

KATELIN PARSONS

ALBERT JÓHANNESSEN
AND THE SCRIBES OF HECLA ISLAND

*Manuscript culture and scribal production
in an Icelandic-Canadian settlement¹*

NOTHING REMAINS of the Flugumýri homestead. On a hot summer's day, flies buzz lazily overhead, and a strip of neatly mowed picnic ground cuts through the waist-high grass leading to the head of the Black Wolf Trail. Be sure to tell someone, says the notice board, if you plan on hiking the entire way. Not far along the trail, facing the eroding lakeshore, stands historian Nelson Gerrard's interpretive sign, which commemorates the Icelanders who once lived here and gave Flugumýri its name. A grainy, black-and-white photograph of a man is superimposed onto the image of a leaf from a handwritten book. Here, in this most unlikely of places, is a monument to a forgotten scribe: Albert Jóhannesson of Hecla Island.

Albert Jóhannesson (1847–1921) was one of thousands of Icelanders who arrived in North America in the late nineteenth century.² For the vast majority, their economic situation meant that the trip would be one-way. Many brought prized family heirlooms with them in anticipation

- 1 Thanks to Nelson Gerrard, Tammy Axelsson, Jan Magnusson, Julianna Roberts, Katarzyna Anna Kapitan, Hólmfríður Tómasdóttir, the two anonymous reviewers, the Honorary Council of the Icelandic National League of Iceland, the manuscript division of the National and University Library of Iceland and the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies for invaluable assistance and support. Funding for the research was received from the Eimskip University Fund, Eimskip, Landsbanki, Icelandair and the Manitoba Heritage Grants Program.
- 2 Júníus H. Kristjánsson's *Vesturfaraskrá 1870–1914* (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 1983) records 14,268 immigrants in the period 1870–1914, of a national population of under 100,000. The actual total is higher, cf. Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, "Sársaukans land," *Burt og meir en þegar leið: Dagbækur og persónuleg skrif Vesturheimsfara á síðari hluta 19. aldar*, ed. by Davíð Ólafsson and Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2001), 51–52. The Íslendingabók database contains 15,557 entries for individuals with the phrase *til Vesturheims* "[went] to North America," Svava G. Sigurðardóttir, personal communication, 6 November 2017.



Nelson Gerrard's interpretive sign at Flugumýri, Hecla Island.

of establishing a new life in a new land. These heirlooms included many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century paper manuscripts, the most famous being the eighteenth-century Melsted Edda (SÁM 66), with its hand-drawn illustrations of scenes from Norse mythology.

For their owners, handwritten books represented material connections to the past and the landscapes of home. A less tangible aspect of Icelandic literary culture brought to North America was the practice of hand-copying texts into homemade books, a centuries-old scribal tradition that influenced the dissemination of popular literature and immigrants' continuing engagement with their rich literary past.³ Not a few of the manuscripts that arrived in North America in an Icelandic immigrant's luggage were personally curated collections of poetry, sagas, somewhat dubious medical advice and assorted other writings.

To date, most research on Icelandic immigrant literacy in North America has focused either on printed material, such as newspapers and commercially produced books, or on personal correspondence and diaries.⁴ The attention given to the newly arrived immigrants' publishing activities and their life-writing is fully deserved. The Icelandic-language printing presses flourished, Icelandic-Canadian and -American writers made their lasting mark on Icelandic literature, and Winnipeg was an important literary and cultural hub where both new currents and the written legacy of the past could find a space in print. Even among those immigrants who did not consider themselves to be serious authors, their self-expression often took written form. Many immigrants documented their experiences poignantly in letters, memoirs, diaries, poems and other writings.

The field of post-medieval Icelandic manuscript studies has grown rapidly over the last three decades, with a large body of research focusing on the nineteenth century.⁵ For scholars of medieval Icelandic literature,

3 Einar G. Pétursson, "About Icelandic Books and Manuscripts in North America," *Lögberg-Heimskringla* (26 May 1995): 1, 3–4; Einar G. Pétursson, "Ah, very true: What don't they sleep on, our fine old ladies," *The Icelandic Canadian* 51 (1993): 141–149.

4 Important recent studies include Úlfar Bragason, *Frelsi, menning, framför: Um bréf og greinar Jóns Halldórssonar* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2017); Daisy Neijmann, *The Icelandic Voice in Canadian Letters* (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit, 1994); and Davíð Ólafsson and Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, *Burt og meir en þegar leið*.

5 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and Davíð Ólafsson, *Minor Knowledge and Microhistory: Manuscript Culture in the Nineteenth Century*, Routledge Studies in Cultural History 47 (New York: Routledge, 2017); Tereza Lansing, "Manuscript Culture in Nineteenth

manuscript transmission in the late pre-modern era has likewise become an important area of study.⁶ The position of Icelandic immigrant communities in Canada and the United States within this scribal dynamic remains largely unknown, however. The Fragile Heritage Project (Icelandic: *Í fótspor Árna Magnússonar í Vesturheimi*) is an ongoing initiative that aims to document Icelandic-language manuscripts and other handwritten Icelandic material found across North America in private collections and public archives.⁷ While its primary goals are to make this unique material more accessible to researchers and contribute to its preservation, it is also the first major study of manuscript culture in Icelandic immigrant communities in North America.

The question of why – and how – a homesteader such as Albert Jóhannesson, living on an isolated island in Lake Winnipeg, with no or very little formal education and limited financial means, copied literature as a pastime is a complex one. There is increasing recognition, however, that scribes did not work alone, obtaining material through private exchanges within informal social networks or scribal communities.⁸ Their services were in lo-

Century Northern Iceland: The Case of Þorsteinn Þorsteinsson á Heiði,” *Vernacular Literacies: Past, Present and Future*, ed. by Ann-Catrine Edlund, Lars-Erik Edlund and Susanne Haugen (Umeå: Umeå University, 2014), 193–211; Silvia Veronika Hufnagel, “The farmer, scribe and lay historian Gunnlaugur Jónsson from Skuggabjörg and his scribal network,” *Gripla* 24 (2013): 235–268; Davíð Ólafsson, “Scribal Communities in Iceland: The Case of Sighvatur Grímsson,” *Black Seeds, White Field: Nordic Literary Practices in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Anna Kuismin and Matthew J. Driscoll (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2013), 40–49; Matthew J. Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve: The Production, Dissemination and Reception of Popular Literature in Post-Reformation Iceland* (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1997).

- 6 See e.g., Sheryl McDonald Werronen, *Popular Romance in Iceland: The Women, Worldviews, and Manuscript Witnesses of Nítíða Saga* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016); Philip Lavender, *Whatever happened to Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra? Origin, transmission and reception of a fornaldarsaga* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Copenhagen, Faculty of Humanities, 2014); and Silvia Veronika Hufnagel, “*Sörla saga sterka* in its final phase of manuscript transmission,” *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, ed. by Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney and Ármann Jakobsson (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012), 431–54.
- 7 The first phase of funding (2015–2018) is complete. During this phase, the author and three other researchers at the University of Iceland (Ryan Eric Johnson, Ólafur Arnar Sveinsson, and Michael John MacPherson) carried out extensive fieldwork in Western Canada and the United States. The author’s own research on the scribes of Hecla Island began in 2011.
- 8 Hufnagel, “The farmer, scribe and lay historian Gunnlaugur Jónsson,” 235–68; Davíð Ólafsson, “Scribal Communities in Iceland,” 40–49.

cal demand, and copies were often commissioned for payment of some sort. Scribes often knew each other personally, and they were sometimes close neighbours, as in the case of Guðbrandur Sturlaugsson of Hvítidalur and Magnús Jónsson of Tjaldanes in the late nineteenth century.⁹

The tradition of scribal dissemination of sagas and poetry (such as *rímur*) remained essentially unbroken for seven centuries, despite the arrival of print technology in the sixteenth century, and romances rank among the most-copied prose works in nineteenth-century Iceland.¹⁰ Albert collectively refers to such romances as *riddarasögur*, which is the term used in this article, although they could equally be described by the term *lygisögur*. Printed editions existed for only a handful of these romances, and handwritten exemplars were the primary means of their transmission. One consequence is considerable textual variation between extant copies and the emergence of multiple redactions and adaptations of individual sagas.¹¹ While many of Albert's texts are medieval in origin, they do not thereby descend directly from Old Norse originals. Following Hall's study of the transmission of the *riddarasögur*, no systematic distinction was made in this paper between pre- and post-medieval redactions.¹² In the absence of scholarly editions of virtually all of the post-medieval saga and *rímur* versions in circulation for a given title, tracing Albert's sources for his many *riddarasögur* would be a long and complicated process, outside the scope of a single article.

Albert's life on both sides of the Atlantic is poorly documented, even though he is one of the last Icelandic scribes to have engaged in the practice of copying sagas and *rímur* from manuscript exemplars: Albert's last dated

- 9 Matthew J. Driscoll, "Pleasure and pastime: The manuscripts of Guðbrandur Sturlaugsson á Hvítadal," *Mirrors of Virtue: Manuscript and Print in Late Pre-modern Iceland*, ed. by Margrét Eggertsdóttir and Matthew J. Driscoll, Opuscula 15 (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2017), 225–76.
- 10 Matthew J. Driscoll, "Þögnin mikla: Hugleiðingar um riddarasögur og stöðu þeirra í íslenskum bókmenntum," *Skáldskaparmál* 1 (1990): 157–68.
- 11 An important source of new prose redactions was *rímur* poetry: verse adaptations of prose sagas, which later writers transformed again into prose narratives. *Rímur*-derived prose has received little scholarly attention, however. See Peter A. Jorgensen, "The Neglected Genre of Rímur-Derived Prose and Post-Reformation *Jónatas saga*," *Gripla* 7 (1990): 187–201.
- 12 Alaric Hall and Katelin Parsons, "Making Stemmas with Small Samples, and Digital Approaches to Publishing Them: Testing the Stemma of *Konráðs saga keisarasonar*," *Digital Medievalist* 9 (2013). DOI: 10.16995/dm.51

saga is from 1910, while the prolific Magnús Jónsson of Tjaldanes's last manuscript was written in 1916.¹³ The present article combines a biographical and a community-based approach to the study of Albert Jóhannesson's scribal output in North America, examining Albert's manuscripts both in the context of his own life and his status as a member of the Hecla Island community. Due to the large volume of material contained in Albert's manuscripts, the article concentrates mainly on saga prose. In investigating Albert's scribal methods, shorter texts with no known history of scribal publication are also helpful.

In quoting manuscript sources, Albert's orthography and punctuation have been standardized to modern Icelandic. For the sake of consistency, modern Icelandic spellings are also used when referring to medieval literature.

A life in fragments

Of the several thousand pages that survive in Albert Jóhannesson's distinctive handwriting, only two leaves torn from a lined notebook document his own life and experiences. A short biography by pioneer historian Þorleifur Jóakimsson Jackson includes the only known photograph of Albert.¹⁴ Nelson Gerrard, who has extensively studied the Hecla Island settlement, was the first to research Albert's homestead on Hecla Island and to recognize his interest in literature.¹⁵ By the time Gerrard began his research on the Hecla Island settlement, however, the community itself had ceased to exist: most former islanders settled elsewhere after the island was declared a provincial park in 1975.¹⁶ Gerrard was nevertheless able to interview individuals who had grown up on Hecla Island and could still remember island life in the early twentieth century.

13 Driscoll, "Pleasure and pastime," 276.

14 Thorleifur Jackson, *Frá austri til vesturs: Framhald af landnámsögu Nýja-Íslands* (Winnipeg: Columbia Press, 1921), 120.

15 Nelson Gerrard, *Hecla Island Pioneers and Placenames* (Eyrarbakki, MB: n.p., 1991), 20–21.

16 On the Hecla Island settlement and its demise, see Ingibjörg Sigurgeirsson McKillop, *Mikley: The Magnificent Island: Treasure of Memories: Hecla Island 1876–1976*, ([Winnipeg]: n.p., 1979).

Early life in Iceland

Albert Jóhannesson was born on July 29, 1847, at the small farm of Geitafell in Vatnsnes in Northwest Iceland.¹⁷ His parents, Jóhannes Sveinsson (1806–1869) and Herdís Bergþórsdóttir (1801–1882) were poor tenant farmers. Albert was the youngest of eleven siblings, five of whom died in early childhood. Albert's eldest brother, Jóhann (1833–1888), left Geitafell to work as a farm labourer in 1850 and married Kristín Jóhannesdóttir in 1853.¹⁸ Stefán (1835–1849), who was disabled, died of exposure after wandering from the farm.¹⁹ Another older brother, Sveinn (1839–1867), left the parish in 1858 for work.

Two of Albert's siblings, Sæunn (1836–1918) and Jón (1843–1927), grew up in foster households. In the 1845 national census, when Sæunn was nine and Jón only three, they were registered at separate farms as *niðursetningar* “paupers”: Sæunn at Þóreyjarnúpur in Víðidalur and Jón at Hlíð in Kirkjuhvamssókn.²⁰ The practice of placing the children of impoverished parents in separate households was not uncommon in Iceland, a system that minimized public expenses but left children vulnerable to neglect, abuse and even outright starvation.²¹ Recipients of poor-relief were often stigmatized, while the family was expected to repay the cost of the child's upbringing at the first opportunity – thus deepening their financial straits.

Albert spent his early years at Geitafell with his parents. In 1860, his parents gave up farming, although they initially remained at Geitafell. Albert's father's status was that of *húsmaður* “house-man,” a lodger not

17 ÞÍ BA/3-1-1, *Prestsþjónustubók Tjarnar á Vatnsnesi 1816–1858*, 30.

18 They separated, and Kristín immigrated to Canada in 1874 with their two surviving children, Hjörtur Jóhannsson (1858–1877) and Ingibjörg Guðríður Jóhannsdóttir (1860–1896).

19 ÞÍ BA/3-1-1, *Prestsþjónustubók Tjarnar á Vatnsnesi 1816–1858*, 104. According to the parish records, Stefán could communicate with others only to a limited extent, cf. ÞÍ BC/2-1-1, *Sóknarmannatal Tjarnar á Vatnsnesi 1824–1839, 1842, 1845 og 1848–1853*, 152–53.

20 Digitized census data for Iceland was accessed from the online database of the National Archives of Iceland (<http://manntal.is>).

21 On young paupers in rural Icelandic society, see Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson, “‘Everyone's Been Good to Me, Especially the Dogs': Foster-Children and Young Paupers in Nineteenth-Century South Iceland,” *Journal of Social History* 27.2 (1993): 341–58; Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, *Wasteland with Words: A Social History of Iceland* (London: Reaktion, 2010), 25–27, 43–44; Jón Ólafur Ísberg and Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, *Fátækt og fúlga: Þurfalingsarnir 1902* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2016).

contractually bound to work for the farmer.²² Albert had not yet reached the age of confirmation and worked at Geitafell as a *léttadrengur* “light-work boy” in the household of Jóhannes Ólafsson.²³

Growing up in such poverty, Albert had little hope of formal schooling. Many Icelandic families did prioritize literacy despite severe poverty, and some children of low socioeconomic status did become fluent self-taught writers.²⁴ Before 1880, however, households had no legal obligation to provide minors with an education beyond basic reading skills.²⁵ In 1840, Ögmundur Sigurðsson, the local minister for Vatnsnes, reported that only 30 of his parishioners could write (including himself).²⁶ Albert could well have reached early adulthood before he learned to write.

According to the parish records, Albert could spell by age 6. He read haltingly by age 9 and well by age 13.²⁷ He was confirmed on June 29, 1862, and was characterized by the local minister as a fluent reader with a quiet personality.²⁸ His older brothers Jóhann and Sveinn were not proficient childhood readers: Jóhann read hesitantly at age 15 and Sveinn could do no more than spell at age 9.²⁹

22 A *húsmaður* had some limited means of supporting himself, and was not the recipient of poor-relief. Loftur Guttormsson, *Bernska, ungdómur og uppeldi á einveldisöld*: Tilraun tilfélagslegrar og lýðfræðilegrar greiningar, (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnun háskóla Íslands, 1983). See also Arnljótur Ólafsson, “Um ómagaframfærslu,” *Andvari* 14.1 (1888): 198–99.

23 In the 1860 national census, 535 boys were listed as *léttadrengur*. They received less pay than a regular farmhand but carried out lighter tasks.

24 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and Davíð Ólafsson, *Minor Knowledge and Microhistory*, 105–51; Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and Davíð Ólafsson, “Barefoot Historians: Education in Iceland in the Modern Period,” *Writing Peasants: Studies on Peasant Literacy in Early Modern Northern Europe*, ed. by Klaus-Joachim Lorenzen-Schmidt and Bjørn Poulsen (Århus: Landbohistorisk Selskab, 2002), 175–209.

25 Loftur Guttormsson, “Lög um uppfræðing barna í skript og reikningi nr. 2/1880.”

26 Ögmundur Sigurðsson, “Tjarnarsókn á Vatnsnesi, 1840,” *Sýslu- og sóknarlýsingar Hins íslenska bókmenn tafélags*, ed. by Jón Eyþórsson, vol. 1, Húnavatnssýsla (Akureyri: Bókaútgáfan Norðri, 1950), 39. The national census that same year puts the parish’s population at 135, of whom 90 had reached the age of 13. Thus, only a third of youths and adults were literate in the modern sense of the word.

27 ÞÍ BC/2-1-1, *Sóknarmannatal Tjarnar á Vatnsnesi 1824–1839, 1842, 1845 og 1848–1853*, 184–85; ÞÍ BC/3-1-1, *Sóknarmannatal Tjarnar á Vatnsnesi 1854–1868*, 12–13, 42–43.

28 “Kann og les vel. Skilningsdaufur. Hæglátur.” ÞÍ BA/4-1-1, *Prestshjónustubók Tjarnar á Vatnsnesi 1816–1863*, 42.

29 ÞÍ BC/2-1-1, *Sóknarmannatal Tjarnar á Vatnsnesi 1824–1839, 1842, 1845 og 1848–1853*, 152–53.

Like many farms in Iceland, more than one tenant household lived at Geitafell. In 1848, Sigurður Sigurðsson (1820–1882) and the widow Magdalena Tómasdóttir (1817–1903) moved from Tunga to Geitafell with two of Magdalena’s children and their infant daughter Kristín. Sigurður and Magdalena remained at Geitafell until 1852. A unique perspective on Albert’s childhood can be found in an essay written by their second-youngest daughter, Ólöf Sigurðardóttir (1857–1933). Geitafell was Sigurður’s childhood home, but not a happy one: Ólöf states candidly that he had been so maltreated in childhood that he never fully became a man.³⁰ According to Ólöf, neither of her parents could write, and only her father could read, although her mother had a reputation for being very intelligent and had memorized an enormous amount of material.³¹

Only one of Ólöf’s nine siblings who survived infancy received formal instruction in writing and arithmetic: one boy spent a half-month learning these skills from the local parson. Ólöf and her other siblings were all self-taught writers, one as an adult man. Ólöf recalled learning to use an ink pen by copying the writing on an old letter to her mother. Her mother later procured a model alphabet (*forskrift*) for Ólöf.³²

An indication of the patchy, self-taught nature of Albert’s own early education is his system of writing page numbers over 1000 as 1000-1, 1000-2, etc. (rather than 1001, 1002), reflecting the conventions of spoken Icelandic (i.e., *þúsund og eitt*, “one-thousand-and-one”). Punctuation marks (supplied in this article as part of normalization to modern Icelandic) are virtually non-existent.

From Vatnsnes to Kaldrananes

In 1866 at age 19, Albert Jóhannesson found stable employment in Kaldrananes in the Westfjords, a small farming and fishing district. His employers, Sigurður Gíslason and Guðrún Jónsdóttir, lived at Bær in Selströnd, one of the largest farms in the area. Albert was hired as a labourer but may have worked seasonally on a shark fishing crew, since the household at Bær was one of several in Kaldrananes to engage in shark fishing.³³

30 Ólöf Sigurðardóttir, “Bernskuheimilið mitt,” *Eimreiðin* 12.2 (1906): 110.

31 Parish records confirm that Magdalena was illiterate.

32 Ólöf Sigurðardóttir, “Bernskuheimilið mitt,” 108.

33 Már Jónsson, “Hákarlaveiðar í Strandasýslu á öðrum fjórðungi 19. aldar,” *Söguþing* 2012: *Ráðstefnurit* (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnun, 2013), 16.

Whether by coincidence or design, Albert's move to Kaldrananas brought him in close contact with a strong and flourishing local scribal culture, described in Davíð Ólafsson's doctoral dissertation from 2008.³⁴ A well-established local reading society circulated books between members, including manuscript copies of *rímur* and prose sagas.³⁵ Sigurður, the farmer at Bær, was a book-lover and a self-educated homeopath, and his home would certainly have had a sizeable library in its own right.³⁶

The earliest evidence of Albert's interest in literature is a short *ríma* composed in 1874 (Lbs 3785 8vo). The *Ríma af Hermannni Indlandskóngi* "Ríma of King Hermann of India" narrates in 66 verses an epic battle between the eighty-year-old King Hermann of India and the invading army of King Bónel of Babylon. The *ríma* ends with the wish that the poet's friend has been entertained. This friend is plausibly Albert himself, since the scribe, the young Eyjólfur Eyjólfsson, dedicates the manuscript to Albert in a scribal colophon: *Albert Jóhannesson á. Forláttu vinur minn og viljann fyrir verkið. Endað 23. desember 1874. E. Eyjólfsson* "Property of Albert Jóhannesson. I beg your pardon, my friend, and [accept] my good intentions. Ended December 23, 1874. E. Eyjólfsson."³⁷ The *ríma*, which is preserved only in this manuscript, has all the markings of a poet's early work, and the date of completion suggests that Eyjólfur perhaps composed it himself as a Christmas present for Albert.

34 Davíð Ólafsson, *Wordmongers: Post-medieval scribal culture and the case of Sighvatur Grímsson* (Doctoral dissertation, University of St. Andrews, 2008). See also Davíð Ólafsson, "Handritasamfélag og textaheimur í Kaldrananeshreppi á Ströndum," *Þriðja íslenska sögufingid 2006: Ráðstefnurit* (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðingafélag Íslands, 2007), 448–57; and Davíð Ólafsson, "Vernacular Literacy Practices in Nineteenth-Century Icelandic Scribal Culture," *Att läsa och att skriva: Två vågor av vardaligt skriftbruk i Norden 1800–2000*, ed. by Ann-Catrine Edlund, (Umeå: Umeå universitet, 2012), 65–85.

35 Described in Davíð Ólafsson, "Handritasamfélag og textaheimur í Kaldrananeshreppi á Ströndum," 448–57.

36 Cf. Thorstina Jackson Walters, *Saga Íslendinga í Norður-Dakota* (Winnipeg: City Printing and Publishing, 1926), 186.

37 Lbs 3785 8vo, 7r. Eyjólfur Eyjólfsson (1855–1935) lived in the household of Einar Gíslason at Sandnes in Steingrímsfjörður to the age of 18. He left the Westfjords in search of employment and in 1900 immigrated to Canada, settling at Red Deer Point in Manitoba. As an elderly man, Eyjólfur was described as "mikill bókavinur, sérlega fróður og minnugur, greindur og skemtilegur í viðræðum og prýðilega skáldmæltur" [a great book-lover, exceptionally knowledgeable and having an excellent memory, an intelligent and entertaining conversant, with quite the poetic talent], Finnboði Hjálmarsson, "Landnámssögubættir frá Íslendingum í Winnipegosis," *Almanak Ólafs S. Thorsteinssonar* 36 (1930): 97.

Two manuscripts in Albert's possession on Hecla Island were written in the Kaldrananes region during Albert's years there: a book of *rímur* (Lbs 4667 4to) and a book of prose sagas (Lbs 3022 4to). The volume of *rímur* is a composite manuscript, with contributions from at least four scribes (including Albert himself),³⁸ and is not bound in chronological order of writing. Dated sections of the manuscripts were written in 1878–1879, but there are later additions by Albert and a repair on f. 196 that uses a scrap of printed English material. The manuscript contains *rímur* of Bálant (Ferakút), Kári Kárason, Randver *fagri*, Fertram and Plató, Blómsturvallakappar, Sigurður *turnari*, Hervör and Heiðrekur and Hjálmar *hugumstóri*.

The prose volume, Lbs 3022 4to, contains seven sagas: *Marons saga sterka*, *Flóres saga konunga og sona hans*, *Þorsteins saga Geirnefjufóstra*, *Sigurðar saga Hlöðvíssonar og Snjáfríðar*, *Hermanns saga og Jarlmanns*, *Ajax saga frækna* and *Úlfs saga Uggasonar*. Its main scribe is Þorsteinn Guðbrandsson (1858–1923), who copied most of the book in 1876–1877. Árni Guðmundsson and Anna Guðmundsdóttir, who moved to Kaldrananes in 1855, adopted Þorsteinn as their foster-son. Þorsteinn became the farmer at Kaldrananes in 1882, moving his household to Bjarnarnes in 1894.³⁹

Þorsteinn's father, Guðbrandur Sturlaugsson, was a prolific scribe who lived at Kaldrananes in 1846–1861 before moving to Hvítidalur in Saurbær. As Driscoll notes, Guðbrandur was a well-off farmer with a reputation for being proud and aloof.⁴⁰ The oldest preserved manuscript in Guðbrandur Sturlaugsson's own hand is from 1869, and Driscoll's suggestion is that Guðbrandur's scribal career began only after Magnús Jónsson moved to Tjaldanes in 1867.⁴¹ A direct connection between Guðbrandur and Albert is unlikely, but Þorsteinn did copy all but one of the sagas at his birth-parents' farm of Hvítidalur (he copied *Marons saga sterka* at Kaldrananes in February 1877).

38 The others are Guðbrandur Guðbrandsson (1853–1920) in Kolbeinsvík in Víkursveit in 1879, S.(?) Eiríksson and B. Sumarli[ðason]. The last-named is probably Brandur Sumarliðason (1828–1899), who lived at Rúnkhús in Reykhólasókn in Barðastrandasýsla in 1880. Sveinn Eiríksson (1855–1905), who lived at Reykhólar in Reykhólasókn in 1880 and emigrated to Hallson in North Dakota in 1886, is a likely candidate for Brandur's co-scribe.

39 G. G., "Þorsteinn Guðbrandsson, bóndi á Kaldrananesi," *Óðinn* 21 (1925): 31–32; Jón Guðnason, *Strandamenn: Æviskrár 1703–1953* (Reykjavík: n.p., 1955), 396.

40 Driscoll, "Pleasure and pastime," 226–32.

41 Driscoll, "Pleasure and pastime," 236.

Albert likely acquired this manuscript in Kaldrananes but could potentially have obtained it after leaving Iceland: five of Þorsteinn's eight siblings who lived to adulthood emigrated to North America. The saga-manuscript was evidently in poor condition after its travels, since Albert replaced some of leaves and added a title-page. He also copied two well-known folk-poems, *Ljúflingsdilla* and *Systrakvæði*, into the manuscript. These additions all appear to postdate his arrival to North America.

Lbs 3022 4to was part of a larger collection of manuscripts sold to the National and University Library of Iceland by bookseller Árni Bjarnarson, comprising Lbs 3019–3027 4to, Lbs 2895–Lbs 2930 8vo and Lbs 3233 8vo. Árni collected manuscripts from Hecla Island and other Icelandic settlements in North America but unfortunately did not record where or from whom items came. Lbs 4667 4to was a donation from Finnur Sigmundsson in 1975. Lbs 3785 8vo was donated in 1968 by librarian Páll Jónsson.

In America, a thousand snares

Albert Jóhannesson's move to North America in 1884 was likely one of necessity. The extraordinarily harsh winter of 1882–83 prompted his employers to leave for North Dakota in 1883. As the winter had left many households struggling, finding stable employment elsewhere in the community after over fifteen years at Bær would have been a challenge.

According to Þorleifur Jackson's biography, Albert's initial destination was North Dakota. Like many Icelandic immigrants, he encountered unfavourable conditions in the Dakota settlements, and he left for Winnipeg in 1886. From there, he headed to the Rocky Mountains, where he worked on the railroad. Travelling with an unnamed Icelandic friend, he reached the West Coast, where Þorleifur states that he was duped into semi-slavery on a whaling ship for nine months, sailing to the West Indies before disembarking at San Francisco, where he worked for a year before returning to the Prairies.⁴²

A single document from the period survives, a vow written by Albert in July 1889, tucked into the back of Lbs 4667 4to. It reads, in part:

If I live, and God almighty is pleased to lead me to Icelanders, happy and healthy in soul and body, before next Christmas, then I will

42 Jackson, *Frá austri til vesturs*, 120.

give J G d K S H if she needs it, and if she has no need for it, then some other poor child. Oh, my almighty God, creator and ruler of all things visible and invisible, help me through all my hardships that lie before me and give me a good and pure heart and resist all temptations so the devil does not gain control of me with his machinations. Alas, I beseech you for help wherever I may be, for in America are a thousand snares.⁴³

Albert's concern for his physical and spiritual health reflects a deep sense of isolation at being separated from other Icelandic immigrants, alone and vulnerable to exploitation. His words stand as a reminder that the immigrant experience could be a genuinely terrifying one, and that human trafficking schemes were very real risks faced by new arrivals to North America.

Albert's vow is unlike a private diary entry: he expresses himself according to a conventional formula, whereby a prayer for specific divine aid is followed by an equally specific promise.⁴⁴ If his vow dates from the outset of his journey from California, as seems likely, then his prayer to be reunited with the Icelanders was granted. Albert successfully reached Winnipeg, says Þorleifur Jackson, then spent two years in North Dakota before homesteading briefly in Geysir, Manitoba, in 1893.

Albert's final destination was Hecla Island, where he received a land grant on January 8, 1894, making him the owner of river lot 13 of Township 24, Range 6E.⁴⁵ This lot had first been settled in 1878 and al-

43 "Ef ég lifi og Guði almáttugum þóknast að leiða mig til Íslendinga glaðan og heilbrigðan á sál og líkama fyrir næstu jól þá skal ég gefa J G d K S H ef hún þarf þess með en ef hún þarf þess ekki þá einhverju fátæku barni öðru. Ó Guð minn almáttugur skapari og stjórnari allra hluta sýnilegra og ósýnilegra hjálpaðu mér í gegnum allar mínar þrautir sem fyrir mér liggja og gef mér gott og hreint hjarta og varast allar freistingar svo fjandinn fái ekki yfirráð yfir mér með sínum vélum. Æ ég grátbæni þig um hjálp hvar sem ég er staddur því í Amíríku eru þúsund snörur." Lbs 4667 4to, 312r. "KSH" is probably a coded promise of cash, as vows often involved giving money to a child in need, cf. fn. 46 below. "J G d" are the initials of the unknown girl (J? G? dóttir) to whom Albert promises to give the money.

44 Margaret Cormack, "Catholic Saints in Lutheran Legend: Post-Reformation Ecclesiastical Folklore in Iceland," *Scripta Islandica* 59 (2008): 59–60, 64–65.

45 Library and Archives Canada, Land Grants of Western Canada, 1870–1930, <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/land/land-grants-western-canada-1870-1930/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=3714&> [Accessed 3 July 2019].

ready bore the name Flugumýri “Fly Mire.”⁴⁶ Whether the abundance of local insect life inspired the name or the original settlers saw a parallel with Flugumýri in Iceland is unknown. Before Albert’s arrival, it had been occupied by Jónas Eyvindsson Doll (1828–1892) and his second wife, Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir (1852–1923), who immigrated to Canada in 1889 with their son Kristinn Frímann (1881–1953) but had not filed the paperwork for the land at the time of Jónas’s death.

On July 12, 1894, Albert and Guðrún’s son Guðbert Bergsveinn was born. The couple are registered as married on the official record of Guðbert’s birth but likely did not formalize their relationship.⁴⁷ The boy’s first name is a symbolic joining of his parents’ names (*Guðrún* and *Albert*) and a reminder of his absent half-brother Guðbergur Jónasson (1884–1904), Guðrún’s second son, who had remained in Iceland with a foster family but immigrated to Manitoba at the age of sixteen. Albert and Guðrún also fostered a young boy, Þorsteinn (Steini or Thorsti) Eiríksson, born in February 1906.⁴⁸

Tragically, Guðbergur and Guðbert both died as young men. Guðbergur drowned in an accident on Lake Winnipeg in December 1904. Guðbert died of tuberculosis at age 17 in February 1911.⁴⁹ Albert Jóhannesson passed away a decade later on May 26, 1921. Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir remained at Flugumýri with her eldest son, Kristinn, who inherited the farm. Kristinn never married and had no children.⁵⁰

Þorleifur Jackson’s biography makes no mention of Albert’s family life on Hecla. His unwillingness to acknowledge Albert’s roles as partner, parent, step-parent and foster-parent reflects the unwritten rules of pioneer history-writing in the early 1900s. It would be easy to conclude on the basis of this biography that he was an isolated hermit, and something of an eccentric lone wolf. The work of later historians, such as Gerrard and

46 Gerrard, *Hecla Island Pioneers and Placenames*, 20.

47 In census records, they alternate between farmer and housekeeper (1901 and 1911) and husband and wife (1906 and 1916). The records contain other inconsistencies: Jóhannesson’s date of birth is recorded as 1850 in 1901 and 1853 in 1911. Canadian census data was accessed from Library and Archives Canada (available online at <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/Pages/census.aspx>).

48 Þorsteinn Eiríksson lived at Flugumýri with Albert and Guðrún as their foster-son in the 1916 census.

49 “Slysfarir,” *Lögberg* (05.01.1905): 7.

50 *Lögberg* (14.05.1953): 8.

Ryan Eyford, is invaluable in filling in the often deliberate gaps left in older settlement narratives.

Albert Jóhannesson's Hecla Island manuscripts

Four manuscripts in Albert's hand survive in Canada, all of which once belonged to the Tomasson family of Hecla Island. Three are privately owned (Jóhannesson A–C). One was donated by Tammy Axelsson to the New Iceland Heritage Museum in Gimli, Manitoba (NIHM 020012.3301); she received it from her aunt Helga Tomasson (1920–2001), a long-time Hecla Island resident. Helga's husband, Helgi, was the son of Gunnar and Kristin Tomasson of Reynistaður, Hecla Island, who were friends of Albert Jóhannesson's.⁵¹ Albert may have gifted these manuscripts to the Tomassons during his lifetime, which would explain why they were not sold to Árni Bjarnarson with Lbs 3022 4to.

All four are large prose volumes. Many of the sagas copied are post-medieval romances and adventures. Others are *rimur*-derived prose, i.e., prose adaptations of *rimur* narratives, some of which could have been the work of Albert Jóhannesson himself.⁵² For reasons of space, a complete description of all four manuscripts and their contents has not been included here.

Jóhannesson A

The oldest manuscript in Albert's hand contains eleven full-length sagas (see Table 1), including one medieval *riddarasaga*, *Ectors saga*. Each saga or story is individually paginated, excepting those that fill no more than two pages. After the tenth saga, *Alexanders saga blinda*, Albert inserts a collection of very short prose narratives, listed in the table of contents as *þættir* "episodes" and *smásögur* "short stories." The shortest occupy only a few lines, and most of these narratives are probably modern texts or translations; a full list is not included here, but they include anecdotes such as *Hais með nautið* "Hays and the Bull," set in the American town of Brownsville, and *Gottfred og hundurinn* "Gottfred and the Dog." The eleventh saga, *Gríms saga Karlssonar og bræðra hans* is the only long text in this second part of Albert's book.

51 Nelson Gerrard, personal communication, 13 August 2011.

52 See Jorgensen, "The Neglected Genre of Rímur-Derived Prose," 187–201.

Title	Completed
Cyrus saga Persakonungs	--
Núma saga	10-02-1891
Líkafróns saga og kappa hans	--
Flóres saga og Leó	--
Falentíns og Ursins saga	--
Ectors saga	--
Högna saga sinnisbráða	--
Okulus saga og Prúdentíu	--
Alexanders saga og Loðvíks	--
Alexanders saga blinda	--
Gríms saga Karlssonar og bræðra hans	--

Table 1. Sagas in Jóhannesson A

The title-page reads: “Gamlar riddarasögur skrifaðar af Albert Jóhannessyni 22. desember 1889” [Old *riddarasögur*, copied by Albert Jóhannesson, 22 December 1889]. This date comes three days before Christmas, the day specified in Albert’s vow of July 1889. Variations in the handwriting, the ink and the condition of the paper demonstrate that the first seven sagas were written over an extended period of time, in an unknown order, and were not initially bound into a single volume. The only dated saga is *Núma saga*, a translation of de Florian’s *Numa Pompilius, Second Roi De Rome*, which Albert completed in 1891. Given that Albert spent the period 1889–1893 as a migrant worker and intermittent homesteader, he probably copied the manuscript at multiple locations.

Jóhannesson B

Albert began his second volume soon after completing his first. The title-page is also similar: “Fornar riddarasögur og Heimskringla Snorra goða. Samansafnað og skrifað hefur Albert Jóhannesson 1892” [Ancient *riddarasögur* and Snorri *goði*’s *Heimskringla*. Collected and copied by Albert Jóhannesson, 1892]. The date of completion for the first saga, a history of Julius Caesar, is August 26th (presumably of 1891 or 1892). Like Jóhannesson A, this manuscript begins with a series of saga texts, 33 in all. The second half of this ambitious scribal project is a post-medieval miscellany on geography and world history that is presented on its title-page as a

copy of Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*. According to Albert's colophon at the end of the manuscript, he completed *Heimskringla* on March 31st, 1892. Possibly by coincidence, Albert did include a modified version of *Ynglinga saga*, the first major work in the historical *Heimskringla*, as the second saga in his manuscript, under the title *Óðins saga Ásakóns* "The Saga of Óðinn, King of the Æsir."

Title	Completed
Július saga Sesars	26-08 (year unspecified) ⁵³
Óðins saga Ásakóns (Ynglinga saga)	--
Frosta saga og Fjalar	--
Leós saga og Hjartar	--
Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs	--
Hrómundar saga frækna ⁵⁴	--
Natons saga Persakonungs	--
Amalíu saga keisaradóttur	--
Sigurðar saga snarfara	--
Sigurðar saga turnara	--
Tístrans saga og Indiönu	--
Flóres saga og Blankiflúr	--
Bálants saga konungs (Ferakuts saga)	--
Randvers saga fagra	--
Fertrams saga og Platós	--
Jasonar saga bjarta	--
Dínus saga drambláta	--
Hermanns saga og Ingvars	--
Títus saga og Sílönu	--
Vilmundar saga viðutan	--
Ála-flekks saga	--
Eiríks saga frækna	--
Starkaðar saga gamla	--
Aristómenus saga og Gorgus	--
Bernótus saga Borneyjarkappa	--

53 "Enduð þann 26. ágúst af Albert Jóhannessyni." Jóhannesson B, p. 52.

54 Not a copy of *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar*.

Title	Completed
Hjálmars saga hugumstóra	--
Bragða-Ölvis saga	--
Drauma-Jóns saga	--
Tíodels saga	--
Virgilius saga	--
Avisenna saga spekinga	--
Pýramusar saga og Tíspu	--
Kristins saga Blökks	--

Table 2. *Sagas in Albert Jóhannesson B (excluding Heimskringla)*

Albert does not specify the location(s) where he worked, but his rise in productivity may have resulted from increasingly stable living conditions. The period during which Albert began this manuscript roughly coincides with his final two years in North Dakota, where he already knew many of the Icelandic settlers. A strip of newspaper from a Winnipeg-based weekly, also named *Heimskringla*, is visible in the binding between pages 868 and 869 and bears the date 4 January 1900. The fact that Albert's manuscript was unbound prior to his arrival on Hecla Island raises the possibility that he inserted material into the manuscript that he copied on Hecla. Supporting this hypothesis is the fact that the table of contents originally listed only the first 25 sagas. While Albert's writings from c. 1893–1889 may not have survived, or his changed circumstances could have led to a sudden drop in scribal productivity, Jóhannesson B could also contain 8 sagas written after 1892, namely *Hjálmars saga hugumstóra*, *Bragða-Ölvis saga*, *Drauma-Jóns saga*, *Tíodels saga*, *Virgilius saga*, *Avisenna saga spekinga* (a pseudo-oriental tale),⁵⁵ *Pýramusar saga og Tíspu* (a translation of the Pyramus and Thisbe story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) and *Kristins saga Blökks* (a translation of Bernhard Severin Ingemann's *Christen Bloks Ungdomsstreger*).

55 The tale is included in François Péris de La Croix's *Thousand and One Days* collection, of which several Icelandic translations exist. Its authenticity as an Arabic narrative is doubtful. See Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, "Tusen och en dag: En sagosamlings vandring från Orienten till Island," *Scripta Islandica* (1980) 31: 54–64.

A full five sagas in Jóhannesson B contain narratives recounted in *rímur* form in Lbs 4667 4to: Bálant, Fertram and Plató, Hjálmar *hugumstóri*, Randver *fagri* and Sigurður *turnari*. Several other sagas copied in Jóhannesson B are also candidates for *rímur*-derived prose: *Tístrans saga og Indiönu* and *Aristómenus saga og Gorgus* probably derive from Sigurður Breiðfjörð's printed *rímur*,⁵⁶ and *Bernótus saga Borneyjarkappa* may be based on Magnús Jónsson's *rímur* from 1823.⁵⁷ Finally, Oddur Jónsson of Fagurey composed *rímur* on Sigurður *snarfari*, Eiríkur *frækni* and Natan *Persakonungur*, three narratives all found in prose form in Jóhannesson B, which raises the possibility that Albert could have had access to a manuscript containing a collection of Oddur Jónsson's *rímur*.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, the still-unedited state of most of the titles found in Jóhannesson B and their *rímur* counterparts makes identification of their sources difficult.

Jóhannesson C

Albert's third manuscript begins with a history of the ancient world from an unidentified source. Its second half contains *Breta sögur* and *Amoratis saga konungs*. Accompanying these are three saints' Lives (St. Vitus, the Seven Sleepers, and St. Christopher); an anti-Semitic piece on divine punishment of the Jews;⁵⁹ a text on the Three Wise Men; a description of the Virgin Mary; and two items copied from the periodical *Ný sumargjöf* (a biography of the tightrope walker Blondin and an anti-Semitic anecdote).⁶⁰

According to the title-page, Albert wrote the manuscript on Hecla Island in 1900. He provides specific dates twice, for *Breta sögur* (completed March 10th, 1900) and the manuscript's final leaf (completed on the 13th day of Christmas 1900, i.e., January 6th, 1901). It comprises 312 numbered pages, making this the shortest of Albert's volumes. Also tucked into the

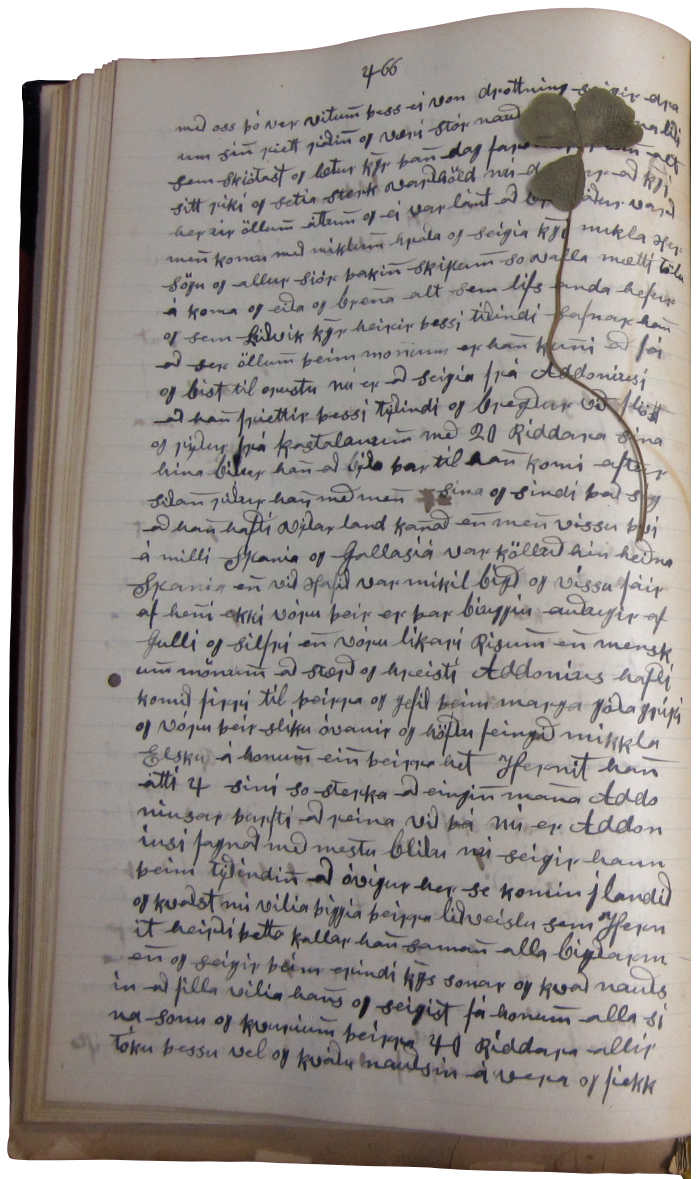
56 Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, 37–38, 470–71.

57 Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, 70–71.

58 Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, 112, 352, 425–26.

59 Probably originating from Francisco de Torrejoncillo's *Centinela contra judíos, puesta en la torre de la Iglesia de Dios*. See François Soyer, *Popularizing Anti-Semitism in Early Modern Spain and its Empire: Francisco de Torrejoncillo and the Centinela contra Judíos* (1674), *The Medieval and Early Modern Iberian World* 54 (Leiden: Brill, 2014). The seventeenth-century poem *Gyðingaraunir* by Guðmundur Erlendsson contains similar material and is another possible source.

60 "Hýddur gyðingur," *Ný sumargjöf* 2 (1860): 112–13; "Blondin," *Ný sumargjöf* 4 (1862): 52–57.



Albert Jóhannesson's copy of Adonias saga in NIHM 020012.3301, New Icelandic Heritage Museum, Gimli, Manitoba, Canada. A cloverleaf is preserved between ff. 233v-234r.

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þann þar als 3000 allir voru þeir stórir og sterkir
er of vecl ad set i heimadi

15. Capítuli

Þá er þar til ad taka sem fir er frá hófð ad Constantinus kerr heriar i Spania og voru i ferð með konungi
inotir kerr og hóflingar ni sendir Lúvík kerr heriar
allt sitt ríki sem fir var ríkið þann sendi menn ad markar
þeim velli ad ornustustad en þá voru lög þingum ad þeim
skildi ríðings-skaparir villeggiast er ríkið eftir þá er
markar voru ornustustadur af þessu stöðvalist heriar Lúvík
kerr þir ni her sin a móti Konstantin kerr og þjóði íslens
erð Addisonisi ad þann skildi konungi fara þvi konungi bótti
íllu borgi ef þann voru heill og ávarstir þvi kerr vissi ei ad
þann var birtvildin Constantinus felkir ni liti þann
er setur fistan og þrenstann Grimald og þá þorskeri er
konungi ríðu ni sína samann felkingar með öflum
er skalf allt undir þekk físt skothvíð og fleugu all þarhanda
þekkiti þekk þá leingi dags fíllar margir en fleiri
erdu sárir eftir þá tókst högg ornusta en sárir þess ad
þeir sterkustu voru þrenstir þá ornusti ei skítt um
málfallid og stáð so længa tíð ad þeir læggest með
svæðum ni þegar ad þeir meðlest skípulest slennir
til þrangöngu Grimaldur satti so langt fram ad ek
kerst stáðt við þann þar skal ni þvi seigia ad þegar
ni hieldu kerri a móti öðrum þar þar þann árdasti
þardagi síðelfir fíllu þeir hant fram markum
sinum og eflia sína menn til þrangöngu Lúvík kerr
sahir fram a sinum ofsti er bali var stór og sterkur
þann ríður ad einum miklum kappi er Doegact
sa ríði á ríðið margir menn kerr leggur sínu spísti i
skíðedun so fast ad spístið þekk i þegnum þann og ni
ni baki og áristi þannir sællinnu ríða þá margir
er leggja ad kerr en þann herklest voru so góð ad þann
var ei sár þá þing þann i Riddara og áker þá þegar

manuscript is a single folded sheet of paper preserving verses exchanged between an unknown immigrant poet(ess) and Sölvi Löngumýri, as well as several verses dated July 17th, 1914.⁶¹

NIHM 020012.3301

NIHM 020012.3301 (hereafter NIHM) is the youngest of Albert's manuscripts. NIHM begins with thirteen sagas copied between 1901 and 1910, probably bound in the same order as Albert completed them. Five include their dates of completion (see Table 3), which is a departure in style from Albert's earlier, sparsely dated manuscripts. Six are medieval Icelandic *riddarasögur*, the first three of which (*Mágus saga*, *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* and *Þjalar-Jóns saga*) had all been published in a print edition by 1901. Seven sagas are post-medieval compositions, including *Knúts saga heimska*, first printed in 1911, and *Ketlerusar saga keisaraefnis*, printed in 1905 (a year before Albert copied it). A third saga, *Henriks saga heilráða*, was published in 1908, the year after Albert copied it. *Ásmundar saga Hryggjubana* almost certainly derives from a manuscript copy, since it was never published, but a *rímur* by Sigurður Bjarnason of Vatnsnes and his father, Bjarni Sigurðsson, could also have been its source.⁶² Although Albert is the main scribe, a second unidentified hand copies 14 lines of *Ásmundar saga víkings* on f. 100v and another 14 lines on f. 108r.

Ff.	Title	Completed
1r–86v	Mágus saga jarls	03-08-1901
87r–100r	Knúts saga heimska	--
100r–120r	Ásmundar saga víkings	--
120v–138v	Konráðs saga keisarasonar	--
139r–161v	Þjalar-Jóns saga	--
161v–174r	Haralds saga Hringbana	--
174r–191v	Ásmundar saga Hryggjubana	28-04-1906
191v–225r	Ketlerusar saga keisaraefnis	28-07-1906
225r–252v	Adonias saga	--

61 Sölvi Sölvason from Syðri-Langamýri (1829–1903), who immigrated to Canada in 1876. Sölvi was an owner of *Akrabók* (SÁM 72).

62 Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, 48.

Ff.	Title	Completed
252v–273v	Henriks saga heilráða	09-11-1907
273v–296r	Huldar saga	--
296r–303v	Nitida saga	--
303v–314r	Dínus saga drambláta	03-01-1910

Table 3. *Legendary-chivalric sagas in NIHM*

Following *Dínus saga drambláta* is *Sagan af Harún Alraskið* (315r–332r), a contemporary translation of an oriental tale. Albert’s source is Benedikt Gröndal’s translation of the Thousand and One Nights, combining text from Gröndal’s preface with the tale of Al-Bundukani “Albondokani.”⁶³ Albert completed the saga on January 16th, 1909, according to his scribal note, and it is clear that *Sagan af Harún Alraskið* was originally copied as a separate booklet, with the verse side of the final leaf blank. The pagination is a later addition, using different ink.

NIHM continues with 23 narratives from the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus (Table 4), mainly episodes from kings’ sagas and related *þættir* that deal with the lives of chieftains and poets. They span the reigns of Haraldur *hárfagri* in the late ninth century through Haraldur *harðráði* in the mid-eleventh century. Most episodes take place during the lifetimes of Ólafur Tryggvason and Ólafur Haraldsson in the tenth and early eleventh centuries, including tales of voyages from Scandinavia and Iceland to the east and south, with a striking omission being sagas on exploration to the west (Greenland and Vinland). Together, they form a well-defined section almost certainly conceived of as a single entity from the outset. These sagas include no dates of completion.

Ff.	Title in NIHM	Source(s)
333r–339r	Sagan af skáldum Haralds konungs hárfagra	Skálda saga
339r–344r	Sagan af Þorleifi jarlaskáldi	Þorleifs þáttur jarlaskálds
344r–345v	Sagan af Sigurði konungi slefu	Sigurðar þáttur slefu
345v–350v	Sagan af Rauðúlfi	Rauðúlfs þáttur

63 Benedikt Gröndal (trans.), *Sögur úr Þúsund og einni nótt* (Reykjavík: Egill Jónsson, 1852), ii, 199–225.

Ff.	Title in NIHM	Sources
351r–359r	Sagan af Ástriði	Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar
359r–369r	Sagan af Erlingi Skjalgssyni og Einari	Ólafs saga helga, Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar, and Magnúss saga góða og Haralds harðráða
369r–369v	Draumur Ólafs helga	Ólafs saga helga
369v–370r	Draumur Ólafs konungs áður hann féll á Stiklastöðum	Ólafs saga helga
370r–379v	Sagan af Ormi Stórolfssyni	Orms þáttur Stórolfssonar
380r–389v	Saga af Þorsteini uxafóts	Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts
389v–398v	Sagan af Þorsteini bæjarmagni	Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns
398v–404r	Sagan af Indriða ilbreiða	Indriða þáttur ilbreiðs
404r–419r	Sagan af Sigmundi Brestirssyni	Færeyinga saga
419r–425r	Sagan af Rögnvaldi og Rauð	Rögnvalds þáttur og Rauðs
425r–429r	Sagan af Sveini og Finni	Sveins þáttur og Finns
429r–434v	Sagan af Ögmundi dytt og Gunnari helming	Ögmundar þáttur dytts og Gunnars helmings
434v–438r	Sagan af Þorvaldi tasalda	Þorvalds þáttur tasalda
438v–439v	Sagan af Þorsteini skelk	Þorsteins þáttur skelks
439v–450v	Sagan af Rauði ramma og félögum hans	Rauðs þáttur ramma
450r–453v	Sagan af Sunnifu helgu	Sunnifu þáttur
453v–454v	Ásólfur kristni	Kristni þáttur
454v	Máni kristni	Þorvalds þáttur viðförla
454v–457v	Sagan af Þórhalli spámanni	Þórhalls þáttur knapp

Table 4. *Þættir and saga-derived episodes in NIHM*

The late fourteenth-century *Flateyjarbók* manuscript (GKS 1005 fol.) preserves the sole medieval copies of many of these works.⁶⁴ However, *Flateyjarbók* does not contain *Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns*. A twelve-volume

64 Guðbrandur Vigfússon and C. R. Unger (eds.), *Flateyjarbok: En samling af norske kongesagaer med indskudte mindre fortællinger om begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samt annaler* (Christiania: Malling, 1860–1868).

ume edition of Old Norse kings' sagas and related material does include *Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns*,⁶⁵ but this edition would have been a rarity in North America, as would Biorner's trilingual version of *Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns*.⁶⁶ *Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns* could be widely obtained in handwritten form, often copied alongside romance-sagas.⁶⁷

Two of the texts are redactions or adaptations found only in NIHM: *Ástriðar saga* and *Erlings saga Skjalgssonar og Einars*. Their source texts are easily identified: *Ástriðar saga* is an innovative reworking of *Ólafar saga Tryggvasonar* from the perspective of Ólafur Tryggvason's mother Ástriður, while *Erlings saga Skjalgssonar og Einars* is a history of two Norwegian chieftains, Erlingur Skjalgsson and Einar Indriðason, whose lives span the events of *Ólafar saga Tryggvasonar*, *Ólafar saga helga* and *Magnúss saga góða og Haralds harðráða*. These texts plausibly derive from an unidentified manuscript exemplar. If Albert worked directly from a printed edition, he must have altered his source material dramatically.

Here, as elsewhere, NIHM groups texts by theme. *Skálda saga* and *Þorleifs þáttur jarlaskálds*, both dealing with poets, are copied back-to-back. Two dream sequences from *Ólafar saga helga* are paired together, while the final four texts are accounts of holy men and women: St. Sunnifa and her companions, two Icelandic anchorites (Ásólfur and Máni) and a noble heathen (Þórhallur) who converts to Christianity after Ólafur Tryggvason visits him in a dream.

The next eleven leaves contain material from Hauksbók, with no information on dates of completion (Table 5). It is an eclectic selection: a rehearsal of monstrous races and a description of paradise, both adapted from Isidore's *Etymologiae*; a translation of an unidentified Latin text on world geography; a text on the sons of Noah, also from the *Etymologiae*; a homily on heresy (Ælfric's *De falsis diis*); and an excerpt from *Elucidarius* on idolatry.⁶⁸

65 Peter Andreas Munch (ed.), *Fornmanna Sögur, eptir gömlum handritum* (Copenhagen: Hið konunglega norræna fornfræðafélag, 1825–1837).

66 Erik J. Biorner (ed.), *Nordiska Kämpa Dater* (Stockholm: 1737).

67 For a list of all known mss containing *Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns*, see the catalogue entry "Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns," *Stories for All Time: The Icelandic Fornaldarsögur*, <http://fasnl.ku.dk/bibl/bibl.aspx?sid=ththb&view=manuscript> [Accessed 31 August 2019].

68 See Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, "Literary, Codicological, and Political Perspectives on *Hauksbók*," *Gripla* 19 (2008): 54–55.

Ff.	Title in NIHM	Source(s) in Hauksbók
458r–462v	Margháttaðar þjóðir	Her segir fra marghattaðum þjóðum. ⁶⁹
463r–464r	Paradís og vatnsföll	a) Fra paradiso. b) <i>no heading</i> ⁷⁰
464r–466v	Hversu lönd liggja í veröldinni	Her segir fra þui huersu lond liggia i veroldenni. ⁷¹
466v–467r	Frá Nóasonum og bygging þeirra	Fra þui huar huerr Noa sona bygði heímim ⁷²
467r	Adam og Eva	Vm þat hvaðan otru hofst. ⁷³
467r–468r	Antikristur	Her segir fra Antíchristo. ⁷⁴
468r–468v	Um uppruna skurðgoðavillu	a) Her segir huaðan blot skur guða hofust. b) Vm þat hvaðan otru hofst. ⁷⁵

Table 5. Encyclopaedic material from *Hauksbók* in NIHM.

Given the reliance on learned material (and *Hauksbók* in particular) in many medieval Icelandic romances, one could view this section as supplementary to the *riddarasögur*: background material for readers unfamiliar with medieval geography and monsters. *Adonias saga*, for example, begins with an elaborate prologue on the history of the ancient world and is set in the ancient Syrian regime of King Marsilius.⁷⁶ In (re)creating the landscape of the romances for modern audiences, encyclopaedic texts have relevance in presenting the worldview from which these works spring.

On closer examination, Albert does not copy his texts directly from the printed edition of *Hauksbók*, and his attitude toward the verisimilitude of these medieval texts is ambiguous. Most notably, the catalogue of monstrous races (*Margháttaðar þjóðir*) has been expanded to include new races, beginning with the Tatars. These younger additions are hardly less fantastic than those in *Hauksbók*, including hermaphroditic men who conceive

69 Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Hauksbók udgiven efter de Arnemagnæanske håndskrifter no. 371, 544 og 675. 4' samt forskellige papirshåndskrifter af Det kongelige nordiske oldskrift-selskab* (Copenhagen: Kongelige nordiske oldskrift-selskab, 1892–1896), 165–67.

70 *Ibid.*, 152, 150–52

71 *Ibid.*, 153–56.

72 *Ibid.*, 164–65.

73 *Ibid.*, 156–57.

74 *Ibid.*, 170–71.

75 *Ibid.*, 170, 158–59.

76 NIHM, ff. 225r–v.

and bear their own children, raising the question of whether dog-headed men and other “medieval” phenomenon belong to a worldview entirely distinct from Albert’s own: Albert’s version of *Margháttaðar þjóðir* ends with the dry comment that Lutherans are evidently a minority in the world.⁷⁷

No Old Norse-Icelandic material appears after f. 468v. First comes a selection from the short-lived periodical *Skemmtileg vinagleði*: three accounts of sailors and explorers – Vasco de Gama (469r–483v), Jacob Heemskerck (483v–492r) and the Russian “hermits of Spitzbergen” (492r–497v) – and an Icelandic translation of Jean François Marmontel’s “*Lausus et Lydie*” (497v–502v).⁷⁸ Like many of the romances in Albert’s collection, “*Lausus et Lydie*” is cast as an ancient tale of love, duty and male friendship, ending with a dramatic battle with a lion. Following this, Albert added two tiger adventures translated from English: a report on a dramatic tiger incident in New York (502v–504r) and the Anglo-Canadian short story “A tiger’s plaything” by Charles G. D. Roberts (504r–507r).⁷⁹ Next comes an Icelandic translation of a Turkish folktale, “*Nasreddin og munkarnir*” [Nasreddin and the monks] (507r–509v), first published in 1904.⁸⁰

The final leaves (509v–554r) preserve an assortment of short stories, anecdotes and information on topics ranging from lifejackets to magic tricks to the meanings of Icelandic names. It ends with lists of archaic measurements (552r–553r),⁸¹ a table of Roman numerals (553r), a runic alphabet (553r–553v) and an explanation of changes to the Icelandic monetary system in the 1870s (553v–554r).

Albert Jóhannesson’s exemplars and scribal methods

In compiling his handwritten books, Albert must have worked at least partially from manuscripts. His own memory could have been a source for some material, but the presence of items such as *Margháttaðar þjóðir* are

77 “[F]áir eru Lúthernar að reikna á móti öllum hinum,” NIHM, f. 513v.

78 *Skemmtileg vinagleði* 1 (1797): 126–152; 154–171; 191–218; 251–291.

79 *Sögusafn Þjóðólfs* 41.37–41 (1889): 123–127; “Í klóm á tigris-kettu,” *Heimskringla* (13 October 1894), 3–4.

80 Þorsteinn Gíslason (trans.), *Nasreddin: Fjörutíu og fimm tyrkneskar kými-sögur* (Reykjavík: n.p., 1904).

81 From Jón Guðmundsson, *Reikningslist einkum handa leikmönnum* (Viðeyjarklaustur: 1841), 73–77.

strong evidence for the presence of other Icelandic manuscripts on Hecla Island. Unfortunately for scholars, Albert provides no details on the manuscripts and printed books from which he copied. A printed catalogue of the holdings of Hecla Island's Icelandic lending library shows virtually no overlap, with the exception of a copy of *Nasreddin* (see fn. 80).⁸²

In examining Albert's scribal methods, the presence of more recent material from contemporary print sources is helpful. Texts first appearing in printed periodicals and books – with no previous history of scribal publication – provide a fixed frame of reference. Two translations of short stories by Swedish author August Blanche in NIHM, both copied from *Þjóðólfrur* (1889),⁸³ are examples of texts where Albert's own voice emerges plainly. The first, “Vel borgaðar sveskjur” [Well-paid Prunes], on ff. 511v–513r, is a comic tale in which a shopkeeper's assistant offers a shabby orphan girl dried prunes, only to discover that her eccentric father has just left her a small fortune. When the shopkeeper arrives to berate him, the assistant announces that he and the girl are getting married and opening up their own shop. Blanche ends by commenting that prunes are not always so well repaid. Albert gives the story's protagonists an even happier ending, adding that the couple lived many years together in harmony and had many children together.⁸⁴

Blanche's second short story, “Gjöfin,” [The Gift], on ff. 513r–514r, is a sombre tale in which a destitute young cotter's wife helps her sick neighbours, breastfeeding their infant while her own husband and child sleep. “Gjöfin” is a fairly dark piece of social realism, with no promises of a happy ending for either family. Albert remedies this by adding:

Daginn eftir fór hún með mjólk til sjúklinganna og því hélt hún þangað til því batnaði. Lifði þetta fólk allt saman lengi. Varð Axel

82 S[tyrkárr] Vésteinn [Helgason], *Skrá yfir bækur lestrarfélagsins Morgunstjarnan á Mikley* (N.p.: 1907).

83 *Sögusafn Þjóðólfs* (1889), 41.33–34: 118–23; *Sögusafn Þjóðólfs* (1889), 41.35.37: 128–31. Icelandic reading societies in immigrant communities could subscribe to periodicals published in Iceland, but *Þjóðólfrur* circulated on a more informal basis on Hecla Island. The Morgunstjarnan reading society did not have a regular subscription and owned only copies from the years 1853–1856, 1860–1862, 1864–1867 and 1891.

84 “Lifðu þau saman mörg ár með yndi og ánægju og áttu mörg börn saman,” NIHM, 513r.

mikill maður og Anna og Marín systur hans urðu ríkismannsfrúr.⁸⁵

[Then next day, [the cotter's wife] went with milk to the invalids and continued doing so until they were better again. They lived for a long time, all those people. Axel became an important man, and his sisters Anna and Marín became rich men's wives.]

Albert had no need of fiction to show him the realities of extreme poverty. It is unsurprising that he wished to complete the tale of the sick family, but it is notable that he does so by naming them – they are anonymous in Blanche's original – and bringing them out of their backwoods isolation. Blanche's short story keeps the family at a distance; Albert integrates them into the larger community and opens up the possibility for them to assume another identity than “peasant” or “poor person.”

Finally, a creative retelling of Felicia Dorothea Hemans's “Casabianca” (NIHM, 510r–510v) ends with the 13-year-old boy jumping off the burning ship and growing up to become a courageous and strong man rather choosing to perish while waiting for his dead father's permission to abandon his post.⁸⁶ Turning the poem's message on its head, Albert's “Casabianca” teaches that bravery is valuable, but ineffectual sacrifice is not. Albert's rejection of the image of the fallen boy-hero shows concern for the well-being of children and the efficacy of one's behaviour. Instead of praising the death of a child soldier, Albert copied information on life-jackets (see above).

In NIHM, Albert reveals himself as a mature storyteller, with a distinct voice informed by his beliefs and experiences. Albert peoples his narratives with individuals who take control of their situation and succeed, even when this requires a radical departure from his source material. Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir's research on Icelandic storytellers shows that individuals' life-experiences can shape their storytelling repertoire and the telling of

85 NIHM, 514r.

86 “Varð hann með tímanum mesti hugrekkismaður og nafnkenndur fyrir hreysti sína,” NIHM, 510v. A verse translation by Bjarni Jónsson is a possible source text, but the English-language poem was also widely taught to Canadian schoolchildren. [Felicia Dorothea Hemans], “Casabianca,” trans. by Bjarni Jónsson, *Ísafold* (12.07.1893): 177–78.

tales.⁸⁷ Albert's manuscripts demonstrate that the same can be true for scribes.

Albert's scribal methods do not make it easy to identify his exemplars. In the section below, the focus is expanded from Albert to the Hecla Island settlement, and one manuscript (SÁM 35) in particular.

The Hecla Island scribal community

Hecla Island, a large island not far off the southwestern shore of Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba, Canada, is situated within the traditional homelands of the Cree and the Anishinaabe. Ryan Eyford's research on the history of New Iceland demonstrates that a group of Cree from Norway House, Manitoba, had wanted to establish a reserve at Grassy Narrows in 1875, the marshy mainland to which Hecla Island today connects via a man-made causeway built in 1971. The Canadian government refused this due to the Icelanders' interest in the same territory, illustrating how land was often apportioned in ways that prioritized European settlers over Indigenous communities.⁸⁸

As Eyford documents, New Iceland was the product of a Canadian government policy of reserving large areas of land for settlers of a specific European ethnicity, actively encouraging immigrant groups to settle in close proximity to each other in the hope of attracting friends and family members from Europe and thus speeding up the settlement process. Under the terms of Canada's Dominion Lands Act, Icelanders moving to New Iceland could apply for a section of land within the reserve from the Canadian government, the only cost to the applicant being an administration fee. The claimant would receive the deed to the land after fulfilling standard requirements, including building a home on the property. Thus it was that Hecla Island, an island two hours' drive from Winnipeg, at the midway point of the North American continent, was rapidly settled by a group consisting almost exclusively of Icelanders. Many came directly from West or Northwest Iceland.

87 Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir, *Sagan upp á hvern mann: Átta íslenskir sagnamenn og ævintýrin þeirra* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, 2011).

88 Ryan Eyford, *White Settler Reserve: New Iceland and the Colonization of the Canadian West* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016).

Hecla Island – or Mikley “Big Island” – was located on the northeastern edge of the New Iceland colony. The first Icelanders arrived to Hecla in 1876. Hecla was subject to periodic seasonal flooding, and many of lakefront lots measured out by government surveyors proved completely unsuitable for long-term habitation. The homestead system meant that the island’s population was distributed around the island, rather than clustered on the eastern shore, where a small fishing village sprang up in the early 1900s. Fishing was a cornerstone of the local economy.⁸⁹

The Canadian government’s immigration strategy unintentionally created conditions favourable for the development of what seems to have been a scribal community of sorts, or at least a network of semi-retired scribes, who brought their collections with them to Hecla Island. I have found evidence of eighteen prose saga and *rímur* manuscripts having been on Hecla Island during the period from 1876 to 1921 (the year of Albert’s death), of which at least seventeen survive (see Table 6).

Benedikt Kjartansson (1860–1957) brought a *riddarasögur* manuscript when he immigrated to Hecla Island from Borgarfjörður in 1900, which he himself had copied, although its contents are unknown.⁹⁰ Farmer-scribe Grímólfur Ólafsson of Mávahlíð in West Iceland (1827–1903), who immigrated to Hecla Island in 1893, also brought his manuscripts with him.⁹¹ His sons Jóhannes and Ólafur are also associated with one privately owned manuscript. The stay of Ágúst Magnússon (1863–1953) from Vatnsnes in Northwest Iceland was brief: the winter of 1896–1897, and again in 1899–1903. Ágúst lived in the household of Jóhann Eliásson Straumfjörð on Engey “Goose Island” and married Ragnheiður Straumfjörð in 1898. Ágúst and Ragnheiður moved to Lundar in 1903, where they remained.

Of these individuals, two were also experienced bookbinders: Ágúst Magnússon and Grímólfur Ólafsson. Only Albert Jóhannesson is known to have continued copying sagas on Hecla Island, but he may have found a patron in Helgi and Margrét Tómasson, whose family carefully preserved his manuscripts for at least three generations.

89 Glenn Sigurdsson, *Vikings on a Prairie Ocean: The Saga of a Lake, a People, a Family and a Man* (Winnipeg: Great Plains Publications, 2014).

90 Ingibjörg Jónsson, “Ferð til eyjarinnar,” *Lögberg* (30.10.1947), 5. The manuscript was still on Hecla Island in 1947, but the author has been unable to locate it.

91 Two of Grímólfur Ólafsson’s manuscripts were sold to the National and University Library of Iceland (Lbs 3020 4to and Lbs 3021 4to).

Name	Scribe & owner	Owner only
Ágúst Magnússon	1	
Albert Jóhannesson	4	3 ⁹²
Benedikt Kjartansson	1 (<i>lost</i>)	
Grímólfur Ólafsson	6	2+
Jóhannes/Ólafur Grímólfsson	1	
Total	13	5+

Table 6. *Saga and rímur manuscripts on Hecla Island, c. 1876–1921*

The best evidence for scribal exchange between the Hecla Islanders is SÁM 35, a manuscript not previously associated with Hecla Island. SÁM 35 was copied in Hrapppsey in West Iceland in 1827–1829. Sigurður Júlíus Jóhannesson (1868–1956), a well-known figure in Winnipeg’s Icelandic community, acquired SÁM 35 and later gave it to the Reverend Eiríkur Brynjólfsson (1903–1962).⁹³ In 1962–1970, it was donated to the Árni Magnússon Institute, where repairs to the binding revealed a scrap of an envelope addressed to Grímólfur Ólafsson of Mávahlíð. The name “G. Ólafsson” is written on f. 2r, strengthening the conclusion that the book was Grímólfur’s property.

Breta sögur in SÁM 35 can be conclusively identified as Albert’s exemplar for Jóhannesson C. This version of *Breta sögur* is an abridgement into thirteen chronological episodes (from Æneas to Beda), ending with a description of King Aðalsteinn (Athelstan) that neatly transitions from English to Icelandic history in the final paragraph. Ultimately deriving from the Hauksbók redaction of *Breta sögur*, the text frequently departs from Hauksbók, occasionally citing an authority such as *Hálfdanar saga gamla* but more often relying on unnamed sources. In a short passage on St. Ursula, Jóhannesson C (ff. 90v–91r) and SÁM 35 (ff. 115r–v) share the following major variants against Hauksbók:⁹⁴ St Ursula’s father is named

92 Albert Jóhannesson made contributions to two of these volumes, Lbs 3022 4to and Lbs 4667 4to, but he was not the main scribe, and his work consisted largely of later additions (see above).

93 SÁM 35, 1r.

94 Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Hauksbók*, 267–68.

Dionisius⁹⁵ (Hauksbók: Dionotus), her suitor is Canannius of Armenia (Hauksbók: Canonius of Armorica), and she leads a company of 9,000 virgins (Hauksbók: 11,000).

The scribal career of Albert Jóhannesson

Based on his research on the Hecla Island community, Gerrard interpreted Albert's scribal activities as a response to trauma, writing that:

Albert sought refuge [at Flugumýri] after sailing the “Seven Seas” and narrowly escaping death at the hands of West Indies islanders. Traumatized by this experience, he had a nervous habit of constantly looking over his shoulder. To occupy his mind, he copied old Icelandic manuscripts by lamplight long into the nights, producing large volumes of obscure histories and adventures that ranged from The Saga of Julius Caesar to Snorri Sturluson's ancient history of the world, *Heimskringla*.⁹⁶

Gerrard's assessment that Albert Jóhannesson was deeply traumatized by his experiences as a migrant worker and sailor – today, he would be called a victim of human trafficking – is supported by his vow in Lbs 4667 4to. That Albert did not write about himself but instead heroes who overcome extreme difficulties and perils in exotic lands could suggest that Albert did not want to revisit his personal experiences directly. On the other hand, his vow speaks to a desire to publicize his own traumatic experiences in a way that positively re-frames them as salvation and triumph over peril. Flugumýri was a refuge, but also part of a larger community where Albert's stories were appreciated and shared. Albert wrote because he had an audience.

95 The name “Dionisius” for St Ursula's father is found in the medieval Icelandic romance *Kirjalax saga* and in *Úrsúlukvæði*, a popular post-medieval poem based on *Kirjalax saga*. Katelin Parsons, “Radiant Maidens and Butchered Brides,” *The Cult of St Ursula and the 11,000 Virgins: Finding St Ursula in Icelandic Literature*, ed. by Jane Cartwright (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016), 227–43.

96 Nelson Gerrard, “Flugumýri,” interpretive sign on the Black Wolf Trail, Manitoba, Canada.

In the words of Barton and Hamilton, “it is important to shift from a conception of literacy located in individuals to examine ways in which people in groups utilise literacy.”⁹⁷ The recent work of scholars in the field of late pre-modern manuscript studies has demonstrated that Icelandic scribes copying sagas and *rímur* were not lone wolves at the margins of society, although sometimes they were not considered the best of farmers. Scribes often knew each other and sometimes corresponded directly. The same, I believe, is true of scribes living and working in Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Wolves travel in packs. So do scribes.

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97 David Barton and Mary Hamilton, *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community* (London: Routledge, 1998), 12.

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SUMMARY

Keywords: post-medieval manuscript studies, Icelandic manuscript culture in North America, scribal communities, literacy as social practice, literary culture of Icelandic immigrants to Canada, Hecla Island

To date, very little research exists on manuscript culture in Icelandic immigrant communities in North America. The present article examines the case study of an immigrant-scribe, Albert Jóhannesson (1847–1921), who left Iceland as an adult in 1884 and eventually settled in the community of Hecla Island, Manitoba, Canada. All four saga manuscripts in Albert's hand remain in Manitoba. Albert Jóhannesson is one of the last known individuals to participate in manuscript production as a pastime: he started his oldest saga manuscript in 1889, and his last dated saga is from 1910. He copied some material from printed books and periodicals, but he probably worked mainly from manuscript exemplars. At least one of these, SÁM 35, was brought to Canada by another Hecla Islander, Grímólfur Ólafsson (1827–1903). Far from being an eccentric hermit in the bush, Albert appears to have been an active participant in a scribal community on Hecla Island. The study demonstrates that scribes operated in collaboration with others in their local settlements and made new connections on their arrival to North America that enabled the continued circulation of manuscript material.

ÁGRIP

Albert Jóhannesson og skrifararnir í Mikley: Handritamenning vesturfarana

Lykilorð: handrit síðari alda, handritamenning vesturfarana, handritasamfélög, læsi sem félagsleg iðja, ritmenning íslenskra innflytjenda í Kanada, Hecla Island (Mikley)

Albert Jóhannesson (1847–1921) var íslenskur skrifari sem flutti til Vesturheims árið 1884. Tæplega áratug síðar settist hann að á Mikley (e. Hecla Island) í Manitoba og bjó þar til æviloka. Þrjú handrit í eigu Alberts hafa varðveist á Íslandi: Lbs 3022 4to, Lbs 4667 4to og Lbs 3785 8vo. Aftur á móti skrifaði hann fjögur sagnahandrit í Vesturheimi sem öll hafa varðveist í Manitoba: Jóhannesson A (1889–1891), Jóhannesson B (1892+), Jóhannesson C (1900–1901) og NIHM 020012.3301 (1901–1910+).

Reynsla og ritvirkni Alberts er skoðuð í ljósi nýrra rannsókna um handritamenningu síðari alda. Niðurstaða höfundarins er að Albert hafi haft aðgengi að fjölda íslenskra handrita í Vesturheimi en jafnframt að Albert hafi verið aðeins einn af nokkrum íslenskum skrifurum sem bjuggu í Mikley um aldamótin 1900.

Handrit Alberts eru til vitnisburðar um að nýtt handritasamfélag eða tengslanet skrifara hafi myndast meðal íslensku vesturfaranna í Mikley vegna sérstakra aðstæðna þar í eyggi. Færð eru rök fyrir því að skrif Alberts hafi verið leið til sjálfstjóningar eftir erfiða lífsreynslu, m.a. það að vera fórnarlamb mansals í Ameríku. Hann var óhræddur við að breyta sögulokum og þá sérstaklega til þess að sýna fram á það hvernig allslaust ungmenni getur sigrast á erfiðum aðstæðum.

Frelsi Alberts sem skrifara torveldar vissulega leitina að forritum hans. Þó er hægt að staðsetja kverið SÁM 35 sem eitt af forritum Alberts. Í þessari grein er sýnt fram á að eigandi þess hafi verið Grímólfur Ólafsson (1827–1903). Lítið er vitað um skrifaramenningu íslensku vesturfaranna og útbreiðslu íslenskra handrita í Norður-Ameríku en greinin sýnir fram á mikilvægi þess að skoða einstaka skrifara í ljósi stærra tengslanets.

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