

FÓSTBRÆÐRA SAGA: A MISSING LINK?

IDENTIFYING the first saga of Icelanders is an inherently interesting prospect, since it would be tantamount to identifying the moment at which a genre in the making broke off from the established kings' saga tradition – a development on which there is broad scholarly consensus.¹ Like a number of other scholars, Sigurður Nordal believed that *Heiðarvíg* saga was the earliest saga of Icelanders, and that *Fóstbræðra* saga also belonged in the beginning of that genre.² Today most scholars are more cautious, and the assessment in *Íslensk bókmenntasaga* may be taken as representative. There, Vésteinn Ólason attributes a date after – probably well after – c. 1230 to both sagas, based on the scholarship of Bjarni Guðnason and Jónas Kristjánsson. Vésteinn concludes that while there may be earlier sagas of Icelanders, *Egils* saga is certainly early.³

Vésteinn's view of *Egils* saga is not controversial, but his conclusion leaves us without a clear conduit from kings' sagas to sagas of Icelanders, and the two older suggestions are therefore worth revisiting.⁴ With regard to *Heiðarvíg* saga, Sigurður advocates for its position as the first saga of Icelanders only with reference to its quality of being *viðvaningsleg* (beginner-like).⁵ This is not a convincing argument on its own, but Einar Ól. Sveinsson has listed linguistic and orthographic archaisms that are retained

- 1 See, for instance, *Íslensk bókmenntasaga* 2, ed. by Vésteinn Ólason, 2nd ed. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2006), 43.
- 2 *Borgfirðinga sögur*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, Íslensk fornrit 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1943), cxxxvii–cxxxix; *Vestfirðinga sögur*, ed. by Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson, Íslensk fornrit 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1938), lxxi–lxxii.
- 3 *Íslensk bókmenntasaga* 2, ed. Vésteinn Ólason, 43.
- 4 Jónas Kristjánsson believed *Egils* saga itself to be that conduit, but his own research on *Fóstbræðra* saga – to be dealt with below – forms a premise for his argument (Jónas Kristjánsson, 'Var Snorri Sturluson upphafsmaður Íslendingasagna?', *Snorrastefna* 25.–27. júlí 1990, ed. Úlfar Bragason (Reykjavík: Stofnun Sigurðar Nordals, 1992), 99–112).
- 5 *Borgfirðinga sögur*, ed. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, cxxxvii–cxxxix.

in the only medieval, incomplete manuscript of the saga (c. 1300).⁶ The collected evidence of the ratio of *of* versus *um*, the spelling *-ðr* for *-nnr* and *komi* for *kæmi* strongly suggests an original from early in the thirteenth century.⁷ There can thus be little doubt that *Heiðarvíg saga* belongs to the oldest group of sagas of Icelanders, and this is supported by a reference to it in *Eyrbyggja saga*.⁸ The only complication is that Bjarni Guðnason has pointed to a passage where it is likely that *Laxdæla saga* has influenced *Heiðarvíg saga*.⁹ If this is correct, the formal criteria suggest that *Laxdæla saga* must have exerted some influence on *Heiðarvíg saga* after its original composition.

By all appearances, then, *Heiðarvíg saga* is one of the earliest sagas of Icelanders, but there is little to suggest that it represents an attempt to write a local saga based on the older conventions of the kings' sagas. It shows no thematic overlap with these and, perhaps more importantly, the treatment of poetry conforms to the conventions of sagas of Icelanders, not of kings' sagas: all poetic quotations in the main manuscript are situational (on this term, see below).¹⁰ *Heiðarvíg saga* is therefore not a likely representative of an initial transition from kings' sagas to sagas of Icelanders.

Fóstbræðra saga is a different matter. First of all, it is the most obvious 'missing link' between kings' sagas and sagas of Icelanders, since its ending overlaps thematically, but not verbally, with the *Oldest Saga* of Óláfr Haraldsson. Secondly, the stylistics of *Fóstbræðra saga* are in some respects unique. Its learned 'digressions' and marked rhetorical features have received much attention, but I shall argue that the saga's treatment of poetry is equally important, or even more so, since the conventions for

6 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Ritunartími Íslendingasagna. Rök og rannsóknaraðferð* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1965), 115 (expletive *of*), 117–18 (*of/um* ratio), 121–22 (orthography). Some additional archaisms are noted in Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (København: G.E.C. Gads forlag, 1920–1924), 2: 484 n. 3.

7 On the use of standard Latin letters for mutated vowels, see Hreinn Benediktsson, *Early Icelandic Script. Íslensk handrit 2* (Reykjavík: The Manuscript Institute of Iceland, 1965), 56–57.

8 *Borgfirðinga sögur*, ed. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, xcvi.

9 Bjarni Guðnason, *Túlkun Heiðarvígasögu*. *Studia Islandica* 50 (Reykjavík: Bókmenntafræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 1993), 250–52.

10 See *Borgfirðinga sögur*, ed. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, 263–311.

the use of poetry in a prose setting can be plotted along a chronological axis. Finally, while Jónas Kristjánsson uses *Fóstbræðra saga*'s intertextual connections and stylistic features to date the saga to the second half of the thirteenth century, none of these really warrant the conclusion, and Theodore Andersson has provided a more convincing explanation of the saga's connection to the sagas about Óláfr Haraldsson than that given by Jónas. All of these matters will be dealt with in turn, and I shall argue that *Fóstbræðra saga* is the product of an early attempt at creating a new kind of historical narrative: namely, what would eventually come to be known as 'sagas of Icelanders'.

The debate about the date of *Fóstbræðra saga* falls into two parts: whether the so-called 'digressions' belong to the archetype or were added later, and whether the saga is one of the earliest sagas of Icelanders, from the beginning of the thirteenth century, or rather belongs late in that century. I begin with the digressions.

Are the Digressions Original to the Saga?

Fóstbræðra saga survives in a short, acephalous version, found only in Hauksbók (AM 544 4to; below Hb), and in a long version, found in Möðruvallabók and its transcripts (AM 132 fol.; below M), Flateyjarbók (GKS 1005 fol.; below F), R (transcripts only: AM 142 fol. and AM 566 a 4to) and, acephalous and with a number of chapters missing, in Bæjarbók (only four leaves preserved as AM 73 b fol., but there are several transcripts, chief among them AM 73 a fol. and AM 76 a fol.; below B).¹¹ *Fóstbræðra saga*'s long version has attracted much scholarly interest, due to its unique digressions of a 'rhetorical, devotional or anatomical nature'.¹²

For my larger argument to be plausible, the additional text in the long version must belong to the archetype of the saga. This hypothesis was first proposed by Vera Lachmann and later – independently – by Sigurður Nordal in his introduction to *Fóstbræðra saga* in *Vestfirðinga sögur*.¹³ He

11 See the description in *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. by Björn K. Þórólfsson (København: Samfund til Udgivelse af Gammel Nordisk Litteratur, 1925–27), iii–xliv.

12 Denne recensens mest iøjnefallende ejendommelighed er dens, i hele sagalitteraturen enestaaende, udsmykninger og digressioner, af retorisk, gudelig, eller anatomisk art' (*Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson, vii).

13 Vera Lachmann, *Das Alter der Harðarsaga* (Leipzig: Mayer & Mayer, 1932), 222–23;

there announced that he would publish a book on the topic, but it never appeared.¹⁴ In the introduction, Sigurður gives general arguments in favour of seeing the additional text as original, but he discusses no diagnostic instances, and this is true also of Jónas Kristjánsson, who subsequently embraced Sigurður's view. The question would therefore remain open if it were not for Sven B.F. Jansson's study of *Fóstbræðra saga* in Hauksbók, in which he demonstrated how Haukr abbreviated the saga text, including some of its most famous digressions, whereas his 'first secretary' did not.¹⁵ The text of Hauksbók's exemplar must therefore have been of roughly equal length to that of other witnesses. Based on the evidence of Jansson's analysis, scholars today agree that the digressions belong to the archetype. One point has escaped notice, however: namely, that Jansson ignores important evidence that would have rendered his results more ambiguous. The question must therefore be addressed once more.

What Jansson does not say is that the digressions and their style are largely absent in the text of Haukr's first secretary as well. Jansson actually quotes one such instance in full, namely that of Þormóðr's interaction with Lúsa-Oddi (Louse-Oddi). F, R and Hb all note that Oddi's coat was covered in lice. F and R then go on:

F: því at þá er sólskin var heitt þá gengu verkfákar fullir frá fódri hans hórunds á inar yztu trefr sinna herbergja ok létu þar þá við sólu síður við blíka.¹⁶

Because when the sunshine was hot, then the workhorses went, full from the fodder of his body, onto the fringes of their lodgings and there they let their sides glimmer against the sun.

Vestfirðinga sǫgur, ed. by Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson. Íslenzk fornrit 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1943), lxx–lxxvii.

14 *Vestfirðinga sǫgur*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, lxxiii.

15 Sven B.F. Jansson, *Handskrifterna till Erik den rödes saga* (Stockholm: Wahlström och Widstrand, 1945), 234, 255–59; for which portions of the manuscript are written by the first secretary, see '*Hauksbók*' *udgiven efter de arnamagnæanske håndskrifter no. 371, 544 og 675, 4^o*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (København: Det kongelige nordiske oldskrift-selskab, 1892–1896), xlv.

16 Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um 'Fóstbræðrasögu'*, 70; *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson, 168–69; '*Hauksbók*', ed. Finnur Jónsson, 398; Jansson, *Handskrifterna till Erik den rödes saga*, 232.

R: ok því at veðr var gott ok heitt þá gengu verkfákar fullir frá fóðri hans hórunds á inar yztu ræfr sinna herbergja ok létu þar blika við sínar síður.¹⁷

And because the weather was good and hot, then the workhorses went, full from the fodder of his body, onto the roof of their lodgings, and there they let their sides glimmer.

Using such strongly metaphorical language about lice is somewhat extreme even among the digressions, and stylistically, the passage should clearly be grouped with these. The variants are mostly inconsequential, except that the article *inar* (f. pl.) shows that *trefr* (f. pl.) in F has been changed to *ræfr* (n.), presumably to achieve a consistent metaphor (the roof, rather than the fringes, of their lodgings), unless the scribe omitted the *t* by mistake.

This passage is missing in Hb, and it is noteworthy that Jansson does not comment on this difference. On the contrary, he argues that the two texts are strikingly similar, and that this is because the first secretary, not Haukr himself, is now holding the pen. Jansson also does not comment on four other digressions, all among the most noteworthy in the saga, which are absent from the text of the first secretary. These relate to the position of various emotions inside the body (F and R);¹⁸ the daughters of Stupidity (F and R);¹⁹ the number of bones, teeth and veins in the human body (only F);²⁰ and the origin of Rome (F and R).²¹ The result is that only one of Jansson's two claims is true: the text of the first secretary is of roughly equal length to that found in other manuscripts, but it is not true that the lack of digressions is a feature of Haukr's text only.²² Rather, it is a feature of the Hb text in general.

The implications of Jansson's omission are considerable, since other scholars have not clearly shown why the digressions of the long version cannot be expansions of the text in the short version, rather than

17 Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um 'Fóstbræðrasögu'*, 70; *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson, 168–69.

18 *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson, 149; *Hauksbók*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, 390.

19 *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson, 155; *Hauksbók*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, 392.

20 *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson, 162; *Hauksbók*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, 395.

21 *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson, 201; *Hauksbók*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, 409.

22 For the first claim, see Jansson, *Handskrifterna till Erik den rödes saga*, 234, 255–59; for the second, see 245–48.

the other way around. The matter is further complicated by B, which is not consulted by Jansson and not included in the apparatus by Björn K. Þórólfsson.²³ Björn notes that the B text is somewhat abbreviated, but that it leaves out no information except for ‘nogle af digressionerne’ – he does not state which.²⁴ In fact, B has none of the five digressions found in R and F (the fourth is found only in F) but missing in the text of the first secretary of Hb, even though B is more closely affiliated with F than with any other manuscript.²⁵ It does have the full digression about the smallness of Þorgeirr’s heart, however, like F, R and M, as well as the preceding one about how God created it.²⁶

The beginning down to page 51 in Björn K. Þórólfsson’s edition is missing in B, and the digressions are found in chapters that are omitted in B.²⁷ The evidence is thus limited, but I believe that B may offer some clues with regard to the character of Hb’s exemplar. Several factors complicate the analysis, however: *Fóstbræðra saga* in M ends just after the first secretary takes over in Hb;²⁸ both Hb and B are acephalous; and B has omitted several relevant chapters. Furthermore, B shares many variants with F against M, but also a number of variants with Hb and R against F.²⁹ Björn and Jónas have constructed one stemma each.

The key point to bear in mind in the evaluation of these stemmas is that it is unlikely that R and F would independently have added the last five digressions (except the fourth one, only in F), but equally unlikely that Hb and B would independently have omitted them. This observation would suggest grouping R and F together against Hb and B, but that would run counter to the fact that Björn and Jónas both see Hb as closely related to R and F as closely related to B. Constructing an alternative stemma under these circumstances would entail *ad hoc* solutions, and this would undermine the credibility of the stemma. I therefore restrict myself to the

23 *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson, xxxiii.

24 *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson, xxxii.

25 I have consulted AM 76 a fol. The missing digressions would have been on 121r, 122v, 124r, 125v.

26 AM 76 a fol. 118r.

27 See the table in Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um ‘Fóstbræðrasögu’*, 66–68.

28 See the table in Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um ‘Fóstbræðrasögu’*, 62–68. The text of transcripts of M ends on ‘*Hauksbók*’, ed. Finnur Jónsson, 388, whereas the first secretary begins writing on 387.

29 *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson, xxxi–xxxii.

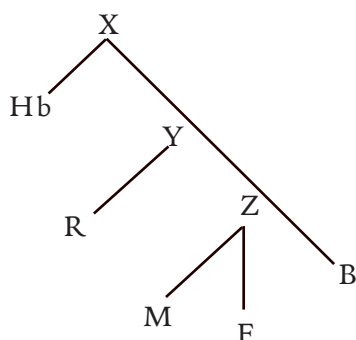


Figure. Simplified stemma based on *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson, xlv.

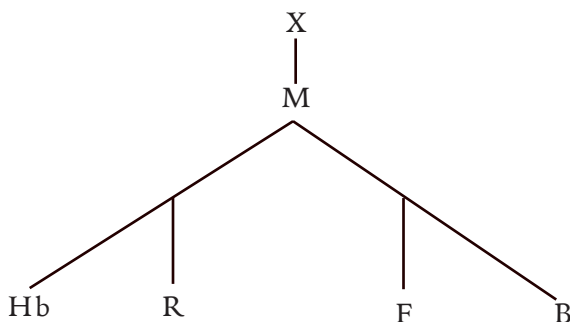


Figure. Simplified stemma based on Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um 'Fóstbræðrasögu'*, 53.

following observation: The last five digressions show that neither stemma can be fully correct, and for lack of a reliable stemma, other factors become decisive – namely, that Haukr's first secretary did not generally abbreviate, which suggests that the last five digressions were absent in his exemplar, and that this observation is supported by their absence in B, which is certainly not dependent on Hb. In all likelihood, then, Hb's exemplar had many digressions, which were abbreviated by Haukr, but it did not have the last five digressions.

The case now becomes less clear-cut, with most digressions probably being archetypal but five having been added in transmission. It would therefore be desirable to find additional parameters to test whether the digressions before the text of the first scribe and the lost text in M were

original to the saga. I wish therefore to discuss two instances that, I believe, bear this out.

One of the most well-known digressions is the anatomical description of Þorgeirr's heart (present also in B). The long version reads:

Svá segja sumir menn, at þeir klyfði hann til hjarta ok vildu sjá hvílikt væri, svá hugprúðr sem hann var, en menn segja at hjartat væri harðla lítit, ok hofðu sumir menn þat fyrir satt, at minni sé hugprúðra manna hjörtu en huglaussa, því at menn kalla minna blóð í litlu hjarta en miklu, en kalla hjartablóði hræðslu fylgja, en segja menn því detta hjarta manna í brjóstinu, at þá hræðiz hjartablóði ok hjartat í mannum.³⁰

Some men say that they cleft him to the heart and wanted to see what it was like, so courageous a man as he was, and men say that the heart was very small, and some men held it to be true that the hearts of courageous men are smaller than those of cowards, since men say that there is less blood in a small heart than in a big one, and [they] say that fear follows the blood of the heart, and men say that men lose heart [lit. men's heart falls in the breast], since then the blood of the heart and the heart becomes afraid in the man.

Hb simply has:

Þeir skáru upp líkam hans ok vildu sjá hjarta hans, ok var þat eigi meira en valhnót ok hart sem sigg ok ekki blóð í.³¹

They cut open his body and wanted to see his heart, and it was no bigger than a walnut and hard as pork skin and there was no blood in it.

Hb's description gives no explanation as to why the men wanted to see Þorgeirr's heart. The passage makes cultural sense in Norse literature, since we find a number of references to the physical appearance of hearts in mythological texts. Most famously, Hjalli's shivering heart and Hogni's

30 *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson, 125.

31 *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson, 125.

steady heart are both presented to Gunnarr in the snake-pit.³² Sigurðr is able to understand bird speech after tasting some of the blood of Fáfnir's heart, but there is no mention of the physical appearance of the heart in that context.³³ In *Skáldskaparmál*, Hrungnir's heart is described as made of stone and with three corners.³⁴ This is the only one of these hearts which is hard, like Þorgeirr's heart in Hb – a characteristic that matches Hrungnir's general toughness, also evident in his head of stone. Þorgeirr's heart is less exceptionally hard, suitable to his extreme, yet still human, toughness.

The smallness of Þorgeirr's heart and its lack of blood are consistent with the overall image of compactness and hardness. Nonetheless, these features stand out in Old Norse heart lore. Thus, for instance, the power of understanding birds' speech is transmitted through the blood of Fáfnir's heart, and the lack of blood in Þorgeirr's heart is therefore apt to raise questions about the significance of this fact – questions that are not answered in the short version. This suggests that the passage in Hb is the result of abbreviation. The opposite scenario is possible, however, namely that this short passage was elaborated into the passage in the long version precisely because it raised questions. If so, the detail of the hardness of Þorgeirr's heart was lost in the process, since it is not found in the corresponding passage in the long version. This detail is found at another juncture in the long version, however, after Þorgeirr's first martial exploit:

[...] því at eigi var hjarta hans sem fóarn í fugli. Eigi var þat blóðfullt svá at þat skylfi af hræðslu, heldr var þat *bert* af inum hæsta hofuðsmið í ǥllum hvatleik.³⁵

[...] since his heart was not like the entrails of a bird. It was not full of blood, so that it shook from fear; rather it was *hardened* with all courage by the highest artisan.

32 Thus *Atlakviða* 23 and 25; *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 37. See *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda* 7, ed. Klaus von See et al. (Heidelberg: Winter, 2012), 282–87, for a discussion of these instances, as well as a comparable expression in *Pórsdrápa*.

33 *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius*, ed. by Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1983), 186 (in the prose of *Fáfnismál*); *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* 1, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnauðgáfan, 1950), 155 (*Vǫlsunga saga*).

34 Snorri Sturluson, *Edda. Skáldskaparmál*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), 21.

35 *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson, 10.

This passage is clearly related to the passage in Hb, since lack of blood and hardness are mentioned together also here. It therefore seems likely that the long digression about Þorgeirr's heart has been reworked in Hb under the influence of this passage. In this instance, we cannot compare the text in Hb, since the quire which contained the end of *Heiðreks saga* and the first part of *Fóstbræðra saga* is missing.³⁶ The passage as a whole, however, is of precisely the type lacking in Hb: an anatomical digression with alliterative pairs and devotional elements.³⁷ Hb's exemplar, then, must have had characteristics that are found in the long version, but not in Hb.

Also in another instance, it is highly plausible that the long version is primary. We are not here dealing with a digression, but with the general difference of lofty versus down-to-earth style between the long version and Haukr's text. In a stanza by Þormóðr, both versions read: 'frá ek Þorgeir eiga hug þann er við mun brugðit' (I have heard that Þorgeirr's courage is such that men will praise it). A few lines further down, the long version reads:

Þorgeirr hjó hart ok tíðum, af miklu afli ok þruggum hug, ok var
hánúm sjálfum *hug* sinn bæði fyrir skjöld ok brynju [...] ³⁸

Þorgeirr slashed hard and often, with great force and firm courage,
and his *courage* served as both shield and byrnie for him [...]

Hb reads:

Hann hjó hart ok tíðum, ok váru hánúm lengi sín *hogg* bæði fyrir
skjöld ok brynju [...]

He slashed hard and often, and for a long time his *slashes* served as
both shield and byrnie for him [...] ³⁹

36 'Hauksbók', ed. Finnur Jónsson, xi.

37 The passage reads in full: 'Eigi roðnaði hann, því at eigi rann hánúm reiði í hqrunð; eigi bliknaði hann, því at hánúm lagði eigi heipt í brjóst; eigi blánaði hann, því at hánúm rann eigi í bein reiði; heldr brá hann sér engan veg við tíðindasögnina, því at eigi var hjarta hans sem fóarn í fugli. Eigi var þat blóðfullt svá at þat skylfi af hræðslu, heldr var þat hert af inum hæsta hofuðsmið í qlum hvatleik (*Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þóroúlfsson, 10).

38 *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þóroúlfsson, 121–22.

39 *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þóroúlfsson, 121–22.

Here, the long version picks up on the word *hugr* (courage) in the stanza, a technique that is common in the sagas and that is sometimes used in *Fóstbræðra saga* itself (thus, for instance, the word *grvendr* [left-handed] in both versions).⁴⁰ This suggests that the long version is primary, and that ‘hug’ has been changed to ‘hogg’ in accordance with the more concrete stylistics of Haukr.

These two instances – the description of Þorgeirr’s heart and the variants *hug/hogg* – are the clearest indications that the long version is primary. In other instances, the changes could have gone either way, but a number of factors – above all Haukr’s tendency to abbreviate – suggest abbreviation as the most likely explanation. This collected evidence is, I believe, sufficient to conclude that most of the digressions are original to the saga, but that the last five have probably been added under the stylistic impact of previous digressions. This means that the earliest reconstructable version of *Fóstbræðra saga* displays stylistic features that are strongly at odds with the style of other sagas of Icelanders.

Date of the Saga

The next question is when this stylistically anomalous saga was composed. Jónas Kristjánsson argued that the saga should be dated to the late thirteenth century against the scholarly consensus of an early date, and his view was subsequently embraced in *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*.⁴¹ Some of his arguments have been countered convincingly by Theodore Andersson.

Jónas assumes that the author of *Fóstbræðra saga* draws on the *Oldest Saga* of Óláfr Haraldsson, the *Legendary Saga* and ‘Styrmir’s book’. These texts all treat the life of Óláfr Haraldsson and were probably composed in that order. They all predate *Heimskringla*. As Andersson notes, this would be a peculiar set of sources in the late thirteenth century, since the manuscript record suggests that *Heimskringla* and the *Separate Saga* were enormously successful once they were composed in the 1220s–1230s, whereas we only have six fragments of the *Oldest Saga*, one Norwegian manuscript of the *Legendary Saga* and excerpts of ‘Styrmir’s book’ in Flateyjarbók. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that an author would collate many king’s sagas only in order to produce a saga of local interest.

⁴⁰ *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson, 164.

⁴¹ See above n. 3.

Andersson discusses the similarities between *Fóstbræðra saga* and *Heimskringla*, and his explanation of them is fully convincing. There are too many textual convergences between them to be coincidental, but their number is still quite limited, and if the author of *Fóstbræðra saga* had used *Heimskringla*, one would have expected many more. If the author of *Heimskringla* used *Fóstbræðra saga* as one of his many sources, however, the moderate number of convergences makes sense. This is by far the most plausible scenario, and it would place *Fóstbræðra saga* before 1225 or so.

As for the *Oldest Saga*, the *Legendary Saga* and ‘Styrmir’s book’, only the *Legendary Saga* is preserved intact, so that it may be compared with *Fóstbræðra saga*, and the wording is almost never close enough to suggest direct influence. The most noteworthy convergence is that the order of Þormóðr’s last is the same.⁴² As Andersson notes, there is one exception to the lack of lexical overlap between *Fóstbræðra saga* and the *Legendary Saga*:

Önnur ráð munu vér nú verða taka heldr en brenna lǫnd sjálfra vára.
(*Legendary saga*)

Annat ráð munu vér taka en brenna land vart sjálfra. (*Fóstbræðra saga*)⁴³

We will now [*Legendary Saga*: have to] adopt another plan than to burn our own land [*Legendary Saga*: lands]

This clause occurs at different places in the narrative, and because of the lack of other verbal correspondences, Andersson concludes that the matching order of the stanzas but almost complete lack of overlap in the prose suggests descent from a written exemplar for the stanzas, but from oral versions for the prose.

There is, however, one important factor which Andersson does not take into account. The fragments of the *Oldest Saga* are extensive enough to verify that the style is the full-blown prosimetrum of the somewhat later

42 Theodore Andersson, ‘Redating *Fóstbræðra saga*’, *Dating the Sagas: Reviews and Revisions*, ed. by Else Mundal (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2013), 55–76 (at 60–61). Andersson counts eight stanzas, but after the first of these, *Fóstbræðra saga* does not have stanzas 53–55 of the *Legendary Saga*.

43 Quotations following Andersson, ‘Redating *Fóstbræðra saga*’, 60.

kings' sagas (they contain the remains of seven stanzas and the first line of a *drápa*).⁴⁴ This is further confirmed by the somewhat later *Legendary Saga* (c. 1225, manuscript c. 1225–1250): the often exact correspondence in wording shows that the *Legendary Saga* is an abbreviated witness to the same redaction as the fragments of the *Oldest Saga*.⁴⁵ This makes the *Oldest Saga*, together with *Orkneyinga saga*, the first witness to the rich prosimetrical form that would have such a great future in the thirteenth century. This is a noteworthy innovation, and given the early date of *Fóstbræðra saga* indicated by *Heimskringla*'s use of it, it is one that the *Oldest Saga* shares with *Fóstbræðra saga*. (*Orkneyinga saga* treats a completely different topic and is likely younger than the *Oldest Saga*, so it is of limited relevance here.) It seems unlikely that two texts, treating the same people and events and quoting the same poetry, would independently innovate in this regard. I would therefore contend that the author of *Fóstbræðra saga* was indeed familiar with the *Oldest Saga*. But how, then, should the stark differences be explained?

The lack of overlap seems to rule out that the author of *Fóstbræðra saga* actively consulted the *Oldest Saga* in the process of writing. He may have read it at some earlier time, or heard it read. He must have read considerable portions of it in order to decide to emulate its rich prosimetrical style, which only becomes evident after some reading. Unlike Andersson, however, I am not convinced that the matching order of the final stanzas is due to a written exemplar, since the evidence for such collections is tenuous.⁴⁶

44 *Otte bruddstykker av den ældste saga om Olav den Hellige*, ed. by Gustav Storm (Christiania: Det norske historiske kildeskriftsfond, 1893), pp. 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10. Dating according to *ONP Registre*, p. 351. Note that fragments seven and eight of Storm's edition have since been shown to belong to another text (see Theodore Andersson, 'Kings' Sagas (*Konungasögur*)', *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature. A Critical Guide*, ed. by Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 212–13 and references there). The form of other historiographical texts that have since been lost cannot be reconstructed with a sufficient degree of certainty (see Andersson, 'Kings' Sagas', 214–15 and references there).

45 Theodore Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas (1180–1280)* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 46–47.

46 Suspensions – that is, that only the first letters of the words of a poetic line or lines are given – in the U manuscript of Snorri's *Edda* suggest that Snorri used one or more compilations of continuous poems when compiling *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál* (Lasse Mårtensson and Heimir Pálsson, 'Anmärkningsvärda suspensioner i DG 11 4to (Codex Upsaliensis av Snorra Edda) – spåren av en skriven förlaga?', *Scripta Islandica* 57

These seven final stanzas are connected to the battle of Stiklarstaðir. As I have argued elsewhere, several texts suggest that sets of stanzas could be transmitted orally with a minimal narrative frame, or even just set in a scene.⁴⁷ One example may suffice here. The poet Einarr Skúlason alludes to the two first stanzas of the cluster of six stanzas found in the beginning of the sixth chapter of *Hallfreðar saga*. In *Øvarflokkur*, Einarr Skúlason employs wordplay involving the meaning of the name of Freyja's daughter, Hnoss (treasure), thereby alluding to Hallfreðr's 'nú ák Sýrar mey dýra' (now I own Sýr's [Freyja's] precious daughter [Hnoss > hnoss]).⁴⁸ In *Geisli*, Einarr quotes the line 'Fyrr vas hitt es harra' (it was in the past that [...] the lord's/to the lord) by Hallfreðr, turning Hallfreðr's mention of pagan sacrifice into an image of the Passion. Einarr's allusions suggest that the stanzas constituted a well-known cluster in his day as well, connected to Hallfreðr's encounter with Óláfr Tryggvason.

In the first of these six stanzas, Hallfreðr thanks the king for a gift, whereas the remaining five are Hallfreðr's so-called 'conversion stanzas', where he reluctantly takes leave of the gods. The first stanza must thus have belonged to a different original context of composition than the other five, but it had apparently become part of the Hallfreðr-meets-Óláfr cluster by Einarr's day. Einarr was probably born around 1090, and he is mentioned as a priest in *Morkinskinna* and in a list of high-born priests in the year 1143.⁴⁹ This brings us to a point in time much earlier than that of the saga authors. It would appear that the saga author has made few adaptations of this cluster to the saga, since the six stanzas are connected by minimal passages of prose, mostly consisting of the king saying that the previous stanza was not good enough and that Hallfreðr has to compose another. This is little more than a frame for the stanzas, and this is also

(2008), 135–55). Only one such suspension has, however, been found in a skaldic poem (Mårtensson and Heimir Pálsson, 147–52).

47 Mikael Males, *The Poetic Genesis of Old Icelandic Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 80–85, 210–12, 259–62.

48 *Vatnsdæla saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1939), 156.

49 *Morkinskinna*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, 2 vols. Íslenzk fornrit, 23–24 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2011), 2, 87, 124; Guðrún Nordal *Skaldic Versifying and Social Discrimination in Medieval Iceland*. The Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies delivered at the University College London 15 March 2001 (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2003), 4.

likely to have been the case when Einarr treated these stanzas as a group long before the saga was written.

In my book, I provide a fuller treatment of this and two additional instances, where we can follow the growth of the prose around a set of stanzas.⁵⁰ In these instances, we are in all likelihood dealing with conceptual frames for given sets of stanzas, but not with prosimetrical oral accounts. When sagas were written down, these frames would be adapted and expanded to suit the saga account. Such a mode of oral transmission of *lausavísur* makes sense, since it provides a way of cataloguing and contextualising them, while it still retains full focus on the stanzas, which is required by the demanding art form of skaldic poetry, as opposed to the more accessible eddic poetry.

Such a 'conceptual frame' scenario can account for the remarkable convergence of the order of the stanzas in *Fóstbræðra saga* and the *Legendary Saga*, while also explaining why there is almost no overlap in the prose; in oral transmission, there was almost no prose to begin with, but all focus was on the stanzas set in a scene. The shared but differently placed sentence presumably belonged to the setting of the scene. This explanation might appear counterintuitive, given the likelihood of influence from the *Oldest Saga*, where the order of the stanzas was probably the same. The author does not appear to have a very clear memory of that saga, however, and I therefore suggest this possible, alternative explanation. Whether the order of the stanzas is dependent on the *Oldest Saga* or not, the combination of thematic and poetic overlap with the shared innovation of rich prosimetrum strongly suggests that the *Oldest Saga* exerted some influence on *Fóstbræðra saga*.

Jónas's remaining arguments in favour of a late date are either intertextual or stylistic, and Andersson does not address these. These features are of limited value for dating *Fóstbræðra saga* to the end of the thirteenth century, but some of them may suggest a dating to the beginning of that century. With regard to intertextual connections, Jónas discusses similarities to number of sagas of Icelanders and contemporary sagas (as well as the Bible, which is irrelevant for dating). Importantly, however, he consistently focuses on whether direct influence is plausible, but not on the direction of influence, and I have found no diagnostic instances

50 See note 45.

among his examples.⁵¹ With regard to courtly sagas (*riddarasögur*), Jónas presents no likely instances of influence in either direction.⁵² He suggests that the author was familiar with the concept of courtly love, but admits that the taxonomy of love and depictions of women is an inexact science.⁵³ In any event, Rognvaldr jarl's *lausavísur* and Bjarni Kolbeinsson's *Jómsvíkingadrápa* suggest that aspects of courtly love entered the literature more than half a century before the royal commission to translate French romances from 1226 onwards.

With regard to stylistics, Jónas's empirical evidence is weak. For instance, he states that *Fóstbræðra saga* uses kennings in prose, and that other instances of this are not found until around 1300 or later. He only presents examples from *Karlamagnúss saga*, however: *hildarleikr* (game of battle), *hildarvǫndr* (battle-rod; sword), *hjartaborg* (heart-castle; breast). To this may be added a few similar instances discussed by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, dating from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries.⁵⁴ These kennings are all intuitively comprehensible and appear as embellishments with some poetic inspiration. *Fóstbræðra saga*, by contrast, has *Ránar dætr* (daughters of Rán; waves) and *elris hundr* (the hound of the elder-tree; wind), which require knowledge of skaldic diction.⁵⁵ Such kennings are otherwise never found in saga prose, but only in poetry and in prose treating kennings. *Fóstbræðra saga* thus represents an approach to how poetic resources may be used in prose that is not found in any other saga (see further below).

Jónas classifies the style of *Fóstbræðra saga* as 'florid' or 'learned' and uses this as an argument for a late date. Jónas does not correlate these features with developments among sagas of Icelanders or kings' sagas, but compares them only to courtly sagas, which draw on conventions established by the early translations (from 1226 on). But why, then, are there no clear analogues? Later in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, many authors were certainly familiar with the conventions of courtly literature, but these were nonetheless kept apart from the established conventions of sagas of Icelanders. Thus, for instance, the 'courtly' *Laxdæla saga* is courtly only in relation to other sagas of Icelanders, since it features a lion on a

51 Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um 'Fóstbræðrasögu'*, 224–49.

52 Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um 'Fóstbræðrasögu'*, 249–51.

53 Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um 'Fóstbræðrasögu'*, 251.

54 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Ritunartími íslendingasagna*, 137–39.

55 Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um 'Fóstbræðrasögu'*, 268.

shield and a few other relevant details; in general, it has little in common with other courtly literature. Einar Ól. Sveinsson gives a list of courtly features that may be used to date sagas after c. 1240, but none of these apply to *Fóstbræðra saga*.⁵⁶

Furthermore, many of the relevant features are also found in early homilies. Indeed, the religious, hyperbolic and learned character of the 'digressions' sounds more homiletic than anything else, and this is precisely what makes them so unusual in a saga context. While homilies and sagas serve very different purposes, it would perhaps not be strange if some of the rhetorical conventions of homiletic discourse spilled over into the saga text of an author who is accustomed to them, and I would argue that this is a likely explanation of some of the unusual features in *Fóstbræðra saga*. I turn now to the features that Jónas sees as indicative of a late date, and I use the Icelandic Homily Book (below IHB) as a point of comparison, because of its early date and relatively varied content.

The most compelling feature, in so far as it is linguistic and probably not exclusively the product of an active choice on the author's behalf, is the use of the indefinite article *einn* ('a man', 'a boat', etc.). Over time, it became more common to write 'maðr einn hét Mǫrðr' (a man was named Mǫrðr), rather than 'maðr hét Mǫrðr' ([a] man was named Mǫrðr), and we find relatively numerous examples of such use of the indefinite article in *Fóstbræðra saga*.

It is somewhat unclear exactly what Jónas is referring to when counting the occurrences of the indefinite article in *Fóstbræðra saga*, given that the number varies between different versions. I have read the text of M as printed in Björn K. Þórolfsson's edition, as well as Hb after M's text stops.⁵⁷ While I come up with the same number of occurrences of *einn* as a numeral with temporal expressions (*einn dag*, *einn vetr*, etc.), namely 16, I find only 22 instances of unequivocal use of *einn* as indefinite article (up to 25 if three doubtful cases are included), against Jónas's 50. Given that our numbers for the use of *einn* as a numeral in temporal expressions are identical, I suspect that in order to reach so high a number, Jónas may have included instances of *einn* where it is not used as indefinite article.⁵⁸

56 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Ritunartími Íslendingasagna*, 141.

57 See *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson, vii, xvii.

58 There are some borderline cases. Thus, for instance, 'einn ungr maðr' (one young man)

The number is still relatively high, but it is doubtful that it would be higher than in most other sagas if it were not for the concentration of occurrences in the Greenland episode: 13 occurrences on 32 pages versus 9 occurrences on the remaining 184 pages.⁵⁹ R lacks many occurrences, in the Greenland episode and elsewhere, but since these are generally found in the other manuscripts, their absence seems to be due to scribal preference rather than to the archetype.⁶⁰ Their concentration in the Greenland episode may at least partly be due to the nature of the action there, since it contains many encounters between people who are previously unknown to each other or who say that they are someone who they are not.

As Jónas notes, indefinite *einn* is also used in the IHB.⁶¹ This point calls for some elaboration. In fact, the number of occurrences in the IHB is very low, but in this instance, numbers are deceptive. The indefinite article generally occurs in 'down-to-earth' narrative sequences where a person or entity not previously mentioned is introduced. While this is a common state of affairs in the sagas, it is rare in the IHB, but when these criteria are met, we get some examples of the indefinite article.⁶² Furthermore, the very uneven distribution within *Fóstbræðra saga* should warn us against using the indefinite article as a dating criterion for this saga; the numbers outside of the Greenland episode are roughly compatible with those that Jónas gives for *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in *Heimskringla* (9 in *Fóstbræðra saga*, 12 in *Óláfs saga*, but given the length of *Óláfs saga*, the ratio in *Fóstbræðra saga* is slightly higher).⁶³

(*Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson, 18.1) and 'einn útlendr maðr' (a foreigner) (*Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson, 166.14), could be taken as indefinite articles, but *einn* in these cases underlines the point that protagonist has singlehandedly performed a feat.

59 *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson, pp. 169.3 and 9, 174.2 (not R), 181.8, 126.9 (not R and F) and 15 (not R), 188.12 (not R), 190.6 (not R), 193.3 (not R), 195.2, 197.8, 198.3 (not F), 200.7 (not R). Occurrences not related to the Greenland episode are: 19.1 (not R), 21.9 (not R), 33.16, 35.1 (not R), 55.2, 88.6, 101.16 (not R), 152.10 (not F), 213.14. Doubtful instances are: 18.1, 63.14, 166.14 (in these cases it is relevant that the person is alone).

60 See previous note.

61 Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um 'Fóstbræðrasögu'*, 283.

62 78r–80v are narrative and 'saga-like', and contain three occurrences of the indefinite article: 78r l. 22, 78v l. 4 (*unus* rather than *einn*), 80v l. 14. See 'The Manuscript Sthm. Perg. 15 4°. A Diplomatic Edition and Introduction', ed. by Andrea van Arkel-de Leeuw van Weenen (PhD Diss., Rijksuniversiteit te Utrecht, 1977). Similar characteristics are found on 94r–97r, but only *þokkurr* (some) is used there.

63 Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um 'Fóstbræðrasögu'*, 285.

Another recurrent feature in *Fóstbræðra saga* is alliteration, in particular alliterative pairs of nearly synonymous words: ‘vittr ok vinsæll’, ‘hvatr ok harðráðr’, etc.⁶⁴ As Jónas notes, this is found in courtly literature, but it is also a staple of homiletic and hagiographic literature, sometimes to the point of extravagance. The IHB has the occasional pair, stretches of pairs, and sometimes even sequences approaching *fornyrðislag*. Again, pairs of nearly synonymous words are particularly common: ‘öfund ok illska’, ‘vit ok vísdómr’, etc.⁶⁵ Unlike the indefinite article, alliteration has a very natural place in homilies, with their lists of concepts and their emotional addresses, and we thus find a more conspicuous use of it here than in sagas of any kind. Alliterative pairs are thus not a late phenomenon, and homiletic interference probably explains the presence of alliteration in courtly literature as well, since it is not present in the French originals.

The question thus becomes why the author of *Fóstbræðra saga* opted for the hyperbolic style found in homilies, hagiography and courtly literature. Comparable features may be found in *Sverris saga*, the first full-length saga of an individual king (see discussion below), and *Íslendingabók* opens with a Latin-style period.⁶⁶ This suggests that features such as hyperbole, simile and alliteration may belong to an early, experimental phase of the development of kings’s sagas and sagas of Icelanders, but that these characteristics gradually came to be seen as inappropriate for such local, recent and comparatively realistic topics.

Drawing on Lars Lönnroth, Jónas also discusses the anatomical lore of some digressions. In this context, it is important that the last five digressions are likely to have been added later, as noted above, and that one of them is found only in F. Neither Lönnroth nor Jónas takes this into account.

The first anatomical digression is that on the smallness of Þorgeirr’s heart, discussed above. The idea that the heart of a brave man is hard is a rather straightforward metaphor that could be drawn from either local

64 Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um ‘Fóstbræðrasögu’*, 279–80.

65 See the lists in David Macmillan McDougall, ‘Studies in the Prose Style of the Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian Homily Books’ (PhD diss., University College London, 1983), 98–127 (see also 26–42).

66 *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*, ed. by Jakob Benediktsson. Íslenzk fornrit 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1986), 4.

or Latin tradition (notably Pliny).⁶⁷ The specific explanation that a small heart has little room for blood in which fear may reside seems to be the author's own, but the fact that the amount of blood is decisive for Þorgeirr's character probably draws its inspiration from humoral theory, since the fundamental parameters of that theory are the excess or lack of humours, heat or moisture.⁶⁸ This theory became commonplace with the spread of Salernian medicine in the twelfth century, and it envisioned four types of blood (black and yellow bile, phlegm and actual blood), which in conjunction with the parameters hot and cold, wet and dry were decisive for the character and well-being of the individual. In the Norse area, aspects of this theory (heat and moisture) are found already in Theodoricus monachus, c. 1180, in his discussion of how men's bodies have become smaller over time:

Cuncta namque in terra ex calore et humore procreantur; in quibus calor abundat, fiunt exiliora, graciliora et subtiliora; et ubi preualet humor, sunt grossiora, proceriora et magis corpulenta.

Everything in the world is generated from heat and moisture; where heat is preponderant, creatures are made thinner, leaner and more delicate; where moisture has the advantage, they are thicker, taller and fleshier.⁶⁹

General knowledge of humoral theory is thus attested at an early date. Interestingly enough, it is here found in a Latin kings' saga, and one that makes ample use of digressions, like *Fóstbræðra saga*.⁷⁰ It should be noted, however, that the theory is also found in the Old Norse translation of Honorius Augustodunensis' *Elucidarius*, before 1200.⁷¹

67 Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um 'Fóstbræðrasögu'*, 246–47; *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda* 7, ed. von See et al., 285–86.

68 Lars Lönnroth, 'Kroppen som själens spegel – ett motiv i de isländska sagorna', *Lychnos* (1963–64): 24–61 (at 46–48).

69 Theodoricus, *De antiquitate regum Norwagiensium. On the Old Norwegian Kings*, ed. and trans. by Egil Kraggerud (Oslo: Novus forlag, 2018), 66–67; cf. Lönnroth, 'Kroppen som själens spegel', 35.

70 For a recent discussion, see Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'Humoral Theory in the Medieval North. An Old Norse Translation of *Epistula Vindiciani* in Hauksbók', *Gripla* 29 (2018): 35–66.

71 Honorius Augustodunensis, *The Old Norse 'Elucidarius'. Original Text and English Translation*, ed. and trans. by Evelyn Scherabon Firchow (Columbia: Camden House, 1992), 14.

Two additional anatomical digressions are found in the saga. The first of these states that:

Reiði hvers manns er í galli en líf í hjarta, minni í heila, metnaðr í lungum, hlátr í milti, lystisemi í lifr.⁷²

The anger of every man is found in the gall, and life in the heart, memory in the brain, pride in the lungs, laughter in the spleen, lust in the liver.

The second reads:

Öll bein hans skulfu, þau sem í vǫru hans líkama, en þat vǫru cc beina ok xiiij bein. Tennr hans nǫtruðu, þær vǫru xxx. Allar æðar í hans hǫrundi pipruðu fyrir hræðslu sakir, þær vǫru cccc ok xv.⁷³

All his bones shook, the ones that were in his body, and that was 214 bones. His teeth rattled, they were 30. All the veins in his body trembled with fear, they were 415.

No exact match to the first digression has been found, but related material may be found in Pliny, Isidore and others.⁷⁴ By contrast, the second digression exactly matches the thirteenth-century Salernian *Flos Medicine*, to the point that the numbers can be shown to be misreadings of numbers given in that text (CCCCXV for CCCLXV and CCXIV for CCXIX). The same can be said, however, about the Old English *Prose Solomon and Saturn*, and the 365 bones can also be found in Irish texts.⁷⁵ This digression may have been influenced by *Flos Medicine*, in which case it is unlikely to predate c. 1300 by very much, but it is equally possible that the numbers have entered the Icelandic tradition through, for instance, Insular monastic influence.

These two digressions belong to the last five in the saga, and as noted above, the texts of Haukr's 'first secretary' and B suggest that these have been added under the influence of earlier digressions. Four of them are

⁷² *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson, 149.

⁷³ *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson, 162.

⁷⁴ Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um 'Fóstbræðrasögu'*, 244.

⁷⁵ See *The 'Prose Solomon and Saturn' and 'Adrian and Ritheus'*, ed. by James. E. Cross and Thomas D. Hill (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 34, 123–26.

found only in F and R, and the last one quoted here is found only in F. This digression thus has the weakest claim to having belonged to the archetype, even among the five. It can therefore at best be used to date itself, and certainly not the saga.

Other features mentioned by Jónas, such as personification, the focus on courage and the comparisons between Þorgeirr and a lion, are certainly reminiscent of what one may find in courtly literature. It should be noted, however, that courage is a staple of eddic poetry, and the door from Valþjófsstaðir (c. 1200) reminds us that knights and their lions were known before courtly literature was translated. With regard to personification, it may be true that the expression ‘dætr Heimskunnar, þær Dul ok Rangvirðing’ (the daughters of Stupidity, Conceit and Bad Judgement) is unlikely to date to the beginning of the thirteenth century, but it belongs in one of the digressions that are likely to have been added.⁷⁶ With regard to the lexicon, this is, I believe, no trustworthy guide. The words discussed by Jónas generally have early attestations.⁷⁷ Somewhat surprisingly, he does not discuss the courtly *hugprúðr* (courageous), but this is a good example of the problems involved. It is found in later hagiographical and courtly literature, but *hugprúðr* once turns up in *Skáldskaparmál*, and its presence in R and C shows it to be archetypal.⁷⁸ This, like other typically courtly words, would thus have been available for someone who aimed for a particular style already at an early date.

In general, I consider the features discussed by Jónas to be marked stylistic choices otherwise largely absent from sagas of Icelanders, much like the ‘digressions’ where many of these features are found. The saga’s stylistic isolation should be taken seriously and the question needs to be addressed when an experiment of this kind could have been conducted, and under what circumstances. I suggest that a plausible setting for influence from established genres – such as hagiography, homiletic literature and kings’ sagas – was at a time when there were as yet no clear generic conventions for sagas of Icelanders. This hypothesis is supported by the scenario outlined by Andersson, in which *Heimskringla* draws on *Fóstbræðra*

76 Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um ‘Fóstbræðrasögu’*, 269–72; Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Ritunartími íslendingasagna*, 154–55.

77 Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um ‘Fóstbræðrasögu’*, 285–91.

78 *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson (København: Kommissionen for det arnamagnæanske legat, 1931), 140 (abbreviated to ‘h.’ in C, but clearly designating ‘hugprúði’).

saga. We have also seen that anatomical lore and digressions are found in conjunction in Theodoricus's history of the Norwegian kings and noted some stylistic affinities with *Sverris saga* – both early texts. In a period close to the composition of these texts, it would make sense to draw on similar rhetorical resources in the composition of local narrative for which no clear conventions as yet existed. Breaking with these conventions once they were established would be more surprising, but perhaps not inconceivable: an unexpected scenario cannot be rejected out of hand. Additional parameters would therefore be desirable, and here *Fóstbræðra saga*'s treatment of poetry becomes a valuable asset, since the diachronic development of conventions for the treatment of poetry in other prosimetrical genres (kings' sagas and hagiography) can be charted in some detail and compared to those of the sagas of Icelanders.

Poetry

I begin with the author's choice regarding the use of authenticating versus situational quotations.⁷⁹ In the sagas, authenticating quotations are typically introduced with the words *svá segir N. N* (as N. N. says) or the like, whereas situational quotations are typically introduced with words like *þá kvað N. N visu* (then N. N recited a stanza). *Fóstbræðra saga* falls into two parts in this regard: before Þormóðr travels to Greenland, the author uses authenticating quotations, with only two exceptions.⁸⁰ After this point, only situational quotations are used.

The bulk of the quotations in the first part belong to Þormóðr's *Þor-*

79 See Alois Wolf, 'Zur Rolle der *Visur* in der altnordischen Prosa', *Festschrift Leonhard C. Frans zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Osmund Menghin and Hermann M. Ölberg (Innsbruck: Innsbrucker Gesellschaft zur Pflege der Geisteswissenschaften, 1965), 459–84; Bjarni Einarsson, 'On the Rôle of Verse in Saga-Literature', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 7 (1974): 118–25; Diana Whaley, 'Skalds and Situational Verses in *Heimskringla*', *Snorri Sturluson. Kolloquium anlässlich der 750. Wiederkehr seines Todestages*, ed. by Alois Wolf (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1993), 252.

80 These are found in *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson, 58, 75. With regard to the authenticity of the stanzas, both *Þorgeirsdrápa* and the stanzas connected to king Óláfr in the end of the saga contain hiatus and other early forms. The stanzas from Greenland, however, do not, and some doubt may accrue to these. See *Vestfirðinga sögur*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson, lix. There is one exception: the stanza where Þormóðr reports his revenge has *aðalþending* in *ǫ*: *a* ('gjört': 'svartan'). See Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um 'Fóstbræðrasögu'*, 118; *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson, 166.

geirsdrápa, stanzas of which have been distributed across the narrative. This is a common technique in kings' sagas, but it is rare in sagas of Icelanders: the only other saga of Icelanders that does it to any considerable extent is *Eyrbyggja saga*. There, Oddr's *Illugadrápa* is quoted twice in the beginning, and Þormóðr Trefilsson's *Hrafnsmál* five times towards the end.⁸¹ With roughly half of its stanzas being authenticating, *Fóstbræðra saga* has far more authenticating quotations than any other saga of Icelanders.

Fóstbræðra saga is therefore a generic hybrid with regard to its quotation of poetry, being more reminiscent of kings' sagas than of other sagas of Icelanders. In *Egils saga*, for instance, long poems are not used in this way, even though the author clearly had access to them. *Fóstbræðra saga*'s technique thus appears to have been carried over from the kings' sagas without the interference of established conventions for how to quote poetry in sagas of Icelanders. This makes it likely that it belongs to the beginning of the tradition of sagas of Icelanders. It should be noted, however, that authenticating quotations are absent in the last part of the saga, which overlaps in content with the sagas of Óláfr Haraldsson. It would appear that the technique of constructing a back-bone of authenticating quotations has been carried over from the kings' sagas to the part of the saga which was not already in existence, whereas the situational quotations that are common in sagas about Óláfr Haraldsson in particular have been retained in *Fóstbræðra saga*.

In two instances, we find traditional, poetic diction in the flowery language of the digressions. Thus, we read: 'Reyndu Ránar dœtr drengina ok buðu þeim sín faðmlog'⁸² (the daughters of Rán tested the men and offered them their embraces). In skaldic diction, the daughters of the goddess Rán are the waves, and their embraces appear to be borrowed from another mythological topos, namely the embraces of the goddess of death, Hel. Indeed, this topos appears somewhat later, where we read: '[...] ok mun Hel, húsfreyja þín, leggja þik sér í faðm [...]'⁸³ (and Hel, your lady of the house, will take you in her embrace). In another instance, we read:

81 As Russell Poole has shown, it is also likely that the stanzas by Þórarinn Máhlíðingr belonged to one poem (or to a 'frame of transmission' as outlined above), but these are all situational quotations (Russell Poole, 'The Origins of the *Máhlíðingavísur*', *Scandinavian Studies* 57 (1985): 244–85).

82 *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson, 20.

83 *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson, 26.

Fjúk ok frost gekk alla nóttina: gó elris hundr alla þá nótt óþrotnum
kjöptum ok tōgg allar jarðir með grimmum kuldatoñnum.

Snow and frost drove all through the night: the hound of the elder-tree [the wind] howled all that night with tireless jaws and bit all lands with cruel teeth of cold.

This personification of the wind as a hound is typical of the flowery digressions in *Fóstbræðra saga*. This is not, however, personification of a general kind: *elris hundr* is a conventional kenning.⁸⁴

As noted above, *Fóstbræðra saga* is unique in embedding non-intuitive kennings in flowery, figurative prose – or any saga prose. The fact that it does so suggests experimentation with the possibilities of poetics without much restraint from established conventions. The norms for how to quote and what to do with poetry took shape gradually in the decades around 1200. Thus, for instance, *Sverris saga* quotes two stanzas to prove a moral point, which is a common strategy in Latin prosimetra but almost unheard of in Old Norse.⁸⁵ Among the kings' sagas, the portions of *Morkinskinna* that are likely to be original to the work display many quotations that are of a merely descriptive character, some of which are composed in simple eddic metres.⁸⁶ The compilations *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*, composed only slightly later, avoid quotations of this type.

It seems likely that the unusual treatment of poetry in *Fóstbræðra saga* – both the mode of quotation and the use of non-intuitive kennings as rhetorical flowers – is a sign that it belongs very early in the tradition of sagas of Icelanders. The flowery style is presumably due to the same factors, and we may again compare it to *Sverris saga* – an early king's saga with an unu-

84 For kennings of this type, see Rudolf Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden. Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik* (Bonn: Kurt Schroeder, 1921), 102.

85 The moral character of both quotations may be related to the particular circumstance that they belong in speeches (*Sverris saga*, ed. by Þorleifur Hauksson. Íslenzk fornrit 30 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2007), 72, 257). Stylistically, *Sverris saga* is more similar to Latin historiographical works than later kings' sagas (Sverre Bagge, 'The Old Norse Kings' Sagas and European Latin Historiography', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 115 (2016): 1–38 (at 4, 11)).

86 *Morkinskinna. The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157)*, trans. by Theodore Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade, *Islandica* 51 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 25.

sually 'European' rhetorical style, partly similar to that of *Fóstbræðra saga*: some speeches have a classical, rhetorical structure,⁸⁷ synonymous word pairs and unnecessary adjectives – both often alliterating – are used,⁸⁸ and the author makes frequent use of similes and opposites.⁸⁹ As in the case of *Fóstbræðra saga*, the most flowery version of the text is clearly oldest, and the saga was gradually redacted to conform to 'classical' style during the fourteenth century.⁹⁰ *Sverris saga* appears mainly to have been composed by abbot Karl Jónsson of Þingeyrar in the years 1185–1188 and somewhat later. *Fóstbræðra saga* is probably later than *Sverris saga*, drawing on conventions established for the kings' sagas, but still so early that conventions for how to compose sagas of Icelanders had not been set: around or after 1200 and before c. 1220 seems plausible, since *Egils saga* must probably have been composed before *Heimskringla*, and *Egils saga* is fully developed generically.⁹¹

Original Context

Many factors support the hypothesis that *Fóstbræðra saga* is the earliest preserved saga of Icelanders: no saga is more directly dependent on a king's saga; the rhetorical register is consistent with an early king's saga like *Sverris saga*, but not with later ones; experiments with the use of poetry in prose are found in early sagas like *Sverris saga* (moral quotation) and *Morkinskinna* (descriptive quotation), but not in later ones; the authenticating mode of quotation is much closer to kings' sagas than what may be found in any other saga of Icelanders.

Since *Fóstbræðra saga* treats the West Fjords, a northwestern point of origin seems likely, and the saga's presence in F and M supports this. The scribes of F drew on books from Þingeyrar when compiling the manuscript, and while the precise point of origin of M is uncertain, it appears to have been written in northern Iceland c. 1330–1370.⁹² This rough loca-

87 *Sverris saga*, ed. Þorleifur Hauksson, lxix–lxx.

88 *Sverris saga*, ed. Þorleifur Hauksson, lxxii–lxxiii.

89 *Sverris saga*, ed. Þorleifur Hauksson, lxvii, lxxiii–lxxiv.

90 *Sverris saga*, ed. Þorleifur Hauksson, xlvii–lii, lxxiv.

91 See Males, *The Poetic Genesis*, 235–36 and references there.

92 On F, see, for instance, *Vestfirðinga sögur*, ed. by Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, lxxv; on M, see *Sagas of Icelandic Bishops*. Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile VII, ed. Stefán Karlsson (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1967), 28–29.

tion of *Fóstbræðra saga* is further corroborated by its use in *Grettis saga* – a point that calls for some elaboration.

Þorgeirsdrápa forms the poetic backdrop of the first part of *Fóstbræðra saga* and has no independent transmission, except one stanza which is quoted in *Grettis saga*.⁹³ The line of borrowing – from *Fóstbræðra saga* to *Grettis saga* – is suggested by the quotation of a stanza by Grettir in *kviðuháttir* in both sagas.⁹⁴ In *Grettis saga*, this is the third of a group of four *kviðuháttir* stanzas on the topic of how Þorbjörg saved Grettir. At least two of these can be deemed spurious, since they draw on Snorri's *Edda*, and the remaining one is highly likely to be, since it employs wordplay (*marþaks fjorðr* 'sea-roof's [ice's] fjord [Ísafjorðr]), which is typical of the style of Pseudo-Grettir.⁹⁵ The stanza found in both sagas differs from the other three in being stylistically simple, and it is probably authentic. It is likely that this stanza is what prompted the author of *Grettis saga* to compose the additional ones, in the same metre but with the elaborate style that he had devised for Grettir. Like *Þorgeirsdrápa*, this stanza has no independent transmission, and it would thus appear that the author of *Grettis saga* got both Grettir's stanza and the stanza from *Þorgeirsdrápa* from *Fóstbræðra saga*.⁹⁶ The author of *Grettis saga* was active in northwestern Iceland, and it seems likely that he was in contact with the monastery at Þingeyrar, if he did not belong to it.⁹⁷

Þingeyrar was an important centre for the development of kings' sagas in the decades around 1200: Karl Jónsson composed *Sverris saga* and Oddr munkr and Gunnlaugr Leifsson both composed Latin sagas about Óláfr Tryggvason there – Oddr's saga was soon translated into Norse.

93 *Skj A I*, 277–81; *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson, Íslenzk fornrit 7 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1936), 92–93.

94 Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson assume that the influence went from *Grettis saga* to *Fóstbræðra saga* in this instance, since the episode is missing in F (*Vestfirðinga sögur*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, lxix). In F, however, *Fóstbræðra saga* has been split into three sections and inserted at various points in *Óláfs saga helga*. The saga heroes, Þormóðr and Þorgeirr, both had dealings with the king, but Grettir did not. Under these circumstances, the Grettir episode became unnecessary, and it is likely that it was dropped for that reason.

95 Males, *The Poetic Genesis*, 266–67, but there I do not discuss the special status of the stanza preserved in both sagas.

96 *Skj A I*, 310 (6).

97 *Grettis saga*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, lxxi–lxxv.

Fóstbræðra saga's indebtedness to kings' sagas, its manuscript transmission and connection to *Grettis saga*, and its learned and hagiographic tendencies may suggest that it was first written at Þingeyrar – but this can be no more than an educated guess. The saga's point of origin in northwestern Iceland may be regarded as certain, however.

Preceding Traditions and Models

We can follow the development of skaldic prosimetra in some detail, which evolved from quoting very little poetry to quoting substantial amounts in the decades around 1200.⁹⁸ There are also indications that the lore about the deeds of early Icelanders gradually accumulated a degree of canonicity during the twelfth century, but not in a prosimetrical setting. With regard to *Landnámabók*, the part of the text that was originally written by Kolskeggr, sometime before c. 1130, often displays a particularly compact style: X took land in Y, his son was Z.⁹⁹ It is also likely that Ari fróði composed some version or part of *Landnámabók*, around the same time or slightly later. A reference to Teitr as a source to Ketilbjörn Ketilsson's taking of land in *Haukdæla þáttr* in all likelihood goes back to Ari, since it refers to Teitr as informant, which is typical of Ari.¹⁰⁰ It seems likely that the text by Ari in this instance was a version of (a part of?) *Landnámabók*, but it cannot be ruled out that we are dealing with the first, lost version of Ari fróði's *Íslendingabók*, which contained genealogies.¹⁰¹ Either way, we know Ari's style through *Íslendingabók*, and while we may here see the signs of a degree of canonisation of some prominent Icelandic people and events, the information is meagre and annalistic in comparison to later sagas. Except for one couplet, it is composed in prose only, and this is likely to have been the case with Kolskeggr's *Landnámabók* as well.

When searching the twelfth century for lore that would evolve into sagas of Icelanders, more promising sources are Haukr Valdísarson's *Íslendingadrápa* and the inscription from c. 1150 in Maeshowe, Orkney, mentioning the axe of Gaukr Trandilsson: 'Þessar rúnar reist sá maðr, er

98 See Males, *The Poetic Genesis*, 195–200.

99 *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, cvii.

100 *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, cxii.

101 *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, viii–x, cxv.

rúnstr er fyrir vestan haf, með þeiri øxi, er átti Gaukr Trandilssonr fyrir sunnan land' (The man who is most skilled in runes west of the ocean carved these runes with the axe that Gaukr Trandilssonr owned in the south of the country [Iceland]).¹⁰² Gaukr is briefly and enigmatically mentioned in *Njáls saga*, where we learn little more than that he was killed by his foster brother.¹⁰³ We know that there existed a saga about him in the fourteenth century, since in M, the commissioner has informed the scribe that he should write down *Gauks saga Trandilssonar* after *Njáls saga*.¹⁰⁴ This never happened, and the saga is now lost to us. Gaukr is also mentioned in *Íslendingadrápa*, where we learn that he made the birds of the battlefield happy and that he was harmful to many a man in combat.¹⁰⁵ The importance of his axe to the carver in Maeshowe suggests that he was connected to martial, saga-like events.

Íslendingadrápa is a poetic list of Icelandic saga heroes. Its date has been disputed, but indications of a twelfth century date are strong, not only because such historical poems seem later to have been replaced by saga writing, but also because the poem repeatedly differs from saga accounts in ways comparable to other twelfth century poems (notably *Háttalykill* and *Reksteffa*). There is also some linguistic evidence in support of this date.¹⁰⁶ We thus have a few indications that the lore of the heroes of Iceland was at the focus of attention in the twelfth century, but while it may have been collected into a precursor of *Landnámabók*, it is unlikely that it was written

102 Michael P. Barnes, *The Runic Inscriptions of Maeshowe, Orkney*, Runrön 8 (Uppsala: Institutionen för nordiska språk, 1994), 152–53.

103 *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1954), 72–73, 371.

104 The reading of parts of this notice is insecure and has become progressively more so in recent years, but the words 'láttu rita hér við Gauks sögu Trandilssonar' (let *Gauks saga Trandilssonar* be written here) have not been called into doubt (*Sagas of Icelandic Bishops. Fragments of Eight Manuscripts*, ed. by Stefán Karlsson. Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile VII (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1967), 27; Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen, *A Grammar of Möðruvallabók* (Leiden: Research School CNWS, 2000), 27).

105 *Skj* A I, 558–59 (19); B I, 543 (19).

106 On the dating of *Íslendingadrápa*, see Jónas Kristjánsson, 'Íslendingadrápa and Oral Tradition', *Grippl* 1 (1975): 76–91. Later dates have been proposed, but largely without responding to Jónas's solid arguments: thus Bjarni Einarsson, 'Íslendingadrápa', *Tímarit Háskóla Íslands* 4 (1989): 127–31; Ernst Walter, 'Argumente zur Bestimmung des Alters der *Íslendingadrápa* Hauks Valdisarsonar', *Deutsch-nordische Begegnungen. 9. Arbeitstagung der Skandinavisten des deutschen Sprachgebiets 1989 in Svendborg*, ed. by Kurt Braunmüller and Mogens Brøndsted (Odense: Odense University Press, 1991), 96–103).

down into sagas. If it had been, *Íslendingadrápa* would probably have been in better factual agreement with the saga accounts, and sagas composed in this early period would have reflected the prevailing prose format of the twelfth century, rather than the prosimetrum of the thirteenth.¹⁰⁷

If we attempt to answer what *Fóstbræðra saga* was to its author, then, it was a saga about local heroes, drawing on the lore of Icelandic heroes that had accumulated a degree of canonicity during the twelfth century. In order to produce such a text, the author drew on known poetry, some of it transmitted as a long poem, some of it perhaps as part of the situational setting of Þormóðr-at-Stiklarstaðir. As written models, he looked to kings' sagas, where the authenticating mode of quotation of poetry dominates (though not for Þormóðr-at-Stiklarstaðir specifically). For rhetorical embellishment, he drew on homiletic models, but he also explored the potential of skaldic diction. All of these factors suggest a tentative approach, and several of them – such as authenticating quotation, skaldic diction in prose and hyperbolic rhetoric – would be rejected by later authors as the genre began to find its own peculiar register. The experiment undertaken by the author of *Fóstbræðra saga*, however, was all-important for later authors to have something to emulate and partly reject, and in order for the genre to reach the perfection of *Egils saga*, *Gísla saga*, *Njáls saga* and others.

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AM 73 a fol. (Bæjarbók)	AM 142 fol.
AM 73 b fol. (Bæjarbók)	GKS 1005 fol. (Flateyjarbók)

Den Arnamagnæanske Samling,

AM 73 a fol.
AM 73 b fol.
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107 On a famous passage in *Þorgils saga ok Haflíða* and why it cannot be used to reconstruct twelfth-century literary forms, see Males, *The Poetic Genesis*, 201–05.

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: *Fóstbræðra saga*, sagas of Icelanders, kings' sagas, prosimetrum

This article argues that *Fóstbræðra saga* constitutes a link between kings' sagas and sagas of Icelanders, and that it is the first prosimetrical saga of Icelanders. It evaluates Sven B.F. Jansson's arguments regarding the long and the short version and whether the 'digressions' were found in the archetype. It is argued that Jansson's

analysis is partly flawed, but that his claim that the digressions were found in the archetype is probably right, except for the last five. In addition, Theodore Andersson has argued convincingly against Jónas Kristjánsson that *Fóstbræðra saga* must be older than *Heimskringla*. The present author accepts Andersson's arguments, but since *Fóstbræðra saga* – like most sagas of Icelanders – offers few dating criteria, additional parameters would be valuable. Under favourable circumstances, the poetry in the sagas may offer some clues, and this article takes two poetic features into account. *Fóstbræðra saga* is unique among sagas of Icelanders both in its high proportion of authenticating quotations of poetry, which is reminiscent of kings' sagas, and in using kennings that require skaldic competence as part of the overblown language of the digressions. A comparison with the treatment of poetry in the kings' sagas suggests that these features indicate an early, experimental approach.

ÁGRIP

Lykilorð: *Fóstbræðra saga*, Íslendingasögur, konungasögur, samþáttun lausamáls og kveðskapar

Í þessari grein er því haldið fram að *Fóstbræðra saga* sé hlekkur sem tengir saman konungasögur og Íslendingasögur og jafnframt að hún sé fyrsta Íslendingasagan sem beitir samtvinnun lausamáls og kveðskapar (*prosimetrum*). Sven B.F. Jansson setti fram athuganir um tengsl styttri og lengri gerðar sögunnar og taldi hann að hinar svokölluðu „klausur“ hefðu verið til staðar í erkiritinu. Hér er málið tekið til endurskoðunar. Þótt ákveðnir gallar séu á rökfærslu Janssons er sú niðurstaða hans að klausurnar séu upphaflegar líklega réttar – en á þó ekki um þær síðustu fimm. Um aldur sögunnar hélt Theodore Andersson því fram að *Fóstbræðra saga* væri eldri en *Heimskringla* en Jónas Kristjánsson var á öndverðum meiði. Málflutningur Anderssons er skynsamlegur og fallist á hann hér en í raun er þó ekki miklu til að dreifa við aldurssetningu Íslendingasagna og væri dýrmætt að finna fleiri rök í málinu. Ef heppnin væri með mætti reyna að ráða eitthvað af kveðskapnum í sögunni og hér eru tveir eiginleikar þessa kveðskapar skoðaðir. *Fóstbræðra saga* er einstök meðal Íslendingasagna í því að þegar hún vitnar í kveðskap er það að miklu leyti til að staðfesta atburðarásina, eins og gert er í konungasögum. Annað sérkenni á sögunni er að nota kenningar úr skáldamáli í því flúraða máli sem notað er í klausunum. Þegar lítið er á það hvernig kveðskapur er notaður í konungasögum má gera því skóna að þessir eiginleikar bendi til hás aldurs og vísi aftur til tíma þegar sagnagerð var á tilraunastigi.

Mikael Males

Trollfaret 8 a, 0490, Oslo, Norway

mikael.males@iln.uio.no