to  $\kappa$  and  $\mu$ , this outcome is to be expected, given that they are copies of  $\epsilon$ . Although the sources for  $\iota$  and  $\nu$  are unknown, their cross-references are almost identical to those found in  $\kappa$  and  $\mu$ .<sup>46</sup>

Finally, it is necessary to mention another seventeenth-century paper manuscript:

- 44  $\theta^1$ : <Suo segia menn ad Gieftur | þesse kiæme á þridia Are rykif Olaffs k(onungs) Tryggva sonar | A því Are komu og til hans tveir menn er Grymar hietu | og voru fender aff Godmunde a Glæfesuöllum þeir | færdu konge tvo horn er Godm(undur) gaff honum þau koll | udu þeir og Gryma þeir höfðu og fleyre erende til kongs | sem fydar mun sagt verda> (f. 1v10–16).
- 45  $\theta^2$ : <fo segia menn ad G(estur) þessi kiami á 3<sup>ia</sup> rijkis ári Ólafs k(onungs) á því fama ari komu 2 | menn til hans er Grimar hetu og voru fendir af Godmundi á Glæfisvöllum, þeir færdu k(onungi) horn 2 er Godmundur gaf | honum þeir kolludu þau og Grima. þeir höfðu og fleire erindi til k(onungs). Anno 998 var artal 3<sup>ia</sup> árs rijkis | Ol(afs) k(onungs)> (f. 9r22–25).
- 46  $\iota$ : <Suo feigia menn ath Gefstur þesse kiæme | a þridia Are rikis Olafs konungs. A því | are komu oc til hans tveir menn er Grimar | hietu. Oc voru fennðir af Godmunde a | Glæfes völlum: þeir færðu konge tvo | horn er Godmundr gaf honum: þau kaull | udu þeir oc Grima. þeir haufðu oc fleire | eyrende til kóngs sem sþar mun sagt | verda> (f. 349v4–12).  $\kappa$ : <So Seigia menn ad gieftur | þefsi kiæmi a 3<sup>a</sup> ári rijkis olaff kongs á þui sama ári komu og til | hans ij menn er Grijmar hietu. og voru sendir aff Godmundi af Glæsis völlum þeir | færdu kongi horn ij er Godm(undur) gaff honum þau kölludu þeir og Grijma þeir hoff | du og fleiri erende til kongs sem sijdar mun sagt verda> (f. 122v8–12).  $\mu$ : <So segia menn ad gieftur [kom] a þridia ari riís olafs konungf á | þui ari komu og til hans 2 menn er Grijmar hietu og varu fendir af godmundi af | Glæfis wollum þeir færdu konungi horn tvo er Godmundur gaf honum þau | Kolludu þeir og Grijma þeir hofðu og fleiri erindi til konungs sem sijdar mun sagt verda> (f. 9v3–6).  $\nu$ : <fva segia | menn at G(estr) þessi kæmi a þridia | ari rikis Ol(afs) konungs til hans, a því | ari komu ok til hans þeir menn er || grimar hetu, ok voru fendir af Guðm | undi a Glafis völlum þeir færðu konungi | horn ij er Guðm(undur) gaf honum þau kol | luðu þeir grima. þeir hofðu ok fleiri | eyrendi til konungs sem sþar mun | sagt verða> (ff. 2v15–3r6).

ω) Holm Papp. 9 4to, preserved at the Kungliga biblioteket, is the only codex in which *HÞ* is attested without *NÞ*, representing the sole witness of *HÞ* as an independent *þáttir*. However, since the manuscripts surveyed in this study are analysed primarily through the cross-reference from *NÞ* to *HÞ* – which is unidirectional – it is not necessary to discuss this codex further.

## Paper Manuscripts from the Eighteenth Century Onwards

There are seven additional, younger manuscripts containing *NÞ* and *HÞ*, dated from the early eighteenth century through to the early twentieth century:

ξ) NB, Ms. fol. 246 II (also catalogued as UB 246 fol.) is preserved at Universitetsbiblioteket (University Library) in Oslo, Norway, and dates from the eighteenth century. It is a copy of  $\theta^1$ , with *NÞ* beginning on page 1 and ending on page 34.

ο) NKS 1223 fol., preserved at Det Kongelige Bibliotek (the Danish Royal Library) in Copenhagen, Denmark, is dated to the eighteenth century. *NÞ* begins on page 1 and ends on page 18; it is followed by a Danish translation of the text.

π) NKS 1150 fol., preserved at Det Kongelige Bibliotek and dated between 1750 and 1799, is a copy of  $\iota$ . *NÞ* begins on page 1 and ends on page 45.

ρ) NKS 1766 4to, preserved at Det Kongelige Bibliotek, is dated between 1750 and 1799. *NÞ* begins on page 77 and ends on page 146.

σ) Lbs 2145 8vo, preserved at Landsbókasafn Íslands (the National Library of Iceland) in Reykjavík, dates from circa 1801. It is the only known nineteenth-century paper manuscript to contain both *NÞ* (pages 295–324) and *HÞ* (pages 325–330), with the two texts preserved consecutively.

τ) Lbs 1496 4to, preserved at Landsbókasafn Íslands, dates from circa 1883. *NÞ* begins on page 5 and ends on page 33.

*v*) SÁM 4, preserved at Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, is dated between 1890 and 1910. *NP* begins on page 521 and ends on page 548.

Examining the cross-reference to *HP* in these manuscripts, one observes that  $\xi$ ,  $o$ ,  $\pi$ ,  $\rho$ ,  $\sigma$ , and  $v$  are nearly identical.<sup>47</sup> Of these, only  $\sigma$  preserves both *þættir* together. However, a closer inspection of the cross-reference in  $\tau$  reveals a slight divergence from other attestations.<sup>48</sup> Instead of alluding to events that “síðar mun sagt verða” (‘will be told later’), as is commonly found in most other manuscripts,  $\tau$  uniquely states that the events concerning the envoys from Glasisvellir are recounted “í öðrum stað” (‘in another place’).

47  $\xi$ : <Svo segia menn að Geftr | þessi kæmi á þriðja ári ríkis Ólafs | konungs Tryggvasonar. á því ári komu | til hans tveir menn er Grímar hetu | og voru sendir af Goðmundi á Glæfis- | völlum. þeir færðu konungi tvo horn | er Goðmundr gaf honum þau kolluðu | þeir og Gríma. þeir höfðu og fleiri | erendi til konungs sem síðar mun | sagt verða> (p. 3, 16–25).  $o$ : <Sva segia menn at geftr þessi kæmi á þriðja ári ríkis | Ólafs kongs til hans, á því ári komu ok til hans þeir | menn er grímar hetu ok voru sendir af gudmundi á glæfis- | völlum, þeir færðu kongi horn tvö er gudmundr gaf | honum, þau kölluðu þeir gríma, þeir höfðu ok fleiri | eyrendi til kongs sem síðar mun sagt verða.> (p. 2, 11–16).  $\pi$ : <Sva segia menn | at geftr þessi kæmi á || þriðja ári ríkis Ólafs Konungs | á því ári komu ok til hans | tveir menn er Grímar hetu | ok voru sendir af Goðmundi á | Glæfis völlum, þeir færðu | konungi tva horn er Goðmun | dr gaf honum þau kolluðu | þeir ok gríma. þeir höfðu | ok fleiri eirindi til konungs | sem síðar mun sagt verða.> (pp. 4–5, 23–10).  $\rho$ : <Sva segia menn | ath Gestur þessi kæmi | á þriðja ári ríkis Ólafs | kongs. á því ári komu | og til hans tveir menn | er Grímar hetu. og voru | sendir af Goðmundi á Glæ- | fisvöllum. Þeir ferðu kóngi || tvö horn er Goðmundur | gaf honum. þeir kaulluðu | þeir og Gríma. þeir höf- | du og fleiri eyrindi til kongs | sem síðar mun sagt verða.> (pp. 84–85, 11–5).  $\sigma$ : <fo segia menn | gestur þessi kiami til konungs á þia | ári Rykis hans | á því ári komu til hans þeir | menn er Grímar hietu og voru fen- | dir af Godmunde á Glæfersvö- | lllum, þessir færðu konungi horn tvo er | Godmundur fendi honum, þa koll | uðu þeir gríma, þeir höfðu og | fleire Eyrendi til konungs sem syðar mun | sagt verrða> (p. 298, 3–13).  $v$ : <Sva segia menn, at Gestr þessi kæmi á þriðja | ári ríkis Ólafs konungs; á því ári komu ok til hans | tveir menn, er Grímar hétu, ok varu sendir af Goðmundi á Glæsisvöllum; þeir færðu konungi | horn tvo, er Goðmundr gaf hanum; þau kölluðu | þeir ok Gríma; þeir höfðu ok fleiri erendi til | konungs, sem síðar mun sagt verða> (p. 523, 15–21).

48  $\tau$ : <Suo segia menn at Gestr þessi | kæmi á þriðja ári ríkis Ólafs konungs; á því ári komu ok | til hans tveir menn er Grímar hétu, ok voru sendir af | Goðmundi á Glæsisvöllum; þeir færðu konungi horn tvo, er | Goðm(undur) gaf honum, þau kölluðu þeir ok Gríma; þeir höfðu | ok fleiri erendi til konungs, sem segir frá í öðrum stað> (p. 7, 10–15).

## Other Manuscripts of *Norna-Gests þáttur* and *Helga þáttur Þórissonar*

In accounting for all manuscripts containing *NP* and *HP* examined in the present study, it has occasionally been necessary to exclude certain witnesses. What follows is a brief overview of these manuscripts, along with the reasons justifying their exclusion from this investigation.

A) Five manuscripts contain *NP* and *HP* (either both together or only one of the two), but all are translations into other languages: i) GKS 1015 fol. I, dated circa 1661, contains a Danish translation of both *NP* and *HP*; ii) GKS 1017 fol. I, dated between 1650 and 1750, likewise contains a Danish translation of both texts; iii) Rostock 78/2, dated to the eighteenth century, preserves a Swedish translation of *NP*; iv) MS 3714, dated circa 1891, contains a French translation of *NP*; v) BL Add. 45317, dated between 1850 and 1890, includes an English translation of *NP*.

B) Three manuscripts were copied from printed editions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and are therefore not considered relevant evidence: i) Lbs 4661 4to, dated to the first half of the nineteenth century, is a copy of Carl Christian Rafn's edition of *fornaldarsögur*; ii) NKS 1685 b 4to, dated between 1800 and 1849, is a copy of Erik Julius Biörner's *Nordiska kämpa dater*; iii) Ms Germ q. 935, dated between 1805 and 1810, is likewise a copy of Biörner's work.<sup>49</sup>

49 To this list must be added a manuscript containing *NP* from a private collection (hereafter labelled KP I). I am indebted to my dear friend Kári Pálsson, the owner of the manuscript, who kindly allowed me to examine this paper manuscript from his collection and to include it in this study. After a closer examination together with Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, we concluded that this manuscript was written by Snæbjörn Kristjánsson in 1881. Unfortunately, it was not possible to ascertain whether any of the texts contained therein were copied from a printed edition; however, judging by its content, this seems likely. The manuscript includes *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, *Norna-Gests þáttur*, *Sörla þáttur*, *Ragnarsona þáttur*, *Völsunga saga*, and *Hrólfs saga kraka* – the same texts, albeit in different order, as those featured in the first volume of *Fornaldar Sögur Norðrlanda*, published by Carl Christian Rafn in 1829–1830. Be that as it may, the relevant point here is that the manuscript contains *NP* (pp. 57–82) without *HP*, although the cross-reference from the former to the latter is attested: <Svo seigia menn að Gestur þessi kjæmi á þriðja | ári ríkisstjórnar Olafs konungs á því ári kómu og til | hans 2 menn er Grímar hétu og voru sendir af | Goðmundi á Glæsisvöllum þeir færðu konungi | horn 2 er Goðm(undr) gaf honum þau



C) A small group of manuscripts are described in catalogues and databases as containing *NP*; however, closer examination reveals that they do not.<sup>50</sup>

## Outlining the Manuscript Transmission

As argued throughout this paper, *NP* and *HP* are two *þættir* originally conceived as inseparable parts of a literary diptych embedded within the longest version of the saga of Óláfr Tryggvason. This interpretation is supported by the earliest manuscript witnesses –  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$ , and  $\delta$  – in which *NP* and *HP* invariably appear together, with the former directly preceding the latter and no other texts interposed between them. Furthermore, as discussed above, the two narratives are closely linked one to the other by means of a cross-reference, providing additional evidence that they are inextricably intertwined and were not haphazardly inserted as unrelated *þættir* into a larger saga narrative. Although the events recounted in the tales of Norna-Gestr and Helgi Þórisson are not to be understood as historical in the modern sense, they are clearly structured and organised according to an internal chronology that can hardly be considered as unintentional. In this way, they are carefully integrated into the narratological framework of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*.

If one examines  $\epsilon$ , a fifteenth-century parchment manuscript containing *NP* without *HP*, the reference to the absent *þáttir* is nevertheless preserved – though it ultimately leads nowhere, as if one were left with a single panel of a diptych, complete with its hinges, but lacking its counterpart. Although  $\zeta$  has a lacuna covering the section where the cross-reference to *HP* would have appeared, it can be assumed with reasonable certainty that

kölluðu þeir og | Gríma þeir höfðu og fleiri erindi til konungs sem sið | ar mun sagt verða> (p. 59, 13–19).

- 50 i) AM 202 g fol., dated between 1600 and 1683. The scribe began to write *NP* but subsequently crossed it out entirely and replaced it with *Rauðúlfs þáttir*; ii) JS 33 4to, dated between 1730 and 1745. According to Páll Eggert Ólason (1927, 496), this manuscript was said to contain *NP* between folia 49r and 51r. Upon examination, however, I discovered that the text in question is different: the first part is a scene from *Óláfs saga helga* commonly known as “Óðinn kom til Óláfs konungs með dul ok prettum”, and the second part is *Tóka þáttir Tókasonar* – these two texts were mistakenly identified as *NP* by the catalogue’s compiler; iii) Lbs 3713 4to, dated between 1776 and 1825. According to the catalogue, this manuscript should contain *NP* between folia 77v and 78r, but it actually includes the same texts as JS 33 4to (“Óðinn kom til Óláfs konungs með dul ok prettum” and *Tóka þáttir Tókasonar*).

it may once have included it, in keeping with the pattern observed in the majority of instances.

An examination of the parchment manuscripts of *NP* and *HP* already reveals a division in the transmission history of the two *þattir*. A first phase – represented by  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$ , and  $\delta$  – reflects a period close to the time when *NP* and *HP* were originally committed to writing, during which they were consistently transmitted together. In contrast, a second phase – represented by  $\varepsilon$  and  $\zeta$  – suggests that the connection between the two texts had begun to fade, resulting in their separate transmission. This trend appears to continue in the paper manuscripts as well.

Overall, it may be concluded that nearly all versions of *NP* preserved in the twenty Icelandic manuscripts examined in this study – comprising six parchment and fourteen paper manuscripts, spanning from the late fourteenth century to the early nineteenth century – contain a reference to events that take place in another *þáttir*, namely that of Helgi Þórisson. Whereas the relationship between the two *þattir* appears to have been recognised in the earliest manuscripts of the first phase of transmission – namely  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$ , and  $\delta$ , which consistently preserve them together – the same cannot be said of the second phase. In this later group, only two manuscripts contain both *þattir*:  $\eta$  and  $\sigma$ . *HP* is thus preserved in just seven manuscripts overall (including the unique case of  $\omega$ , where it appears without *NP*), a marked contrast to the significantly broader transmission of *NP*. The remaining fourteen manuscripts – two on parchment ( $\varepsilon$  and  $\zeta$ ) and twelve on paper ( $\theta$ ,  $\iota$ ,  $\kappa$ ,  $\lambda$ ,  $\mu$ ,  $\nu$ ,  $\xi$ ,  $\omicron$ ,  $\pi$ ,  $\rho$ ,  $\tau$ , and  $\upsilon$ ) – preserve only *NP* without *HP*. Nonetheless, the cross-reference between the two texts often survives, functioning like a metaphorical hinge still attached to one panel of this literary diptych, bearing witness to their original connection. In most of the manuscripts examined above ( $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$ ,  $\delta$ ,  $\varepsilon$ ,  $\theta^1$ ,  $\iota$ ,  $\kappa$ ,  $\mu$ ,  $\nu$ ,  $\xi$ ,  $\omicron$ ,  $\pi$ ,  $\rho$ ,  $\sigma$ , and  $\upsilon$ ), the reference takes the form of a remark that the related events “will be told later”, regardless of whether *HP* is actually included. In a few other cases, there may be no explicit mention of another text, yet the arrival of Norna-Gestr at Óláfr Tryggvason’s court is still consistently linked to the visit of the two envoys from Glasisvellir, as attested by  $\theta^2$ . Despite these variations in form, the cross-reference to *HP* is thus regularly preserved in manuscripts that transmit *NP*.

As observed above,  $\eta$  represents a unique case in directly mentioning a “Saga Helga Þórissonar”. Such an explicit reference to the title of *HP* is unparalleled among the other manuscripts examined in this study. Nonetheless, since  $\eta$  contains both *NP* and *HP*, and the events are reported roughly one hundred pages later, this variation is unsurprising. Another notably distinct version of *NP* is preserved in  $\lambda$ , which offers a considerably shorter rendition of the *þáttir* and contains no reference whatsoever to the tale of Helgi Þórisson. This is the sole instance in which the visit of the two envoys from Glasisvellir to Óláfr Tryggvason’s court is omitted. However, given the overall conciseness of this version, such an omission may be less unexpected than it initially appears. Lastly,  $\tau$  represents an isolated case in which, rather than referring to something that “will be told later”, the text instead mentions that the events are recounted “í öðrum stað” (“in another place”).

The variations found in  $\eta$ ,  $\lambda$ , and  $\tau$  do not permit any definitive conclusion but suggest the presence of authorial or editorial interventions, likely occurring at different times and under different circumstances for all of them. This stands in stark contrast to the other manuscripts examined in this study, where the allusion to *HP* remains unchanged despite the absence of the text itself. Indeed, in all the other cases ( $\epsilon$ ,  $\zeta$ ,  $\theta$ ,  $\iota$ ,  $\kappa$ ,  $\lambda$ ,  $\mu$ ,  $\nu$ ,  $\xi$ ,  $\omicron$ ,  $\pi$ ,  $\rho$ ,  $\tau$ , and  $\upsilon$ ), the cross-reference leads nowhere.

It is difficult to account for such an oversight on the part of so many compilers, working across a span of more than five centuries. One might hypothesise that they either intended to include *HP* at a later point in the manuscript (as appears to be the case in  $\eta$ ), or, more plausibly, that they simply copied *NP* without giving any thought about the reference to another text. Given the composite and often fragmentary nature of the younger manuscripts, any definitive conclusion remains elusive; nevertheless, the latter explanation seems the more likely. This suggests that *NP* and *HP* were originally composed to function as a pair, but – aside from a few exceptions – the two components of this literary diptych became separated during what may be termed the second phase of their transmission.

## Concluding Remarks

Medieval compilation practices have left us with artefacts – medieval manuscripts – that may be regarded as masterpieces in terms of their design,

even though the processes by which these works were conceived, crafted, and assembled are not always fully understood today.<sup>51</sup> Flateyjarbók is one of the most renowned medieval Icelandic manuscripts and stands as a significant testament to the compilation practices employed in fourteenth-century Iceland. As noted above, Jón Þórðarson – the scribe responsible for copying the first part of Flateyjarbók – offers an explanation for the interpolation of *exempla*, which he refers to as *ævintýri*, within his work. When *NP* and *HP* are examined within their original context, they can indeed be considered as *exempla*: their purpose clearly appears to provide Óláfr Tryggvason with an opportunity to confront the pagan past and present of his country while carrying out his missionary endeavour.

This study does not aim to provide a detailed literary analysis of *NP* and *HP*; however, the interpretation of these texts as a diptych – modelled on the artworks commonly admired in churches across medieval Europe – is undoubtedly strengthened when one considers the religious message and moral instruction they convey. Long after his disappearance at the battle of Svölðr, Óláfr Tryggvason came to be regarded as the “Apostle of the North”, particularly by Icelanders, who began composing sagas about his life as early as the twelfth century.<sup>52</sup> Biographies of Óláfr Tryggvason continued to be written and expanded in the centuries that followed, not least by Snorri Sturluson in his *Heimskringla*, ultimately culminating in the longest saga devoted to Norway’s first missionary king: *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. As Ólafur Halldórsson (1963, 85) notes, the D redaction of this saga is preserved in  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  – the very manuscripts in which *NP* and *HP* are first attested. These two *þættir* appear within the king’s biography, and it is particularly in this context that their moral function becomes evident: *NP*, on the one hand, provides Óláfr Tryggvason with the opportunity to reconcile with his heathen ancestry through the baptism of a representative of pagan Scandinavia, while *HP*, on the other, serves as a warning against the dangers of sin and temptation, embodied by the legendary realm of Glasisvellir and its inhabitants.

If one considers their moral dimensions, the central contention of this article is further reinforced: *NP* and *HP*, likely composed in fourteenth-

51 For a discussion concerning compilation practice in medieval Icelandic manuscripts, see Lethbridge (2014), especially pp. 75–76.

52 See Fidjestøl (1997) and Bagge (2006).

century Iceland, were originally intended to function together within *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* but eventually became decontextualised and disconnected during the second phase of their transmission. This was an unfortunate destiny, particularly given that much of *HP*'s literary content is more readily understood when read in conjunction with *NP* – as Elizabeth Ashman Rowe has emphasised. When viewed as *exempla* – *HP* serving as the “negative exemplum” of *NP* – it becomes clear that part of their intended meaning was lost once the two *þættir* began to circulate as independent narratives, first in younger manuscripts and then in most printed editions. Their fate as separate texts suggests that the relationship between them, which must have held some significance at the time of their composition, eventually ceased to be recognised as meaningful. Whether later scribes and compilers consciously chose to treat the two *þættir* as independent units or were simply unaware of their connection is difficult to determine. In some cases, we know the text was copied from a manuscript that did not contain *HP*, which may suggest unawareness rather than intention.<sup>53</sup> However, even in such instances, this does not explain why the reference to a later text was retained. Beyond these limited examples, the question remains largely unresolved. Overall, what can be noted, is that most compilers who copied *NP* appear to have carried out their task without altering the text – preserving a reference to a scene that, in most cases, is never actually recounted.

The transmission of the two *þættir* examined here demonstrates that texts should, whenever possible, be read and interpreted within their original contexts. Only through such contextual reading can one fully perceive and appreciate the sophisticated intellectual framework of medieval Icelandic literature. *NP* and *HP* ought to be understood in light of their original relationship and context – a connection otherwise impossible to discern if the evidence provided by the oldest manuscripts is overlooked. To treat these *þættir* as independent texts risks losing a significant portion of their meaning. This becomes especially clear when one considers the etymological meaning of the term *þáttir* – namely, ‘strand’.<sup>54</sup> Reading these *strands* unravelled from their original textual fabric – the quite literal Latin *textus* – prevents us from grasping the full nuance of the tapestry in which

53 See, for instance:  $\pi$ , copied from  $\iota$ ;  $\xi$ , copied from  $\theta^1$ ;  $\mu$  and  $\kappa$ , both copied from  $\epsilon$ .

54 Cf. Lindow (1978).

they were woven. Or, to return one last time to the metaphor of the diptych, it would be as though we were to appreciate only one of two panels that once formed a pair; we might understand part of its meaning, but its full significance would be lost in time.

Icelandic manuscripts of *Norna-Gests þáttur* and *Helga þáttur Þórissonar*

Shelfmark	Year	Century	NP	HP	Material	Reference
α) GKS 1005 fol.	1387–1394	(14 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	Yes	Parchment	Yes
β) AM 62 fol.	1375–1399	(14 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	Yes	Parchment	Yes
γ) AM 309 4to	1498	(15 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	Yes	Parchment	Yes
δ) AM 54 fol.	Added 1510	(16 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	Yes	Parchment	Yes
ε) GKS 2845 4to	1440–1460	(15 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Parchment	Yes
ζ) AM 567 V 4to	1450–1499	(15 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Partly	No	Parchment	Defective
η) AM 313 4to	1657	(17 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	Yes	Paper	Different
θ) AM 202 i fol.	1600–1699	(17 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes (2)	No	Paper	Yes (x2)
ι) AM 65 fol.	1625–1672	(17 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper	Yes
κ) Holm Papp. 5 4to	1630–1670	(17 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper	Yes
λ) Holm Papp. 22 fol.	1600–1650	(17 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper	No
μ) Holm Papp. 15 4to	1650–1700	(17 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper	Yes
ν) AM 348 4to	1688–1730	(17 <sup>th</sup> /18 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper	Yes
ω) Holm Papp. 9 4to	1600–1699	(17 <sup>th</sup> c.)	No	Yes	Paper	–
ξ) NB, Ms. fol. 246 II	1700–1799	(18 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper	Yes
ο) NKS 1223 fol.	1700–1799	(18 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper	Yes
π) NKS 1150 fol.	1750–1799	(18 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper	Yes
ρ) NKS 1766 4to	1750–1799	(18 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper	Yes
σ) Lbs 2145 8vo	1801	(19 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	Yes	Paper	Yes
τ) Lbs 1496 4to	1883	(19 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper	Different
υ) SÁM 4	1890–1910	(19 <sup>th</sup> /20 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper	Yes

Manuscripts not included in this study

*Manuscripts in other languages*

GKS 1015 fol. I	1661	(17 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper
GKS 1017 fol. I	1650–1750	(17 <sup>th</sup> /18 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper
Rostock 78/2	1700–1799	(18 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper
MS 3714	1891	(19 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper
BL Add. 45317	1850–1890	(19 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper

*Manuscripts copied from editions*

Lbs 4661 4to	1827	(19 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper
NKS 1685 b 4to	1800–1849	(19 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper
Ms Germ q. 935	1805–1810	(19 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	Yes	Paper

*Manuscripts listed in archives as containing Norna-Gests þáttir but without it*

AM 202 g fol.	1600–1683	(17 <sup>th</sup> c.)	No	No	Paper
JS 33 4to	1730–1745	(18 <sup>th</sup> c.)	No	No	Paper
Lbs 3713 4to	1776–1825	(18 <sup>th</sup> /19 <sup>th</sup> c.)	No	No	Paper

*Manuscript from private collection*

Einkasafn KP I	1881	(19 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Yes	No	Paper
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NB, Ms. fol. 246 II

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## SUMMARY

*Norna-Gests þáttur* and *Helga þáttur Þórissonar* in Icelandic Manuscripts: A Literary Diptych Lost in Time

**Keywords:** *Norna-Gests þáttur*, *Helga þáttur Þórissonar*, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, medieval Icelandic literature, manuscript studies, literary diptych

This article aims to reconstruct the relationship between *Norna-Gests þáttur* and *Helga þáttur Þórissonar* by assessing their presence first in Icelandic parchment manuscripts and then in younger paper manuscripts. It will argue that these two texts were originally intended to function together as a literary diptych embedded within the narratological framework of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, demonstrating how they are connected through medieval compilation practices on two levels: interdependence and careful insertion within a broader literary context. Although scholarship has briefly commented on the existing relationship between these two þættir, no previous work has extensively tackled the subject by considering their manuscripts alone, which seem to bear witness to the close connection between them. After elucidating their relationship, the article will argue that, although they were originally meant to be interdependent texts, they became separated from each other when they were later committed to paper in the witnesses of their post-medieval reception.

## ÁGRIP

*Norna-Gests þáttur* og *Helga þáttur Þórissonar* í íslenskum handritum: Glatað tvíþætt bókmenntaverk frá miðöldum

**Efnisorð:** *Norna-Gests þáttur*, *Helga þáttur Þórissonar*, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, íslenskar miðaldabókmenntir, handritafræði, tvíþætt bókmenntaverk

Tilgangur þessarar greinar er að varpa ljósi á tengsl *Norna-Gests þáttar* og *Helga þáttar Þórissonar* með því að rannsaka varðveislusögu þeirra í skinnhandritum áður en litið er á gerðir þeirra í yngri pappírshandritum. Rökstutt er að þessir þættir hafi upprunalega verið settir saman til að mynda tvíþætt bókmenntaverk (e. *literary diptych*) í ramma *Óláfs sögu Tryggvasonar ennar mestu*. Sýnt er fram á hvernig þeir tengjast á tvöfaldan hátt í gegnum bókmenntalegar ritunarhefðir miðalda: annars vegar með því að vera innbyrðis háðir hvor öðrum og hins vegar með því að vera vandlega grepptir í breiðara bókmenntalegt samhengi. Þó að nokkrir fræðimenn hafi þegar stuttlega bent á tengsl milli þáttanna tveggja hefur hingað til ekki verið nægilegur gaumur gefinn að handritageymd þeirra og samhenginu sem varpar ljósi á skyldleika textanna í báðum þáttum. Eftir að upprunaleg tengsl *Norna-Gests þáttar* og *Helga þáttar Þórissonar* hafa verið skýrð er að lokum gerð grein fyrir því hvernig þættirnir varðveittust hvor um sig í yngri pappírshandritum.

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